

HOROSCOPIA

By TIM CUMMINGS

The town of Lighthaus was small, sweet, and simple.

A woman named Moira Place had lived there her whole life, and she knew in her heart that she must find a man called Thorin Fulsome. Thorin Fulsome was the writer of the horoscope column in the town paper *The Lighthouse Times*. Moira had neither been superstitious, spiritual, nor prone to ‘sensitivities’ when it came to ominous occurrences and coincidental incidents. She was, like so many others, a hard-working, newly single mother of two boys, living—surviving—on a barely acceptable salary.

She was a teacher.

Her fourth-grade class was a contented little cluster of ten-year-old boys and girls of various attributes and shortcomings. ‘Mrs. Place’ tethered together what was good, addressed what was bad, taught the children what they needed to know, and veered them from what they did not. This she did for herself as well as for her boys, Griffin, ten, and Guy, seven. There was nothing neither illustrious nor extraordinary about Moira Place and her simple life in the charming little nowhere town of Lighthaus.

Moira and the boys lived at what was once a farmhouse, but which they’d converted into a livable home, with piping and wiring installed for water, electricity, phones, and heat. The residence was small and modest, but the land on which it sat was vast and unadulterated. This was a good thing for Griffin and Guy, who’d become rather wild since the sudden departure of their father, Lucky. The land allowed the wild boys free reign for their aggressions, frustrations, and excursions. The landscape was their dominion for hunting toads, chipmunks, baby owls, and snakes. They imagined themselves as reckless, brave soldiers on battered battlefields, tearing off

branches from once stalwart trees and, with knives (taken from Moira's kitchen drawers) they'd carve them into weapons. The land was prominent with forts, tree houses, tents made of Moira's old sheets, squirrel carcasses, snake skins, and fire pits. The land was like a marked-up pirate's map of male childhood, replete with singed edges.

Moira started subscribing to *The Lighthouse Times* because a memo went out that the boundary for delivery was going to widen and include residences farther from the heart of town. Each morning, the white van would pull up in front of the Place's long driveway—rather far from their farmhouse, on a slight upraise, a distance from the road—and drop off the paper. Though she might not openly admit it, Moira's original intention for subscribing to the paper was for the personal ads.

The Lighthouse Times supposedly featured a reputable personal ads section; something everyone in town knew about. Many of Moira's friends had found mates via these ads. Moira thought she might as well try it. What else could she do? A quiet, private person, Moira Place was not likely to confess to friends her truest of feelings—that she was aching for love, and for love's life, its very light. She'd not had those things with Lucky, her husband-gone. There was so little alleviation, however, for her daily life was so routine, so methodical. She endured it all, quietly, while taking the utmost care of her students, and of her boys. That had to be enough. That was all. “But something has to give,” she'd whispered to herself in her mirror one morning. “Something has to *happen*.” And a little shiver ran down her spine then, as if she'd felt a ghost. But she shrugged it off.

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Flipping through the pages looking for the personals, Moira came upon an illustrious two-paged display of horoscopes. The artwork was mystical and colorful, like the drawings on Tarot cards. She felt intrigued, and so took to reading her sign, Sagittarius, every morning. At first, there was nothing spectacular, nor even ordinary, for that matter.

Monday: *An old flame pours back into your life like milk on cereal.*

Tuesday: *Financial dilemmas put you in a poor mood today.*

Wednesday: *A big family gathering finds you in need of resolving an old issue.*

None of this meant anything to her, of course. Nor did she care about it either way. It was just amusing, and pretty; something to read at the table as she buttered the boys' bread, something to procrastinate over on her way to the personals. She liked the Sagittarius drawing of the centaur archer; a female who had determination and intensity in her gaze, poised as she was, ready to let the arrow burst from the bow.

One morning the front-page featured a report of a car accident that almost claimed the life of a local Lighthouse native, a forty-year-old journalist recently returned from New York City. Moira read with mild interest, then flipped ahead to the horoscopes. It said: *Take heed, for the storm clouds are gathering. Batten down the hatches before it's too late!* This ominous advice was written for every single Zodiacal sign that day. "That's odd..." Moira said to herself.

Then, in the days following, there were no horoscopes at all. As if the column had completely disappeared. Moira figured that the columnist, Thorin Fulsome, maybe went on vacation? Family death? Sabbatical? The column was replaced with two pages of coupons for the local farm-supply store, Buggies.

The following day, and continuing for the rest of that week, there came a stretch of the most horrendous weather the town of Lighthouse had ever seen, especially for a normally temperate

climate: endless torrential downpours, windstorms, thunder and lightning, tornadoes, flooding, hail, all manner of meteorological madness rumbled from the heavens for ten days as the crow flies. Daily reports of destruction and domestic ruination poured into the papers and across the TV news. The dozen or so historical manmade log cabins at the edge of the lake—landmarks, heirlooms — had been demolished.

Moira all but forgot about her daily forage to the realm of the personal ads in favor of scrambling to protect the farmhouse from the havoc of the skies. She and her boys taped and boarded up windows, placed buckets under drips, patched, nailed, shifted, and fixed. The school where she taught was closed for days.

Weather being what it is, mercurial, the skies eventually cleared up enough for the schools to re-open and the townsfolk to continue with their lives. One afternoon after school, Moira was driving home with the boys playing in the back seat. She cleared the summit of Granger Down, which was a winding back road up to the small, unpaved road out to her farmhouse offering a breathtaking view of the land, and then slammed on the brakes—across the vast fields she spotted a twister! She gasped at the colossal black column twirling like a demon let loose of a soul.

Griffin and Guy, sitting in the backseat, laughed as they went flying forward from the force of the car stopping so suddenly. Then they too gasped, spotting the twister, and all three of them gaped in awe at the whirling funnel. Moira quickly turned the car around and sped off as she tuned into the news on the radio to listen for instructions on what to do, where to go. Speeding through a maelstrom of debris, she headed to the designated shelter: the basement of the power plant, of all places, for so unequipped were they at having to deal with sudden, unexpected meteorological catastrophes like this. Once safely inside, the townspeople of Lighthouse huddled in fear and waited quietly, some praying, others conferring, some dumbfounded, others thrilled.

Later, driving back home, Moira was terrified—what if the house had been lifted, tossed about, hurled away? What would she do? Where would she and the boys go? But driving over Granger Down again, right at the point where they had seen the twister earlier, she felt relieved that her house was untouched. The twister passed right by. Not even a picket on her fence was disturbed. Mystified, she and the boys walked the property, collecting the branches of fallen trees as if they were relics.

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Monday again.

The Lighthouse Times sat at the foot of the driveway.

