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The Shadow of Light

by

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A low clicking sound awoke Marie Bolang Hastings. Having children made her very sensitive to noise—the motion of a child awake in the night, the soft sound of distress before little Leora began to cry. Marie sat up on the bed without waking her husband. She was a slight woman, petite and exquisitely beautiful. Her skin was the color of cappuccino. Her hair was black, long, and silky. Her eyes, more appropriate on an Egyptian tomb painting were large and brown and exotic. She was, by rights, an English Lady, the Lady Hastings in waiting. She stole a glance at her sleeping husband, George, and sighed. She pulled on her robe and walked out their door to where she heard the strange sounds. Down the hall, Lumière Bolang, Marie's sister, sat in the darkness of the small living room. Marie knew it was Lumière. She couldn't tell why, but her soul and spirit told her Lumière sat on their mother's couch and mumbled in French, the sound of clicking came incessantly from Lumière's hands. Lumière appeared very much like Marie. They were sisters, after all. Any difference was due to Lumière's slimmer build and brilliant emerald eyes. Where Marie's face was round and her figure full; Lumière was thin, still curvaceous, but thin, perhaps too thin. She looked strikingly like their mother.

Marie called softly into the darkness, “Are you praying, Lumière?”

The sounds didn’t stop. Lumière’s quiet, injured voice rose out of the darkness, “I am praying, Marie.”

“What are you praying about?”

The clicking didn’t stop, “About mother, father, you…” there was a sudden smile in her voice, “About Aleksandr and Robert and Jacques. What do you pray for, Marie?”

“Right now, I pray mostly for you.”

The sound stopped for a moment, then continued, “Why me, Marie?”

“I am so afraid for you Lumière. I love you so much, but now I can’t understand you now at all.”

Lumière laughed gently, “That is because, Marie, I can’t understand myself.”

“Is Aleksandr sleeping?”

Lumière’s voice took on an edge, “How would I know? I don’t share a bed with him.”

Under her breath, Marie replied, “Perhaps you should.” Aloud she uttered, “When will you marry?”

“I’m not sure we will.”

Marie threw out her hands, “Lumière that’s just what I meant. Aleksandr is wonderful. He is handsome and fun. He loves you Lumière. Why wouldn’t you marry him?”

“What kind of wife could I be to him, Marie? He expects peace; I can only offer him turmoil. He expects love—I’m not sure I can love anyone.”

“Yet everyone loves you, Lumière.”

“Ha, there you are wrong. The State Department does not like me at all.”

“You shouldn’t be so bitter, Lumière. They let you stay here in America.”

“They were ready to throw Aleksandr and me back into the hands of the Soviet State. What do you think would have happened then?”

“I’m sure they would have killed you.”

“Marie. You have no idea. They would have kept us both alive for a long time and played us against each other—torture is a pastime to them. You all live fat here...like the Communist Party there. You have no idea the pain and suffering that is going on in that place.”

“But I do know, Lumière. I know of it because of you.”

Lumière was suddenly quiet. In the stillness and darkness, Marie heard her soft sobs. Marie stepped over to the thin young woman and put her arms around her. Lumie’re stiffened for a moment then let Marie gather her in her arms, “What are you thinking of Lumière that makes you so sad?”

Lumière’s voice was a wail, “I left so many who depended on me and who helped me.”

“There was nothing else you could have done.”

“Perhaps not, but I should be there and not them. I should be facing torture and not them.”

“But you don’t know they are being tortured.”

“Anyone who touched me for any good is locked away in the basements of the MVD, the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. They are facing excruciating pain, suffering, and degradation because of me.” Lumière gave a gentle sob, “Mother Anna and Mother Marya are likely there. They don’t deserve that.”

“I don’t know what to say to you Lumière. I don’t know what to do.”

“That, Marie, is why I pray, and that is why I don’t deserve any pleasure or comfort or to lie safe in Aleksandr’s arms.”

“But Lumière, you can’t do anything about any of those things. You can’t right all the evil in the world.”

