

## To Star Y, BioFather

by Beth Cleary

To Star Y:

This letter hails you in the outer reaches of my firmament. You throb there but are not visible, will never be visible—like a boson star collapsed into nothingness but still exerting gravitational pull. My words pour through my fingers and, for the first time, I give you a name—Star Y—and sense the nearly imperceptible tether threading me, mortal daughter, to you, far gone not-father, hapless and possibly violent co-maker of me.

I think often of the constellations in my sky. Parents, of course, they who adopted me, now each again of the stars. I wouldn't say I'm guided by them, as some say of stars, but they gave me the sextants, sights for navigating this life. Now gone and dim, their tow still startles me: mother's quick gait in a stranger's walk, father's kind voice at the grocery store, *Ramblin' Rose* on the oldies station. When I pick up a hammer, my father hefts the tool. When I set a table, my mother worries where the spoons go. They are polestars in my *Alpha Centauri*. Family, friends, dogs, teachers who've left this world—they are there, too, brightest on anniversary days and seasons, sometimes whizzing like comets through my heart when I hear a certain song, pass a particular restaurant, see an idle fetch ball in the garden. Here below, gravity holds me alongside beloved husband, sister, friends, earthly stars. I twirl, tend, and cry with them. Like all stars, they contain light and reflect it beyond themselves. Like all stars, except the failed ones, they are life itself.

It feels like the job of memory, citizen-scientist of my imagination, to travel the tiers, the temperatures and resultant colors of the near and far, mortal and celestial, in my life. And so, in this letter, I account for you, furthest star gone dark. Star Y.

When I came into this world through Star X, I was thrown through a hole in the firmament and eventually materialized as me, caught by Stars P1 and P2, my adopting parents. Star X is almost as far away as you, Star Y, though she blazed into visibility once. I trained a scope toward her general coordinates and, through that star catcher colony

known as Catholic Charities, located her. She was a cold star, in our meeting at a restaurant with Christmas tinsel and blinking lights—faux celestial. She was skeptical. “You don’t look like me.” It’s true, I didn’t, and this fact lay like grease of unknown origins on the table, to be avoided. “My father?” I asked, with too much heat. Her eyes narrowed. “I’m not talking about him. I won’t say his name. We were both drunk. It was rape.”

Rape. Thud. Me? Abhorred. So. Dead star. Thud.

So.

Star Y, you are cursed by Star X whose path you crossed one June night in Charlestown. I haven’t much contemplated the little bang that made me—especially now, *how to navigate this?*—but I know in June, in the northern hemisphere above the bar, the alley out back, the chain-link fence where you collided, the brightest constellations are The Little Bear and The Herdsman. Polaris, Arcturus, bright as day. I doubt you knew, either of you, in the drunken push, the frantic pull, the breaking, the unmaking and unwitting making.

She wouldn’t speak your name, the regret and shame were so deep. She carried its train of fire with her to the elements below ground. In her life after you, she hoped to forget—you, that night, me. Despite that hope, there is no black hole of fully forgetting.

All adoptions are disasters. Some of us find navigation tools and light our way forward, chart constellations of a kind earth. But many many don’t. That the human-wrecked world goes on. That I survived it is no redemption for you or your kind. The gravity you exert in your laws, your threats, your taking and demeaning, menace us women and threaten to detour us off course. We huddle and shine apart, we in the havens of Pleiades.

Goodbye, Star Y. The sun, nearest star to earth, suffuses this Spring day, encourages the first rue, columbine, and blazing star. Today, I’ll pull weeds in the garden. I’ll breathe the earth, hear the birds, and tug on all the filaments that thread me to sky.

Abidingly --

EarthStar031461

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