It was early, the boys were still asleep, and the morning sky was gloss-blue and feather-pink. The breeze was warm and fresh like the first bread of the morning. Moira sat at the kitchen table with the paper. The front-page featured photographs of the disaster and the headlining story was the uprooting of the town's staple landmark and namesake, the famous lighthouse, which had been wrenched from the soil and pitched into the abyss. The town was in shock. Plans to resurrect their most precious landmark were underway, but fundraisers would need to be implemented in order for it to happen. Volunteers were called for.

Moira, sighing, flipped to the horoscopes—Thorin Fulsome's column was back! She smiled, sipped her coffee, and read: *Today you will be offered a raise at work.* She scoffed, mumbling, "that'll be the day" as she then flipped reluctantly toward the personals section. She didn't quite make it there, though, because then the boys came rambling down the stairs and bounding into the kitchen demanding waffles and juice. Moira hugged them both.

Later that day, just after her lunch break, she was called into the Assistant Principal's office. Assistant Principal Kathleen Kout also happened to be Moira's good friend. Mrs. Kout was a bit of a town legend, and a curiosity, in that she was Lighthouse's tallest person, standing 6'4". She was taller than even the tallest man in town, at 6'2". (Her husband Phillip, a good and patient man, stood 5'9".) Kathleen always wore her long hair in a tight bun, which she was constantly re-adjusting, re-tightening or tearing out altogether because she hated having to do it in the first place but did so because she had to present herself in a certain manner for her important position.

"Sit. Sit down, doll," Kathleen said. Moira sat. "Dove, I'm real proud of you and I'll tell you why, and no, it's not because you're a good mother and a good teacher and a good friend. It's because you ordered home delivery of *The Lighthouse Times*, and that means you took the advice we gave you, and—"

"Kathy," Moira said, but was cut off.

"—as you know, we're sad to see you mopin' and hopin'—and, now, wait, wait, just listen—don't misunderstand me, I know you have your boys as a *distraction*, not that takin' care of two rowdy boys especially with the poisonous blood of that useless ex-husband of yours running rampant in their poor innocent little veins is a distraction, but you know what I mean, Moira... and anyway—"

"Kathy—"

"—anyway, it doesn't matter because I didn't bring you in here to give you a lecture, I brought you in here to say I am proud of you and I hope you are indeed surveying those personal ads because I think you'll find a real catch for yourself." Kathleen then tugged at her bun, frowning. She took a pencil, mused it around in there a bit, then tossed it down on her desk, continuing, "There are plenty of handsome, smart, and responsible men in our town...or at least I think there

are. They might be all gone by now. Or they just gotta' be dug up from under the soil sometimes, HA! Like a bird searchin' for a worm, so that is why I lobbied with the district administration and got you a RAISE, raisin!"

Moira cocked her head at that.

"Because you've worked hard and you deserve it. No, don't thank me. Just scoot, go back to class, I got that little demon Kevin Blair coming in now, gotta give him a lecture for whippin' out his willy at the girls during gym class, th' little turd head. Go! I will talk to you later."

Moira walked toward the door, slowly, opened it, turned back to look at Kathleen, and then shuffled down the hallway back to class. She was distracted for the rest of the day. When she got home, she pulled the paper from the trash and looked over her horoscope again: *Today you will be offered a raise at work.* Moira then tore the page from the paper, folded it neatly, and placed it in the kitchen drawer where she kept miscellaneous items.

The next morning, Moira read: *A minor tragedy puts someone you love in the hospital, with burns and broken bones to boot.* But that particular day brought no news of that sort. It was a sluggish, muggy kind of day, and most of the students were moody and belligerent. Moira was tired when she got home, contemplative, and as she began preparing dinner in the kitchen, Griffin came tearing into the house in a panic, hysterical about how he and Guy had been re-building their tree fort in the woods, and had started a small bonfire in a pit just beneath the tree so that they could toast marshmallows upon completion: "...and, mommy, y'gotta' come with me now," and he tugged at her, "because Guy fell from the tree and landed in the fire!"

Moira rushed him to the hospital. The prognosis: minor burns on his body, and a broken collarbone. While she waited for the doctor to finish up with him, she walked up and down the hallways of the hospital, chewing her nails as she searched for a copy of that day's *Lighthouse*

Times. She finally found one, in the cafeteria, left in a heap of folded-back, coffee-stained pages on a table in the far corner of the room, where a dozen or so dazed and sorrowful elderly town residents patiently awaited news from nurses about their ailing loved ones. She picked up the paper, but she didn't flip to the page containing the horoscopes. She just held the paper in her hands for a moment. Then she gently placed it back down.

Later, she put the boys to bed, and tossed and turned all night.

At dawn, as soon she heard the van that delivered the paper clear the summit of Granger Down, she tore out of bed and ran downstairs. After the van tossed the paper at the foot of her long driveway and drove off, she scurried in her robe and slippers to retrieve it. In the early morning sun, she flipped to Wednesday's column: *Someone from your past wants something from you, and they will try to get it.*

Moira called Kathleen to explain what had happened to Guy, to let her know she was going to stay home with him and that the school should call in a substitute teacher. Two hours later, there was a knock at the front door: she answered it to find her ex-husband, that awfully handsome devil Lucky Place, standing there. He was wearing a white V-neck T-shirt under an unbuttoned flannel, big black boots covered in scuffmarks, and his rugged weatherworn hands shoved sheepishly into the pockets of his jeans.

She didn't know if she should laugh, cry, spit, or all three at once, not because he was actually there, standing on her porch, but because she knew—she *knew*—that this was the 'someone from your past' that had been mentioned in that very morning's horoscope. And though chills spilled up and down her spine about that very fact, she cut straight to the chase: "What do you *want* from me, Lucky?"

“Now, now, just relax now. He called me, Moira, he called me right up,” Lucky said. “Griffin called me and told me what happened to Guy. I come to my boy, I come because my boy needs me, and I am doing okay now, so I’m ready to take my boys. Here.”

He handed her papers meant to initiate the process of claiming custody of his boys, whom he was planning to bring away with him; somewhere far away. She closed the door on Lucky’s face. She tossed the papers down on the little mail table in the vestibule. She thought about setting fire to them. She headed upstairs to Guy’s room to check on him, but between the third and fourth step, she collapsed in tears.

She was not sad so much as confused. “What is happening to me? Am I going crazy?”

Thursday, then—early morning—foot of the driveway—Thorin’s page:

Something lost you shall find, and the lost thing shall become part of your life.

She sighed, wondering what the heck the day may have in store for her pertaining to *that* little tidbit, and she looked up, shaking her head. Appearing out of the crimson shadows on the rise of Granger Down, she saw a little puppy limping toward her, a beagle, silhouetted in the morning light. She waited there. The light brightened the morning sky as the little puppy wagged its tail as it made its way slowly toward her. She picked it up, it licked her face, she checked its sex (another boy) and she took him inside, cleaned him up, fed him, and gave him to Guy as a get-well gift.

