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John Cornelius
Judged by Etruscan author Karen Donovan

Second Marriage

Our nights huddled together, which had the effect of destroying our days. The sun gave up its theater of expansion and contraction, its right to a colorful death, and simply withdrew, leaving a wisp of odorless smoke. We lay in a room and let the windows open to tell us their dark tales. Their breath smelled of sweat with a bitter edge, like cumin seed.

A black moon rose. Pines and firs and spruces thickened near the windows, mingling to obscure their implications. When we moved to touch each other, we frightened impossibly large owls from their perches. They flapped once and silently glided away, never to be seen again.

Eventually we moved to a window and looked straight up, seeking something familiar; but constellations kept rearranging themselves into strange asterisms. They settled on rows and columns which carefully tabulated my failures, solely for the purpose of shaming me when I was at my most vulnerable.

She placed a hand on my heart. It was just the right size.

Forgive, she said.