“Mother used to tell me that all the time. You remember, Marie. Mother used to say those very words...”

“Because, even as a child, you bore the burden of the whole world on your shoulders.”

Marie could feel Lumière’s smile in the darkness, “Now the burden of the world is on my shoulders.” Her face turned to Marie, “What can I do, sister? What else can I do?”

Marie drew her older sister to her and held her face against her, “Lumière, I don’t know what you can or should do—I only know that you should grasp the love you can when you can, and that you hold on to the love that is offered to you when it is offered to you. If you don’t, you will hate yourself and hate what you will become.”

Lumière buried her face in Marie’s hair, “You don’t understand, Marie. I already hate what I am and what I have become. That is my problem.”

Marie held her sister for a long time—until the sun began to shine through the thin curtains of the living room. Lumière lifted up her miserable and lonely face. Her face was covered with tears and sadness, “It is time for Matins, Marie. I must pray.”

Marie gently disentangled herself from her sister’s arms and headed back to the guest bedroom she shared with her husband George. Marie turned around at the opening to the corridor, “If you must pray, Lumière, pray mostly for yourself. Pray for your whole world. That is the most important thing right now.”

Late in the morning, Lumière entered the dining room. Her mother and father, Leora and Paul, and their great friends, Tilly and Bruce, sat at the table. Leora Bolang was almost an exact

copy of Lumière. If there was any difference, it was simply their age and eye color. Leora appeared as Lumière would when she was some twenty years older. Paul displayed an officer's stature and grace. He was tall and strong and handsome. His face was wrinkled with smile lines at the corners of his mouth and eyes. It was worn with weather and the worry of command, but always full of strength and optimism. Matilda Anne Robina Acland Hastings Lyons was their old friend. She was a thin athletic looking woman with a round face. She was the daughter of Lord and Lady Hastings. When her parents died Marie and George would attain those hereditary positions. In consequence, Tilly loved Marie like a daughter and treated all of Leora's children like her own. Bruce Lyons was her husband. Bruce was a handsome man with a strong face and a calm manner. A long scar crawled across his forehead and gave his right eye a slight droop. He was a hero of the Second World War and the head of "the organization," a British Military Intelligence agency.

Aleksandr sat at the end of the table. He was tall and also spare with a shock of blond hair and northern Russian features. He was Russian and did not speak English well. He raised his face toward Lumière, and when she didn't acknowledge him, he reluctantly turned his face away. Tilly stood and walked over to Lumière. Her British accent made her sound brisk, "Good morning, Lumière. Would you like coffee?"

Aleksandr called out in his rough English, "No. No coffee, tea. She would like tea, tea with milk and sugar."

Lumière looked down and then back toward Tilly, "Yes, tea with milk and sugar—if you have it."

Lumière sat awkwardly at the table between her parents and Tilly and Bruce. Aleksandr was across from her. He did not look up at her.

Tilly poured a cup of hot water and began to brew some British tea for Lumière.

Leora glanced at Lumière, “Did you sleep last night, child?”

Lumière turned her face toward her mother, “Mother, I did not sleep last night. I did not sleep the night before.”

Leora winced. She whispered, “You’ll kill yourself.” Louder, she asked, “Why can’t you sleep? What is bothering you so much?”

“I won’t speak about it right now. I can’t. Not here and not in front of everyone.”

Leora raised her hand, “I’m sorry—I didn’t know it was like that.”

“Like what?”

Tilly placed a cup of tea in front of Lumière, “Drop it, Lumière. You haven’t slept. You are worried about something. You won’t tell us what is bothering you—just drop it for now.”

“I really can’t tell you.” She glanced down into her tea and took a sip.

Aleksandr stared darkly at Lumière. In his limited English and thick Russian accent, he stated, “I can tell you what is bothering her.”

Lumière glared at him. She barked at him in Russian, “Shut up, Aleksandr.”