On Friday morning she flipped frantically to Thorin’s page: *An incident of strange phenomena leaves you feeling...skeptical?* And all that day she sought it out, ‘strange phenomena’ ‘strange phenomena’ ‘strange phenomena’...but aside from her slowest and laziest student actually receiving an A+ on a spelling exam, nothing phenomenal took place. When she arrived home later

with the boys in tow, she found a neighbor at the foot of the driveway. It was Rusty Lamboro, seventy-seven, a farmer who lived with his wife and dogs on the farm about a mile east.

“Why, af’ernoon’ Mrs. Palace, how’re ya’?” Rusty tipped his dusty cap.

“Mr. Lamboro. Nice to see you. Did you walk all the way over here?”

“Don’ worbout that. Good for my agin’ heart, Mrs. Palace.” He patted his heart and a small cloud of white dust lifted off the faded denim of his overalls. He gave a chuckle. “Been bakin’ the bread all day, got some stray flour stuck on me, I guess, heh.”

“Place!” Griffin called from the back. “Place, not Palace!”

Moira said, “Well, what can I do for you? Do you want to come on in?”

“Won’t take too much of your time, Mrs...er...*Police*?”

“Moira. Please.”

“Oh, it’s Please? Or is it Place? Palace? Police? Aw, rats-in-glue!”

The boys cracked up in the backseat.

“Moira will do, Mr. Lamboro.”

“Right. Moira. Well, the last few nights me and m’wife Bessie been noticin’ somethin’ strange out back, and I was just’n’wonderin’ if by any chance you’d done seen somethin’n’similar?”

Moira’s heart skipped a beat. “What kind of...strange thing?”

“Lights! Looked at first like one of them helicopters shootin’ its beam down way out in the fields, you know? Lookin’ for somedin’...but then the light got too bright for a chopper and turned into every color of the rainbow. Went outside and noticed that this thing hadn’t any sound to it, like a chopper would have sound, right? It were but silent as a tomb out there. Happened again for two nights after.”

Moira said, “I haven’t seen anything. But....”

“But what?”

“I believe you. I’m not...*skeptical*.”

“Skeptical? Hell. ‘Bout what?”

“U.F.O.’s.”

“Who said anything ‘bout silly flyin’ saucers? Hell, seen *plenty* of those buggers in my time! Naw, this wasn’t one of them, and besides, m’dogs weren’t barkin’ like mad like they usually do when one a ‘em Martian ships comes round here. Naw, this was sombin else.”

Moira got out of the car and closed the door. “Can I ask you something, Mr. Lamboro? Do you, or does your wife, by any chance read *The Lighthouse Times*?”

“Sure we does.”

“Do you read the horoscopes column?”

“Hellnaw. Load o’toad pucky. Foolishness. Why d’y’ask?”

“No reason.”

“Right, well, you have a good night, Mrs. Pa...Pl...Po—*Moira*, and be sure to let me and Bessie know if you notice anythin’ weird, ok?” And with that, he put his hands in his pockets and headed off, mumbling about bright lights, Martians, and silent choppers.

Moira sighed.

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Later, she called (needed) her friends, Kathleen, and also the sixth-grade art teacher Gwenny Nin, and invited them over for dinner the following night, which was Saturday,

mercifully, Moira thought, *a day with no horoscopes*, for they were not printed on the weekends. She let Griffin and a quickly convalesced Guy play all day in the fields with the puppy, whom they named Bagel. They played with such reckless abandon that by the time the sun went down they were so tired that they crawled into their respective bunks and were fast asleep by 8:00pm, Bagel curled in a ball at the foot of Guy's bed.

Moira set to work on dinner and dessert.

Gweny had brought with her three bottles of wine (Moira was enjoying glass after glass of it) and after dinner they sat on the porch and marveled at the starry summer sky, talking, pausing often to listen to the chirps, hoots, yelps and calls of the night creatures. After they'd adequately caught up with each other's lives, Moira took a deep breath and looked at her friends. Then she explained, step-by-step, day-by-day, the events that had transpired since the onslaught of the storms, which, she reminded them, had started shortly after she bought *The Lighthouse Times* for home delivery.

She explained everything as best as she could, but she was a little tipsy, truth told. Being that her friends Kathleen and Gweny knew her more as a shy and quiet type, more of a reserved individual, they relished in the way in which she told the tale—elatedly. And they liked it.

“So,” Moira finally said, concluding with the incidents of the puppy and the strange phenomena, “Be honest. You think I'm bonkers? Nuts?”

Gweny and Kathleen stared a little longer at the sparkling sky, listened a little more attentively to nature's night-creatures. Then Kathleen cleared her throat. “Well, certainly the whole town is just crazy these days,” she said. “Moira, I think it's been rough for you having the boys to take care of and no husband anymore. And you've gained weight and that can often have a very

dramatic effect on the way a lady perceives the world. So, yes, in answer to your question, I think you're going crazy."

Moira stood and paced the porch. Gwenny scoffed and batted her hand at Kathleen.

"BUT, dove," Kathleen continued, "Please don't worry about it. It's a phase and it will pass and, in the meantime, you should just keep your mind in the classroom. The children need you now—tornadoes, hailstorms, hurricanes?! This town has gone belly up, like a dead fish!"

Moira gulped the last spill of wine in her glass.

"Oh, and by the way," Kathleen said, standing to stretch her enormous body, "That substitute teacher was a travesty. Don't you ever call in sick again!"

Gwenny Nin put her hand up as if to convey something relevant...then dropped her hand back in her lap...sat still for a moment...pointed a recriminatory finger at Kathleen...and then reached into her purse for lipstick. She applied it slowly, carefully, put it away again and finally threw her skinny arms straight up to the stars. In her signature high-pitched squeal she said, "Shame on you, Kathleen Kout, you stuffy old school wench. You, who has no interesting perspectives on anything anymore! Clearly what Moira says happened IS what happened! Why would she lie?"

Kathleen stared off into the darkness a moment, and then shrugged. "You're right. I'm a raisin, a withered old hag, a moron in charge of moronic children. Ah, what can you do? Give me some more of that wine, Moira—stop hogging it and pass it to me."

"Moira, I think it's sweet," Gwenny declared. "And weird, indeed it's weird. I think that maybe...maybe God is trying to tell you something, Moira Place? But why he would send his heavenly minion in the form of a horoscope column is beyond the likes of me to discern..." She lowered her voice to an exalted whisper, leaning forward in her half-broke, linen-backed porch

chair: “Maybe it’s magic! Here in Lighthouse! Could you imagine? Oh, goodness, I hope it’s good magic and not the dark kind.”

