

# THE ASTRONOMER'S DAUGHTER

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"Now I'm looking for you, or anyone like you."

The stereo repeated the same lyrics for the fifteenth time now. Scarlett flicked the ash off the tip of her cheap cigarette and leaned back against the grills of the slightly open window. She had one of her father's journals resting on her palm and read, with undivided attention, the words he had once scribbled in its pages.

There was something magical about the way the moonlight graced her pale skin, a scene so beautiful that Cory couldn't take his eyes off her. He was sure she had forgotten he was even there in her bed, gawking at her for what seemed like forever and waiting for her to say something. Anything would do. He had spent almost the entire day every day for the last few months with her and he couldn't remember the last time they had an actual conversation.

"Do you believe in eternity?" he asked, pulling the sheets up to cover his legs. It was getting awfully cold in the little room but she insisted on turning on the heater and he had no choice but to oblige.

She looked up from the maroon diary in her hands and glared at him. It froze him to his bones and he looked away. He knew better than to mess with her temper. In the time they had been working together, he had learned his lessons and he was not ready to go through one of her fits again. He never was.

His gaze followed her as she walked over to the table and set the diary down. Making herself comfortable in the little, wooden chair, she turned on the table-lamp and in its dim yellow glow, began to flip through the half-torn pages.

"You know, being together forever, all that stuff- do you believe in that?" he tried again.

"Eternity," she chuckled. He cherished her laughter. He knew how rare and ephemeral it was and he'd be a fool to expect it any time soon.

"What do you know about eternity?" she said, as she pulled open a drawer to bring out another maroon diary. They all seemed identical and yet, they all were galaxies apart from one another. They all belonged to her father, and she treasured them more than she treasured her own life.

Her father was a self-proclaimed astronomer, and one of the best of his time according to her. It was a shame, she said, how his works never made it to the limelight. When Cory read a two hundred and fifty word article on the back page of an old newspaper about him, he thought so too. His works were eccentric, and at first seemed like the ramblings of a man who missed the last bus home and spent the night at the nearest bar but a little thought was all it took to really understand the depth of his research. He wasn't popular at all among his contemporaries. His works would more often than not be rejected by authorities. Rumour had it, it was these numerous rejections that drove him to the peak of insanity and it was only a matter of months before his stone-cold corpse was found in his cheap mar-

ble bathtub.

Cory met Scarlett in college. She was in his astronomy class and he wasn't sure if it was just mere luck that she sat next to him on the first day. Nights like this, he wondered if it was the eccentricity and uniqueness of her father's works or the supernovae that had occurred in his veins every time he heard her talk about them that had led him to asking her if they

her father had scribbled down in a drunken whim and be infuriated when he couldn't make sense of them but it didn't matter to him as long as he got to be around her. It was hard coping with his grades but her presence in his life made up for it.

He had begun spending most of his time with her, if not all of it, first at the college café, then at the local library and

he wanted to hear the words.

"I'm sad alone, I'm so sad on my own."

The song had given him a headache by now. He stared at the silhouette of the tiny figure now leaning against the table, reading her father's gibberish.

"Then teach me about Eternity. Tell me what your father wrote about it." Cory said.

"I don't want to tell you what my father wrote about Eternity." She snapped. "Damn it Cory, I was in the middle of reading something and you ruined it!"

"Then tell me what you're reading. Tell me something. Anything. But just talk to me! Just let me know that you're here, that you exist! That you're not just some ghost drifting through space!"

He was aware of the fact that he had been a bit too loud. She hated it when someone yelled at her. It reminded her of her mother who blamed her husband's demise on her child and followed his footsteps eventually. Her eyes were blood-shot and she seethed with anger and he knew what was coming.

"Leave." She whispered through clenched teeth. "Leave right now."

"Look, I'm-"

"Leave," she screamed at the top of her lungs and Cory felt a hard object hit his face. Rubbing his forehead, he looked at the maroon cover that rested on his lap. The rest of the half-torn pages lay in a mess on the floor. He slowly got out of the sheets and made his way towards the door. She stood, shivering, rooted to her spot for a while, her eyes glistening with fear and anger before she rushed past him towards where the pages were.

Cory stared at her face from the door. She had never looked so panic-stricken. She was on her knees, trembling and whimpering hysterically while fumbling with the pages, trying to put them back in order.

"The truth is, we were much too young."

Cory closed his eyes and imagined himself in a dingy bathroom. He found himself heading towards a little bathtub made of cheap marble. He stopped a few steps away from it, and leaned over. And there she was, lying in a state of eternal bliss under the crystal clear water, her face pale and her lips blue. And he looked up at the ceiling above to find the Milky Way painted all over it- the planets, comets, asteroids and other celestial bodies revolving around the Sun that illuminated them, the Sun that illuminated her face.

Cory opened his eyes. She was still at it, now bawling her eyes out while trying to sort the pages. He stepped inside the room, and walked towards her.

"Cory, please..." she whispered. He knelt down on the floor, wrapped his arms around her and stayed like that till she stopped shaking and then got his hands on the pages. He remembered her saying she would never let him touch them and sighed.

"Now you're looking for me, or anyone like me," the lyrics echoed as he slowly put the pages back in order.



could research on her father's work together, just the two of them, solving mysteries about the Universe that were beyond the mundane and the ordinary. Why she agreed, he didn't know and by now, he had lost all hopes of finding out.

Work wasn't how he thought it was going to be. She had made it clear on the first day how her father's journals were only hers to read and he mustn't dare lay a finger on them. She would occasionally read out loud paradoxes and theories that

finally at her place and soon enough, he had confessed his feelings for her. She didn't say anything and he thought he knew what her silence meant but when he didn't show up the next day at her place, she called him and yelled at him for ten minutes straight for being so idiotic and irresponsible and ordered him to be there as fast as he could. By the time she hung up, he was at her doorstep.

She never really told him if she reciprocated his feelings as well but boy, did