He responded in Russian, “Svetlana, I don’t work for you any longer. I can do whatever I want now.” He stood up and nodded at Leora and Paul, Tilly and Bruce; then he stalked out of the room.

Lumière stared at her tea until he was gone. When Aleksandr was safely out of sight and hearing, she threw the cup and saucer away from her. It fell off the table and shattered on the floor. Then Lumière buried her face in her arms.

Leora pursed her lips. She lifted her chin to Paul. He stood and left the room. Tilly and Bruce stood and nodded at Leora. Leora sat watching Lumière and sipped her coffee. After a

long time Lumière slowly lifted her head. She didn't look to either side. It was as though no one else was there—it was as though the tragedy that was Lumière was her tragedy alone, and her actions were all intentional. She didn't notice whether anyone remained in the room. Lumière started to stand. Leora placed her hand on Lumière's arm. Lumière stared at her mother's fingers. She made a face as though deciding whether to stay or whether to leave. Lumière sat back in her place. She stared straight ahead like a child caught in a misdeed who knows they deserve some punishment.

Leora said nothing. Finally Lumière built up enough courage to speak. Unspent tears choked her rough voice, "Mother, the last time I almost killed Aleksandr. I had to use... He was dead. Except for...except for...He would be dead now." She buried her face again in her hands.

"Does he know?"

"I'm not sure he understands what I had to do...I don't know."

"But you love him?"

"You don't know how long I tried not to love him. After that, I tried everything to make him not love me. I treated him badly." She stared at her mother, "Now, I may have finally succeeded."

Leora pulled Lumière closer to her, "But do you love him?"

Lumière put her fingers against her lips. Her face twisted in absolute despair, "I love him like I love life." She almost choked with emotion, "I can't imagine life without him. Now he is gone."

As though Lumière's words were prescient, the front door opened and shut with a bang.

Captured gently in her mother's arms, Lumière shook her head, "He is gone."

"Then, my child, what will you do to get him back?"

Lumière shuddered and took a deep breath, “Nothing. I will do nothing. The last time I almost killed him. Now, I have no way to protect him. I must eventually confront Leila. She would destroy him—I can’t allow that.”

Leora thought to herself, *doesn't she realize Leila is dead*. Leora held Lumière closer, “Your father confronted Leila at my side twice. She could not defeat him.”

Lumière raised her head a little. Her face was filled with wonder, “Did he really?”

“Don’t you remember? You were there the second time. Each time, your father provided the blow that defeated her. He was the reason. He was the hand of the Aton God against her.”

Leora kissed Lumière’s hair, “I never told any of you about the first time we encountered Leila. The first time was in Tunisia in her tomb. You know it all happened at Fort Saint, your father’s command. The summer sun was blazing. I was able to convince them to release Leila when the sun was at its height. This was before I knew the Aton God. I worshiped Ra—my power was at its peak when Ra stood high in the sky. I was dressed in a Legionnaire’s pants and shirt. At first, I was afraid to reenter the tomb, but your father called me to the ladder. He descended first and at the bottom, held the ladder for me. I regretted leaving the bright sunlight because I knew the darkness would limit my power.

“Inside the tomb, your father carried a torch for the two of us. He was dressed in his field uniform. On his back, he wore his grandfather’s large saber—you have seen it. It is ‘the sword.’ The blade was too long to hang from his scabbard. Attached to his belt, he carried four Molotov cocktails, two on each side. He convinced the archeologists to each carry one. He had at least convinced them to that degree. They were convinced but unbelieving.

“Your father loved me even then. He was bewitched by me. Though I wore a man’s clothing, he couldn’t keep his eyes off me. I had braided my long black tresses, and in the

torchlight, he thought my hair and I were beautiful. I know he could not help but remember me as he first saw me, naked and undaunted, unashamed.

“I chastised him gently because I knew he loved me then. How could he know that his love of me was the greatest power that could protect him in Leila’s realm, yet that same love could distract his mind from its necessary work?”