Kathleen laughed. “No wonder she’s the art teacher. You New-Age hippie.”

“Oh, hush up, you seven-foot beast! What do you know about art? Or hippies?”

Moira stepped off the porch, down onto the lawn and onto the dark driveway. She started walking toward the road in the distance, though she could barely see a thing. Only the milky spill of starlight from gaseous orbs a billion light-years away illuminated the path, but that elucidation was dim, and untrustworthy. *For what are the stars, she thought, if we never reach for them?*

The light from the porch dissipated with each step until she was in total darkness. She turned to her friends and called out. “I have to figure this out. You understand me? I’ve got to find this...*Thorin Fulsome.*”

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On Monday morning, Moira called Kathleen and told her to bring in that substitute; she needed the day off. Kathleen scoffed and said, “Oh my God, is this about that zodiacal preposterousness?” Moira hung up, got ready, dropped the boys off at school, and then drove on down to *The Lighthouse Times*.

The corporate-looking building that housed the newspaper’s offices was squat, gray, and strange. It was in a circular-shaped business park that had been built about a decade ago by a hotshot business school grad that had originally hailed from Lighthouse, hit it big in the Stock Market, and then returned to take care of his ailing parents. In his boredom, he decided to capitalize, as business grads are wont to do.

The receptionist offered Moira water, coffee, soda, and a copy of *The Lighthouse Times*. All of these niceties she declined and was eventually directed to Thorin Fulsome’s office: 2nd floor, left down the main corridor, turn left again, turn left one last time, and his office is on the left.

In Moira’s mind, Thorin Fulsome was someone who looked like Santa Claus: jolly, fat, and wise. But when she turned that third left and saw him sitting at his desk—a scruffy and unkempt fellow, handsome but hollow, dazed and bored as he stared at his computer monitor—she stopped still, stood there, and stared. On the desk she saw a large green mug and a small sliver flask. He uncapped it, sighed, and she watched a ribbon of gold liquid cascade into the mug. He downed it in one gulp.

“Excuse me? Mr. Thorin Fulsome?” Moira said.

The man startled so suddenly that his mug dropped from his hands and smashed onto the floor. Moira gasped. The man looked down at it like someone who fully understood why he was about to be fired from his job. With whatever dampened remnant of pride that remained, he managed to stand up, shove the flask into a drawer, adjust his tie, and turn around.

“Yeah. Can I, uh, can I help you?” he asked.

Moira stared at him.



Last Christmas, where the icy city is dark, and it's cold, and it's cursed.

City life is so much easier said than done.

Last year, on a terrible Christmas Eve, an unhappy wife exchanges gifts with her unhappy husband. The wife has wrapped two large and rather bulky objects for her husband; these items sit laboriously beside a barren little Christmas tree. Outside the tiny window of their too-confined apartment hangs a string of lumpen lights, many of its bulbs broken, their sockets vulnerable to the rain. Crackling, popping, and hissing sounds fill the malignant apartment.

The unhappy husband, Ted Fisk, gazes out the window, imagining what it would be like if his fingers were plunged purposely into those sockets—imagining everything he owns and knows singed to an instant crisp, ZAP, an immediate cloud of cinders, and he, dead and gone after a few agonizing seconds. Ted drains his tumbler of whiskey. He sighs, coughs, and goes for a refill.

The wife is at the other end of the room, writing out holiday cards. She places one inside a festive red and green envelope, licks the seal, grimaces, and looks over her shoulder when she hears Ted in the kitchen uncapping, pouring, and gulping. She slams shut the little drawer of the desk at which she sits, stands and walks to the window, listens to the crackling trill of the dangerous electric malevolence. She opens the window slowly, and gasps when she spots a dead bird on the fire escape. It looks so peaceful, curled into itself, shrunken yet plump, a pigeon—a white pigeon.

“A dove?” she says, quietly. “Ted!”

Ted joins her. “What fresh hell is this?” he mutters, spotting a slaughtered dove and quoting a revered bard. He leans forward out the window to get a better look, and then retreats when two plangent crackles of the lights startle him.

“Ted, my God.” The wife’s eyes glisten, filling with cinnamon tears. She closes the window and walks to the couch. She sits. “A dead dove on our fire escape at Christmas. So ominous” She cries.

Ted mulls this over, but...

Ted had never been superstitious, spiritual, or even prone to sensitivities when it came to so-called ominous occurrences or coincidental incidents. That’s what made him a great Journalist. He was, like many, a hard-working fellow, living—surviving, really—in New York City on a barely acceptable salary. Ted fell in love and married a beautiful woman of various attributes as well as shortcomings. He tethered what was good, and right, and also what was bad, and wrong. He wrote, reported, what he felt the world needed to know about any given incident, and veered his readers away from what they did not need to know. There was nothing neither illustrious nor extraordinary about Ted Fisk or his conduct of life.

He had recently lost his job as a head Journalist for a renowned city newspaper because, among other reasons, he could never make it to work on time, as he’d become a hapless drunk amidst the maelstrom of the issues he was having with his wife. A month before, he had been dropped by his literary agent. She told him outright, loose cannon that she was, that he was no longer a ‘cash-cow’ and that his last two novels ‘sucked pig sperm’.

Prior to, he’d been discovered with a frisky and busty young intern named Tina. She’d seduced him because she thought he looked like George Clooney, and because she was, of course, power-hungry. She admitted both of these things openly, not only to Ted, but to his wife as well.

Ted did not know what was happening to him, or why he had become such a loser. One day, his life just began unraveling. If he had once been a tightly woven ball of thickly twined cotton yarn, then it seemed like some relentless force was a hand tugging persistently at the string, disentangling him. He did not know why. It was as sudden as a cheap scare in a bad horror flick.

He joins his wife in the living room, sits across from her, stares at the floor.

She hands him the card she'd written out moments ago. He places his emptied whiskey glass down and opens the envelope. Inside the envelope there is a card, and also some papers, folded up. Inside the card, there is a poem.

"Read it aloud," his wife says, "I love the way you recite poetry."

Ted reads:

*"Once I really loved you,
But
That seems so long ago
Once you were a poet,
But
Now I just don't know
The man I married; who has he become?
A drunken, cheating bastard...AND THEN SOME
Ted, dearest, Merry Christmas to you
And to Tina—the busty blonde intern, too
I hope you get what's coming to you, real soon
Oh, I can't wait to watch you crash and boon."*

He mumbles, "Lovely rubric, honey. Crash and *boon*. Genius." Ted unfolds the papers.
"Looky here. Divorce papers. What a surprise."

The wife hands him a pen. From outside, more crackling, sputtering, and popping. Birds await death out there. The lights on the wire lure them; blinking colors, bright and warm. Other disasters, so many of them, are possible now.

