

Celeste

Lucy Eaton (2023)

The brass clock ticked as the enchantress wandered through the room. The walls were lined with thousands of oak shelves, each housing more knowledge than the last. The enchantress had resided within those libraries walls far longer than any empire had lasted, 1,576 years. It was as if she lived within the stories themselves, etching every creation into her being: each idea, instance of love, confession, forgiveness, revenge, or betrayal.

‘What shall she choose?’ muttered one book to another, pages flapping with excitement. ‘The reading will happen soon.’

‘Me! For I am important and a relevant source on what matters most,’ stated the Constitution.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ said a worn-out-looking cookbook. ‘I have a collection of recipes that would fill the void of loneliness she feels every day.’

‘She’s the cat’s mother,’ mumbled a thick, leather book, its pages dog-eared and ripped.

The clamorous riot continued, but that didn’t seem to bother the enchantress. She remained calm and collected. Reaching over, she picked up a hard-back book; shades of blues and purples decorated the cover. The title was written in beautiful gold-plated gilding. With a heavy heart, the enchantress ran along the name of the book—her favourite—*Pride and Prejudice*. And just as she had done before she traced the author’s name.

‘Hello, old friend,’ she whispered.

Unlike the lively literature that continued arguing, this book remained dormant. The enchantress cradled her package as she placed the story on a marble pedestal. Gently, she pried the pages apart and began to recite the familiar tale.

‘Look!’ the cookbook said. ‘Look, she has chosen!’

The collection of books fell silent. Eager to see what their keeper had selected, each book fell from their shelf, one by one. Down went the constitution, down went the dog-eared book, down went the nursery rhymes and down went the cookbook. Their spines crackled as their pages fluttered like wings. They fell into a rhythm and began to slowly circle the enchantress, hovering above her head.

They listened as she read about Lizzie's first encounter with Mr Darcy, about how Lydia's elopement with Mr Wickham was burdensome, and questioned how Mr Bennet's ears were still intact. Finally, they were nearing the end. The enchantress's voice was barely audible as lost emotions found her once again. Her tears flowed as she read the last lines. Then she began to sob. Tears tainted her skin in streams of violet, vermillion and cerulean, as if she were a child's art project. A resentment towards her entire being arose—how unfair it was that she had read the greatest love stories yet never been given the chance to experience love herself. The colours fell upon *Pride and prejudice* in angry swirls, blurring the ink and melding the pages into one, but the book didn't seem to mind.

Seeing their keeper in pain caused the group of books fluttering above great sorrow and soon they also began to weep. The colours of their emotions fell from the sky like rain. Pinks and blues, greens, and purples.

'Dear heavens,' the enchantress cried, 'why must you let me suffer like so? Have I not given you everything I have?'

An eternity spent alone was what she faced, with no family or friends to call her own. Yes, she had the books, but there was only so much they could offer. The pain that filled the room morphed into an angry storm; the water washed away all the words ever written or spoken within those walls. The colours mixed and swirled, crashing against the shelves as if they were a tumultuous ocean.

As the rain kept on, the books became heavy with the burden of their newfound emotions; slowly, but surely, they began to tire. One by one each book fell into the crashing waves below. Down went the constitution, down went the dog-eared book, down went the nursery rhymes and down went the cookbook. Nonetheless, the copy of *Pride and prejudice* didn't budge—it soaked in the pain and sorrow its fellow brethren had felt. It soaked up the tears its keeper had cried, all the laughter and torment she had endured. For many years the book had done this. Whether it be in a little nook, or under the light of the moon, it had always comforted the enchantress.

Unfortunately, it felt as if this may have been for the last time. One final wave of colour swept down before the book was no more, ripped and warped, the cover torn off with almighty force. The waves shredded the work into the oak shelves, sentencing it to an end.

As the storm quietened, the enchantress was stuck numb on the ground. Now alone and empty, her vehement performance had left her undone. She sat there for some time, digesting

everything that had happened. The sun had set and the moon was full in the night sky when the enchantress finally got up. Wandering around, she gathered the dampened pages and shattered covers that lay strewn across the floor. She shaped the mess into something resembling a human form before dropping to her knees.

‘I’m sorry,’ she whispered, ‘all these years you have brought me nothing but comfort and companionship, and this is how I pay you back. I was too busy asking in my self-pity, I didn’t even stop to say thank you.’

She gave the pile a quick peck, before standing again. She hoped they would forgive her weakness and that they would rest easy now. Trudging away from the scene, the enchantress decided to call it a night—the new day needed a stronger version of herself, not the self-loathing woman who had appeared earlier in the day. What she didn’t notice was the small movement that came from the pile, pulsating like a heart.

By the time the morning arrived, the enchantress had stopped mourning the loss of her companions. She was still filled with regret, but there was nothing to be done. She approached the spot in which she had built the pile but, to her surprise, it was no longer there.

‘Impossible,’ she muttered. ‘How could it have disappeared? It’s not like it could have grown legs and walked away.’

‘If that were true, you wouldn’t exist, my dear,’ a deep voice challenged.

The enchantress whipped around and was greeted with the sight of a man. His skin was stained violet, vermillion, and cerulean, his eyes grey like storm clouds. His clothes resembled the outfits depicted in a Sherlock Holmes novel, and his shoes were worn like the leather of a loved book.

‘Who are you?’ asked the enchantress.

The man smiled and shook his head. ‘I think you know the answer already, don’t you?’

Realisation dawned as she assessed the man. His face was new, yet his manner familiar. At that moment, she concluded there truly were no boundaries in her world.

‘Well, what do you want?’

‘I would like to know your name miss,’ he said. ‘A millennium we have spent together, but all I know is that you would rather read Jane Austen over Charles Dickens any day.’

‘My name is Celeste.’ A long silence followed; she was lost deep in thought. ‘Although I have a feeling you knew that.’

They looked at each other and smiled knowingly. Maybe she didn’t have to be alone forever.