“When we entered the antechamber of the tomb, I held his hand and felt through it his strength and power—he is powerful. A power beyond anything or anyone I ever knew before.

“Our torches and the archeologists didn’t make a dent in the darkness of the tomb. The archeologists, Audrey, Parrain, and Williams stood at the western wall. With their torches, they formed three tiny pools of light in the black room.

“Near their feet, the mortar was chipped away around a block in the center of the wall. It was the block in front of the glyph for darkness. It was the same block under which the blood channel ran.

“Williams leaned on a pick and behind him, near the wall, lay a sledgehammer and a shovel. When we arrived, that was the signal to begin. Williams set his torch in a holder on the floor and raised his pick in a long arch. The blade came down on the stone with a sound that reverberated throughout the chamber. The plaster around the wall trembled and loosened a shower of masonry. The stone moved a little. Williams raised the pick a second time and, again brought it down fiercely against the stone; the stone moved forward slowly.

“Audrey and Parrain radiated the same sense of expectation as they had when they opened the eastern tomb, my tomb. They both leaned forward filled with anticipation. The darkness of Leila called them forward. They forgot the warning of the stone. The thought of treasure, the lure of excitement, the secrets of antiquity beguiled them.

“Your father trusted the Aton God, and he trusted me. He resisted Leila’s pull. He leaned toward me and stood like a warrior, lightly on the balls of his feet. He was ready to fight, ready to meet whatever the tomb had to offer.

“Williams swung his pick again with great force; the blade slammed against the block and cracked the stone from top to bottom. The block split so unexpectedly he stumbled forward and dropped the pick. The halves of the block fell slowly into the tomb, and the stones began to collapse upon themselves. Without warning, the first layer of falling stones came together at the apex of the opening and the wall settled unmoving. A puff of ancient dust from the opening suddenly sucked back in, and the violent rush of air caught us all unawares. It tore around our clothing and into the breached wall. In the angry wind, the torches fanned to greater flames until the gust slowly died.

“I told Williams to hit the wall again. Your father yelled at Williams, and Williams picked up the tool and swung it against the topmost stones. The blocks began to move again. They fell into the opening and into the tomb. The dust rose with the noise of the stones, but this time, no rush of wind into the sealed tomb cleared the air. Under the dust, the noise of the falling stones continued for a long time.

“I grasped your father’s hand again. He is a very brave man, but these mysteries bring fear to the even the most powerful. As the dust slowly settled, we saw the gold in Leila’s tomb caught in a whirl like tiny threads flashing on a golden loom. The motion centered around the middle of the tomb, and through the dust, we discerned the outline of a magnificent golden sarcophagus.

“A sound grew in the tomb. The sound was like humming bees or buzzing wasps—like a million wings moving in a blur. As the ancient dust settled, the gold seemed to rise into the air, and the sounds became louder. I told your father the spell was knitting Leila’s body. Because of

his actions before, the spell was not done properly from the beginning, and so, it took longer now.

“Your father asked if we should attack Leila—he is so brave and so great, always so brave and wonderful. I warned him that the spell had wards and pointed out Leila’s wraith, who guarded her from the upper reaches of the tomb.

“Parrain was enraptured by the spiritual power in the tomb. He took a step toward the tomb’s opening, then another. Parrain headed toward the spiritual center of the room. Only by chance, he stepped to within a yard of the sarcophagus just as the spell finished its action. Silence immediately covered the tomb.

“The torches dimmed, but I called a word that demanded light and caused them to flare to greater brightness. The air chilled, and the golden dust began to disperse in the chamber.

“My word of power restrained Leila so she could not flee—I wanted your father to be able to fight against her.”

Lumière stared at Leora, “Even if it could have meant his death?”

“Yes—especially if it could mean his death. You can’t protect a brave man from doing what he knows is right. But listen to what happened next. Parrain stood directly before Leila. She was naked. Her face and body held the keys of beauty; they were proportioned exactly like mine—and yours.” Leora looked puzzled for a moment, “Except her eyes were green, like yours.” Leora continued her account, “Leila’s stance was arrogant and angry. A look of malice skewed her features, and a perpetual frown turned down the sides of her mouth. She thrust her hip forward invitingly, yet her stance was purely sexual and held no degree of sensuality.”