Ted signs the papers, resigned; a zombie accepting he is living-dead.

She gathers the papers, takes one last look around, and leaves the apartment.

*

In the days that followed, Ted Fisk drained many bottles of whiskey. He stayed in bed. He did not write, did not think, did not work, or wonder. Birds died on the fire escape. Tina the busty blonde intern with whom he had an affair texted: “Ted, it’s not going to work. You’re, like, gross.” Then, the landlord: “I got a call from your wife. She told me everything. Go, sir. It is her name on the lease, after all.”

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What else does a weary, wounded man do in a time like this?

Call his mother.

She gasped, ecstatic, her hand clasped to her heart: “You’re coming home? My only son? Kibbles!”

“Mom. I, uh, need money for a ticket home.”

“Of course, nubbin. Teddy, my luckybucky...what *happened*? Is everything all right?”

“Mom, I—”

“Just you come home my pickyflicky crow. Fly, fly. We’ll talk all about it when you return home. Home to *Lighthaus!*”

*

Sitting in the living room, staring out the bay window at the lake in southern Lighthaus, Ted Fisk sipped the soothing lemon tea his mother had made for him (that he’d spiked with whiskey, though his mother did not know that). Ted had neither shaved nor showered in days. He glanced at a photo on the wall above the hearth: a framed picture of him when he graduated Magna Cum Laude from Cornell. Surrounding this photograph were awards he had won throughout the years. Ted scowled and flipped himself the bird, and in so doing, dropped the mug of tea on the floor. It shattered, and steaming, whiskey-spiked liquid radiated off the old wood floor.

His mother’s four parakeets chattered noisily, a relentless din of high-pitched chirps. He got up and took the black cloth used to cover their cage at night and laid it over them. The birds went silent. Ted went back to staring out at the lake, where the famous lighthouse stood in the distance, at the summit of a hill. “What an idiotic town this is,” he said aloud. “Who the hell builds a *lighthouse* like that to sit on the edge of a *lake*? C’mon! Lighthouses belong on the shores of seas, not on the banks of lakes, in the middle of nowhere, useless and utterly ridiculous.”

“Don’t you do that, my honey-bean,” his old mother said as she entered the room, unveiled her covered birds, and set to the task of cleaning up the tea-whiskey mess. “Your Papa bless his resting, triple-bypassed heart, always talked out loud to himself and it worried the niggles out of me. He’d sit there staring out at that old muxxy, nuxxy lake, talking to nobody that wasn’t there—oh my, but this lemon tea smells so strong. Was it sour, honey?”

The parakeets started in again.

“I just don’t like that lighthouse, Ma. There are no boats here, there’s no ocean, there’s never even any fog, for God’s sake. What *need* is there for that thing? I’ve always hated it. I’ve never understood it. You know, it’s like people who keep clocks that don’t work anymore.”

“Hush, you! Your father helped to guggle that beautiful lighthouse.”

“Ma, he didn’t. Really. He landscaped it with stones and small trees.”

“Still, he took puggy in its assembly! His name is on its commemorative plaque!”

“I know, but—”

“It meant a lot to your father when he helped to kigggle that beautiful thing during the wars. You weren’t born yet, but those were hard times. That lighthouse was a yimby of hope. Because...well, because it helps you if you’re lost.”

“But why is it—”

“You know *why*, silly, you just don’t remember. You leave home, and home leaves with you. So. A lighthouse saved our town’s oldest ancestors, on their way across the seas, whose beam brought them safely to land in a terrible storm. They were way off course, and they lost many people that night. When they arrived safely, though they moved further and further inland, they never forgot the oojiggyjiggy that the lighthouse had offered! So that’s what’s it about, that’s why it was built, as a beacon of finding direction when you have no idea which way to go. When you’re lost. It’s about *family*. Here, you has a kiwi biscuit.”

“Lost,” Ted said, and looked at his awards. “No wonder no one ever leaves this town.”

“Well, there you go, smarty-pants. The lighthouse helps you find your back if you *do* go!”

“Please, Ma, no fantasies, or allegories, please. Just—”

“Yes, I will shut up now, yes I will. But it’s so nice to have you back home again, even if you won’t even bibble me why you’re here or tell me why you look like you just came back from a year-long spiggle through hecky.” She patted him on the head. She hugged him. She loved him very much. She went back to her kitchen. She hummed and whistled as she went.

*

The next morning was as sunny and yellow as the yolk of a farm-fresh egg.

Ted called up an old childhood friend named Max Pavey, who was the next tallest person in the town next to Kathleen Kout. Max Pavey had a heart as big as a horse, though he was dopey. Ted and Max had met at summer camp when they were young. They stayed pals all through their years at school, but then Ted left for college.

Max, on the other hand, had never left Lighthouse. He’d held down the job of delivery driver for *The Lighthouse Times* since high school. Ted and Max arranged to meet at the lighthouse for beer, ribs, and potato chips. After the small talk and the catching-up and the swapping of irrelevant stories, Max started asking his questions.

“What the chickens happened t’ya, Teddy? Y’look like rabbit feed. You were the town HERO when you left here with a scholarship to a big ol’ university college school. And your mom would send copies of the stories you wrote in the papers to everyone in Lighthouse. We were all so proud. All them postcards from different countries you’d been to. I never even have been on a plane! Your mom, haw jeez, would post them cards on the boards at church. Real neat stuff, Teddy—real neat! And your wife, so pretty, she seems real nice, real sweet.”

Ted held his hands out in front of him, looked at them, and then finished his beer. He explained to his old pal what had happened, and said, “I don’t know, Max. There was a peaceful time once when I was so disinterested in myself. I was interested in the world. Get it? Only the world, this huge amazing world we live in, beyond this dumb town, with its inconsequential lighthouse, and its ugly man-made lake, and its unadventurous citizens. ”

Max scratched his head.

“But then...*I* became interesting, after I garnered success in my career. *I* became more interested in myself than in the world. And when you only think YOU are interesting; you just lie about everything. I lied to my wife when I told her I loved her. I lied to my readers when I would write falsities about truths. I lied about everything.”

Max popped open another beer for his friend and handed it to him. “Huh.”

“Nothing makes sense. I’m tired. I’m a drunk. I’m forty and I’m over.”

“I don’t know what a lotta’ that stuff means. I just...I’m, so glad you’re back here, Teddy, back home, and I hope that good stuff happens for you.”

Ted nodded, looked up at the lighthouse: lonely, placeless, and extraneous.

“Say, Teddy bear, you need a job?” Max asked. “Cos, cos I could get you a job at *The Lighthouse Times*.” Ted shrugged and attempted to stand up and get a little air. Instead, he toppled onto his face in the dirt. And he wasn’t even drunk.

