

“THE INK GIRL”

by

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ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

Chile

discovering voices

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On a single page of an otherwise blank book, a girl is scribbled in dark ink. She opens her big, round eyes, as if waking for the first time.

“Who’re you?”

“I am your Reader. And you’re... well, the one who lives in this book.” you answer.

She tilts her head, never breaking eye contact with you down from the pages. “I’ll need a name.”

“You can choose. After all, you’re your own person.”

“I suppose so. Well, I’ll name myself Yours, and you will be Mine. How’s that?”

You smile down at her, this creature that knows nothing other than herself and you. “I like that.”

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“I know nothing, Mine. I can barely imagine anything outside my pages.”

You giggle, “What would you like to know?”

“Well...” she sits down, thinking. “Ah, yes! Are there others like you?”

“Like me?”

“Beings outside my book.”

“Of course!” you smile.

“Oh, wow!”

“We’re made of flesh and bone. That's why you and I are different, since you are made of ink.”

“And... are there others like me?”

“As far as I'm aware, you're the only Ink Girl there is.”

She frowns, “That sounds lonely.”

“Not really, since I’m here.”

“Will you always be?”

You shake your head, “I'm afraid not, Yours. As I’m a human, and I need sleep and food to stay alive.”

Wonder flashes in her eyes. “I do none of that! Why am I alive?”

“Well, you don't have bones and flesh like me. You don't need to sustain yourself.”

“What happens if you aren't alive?”

You raise your eyebrows, “You die, of course.”

“What’s that?”

“How can I explain...? When you die, you simply sleep forever.”

“How can that be?”

“It’s eternal rest.”

“Isn’t it peaceful?”

“It might sound that way,” you shrug, “but people are terrified of death.”

“Why?”

“What comes after is unknown.”

“So?”

“Humans fear the unknown. Always have, and always will.”

“So...I cannot die?”

You shake your head, “No, you can't.”

“That’s horrible!” she exclaims.

“Why? Many wish to live forever!”

“They’re stupid!” she cries. “If I am to live forever, who will stay with me?
Everyone else will die!”

“I... I suppose so.”

You close the book quietly, deprived of words.

You flip the pages until you find the familiar black stain of ink.

"Good morning, Mine!"

You laugh, correcting her, "It's well into the afternoon, Yours."

"Oh," confusion contorts her features, "but you greeted me that way the last time..."

"You can say 'good morning' shortly after the sun rises. After that, it's common to say 'good afternoon'."

"How can I know the time?"

"I believe you cannot."

"The world is confusing, isn't it?"

"It depends on whom you ask. Feelings are the most confusing, if you ask me."

"Feelings?"

"Yes, feelings. Do you not know what they are?"

She crosses her arms, irritated, "How am I supposed to know anything? I'm stuck here!"

"That was inconsiderate of me to say. Apologies, Mine. Would you like me to explain what they are?"

"Yes! Please do!"

You rub your head, "Feelings are... uh... I didn't think it'd be this difficult to put into words!"

“Do I have feelings?” she pouts.

“You have emotional reactions to things I say... so, you do have feelings.”

“How would I know?”

“Well, when I told you about death, you reacted a certain way.”

“Yes,” she nods, “there was this hole in my chest. I hated it.”

“That was a feeling. Sadness and frustration, probably.”

Her eyes widened, “That's terrible! I don't want to feel, if that's what it's like!”

“No, no! Not all feelings are like that! There are wonderful feelings too!”

“Such as?”

“Love,” you smile.

“Love,” she parrots, “it feels sultry when you say it.”

“I suppose so.”

“Go on! Tell me what love is like!”

“The complete opposite of what you felt before.”

She frowned, “I can barely imagine that.”

“When I saw my mother, for example, I looked up to her, and felt affection. I felt fuzzy, but calm at the same time. Love takes different shapes, though. The love you feel for a parent isn’t the same as the one you feel in romance, nor a friendship.”

“Romance.” she repeats, as if tasting the word. “Have you been in love?”

“That’s the golden question. I don’t know if I was ever in love. But, supposedly, when you are you simply know. So I suppose I haven’t.”

“Losing that love thing must be shattering.”

“Yes, we call it heartbreak. It’s quite painful. Some say it’s the biggest pain there is.”

“Then why fall in love at all, knowing the risk of heartbreak?”

“You cannot control it,” you reply. “It just happens. Heartbreak is another piece in the game. You cannot win without risk.”

"Will *you* break my heart?"

"Why would I?!"

"I think you have the power to. And it's scary."

"Always," you sigh.

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"You are everything to me, Mine. Am I not everything to you?"

You ache when answering, "No, you're not."

Painstakingly, she replies, "Why?"

"You're nothing but an ink girl in a book. I know a whole world besides you. I know real people, who cry real tears and have real blood."

"But I have real tears and real blood!" She cries.

"No, you don't."

"I do!"

And then, she bites into her hand until ink starts to spill from it. "See?! I bleed! Why am I less real, then?!"

You sigh, "You wouldn't understand. I better leave you alone for now."

When you close the book, you can see ink tears spilling down the page.

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She sits on the edge of the page, expectant.

"What are you doing?"

"Grab the page and tilt it up, please."

"What for?"

"Maybe I can climb out of the book and become a real girl! I want to be free from this damned life of mine."

So you obey. You watch her jump up, unable to grab onto anything to ascend.

"Hold on."

You fetch a pen, and draw a ladder to assist her.

She smiles brightly, "Thank you, Mine!" and she begins to climb.

When she reaches the top, she extends her hand, as if trying to exit the book. But she loses balance and falls down the ladder, hitting the bottom of the page.

She weeps in frustration and when she stops, you close the book, wordlessly.

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"I can't do this any more. I'm nothing to you, and you're everything to me. I'm lonely, so lonely. Can't I end it all?"

This time, the tears falling are yours.

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As you open the pages once again, your eyes meet is a single puddle of ink, the girl no longer around.

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The book rests on your table. You open it, curious if she'll be there.

To your surprise, she is.

She opens her big eyes, asking, "Who are you?"

You cry as you answer, "I am your reader, and you are the one who lives in this book."

Then, while looking at her beautiful, ink face, you throw the book into the fireplace.

As the flames consume the book and her screams of despair die down, you know you freed her.