Lumière twisted her face, “That is exactly how she always presented herself to me.”

“Leila stared down her body as if she took stock of it, and an evil hiss escaped between her clenched teeth that turned into an awful moan. Her breasts were like scars, like a mummy’s breasts, and when she reached up to touch them, she moaned again. One arm was whole but the other was a horrible stick, a brittle, imperfect image of the other.”

“When I saw her, she appeared whole.”

“Listen to what she did, Lumière, and you will understand. The Goddess of Darkness flung out her arms and called an unspeakable word. A cascade of black words filled her mouth. Parrain knelt to her, and she sneered. Williams stalked toward the Goddess of Darkness and raised his pick menacingly at her, but a lone word from Leila sent her wraith against him. Williams dropped heavily to the paving stones. He lay moaning on the ground while Leila licked the blood that sprinkled her hands.

“She called the black wraith to her. The wraith blended with Leila for an instant, and when her shape was solid once again, she had changed. Her arm and breasts became black but whole. Her face and eyes also turned as dark as the darkest night.”

Lumière lifted a little in her mother’s grasp, “That is why she appears black like pitch, it is her wraith.”

Leora continued, “Parrain stood. He reached out to embrace Leila, and she enveloped him with her black arms. He bent over to kiss her, but her lips opened like a cavern, and slowly like a snake, she engulfed his head. He writhed in her arms, first with desire, then with a mixture of pain and passion, and his muffled groans came from inside Leila’s misshapen skull.

“Your father and Audrey began to move toward the western tomb’s entrance, toward Leila. I was afraid for a moment, afraid I had lost him to Leila’s power, but he spoke my name, once, then again, then over and over.

“Because of that, Leila noticed your father. She recognized her danger from a man who was not bewitched by her.” Leora stared at Lumière, “You realize a power of the Goddess of Darkness is to beguile men.”

Lumière shook her head.

Leora continued, “Leila turned her disfigured head and stared directly at your father.

“Your father handed his torch to me. He reached over his shoulder and drew the heavy sword out of its scabbard. He hefted the sword in his hands. Then he hesitated.”

Lumière cried, “He hesitated? When has father ever hesitated?”

“I told him to kill Leila. But he said that he had never before killed a woman, and that Leila looked like me.”

Lumière stared at her mother, “He is an honorable man.”

“He is a man who holds honor above life. That is why we have to temper these men—they will give all to God when God only wants from them what it has given them to do.

“Parrain’s body still writhed in the grip of the creature. Your father began to pace toward Leila. He used my name to encourage and empower himself. He knocked Audrey out of the way.

“Leila screamed around the head in her mouth, then her mouth closed on his neck and Parrain’s body dropped headless, still writhing, to the stone. Leila spat Parrain’s head at your father. His sword came up and caught the head midair. The great blade deflected it from him.

“Your father cried my name as he rushed forward and swung his sword blindly before him. The long sword sliced Leila through her belly and spilled her entrails along her thighs. Leila moved back into the left alcove. Paul tried to follow Leila, but Audrey grasped him around the

legs. He kicked Audrey away, and as your father looked up, Leila attacked him again. Her head had returned to its normal size and shape. It took on my appearance.

“Paul’s sword came up. Leila grasped the blade in her hands and tried to snatch it from him. Her black hands were bloodless and as strong as iron, and the blade deformed under her inhuman strength. She kicked at him and moved down the sword to grasp him with her arms and mouth.

“Audrey again reached out to trip your father. Your father kicked out, and Audrey’s torch fell at his feet. Your father took one hand from the sword and grasped a Molotov cocktail at his belt. Before Audrey’s torch went out, he lit the trailing cloth of the Molotov cocktail and threw it at the ground before Leila.