*

A week later, Ted Fisk was offered a job at *The Lighthouse Times*.

The editor, Mr. Neville Rotide, was impressed with his resume, and his portfolio. He offered Ted Fisk a ‘placement position’ from which he could eventually move up to better opportunities. Ted needed money, and he did not really care either way, so he said yes.

He sat in Neville’s office on his first day of work, a bit sozzled. He had managed to get up early and groom himself, but in exchange for the effort verily imbibed whiskey in the car on the way there.

“Well, Ted, here’s what I’m gonna’ do,” Neville said. “Zelda Statsten left the paper last week to start up her own business. One of them silly shops that gives you your fortune. So her column, *Horoscopia*, has opened on up. It’s our most popular column. Folks in this town just go hog-freak for that dung. Hell, so do I! ‘Course, it’s all bullzinky, everyone knows that, but it could be fun for ya’, and it’s good pay, and it’s temporary. Right then? Hey, what’s your sign, anyway?”

“I can’t...I can’t write horoscopes. I’m not a...astrologer.”

“Make it up as you go along, Ted,” Neville leaned in and whispered. “It’s all we can give you right now. I know we were supposed to get you in on the Obits instead, but it don’t matter. People will believe *anything* you tell them. Use your instincts. Hell, I don’t know. Just do it for now. Right, then?”

“I don’t really like that kind of stuff, though.”

“Now, listen—I knew your daddy well, we worked on the Lighthouse together. And your ma still workin’ at that pet store all these years and baking cakes for the Sunday services. You’re a good kid. Do this. The horoscopes and the personals are popular here in this town.”

That evening Ted called Zelda Statsen, because Neville had given him her number so they could chat about writing horoscopes. When he got her on the line, he told her that he had been offered her former job.

“Good for you, honeycomb. Study them stars!”

“But I don’t believe in this stuff.”

“Shush that tongue! What is your name, sugar-on-the-cob?”

“Ted Fisk.”

“Ginny Fisk’s son?”

“Yes.”

“Well, well, the big town star! I’ll be flanked by a sparklefurter! Listen, first thing you got to do is change your name, kid. My real name’s Doris Wikbur. Don’t sound no better than Ted Fisk, does it? No. Gotta’ make the folks think you is...*mystic*. How ‘bout...hmm.... ‘Thorin Fulsome’? That has a nice ring to it. I like it. Use it!”

“What? Who?” *Thorn Salted?*”

“THOR-IN FUL-SOME. Just a name. I’m good with names. My late husband was the real moniker genius, though. He called himself ‘Pierce Pisaster’. ‘Course his real name was Albert Byron Wikbur.” She cleared her throat and whispered: “He was a real Warlock, though. Don’t you doubt it. Died doin’ dark magic up in the old lighthouse. I told him no, don’t you do it Albert B., let’s stay clean, but...he had *urgings*, y’see...temptations for other things. Not just the drink, but...ah, well—that’s a husband in a small town for ya’, eh?”

“So, you’re saying,” Ted asked, “That your dead wizard husband died doing dark magic in the tower of the lighthouse?”

“Did! Did indeed! See, he needed a higher place to do it in, to be closer to the skies, you see. So he broke in and climbed up and began his spellin’ and fixin.’ Then, well, a bolt a’lightnin’ shot from the sky and hit him straight on in the eye and heart. He died there and then, standin’ straight up. Such a shame. Miss him. Little bit. Not much. Sometimes.” A moment. “Still there, vanillabeans?”

“I have no idea what the hell you’re talking about.”

“Oh, don’t you doubt it, drearydeary! This town has *history*. This little place we live in is not quite what it seems. Trust an old lady. You’re a reporter, ain’t ya—go do your homework and you’ll see what I mean!”

Ted closed his eyes, shook his head, downed his whiskey, and hung up the phone.

Then he stumbled out of the house, walked down to the lake, and dove in. He swam across to the lighthouse. He stayed awake all night, there on the bank, staring at the lake, shivering, and praying to a God he did not believe in to forgive him for being such a miserable, terrible person.

*

That night, great gleaming stars glinted high above little Lighthaus.

*

And so Ted Fisk reported to work each morning without incident.

He was never late, but how could he be? With his mother’s energy level peaking at 6:00am, and the parakeets squealing at the first drop of sun in the morning? He’d sheepishly trudge into his

small, bare office on the second floor of the building that housed the newspaper, sit down, unshaven and under-attired, and stare at his computer monitor for extended bouts of time...remembering longingly the time in life when he found himself to be the most uninteresting person in the world. *That* was when life was viewed as a vast horizon of possibility, homing in oceans of thought, of process, of easy, steadfast execution.

Finally, his torpid fingers would crawl across the keyboard. He had no word-count limitations whatsoever for the column, but you'd of thought otherwise:

Aquarius—*An idea you presented to someone backfires today.*

(Now compare that to one of Zelda Statsen's old Aquarian predictions: *The intervening of Mars in retrograde the next two weeks finds you repeatedly falling into pools of deep reflection. The time is rife for you to consider new scenarios. A long road trip, perhaps, or repeated hikes to the tops of mountains where you can observe from on-high how little things are from way up there. Furthermore, Mars in retrograde can signify odd epidermal dilemmas, such as rashes or burns, especially on the feet or elbows. Get a good cream and slap it on over the next few days).*

Leo—*My, you are competitive today, ye lions.*

(Again, contrast: *The lion sleeps tonight? Think again, hardy Leo. You haven't felt this vivacious in months! Why? Because Saturn's rings have been thawing a little bit, what with the sun at a new angle, and its light and its heart reaching far out into the cosmos. You too, Leo, feel like you're reaching out into the unknown. Go boldly, lion. Go blind, for it is dark out there, but your ruling spirit and natural inclination toward aggressiveness in the face of adversity bestows a stronger sense of sight and forces you onward across the desert plains.*)

Despite Ted's obvious lack of interest in his newfound 'job', letters of encouragement and praise poured in from the town's residents:

Dear Mr. Fulsome, (Ted took Zelda's advice about changing his name) I like the new horoscope column very much, thank you. The prose is terse and astute. Your predictions are uncomplicated and precise. Zelda Statsen, your predecessor, was a prattling old wallop and we are happy to see her go!

This did little to encourage Ted, and made him feel worse, actually; were his effortless and pretentious blunderings actually having some positive effect? It all just served to cause more drinking on his way to work in the mornings, and increased the frequency of his post-work visits to *Lights Out—The Beer Haus*, where he had become a regular; the quiet guy who sat at the bar by himself with no inclination to engage in conversation with anyone. He penned poems on whiskey-spoiled napkins, attempting to rekindle the spark that made him a once-virtuous poet.

