

Just One Sentence

by L. R. Styles

"I have wished to know how the stars shine..."

The professor took off his glasses as he spoke. He spent some moments buffing the lenses in front of the silent group of students. Peering at his spectacles critically, the thin man set the glasses back on his nose and looked over the rims at his audience. "*That* is the phrase by which you will enter into the realm of creative writing," he finished.

A few groans could be heard, though in the dimly-lit seats the issuers were safe from identification. The professor's eyes narrowed.

"No variations; no improvising on the arrangement of words... begin your story with this sentence and surprise me. Thrill my gray cells with just one, common sentence to start your story. I cannot wait to see what this rather ethereal phrase invokes. Due Monday, no exceptions... not even for death." The last statement brought a few, nervous giggles from shadows. The professor closed his laptop, signaling the end of class.

Eleanor stood up from her seat, slinging her carryall over one shoulder. She trudged up the aisle along with the others, entrenched in same pensive silence as they.

"I have wished to know how the stars shine?" she thought, her eyebrows drawn. *"The stars are balls of burning gas, most of which have already burned out long ago..."*

Perhaps the professor deemed the phrase a 'poetic' statement; if so, then why must the students begin their story thus?

"It's a waste of the hook space," Eleanor muttered to herself as she made her way through the halls of the university. She knew that the first line in the first sentence of a story was the most important--followed only in importance by the next sentence--in order to snag and then draw in the reader. Eleanor sighed.

"It's not like its some great epic," she mused, silently. "It's just a class assignment." The corner of her mouth lifted a little at the idea. "It will be forgotten in a week..."

Bearing these notions in mind she traveled to the library and sat in front of the computer for some moments, wondering where to begin. Her fingers curved over the keyboard Eleanor began typing in 'stars' in the search engine. She stopped and erased the word. As a student of science it would be all too easy for her to turn this creative writing piece into a thinly-veiled study on the chemical makeup of celestial bodies. Glaring at the computer screen, Eleanor realized the austere Professor of Literature Arts was probably not as interested in *how* the stars shone, but rather was referring to the poetic wondering itself.

Leaving the computer Eleanor took her bag of books and vacated the library altogether. There was nothing remarkable about the young woman's face to suggest an epiphany; she walked to her bicycle as she did each day, her movements careful and habitual. The wind rode with her as she soared down the straight, narrow road behind the university. Eventually it leveled out as the ocean came into view, extending past the neat rows of town homes until it touched the sky in the distance. Sunset slowly descended on the beach, bathing the sand in orange and red tones. Eleanor leaned her bicycle against a lonely, stunted tree and smiled at the water. She sat down in the sand. It yet felt warm, a last blessing from the fleeing sun.

Hours passed. One by one the stars began to introduce themselves to the inhabitants of Earth, as the atmosphere allowed. Eleanor watched the galaxy blossom as night fell further towards her. Rolling back the knowledge given over all her years, the young woman sat alone on the beach, her face lifted to the dark sky, trying to remember what it was like to wonder. A few Greek myths briefly came to mind, but they did not feel anywhere close to something she might create. Surely there were stories to be told of stars that had not already been thought of; something that may not need great effort to produce, merely a relaxed body and open eyes.

"Night appears to have spilled ink on the sky," Eleanor whispered. The idea seemed so tentative that a normal voice might scare it away. "In his haste to clean it up, a glass broke... it scattered, glinting light back from a nearby window. Night dabs at the ink, smearing it around to no avail... it remains and he leaves it there. It is a testament of accidental artistry; after a few hours he covers it up with a white sheet. Some hours later he uncovers it again, and the moment is repeated until the end of time."

Blinking, Eleanor frowned at the words she'd uttered. They were absurd... foolish. Unequivocally unscientific, but beautiful nonetheless. The notion of the sunless hours embodied as a clumsy artist struck the student as interesting. "They shine because they are broken. Shards that have nothing left, but a chance to reflect light."

Eleanor hurriedly dug in her book bag for a notebook, pen and flashlight. She wrote the words down by feeble light as if there were no tomorrow, stopping now and again to remember and ruminate. More ideas poured out of her fingers, as if the trickle of inspiration had become a torrent. The barely-legible words formed sentences upon the pages of her notebook with an almost dream-like rapidity. The sight of the collective sentences imparted a little energy in of themselves.

The form of the young woman stayed silhouetted against the night sky for some time, hunched over and busily writing. Now and then the flashlight's glow illuminated her face. Above the beach, the stars glimmered and danced in slow circles, putting on a show for the budding writer below.