“The bottle burst and splattered flames all along the floor. Leila released the sword and screamed horribly. She stepped back into the now fiery alcove. Your father stood and waited for her to rush at him again. Instead, she cursed him and made a spell against the stone.

“Your father stepped back out of the tomb just as Leila broke through the alcove wall into the antechamber. The tomb’s ceiling fell.

“A piece of stone struck your father on his right shoulder, and he dropped to his knees. As he fell, Leila rushed suddenly toward him. Her mouth was wide open and ready to engulf him. Her black hands reached out triumphantly like steel talons.

“He called my name, and the sword came up in a large arch. It caught Leila across her throat and breastbone. The blow sliced Leila’s head almost completely off. Leila staggered back, but not before her razor sharp nails tore into your father’s arms and chest.”

Lumie’re’s eyes widened, “That is the reason for his terrible scars.”

Leora nodded, then continued, “Paul sliced her torso and breast so her head fell away completely. He ignored his own bloody wounds. Paul lit a Molotov from my torch and broke it

against Leila's remains. Your father broke a second gasoline bomb alongside her body, and we backed toward the northern exit of the tomb.

"Your father tried to save Audrey. He called to him, but Leila still held Audrey enthralled—Audrey reached for the burning Leila. At Audrey's belt, the Molotov cocktail caught fire and burst, and Audrey was swallowed up in flames. Your father still wanted to save the man, but I held him back.

"The fury of the fire lit the darkest corners of the tomb, and the wraith-linked body of Leila finally died. In the confines of the tomb, the spiritual pressure became almost physical, and a spirit as black as the wraith burst from the charred remains of Leila's body. This thing possessed no form, no beauty. It was obscene in its repulsiveness, a foul unclean creature of the night.

"From it, Leila spoke to us a threat, but she had little power against us then. When the flames moved closer, we stepped toward the northern entrance of the antechamber. She spoke to us a little longer, then the black form that was her ka dissipated and was gone. We heard a slow rumble.

"I grabbed your father's hand and ran back through the corridors. The earth shook and moved beneath our feet. Stones fell from the walls and ceiling. At the archeologists' opening, the ladder had already fallen and ceiling stones broke it to pieces and partially covered it.

"I began to pull up the stones to uncover the ladder, but your father grabbed me by the arm and pointed to the opening above. It was already sealed. The basalt slab moved slowly into the corridor, and the quaking earth made it difficult for us to stand. Stones fell around us. The flying dust coated them. Dust mingled with the blood on your father's arms—they acquired gray streaks where Leila slashed him.

“Your father pulled me along beside him into the right hand corridor. At the end, the sun shone clearly through the ancient entrance made by the first, ancient desecrators of the tomb.

We dropped our torch and ran for the opening.

“Your father grasped me and lifted me up into the bottom of the shaft. I grabbed the broken stones, and he pushed me from below, so I could pull myself up and wedge myself across the well-like opening. Your father took a running leap and grasped the bottom stones. He pulled himself into the chimney. Together, we inched up the slender rock opening.

“At the top, your father pushed me out of the well, and we both rolled out onto the hot sand. We lay for a long moment, our bodies quietly touching until we regained our breath. The temple foundation began to collapse. Amid the moving earth, the center of the complex slowly fell in upon itself. It collapsed from the inside out, devouring the foundation and the rock and sand around it.

“We stood to our feet. We held one another and made a limping run toward Fort Saint. The archeologists’ tents collapsed, and were eaten up by the opening earth.

“Fort Saint itself was falling. The stone meant to protect from ancient and modern arms was no deterrent to the force of the moving earth.

“Your father and I watched the earth consume his command, his responsibility, his men. He stopped and swayed against the still violently shaking earth. On the temple side of the fort, the earth ate away at the walls. It felled men and equipment into the devouring sinkhole. On the cliff side, the Fort fell away in great chunks and dropped horses and men to their death three hundred meters below.