One morning—some weeks later—Ted was driving to work, swigging heartily from his flask. When he turned left onto Winston Down, a narrow, descending road that connected to the main junction of the town, something suddenly jutted out from the trees on the roadside.

It was a puppy, galloping into the middle of the road. Ted swerved to avoid hitting it, but he didn't yank the steering wheel fast enough and nipped the poor little critter in the bud. The puppy squealed in pain and limped, frightened, back into the trees. That was when Ted collided head-on with the trunk of an old oak. There was a sickening crunch of metal against wood, and suddenly the entire front end of the car was in the driver's seat with Ted, who was covered with and maimed by smashed glass, blood, and bits of broken bark.

Later, Max Pavey was on his morning delivery route. He, too, turned left onto Winston Down and immediately brought the van to a screeching halt. "Oh, no!" he cried as he got out to help his wounded friend. He cradled Ted's head in his big hands smeared with newspaper ink. Ted tried to speak, and Max feared it might be his very last words, and so bent forward to make sure

he heard him. Ted gurgled out a strangled sentence: “Take heed, storm clouds are gathering. Batten down the hatches before it’s too late.” Max lifted him out of the wreck and into the back of the van. He laid him down on the remaining newspapers and rushed his good friend to the hospital.

Ted barely made it there alive.

His mother rushed to his bedside upon hearing the news and stayed with him for days on end (except she had to go back to the house to fetch the parakeets, which she kept with her in the hospital, their cage propped up on a table beside Ted’s bed. She thought their noisy chattering might wake Ted up). But Ted didn’t come around.

When Max headed back to *The Lighthouse Times* that morning after delivering his friend to the hospital and entrusting him into his mother’s care, he explained to Mr. Rotide what had happened. Mr. Rotide arranged for the horoscopes column to be replaced with coupons until further notice.

Problem was, they still needed *something* for that day, for it was too late for other arrangements to be made. So Max went upstairs to Ted’s office and sat down at his friend’s desk. He choked back tears. He typed Ted’s words for each one of the zodiacal signs: ‘Take heed, for the storm clouds are gathering. Batten down the hatches before it’s too late.’ He did this because he thought it might be Ted’s final words, and he wanted everyone to know what they were. Max blew his nose, sighed, and forwarded the day’s horoscope to the copy editor.

*

While in his deep sleep, Ted Fisk’s concussion-swelled brain hosted many a peculiar dream. Ted found himself seeking refuge from violent storms taking over the town of Lighthaus.

He would find cover in the tower of the lighthouse that stood on the other side of the lake from his house. Beside him in the tower was a man, tall and thin with one piercing green eye and one eye burned out from its socket, as if it had been carved out with a great, sooty knife. This strange man in a long black robe with a hood hanging down his back never spoke to Ted. Rather, he stared up the night sky, raging with winds and rain and lightning.

But one night, a fierce tornado tore them both from the lighthouse and obliterated them into vapor. Ted woke from this nightmare with a violent jerk, and sat upright in his hospital bed, sweating. His mother clasped her hands together and wept with joy.

Ted was confused and frightened in the days following his waking, what with the town displaced by a solid week of uninterrupted meteorological disturbances. Also, the lighthouse had been uprooted from its foundation at the foot of the lake and then reduced to bits. It was the stuff his dreams were made of—and yet, it had all really happened?

On his first day back at work, Ted looked at his reflection in the mirror for a long time. He *felt* the same: empty, in need of whiskey, interested in himself. But he didn't *look* the same: a new pair of glasses (the old ones destroyed in the accident), a purple bruise on his forehead, and his gray eyes mere sorrowful portals of longing. Then he went back to his office. He sat there. He stared at his monitor. He thought about his strange dreams. He tipped his flask of whiskey into his mug of tea, when—

“Excuse me? Mr. Thorin Fulsome?” the woman said.

He startled so suddenly that his mug dropped from his hands and smashed onto the floor. The woman gasped. Ted looked down at the mess a moment, dejectedly, like someone who fully understood why he was about to be fired. With whatever dampened remnant of pride that remained, he managed to stand up, albeit guiltily, shove the flask into a drawer, adjust his tie, and turn around.

He saw some woman he did not know standing in his doorway, and figured she must be from HR, sent to fire him.

“Yeah. Can I, uh, can I help you?” he asked.

The woman, staring at him, blinked. “Sorry. I think I have the wrong office. I was looking for the writer of the horoscopes column?”

“Yeah. Yup. You found him.”

“It’s *you*, then?”

Ted stared at her, silent; just as she, also silent, stared at him.

There was something...the look in her eyes, the earnestness in her voice, a barely discernible apprehension that trembled, beautifully, beneath her surface. Ted suddenly felt like he had been forgiven, like he was not, in fact, a bad person—only a little lost. It felt like a gentle wave of warm salty water washed over his head and brought a redemptive sense of peace, of tranquility. He felt free again, as if a black cloud had passed over, as if some shadowy presence was moving on, leaving him, finally, in peace.

He exhaled. “Right. Um. There is no Thorin Fulsome. Not really.”

“Sorry?”

“Well, it’s a moniker. A fake name. I’m Ted Fisk. I write the horoscopes. Sort of.”

“Fisk? Ginny Fisk’s son?” Ted nodded. “Oh. I know your mother. Are you the one who...got into the accident?”

Ted nodded. “I was, um, drunk.”

Moira looked at the floor, lost in thought.

Ted continued, “I’d swerved to avoid running over a puppy. Little thing came out of nowhere. A beagle. I don’t think I hit it, I think it got away, but then I hit a tree. And lights out. Uh, I’m sorry, who are you? You work here?”

The woman shook her head. “My name is Moira Place.”

She put her head in her hands for a moment, then looked up, and surveyed the office: it was so ordinary, so plain. No sense of magic. *What’s happening?* “Listen, Mr. Fulso...uh, Fisk, I really need to speak with you, about your column. I don’t think now is the right time, but maybe we could meet sometime and—”

“How about tonight?” Ted said. He took a step toward her.

A moment passed between them, a candle flame quivering. Moira slowly put her hand to her heart, but then caught herself, and quickly made as if to scratch an itch she had there. “Yes. Fine. Can I make dinner?” she said. “I live off Bagdasar Road, at the top of Granger Down...that land there with the old farmhouses? You know it?”

Ted nodded. “Dinner sounds perfect.”

He stepped forward and offered his hand.

She took it.

*

That evening Ted dressed himself in his good gray suit and wore a light blue tie that reflected the light of his blue-gray eyes. He walked into the backyard just as the sun was slipping away; a wispy, pinkish smear in the falling westward sky. Beyond the wreckage of the lighthouse

across the lake. He knelt to the flowers that grew in his mother's well-tended garden and clipped a few of the most flourishing. Then he was on his way.

