

Mesmerized

by Richda McNutt

At first glance, there was nothing out-of-the-ordinary about him. Average height; medium build; worn, faded jeans; soft, gray sweatshirt; close-fitting visored cap; and just enough hair visible to suggest salt and pepper. Then he glanced at her and - those eyes. A lost blue sadness that enveloped her and froze her mid-movement.

She had seen him twice - both times in the science section of the library. The first time he was searching in the astronomy books for the connection between the stars and the signs of the zodiac. She directed him to the astrology section, but he was resistant. He wanted the scientific basis, not some pseudo-meaningful symbology. When she tried to explain that he really would find the explanation there, those eyes became doubtful, reproachful - as though she had betrayed a trust.

The second time he wanted information on how remote control devices worked, so she took him to the electronics section and found a book that included an entire chapter on remote control - he scanned the index she pointed to, and added that he also wanted to know how it applied to robotics. When she pointed out that section, he thanked her and continued scanning the shelves.

Those eyes suggested a solitary life in a lonely cabin in the woods, a battered pick-up truck, a kettle of stew cooked over an open fire, braided rag rugs. Rifles, shotguns, the chunk of an ax biting into firewood, maybe a floppy-eared hound dog. Would that coexist with robotics? Maybe that disconnect was the source of the sadness - which world did he really belong to? The modern one or the nostalgic one that we always picture as being better than it really was? Did he feel out of place wherever he was?

She continued working her way down the rows of shelves, putting the books in the appropriate spaces - from gardening to pets to cookbooks to home improvement. Everything in its proper place. Except those eyes.