“Your father dropped to his knees. His face was covered with tears. The most important thing to him was his men and his responsibility. I forced him to come with me. He would have rather died with them than to leave with me, but he did come with me.”

Leora’s words stopped suddenly in the very quiet kitchen. Neither Lumière nor she said anything more for a while.

Lumière sat up and wiped her eyes and nose. She disentangled herself from her mother’s arms and rested loosely in her grasp. She stared at her mother as though her mother had shared the most personal incident in her life, “Thank you, mama, for telling this to me. I can see in your eyes it was a great triumph, but that it also caused you terrible pain.” She took a deep breath, “You were willing to risk your warrior to defeat your sister.” She took another deep breath, “You are much stronger than I, and Aleksandr is no warrior.” She stared sadly away, “I am afraid I can’t make that choice for him.”

Leora shook her head, “Child, you don’t understand. He is a man. You must let him make his own choice. He must choose for himself, bravery, love, courage. I ask you again, do you love him?”

Lumière shuddered, “I love him, mother.” Her face crumpled in emotion, “I love him.”

“Then you must explain everything to him and let him choose. Your love does not sustain and uphold him. Your love can only help him achieve what the Aton God has called him to do.”

“And his love?”

“His love will make your life so sweet that each day will grow more and more delightful. The Aton God will seem daily closer because of his love.”

Lumière stared down at the table, her lips pursed and her eyes closed, “Oh, mama, what am I to do? I let him choose. I already explained everything to him. I was so cruel to him, but he still

said he loved me—now, he is gone. Now, he has made another choice—I chose this time for him, and I don't think I should have.”

“No, Lumière. Men are fragile beings. Their hearts need care and their sense of worth depends on how others see them. Do you understand this?”

“I...I think I do. I did not know.”

“So what will you do?”

Lumière glanced around frantically, “I don't know. What should I do, mama?”

“What do you believe you should do?”

Lumière spoke very quietly, “I believe I have hurt him terribly. I think I should go find him and bring him home.”

Leora sighed, “Would you like me to go with you?”

Lumière stood shakily, “Yes, but I don't think you should.” Lumière hobbled toward the door. She put on her coat. It was a warm new coat her mother and father bought her.

Aleksandr's coat was gone from its hook. Her mother and father bought his too. The late fall day was very cold. She stepped out of the house and onto the Leavenworth, Kansas street.

Young children played in the front yards and road their bikes down the nearly empty road.

Lumière walked to the street and looked to the right and left. She did not see Aleksandr and started down the road toward the center of the city.

Lumière had traveled almost a full block before her father found her. He drove his big Oldsmobile up beside her and rolled down the window, “Hi, Lumière.”

“Hi, papa.”

“Would you like me to help you find your young man?”

Lumière knuckled her eyes. He stopped the car and she limped around to the passenger's side and jumped in, "Yes, papa. Please help me find him."

They drove all over the city of Leavenworth.

Late in the evening, Paul's Oldsmobile drove up to the house and into the driveway. Paul stepped out of the car dejectedly followed by Lumière.

Leora met them at the front door. Tilly, Bruce, Marie, and George listened from the kitchen doorway. Leora threw wide the door before Paul could open it. She reached out to Lumière, "Lumière, where is Aleksandr?"

Lumière could not speak. She put her hand over her mouth.

Paul answered for her, "We couldn't find him. He is gone."

Lumière fell into Leora's arms. Leora half carried Lumière through the house. In Lumière's small room, Leora helped her undress. Leora cringed anew at Lumière's scars. The missing piece of calf and the terrible marks and punctures of burns and lacerations across the back of her legs, buttocks, and right arm. Leora shook her head. She pulled Lumière's nightgown over her slight body and turned back the covers. Gentle sobs wracked Lumière's body the entire time. Leora helped her daughter into bed and pulled the covers up over her. She kissed Lumière on her forehead and on both cheeks.

At the door, Leora turned out the light. As she shut the door, she still heard her daughter's half stifled sobs in the darkness.