He was surprised when a familiar little limping beagle greeted him at the door. He leaned down, picked him up, and held him. Moira introduced Ted to Guy and Griffin, and then she put her boys to bed. About an hour later, after they'd finished dinner, Moira placed a freshly baked apple pie on the table. "Help yourself," she said.

"Thanks. That was an amazing meal," Ted said. And then, shaking his head, "Damn. That's the first time I've actually felt like it's good to be back home."

Moira watched him eat the pie she'd made, and he seemed to be enjoying it. He looked at her and smiled. There was something so simple, so easy about this. It made her realize that who she was and what she had was enough, and that there was never any need for the silly personals ads in the paper—and as she thought that, she chuckled quietly to herself, realizing in that moment that she'd never actually made it to personals pages and never once surveyed even one of them.

"Well," Moira said. "I suppose I should tell you why I looked for you."

"I really enjoy your company," Ted said.

Moira nodded. Then she said, "Everything you wrote in your column for my horoscope—every single thing—came true for me, for an entire week, every day, without fail." She retrieved the clippings she'd saved, laid them out on the table, and proceeded to detail each instance for Ted: the storms, the raise at work, the burn and broken bones, the person from the past, the finding of something lost, and the strange phenomena.

All Ted wanted was a drink. He fought the urge so intensely that little beads of sweat formed on his forehead. He couldn't shake the feeling that he was being duped somehow; that this was a joke, maybe even set up by his ex-wife. But at the same time, he knew that this was not a

prank. He felt energized. There was a sense of ease, of quietude, of some peaceful mystery at hand. He pushed the pie away and stared into the flame of the candle on the table between them. “Hey. You want to go for a little walk?” he asked. “Look at the stars?”

The wind was slight, high and slow, and it soared from the north like a nighthawk.

It was a new moon that night, and a pitch-black sky sparkled with God’s glitter; silver flickers spilled across a swathe of gloss-dark velvet. Ted and Moira headed down the driveway toward the road, Moira holding a flashlight, neither of them speaking, both of them deep in thought. Ted found a big rock, sat on it, and stared at the sky. Moira slipped down beside him, careful not to disturb a little crucifix that had been made of sticks and inserted into the earth where Guy had buried one of his fallen lizards.

Ted said, “Here’s the thing...I sat in that office day after day, drunk usually, and churned out crap. I don’t believe in that stuff, I didn’t want to take the job, I did it because I needed money.”

Moira put her head in her hands.

“I was making that crap up on the spot. Hell, any moron can sit down and write horoscopes and make them sound genuine.”

“Has anyone else contacted you about this?” she asked. Ted shook his head. “So I am the *only one* this stuff happened to?”

Ted shrugged. “Well, so far, anyway.” At that, they chuckled.

Moira stood up, walked a few feet away, and looked at the sky. “This is just utterly unbelievable,” she said quietly.

Ted stood, walked to her, touched her shoulders, and turned her around to face him.

Moira's eyes reflected the stars that hovered in the lower part of the sky behind Ted; stars that quivered and glistened before spilling their tears. Ted kissed her as those tears fell; a cascade of starwater that graced his face at the same time that it adorned hers.

*

Weeks, then.

Hours flew by that were simultaneously magical and terrifying for Moira and Ted, given their strange circumstances. And they were 'circumstances' that required investigation, they both knew, even as Lighthouse life went on as it did, day after day with a solstice, and birthday parties, a grand opening of a hardware store, weddings, funerals, christenings, unfortunate accidents. The usual stuff: the waking and working of the world, during which Ted and Moira plummeted into love with one another. They were like skydivers leaping from planes.

He was a great surrogate dad for Guy and Griffin, because he tromped the fields with them, built forts and fires, trapped rabbits and snakes, and took the boys fishing at the lake. Before long, Moira started up her own class at the local college: A literature course aptly titled *Utopias & Dystopias*. She and the students studied the works of H.G Wells, Ursula LeGuin, L. Frank Baum, J.K. Rowling, J.R.R Tolkien, Nancy Farmer, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, H.P. Lovecraft, and Philip Pullman: stories of good and bad magic, of epic journeys, of wizards, and witches, and of oddball worlds bogged down by instances of coincidence, incidents, and manifest destinies playing out before vengeful (or non-existent) Gods.

All this is to say: they lived happily ever after.

H O W E V E R –

Ted and Moira, were unable, for reasons unknown, to birth a child. Ted was not impotent; Moira was not barren. Doctors in two surrounding states could find no legitimate medical explanation. For years they tried to conceive, and for years they failed. But were Ted and Moira melancholy? No. Perplexed, yes, but nonetheless resolved to accept that whatever gentle force that had conjoined them would also quietly guide them through whatever other obscurities awaited.

Ted thought to seek out Zelda Statsen, the old writer of the horoscopes column that he had succeeded, because he suspected that she had some answers. *Do your homework*, she'd told him. Maybe that was what Ted needed to do. Maybe there was something there in Lighthouse. But then, he thought, whatever it was, it had brought them together, and that was the most important thing to him. So, what good could come of uncovering the town's historical mysteries? Why not just leave it all alone?

Ted and Moira were neither melancholy nor troubled about their strange predicament—but Ginny Fisk sure was! Ted's mom wanted more than birds to care for after all! And Max Pavey, Kathleen Kout, and Gwenny Nin all would've made wonderful Godparents, baby-sitters, and surrogate aunts and uncles. But, no bother. Everyone was thrilled that they'd found one another.

Nonetheless, Ted and Moira sometimes speculated about possible ways to conceive; ways that coincided somehow with their magical quandary:

“Should we ‘do it’ on the spot where the lighthouse used to stand?” Moira asked. So, they did, but that did not work.

“Should I go back to writing horoscopes and see if that does it?” Ted wondered? He tried it for a few weeks, but to no avail.

Ted had told Moira all about Zelda Statsen, and they both agreed that she might be the key, but again, they could not find her. They resolved to keep looking.

And so, again—they lived happily ever after....

*

Should you, gentle reader, pass through the town of Lighthouse at any time during your life, by all means clear the summit of Granger Down, take a left onto Bagdasar Road and head to the old farm about two miles down. Say hello. Smile. Cock your head in wonder. Be warned, however, if you are neither superstitious, spiritual, nor prone to ‘sensitivities’ when it comes to ominous occurrences, or coincidental incidents. Be warned, for if you bring that stuff up, Ted and Moira just might sit you down, give you some pie, and tell you a little tale about the eradication of their own incredulity as far as superstitious stuff is concerned. Stay until it gets dark, if you can. Then go outside and look up—the view of the stars from Moira and Ted’s house will make you a believer.

In everything.

