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THE BINARY GHOST

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A GRIPPING EPIC OF LOVE AND PROFIT IN A NEAR FUTURE OF CORPORATE INTRIGUE AND TECHNOLOGY.

CAN YOU SOLVE THIS MYSTERY?



L. Lightfeather

sentient

LACHRIMÆ





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THE RUSSIAN FISHERMAN

— Would you like to hear the story of the Russian fisherman? said Lachrimae as she delicately sat down on a pink sofa entirely lined with lotus silk.

The electric heater that simulated a flame on an interactive screen radiated a cozy wave of heat amidst all those books distributed on massive shelves that stretched to heights only reachable with the help of sliding ladders whose tracks extended throughout the length of that room.

The library of the Malyshev family palace represented one of the rooms on the six floors of the architectural legacy that her father had built as a consequence of leading Russia's industry for three decades.

— I don't know, aunt, your stories scare me, said Mikhail, her nephew, as he joined her on the sofa, carrying a heavy navy blue woolen blanket with golden adornments that enveloped him like a cocoon.

— My stories prepare you for life, Mikhail. If you don't have the courage to listen, that's fine.

— Is the ending sad or happy? Said Mikhail, looking at his aunt suspiciously.

Lachrimae's voice was velvety and uniformly soothing, conveying a sonorous comfort whose notes existed only thanks to the perfect balance between the high and low tones of her vocal cords. That was precisely why bedtime reading was impeccable for putting her nephew to sleep.

"Ask her to come to my office after the program, I want to meet her. Alright, we'll be back from commercials in a minute, have a nice tea, Krishna. You got this. Oh, one more thing. The board said once again to go easy on the senator," Marina finished as she retreated behind the cameras and took her agenda with her.

— The Russian fisherman lost his wife during the birth of his firstborn on the eighth twilight of a waning moon. Consumed by profound grief over the loss of the only love he was capable of feeling, the Russian fisherman buried them both in the yard and went on to live the rest of his life without a true reason that could make him smile again.

— Why did this happen to him? It's not fair, interrupted Mikhail, intrigued by the story's beginning.

— There is no way to know dear. That's nature. It can give just as easily as it can take away, replied Lachrimae as she stroked the blonde locks that guarded her nephew's temple.

— He then started living the rest of his life seeing in black and white. He couldn't explain what he felt precisely because he didn't feel anything. He was unable to imagine the future because he didn't believe he had

one. He got up from bed and navigated through his days the same way our lungs inhale and exhale air. Back and forth, Forth and back.

The cell phone on the armrest of the couch vibrates and Lachrimae glances at the notification while continuing.

— The fisherman was never the same after that night. He was no longer able to take care of his health, he didn't eat, and very rarely drank water. He scooped two spoons of water from the well every morning and that was enough for the rest of the day. Because of that, he grew thinner and thinner, becoming a man with bony shoulders and a sunken neck.

— Two spoons of water a day? It makes me thirsty just thinking about it. Mikhail said with a weak voice, taken by sleep.

— Two spoons of water a day. He spent most of his days on his fishing boat surrounded by water, pulling his fishing line and changing his baits, time and time again, catching cods, haddocks, herrings, halibuts, and salmons, but he returned all of them to the sea except for the last. Sometimes, he also threw his fishing basket in search of crabs. These and the coveted salmons had the highest exchange price in the village, and for that reason, he took as much as he could to his cabin during his long afternoons and also fishing nights when he needed to light the lamp he carried with him.

Lachrimae paused to see if there were any questions and still caressing her nephew, she continued.

— And just like that, the fisherman kept living, for minutes and hours - which became days - days and weeks, which became months - and finally - months that added up to other months, which became years. Years that passed before his eyes, eyes that sunk deeper into a face that would sculpt itself in bones. But never, Mikhail, could the fisherman imagine what would happen when he left home one last time. When on the eighth waning moon, of the eighth year since the death of his wife and son, he set out once again for another ephemeral fishing before an endless life. For on that day, he would stay on the lake once again until dawn. On that much-awaited day, he would stay until the moment the waning glow of the sharp half-moon began to reflect its light on the water and penetrate a reflection in his eyes. He did not recognize that the moon was trying to tell him something and decided it was time to retrieve his basket and leave. But it was inevitable, simply inevitable, for destiny to find him, for when he pulled the basket up with force to the boat, his wife's bones interwoven in the hook line would come along with the basket.

Lacrhimae paused to catch her breath and continued.

— Contrary to what you may think, Mikhail, the man was not frightened when he came across what was left of a body, of a once-living person, of his reminiscent wife. A body sustained by worn-out bones, attached together by the hook, which creaked with movement, seemed to no longer have life, as it was believed for eight long years that it no longer had. He carefully positioned

his wife's bones in the boat, without risking undoing the hook knots, as seeing that did not frighten him, but unseeing her once again terrified him to the core. He rowed, and he rowed. How the fisherman rowed, Mikhail. He rowed as he had never rowed before, like he could not even imagine, he could row anymore. He rowed without blinking, for in the same direction as the horizon sat his wife, and the moon floated in the sky, in a waning of a blink. He rowed until finally, he reached his cabin and, with caution, took his wife's bones inside. But he ended up entangled in the hook and, due to sheer exhaustion from rowing so much, he could no longer move. He sat near the bed, looking and feeling in disbelief until he could no longer stay awake, and his gaze finally rowed toward sleep. He began to dream as he had never dreamed before, dreaming that he rowed with fervor. He rowed towards the horizon where he now finally knew something was waiting for him. He longed for his destination while smiling with a newfound glimmer. He dreamed so deeply, Mikhail, that even while still asleep in the real world, he unconsciously unveiled a subtle smile. After eight long years he also finally cried. He cried two spoonfuls of tears that traveled down his dormant face until they met with his wife's bones. His dehydrated wife, who was thirsting deeply. His reminiscent love, deeply dehydrated, forever ossified, at last, found by him. Found by the two spoonfuls of tears that were more than enough for her, who absorbed that water as if it were the last drops of life from the ocean of a man. Finally leading the fisherman

to dry up into bones, while his wife, forever and always, became hydrated in a blink.

She paused her speech and observed her nephew, still in her arms, who remained motionless and breathed peacefully, going back and forth.

— *Dorogoy*, always sleeps at the best part. She said as she calmly stood up from the couch and left her nephew sleeping.

She grabbed her phone, replied to a message, and went towards a desk where she picked up a cream-colored cardstock paper and dipped a fountain pen to write a note for the next morning.

"I had to travel for work. Your aunt loves you."

PS. Drink plenty of water."

Lachrimae