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My Sanctuary

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Within my two story house, up on the top floor, is the room I once dreamed of. Ever since I was a young child, books have fascinated me. As I grew older, my bedroom in my parent's home steadily became cluttered with my collection. The thick wood of the closet shelves sagged under the weight of the books, which were stacked all the way to the ceiling, and next the closet floor held piles of books precariously balanced on the thick carpet. Once it became too difficult to enter the closet due to limited floor space, my collection spilled out into the bedroom. Mountains of books leaned against the walls in the four corners of my room and were scattered across every available surface of my nightstand, dresser and desk. I dearly cherished every book I owned, such as *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder and *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Despite the lack of living space, every time I visited a book store I usually walked up to the register with a stack of novels held in my arms as high as my chin. Even with the discomfort of dwelling in such an incommodious bedroom, I considered it a crime when my younger sister attempted to sell a portion of my books during a garage sale one summer. As a young girl, I yearned for the day when I could comfortably accommodate my precious collection. Then that day came. Nearly three years ago, in the early autumn, my husband and I became home owners, which provided a unique opportunity. I was able to design one of the spare bedrooms as a reflection of myself, and I transformed a wish into reality.

Now, it is often after sunset when I have the chance to retire to this fantasy-become-fact. As I cross the threshold, my bare feet leave the smooth hardwood floor of the hallway and sink into the lush, speckled beige carpet of the darkened room. The light switch on the wall to the left has never functioned, so initially there is no sight as I step further into the room. The light from the dim street lamp outside reaches no further than the curtains from the two windows which face to the north and west. So, physical sensation is always the first to greet me. The soft carpet beneath my toes complements the cool breeze across my skin. The quiet twirling hum of the overhead fan reaches my ears. I draw a deep breath as the tension from the day eases away, and there is a subtle scent upon the air. It is a hint of the past because the room is infused with the smell of aged paper.

I need no light to safely guide me into the room, for the path has long been imprinted upon my memory. When my feet come to a halt near the center of the room, I raise one arm towards the source of the breeze, the ceiling fan. My fingertips find the thin metal chain above me in the darkness. With a gentle tug, electricity courses through the four lights attached to the fan. The room becomes illuminated, and vibrant colors dance across my vision as my eyes adjust to the hues of the room. Olive green and burgundy red dominate the decor, complimented by accents of copper, bronze and gold. The four walls are painted a pale grass green, and an ivory trim borders the floor and two windows.

This is a room of far away lands, just as I had intended. It possesses the exotic quality of an Arabian night. The curtains are dark green, yet the thin material is sheer. Long, beaded strings hang before the curtains, their tiny pale gold beads occasionally sparkling in the light as they sway in the fan's gentle breeze. Instead of a valance over the two windows, I have draped long silk scarves with patterns of red and gold over each ornate curtain rod. Thick, handmade tablecloths, which cover two small wood tables, come from across the ocean. The cloth has delicate stitches of colorful thread, in hues of red, green, orange and yellow, which swirl and loop into floral patterns. Tiny square mirror
beads sewn onto the tablecloths reflect miniature pictures of the room. These elements of the room bring to mind the collection of folk tales titled *One Thousand and One Nights*, wherein the newest bride Scheherazade of the sultan Schahriar weaves imaginative tales to captivate the attention of her husband, who has been struck by a madness. Each day he takes a new wife and each morning, under the wrongful impression that all women are wicked, he murders his wife so that none have the opportunity to betray him. With Scheherazade's masterful storytelling, each morning he is so entranced by his newest wife that he spares her life so that she may continue the tale the next night. After one thousand and one nights, the day finally comes when his trust in women and sanity have been restored. From this book comes many classic stories, such as *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*, *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*, and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*.

Hanging from the wall, near the smaller window which faces to the west, is a narrow Oriental wall scroll. This white, paneled scroll has a red border which matches the color of the kimono of the noble woman in the painting. Thin bamboo trees with green leaves form the background behind her. The serene beauty of the woman reminds me of the character Lady Maruyama Naomi, from the novel *Across the Nightingale Floor* by Lian Hearn. Hers is a tragic tale in a land akin to feudal Japan, for she is a woman of high birth who struggles against the restrictions of a rigid society, where a harsh man, Iida Sadamu, holds her daughter as hostage and the prospect of marriage to her true love, Otori Shigeru, is denied to her as a result. The name of the novel is in reference to a floor built in the household of the enemy Iida Sadamu which chirps like the song of the nightingale when the pressure from footsteps is applied to each panel, a protection against the quiet tread of assassins, and the effort of Otori Takeo, the heir of Otori Shigeru, to silently cross the floor in order to end the terrible reign of the warlord.

Despite the cultural differences, the wall scroll blends in well with the other decor, as does a collection of Scottish heritage, heirlooms from my husband's family, which are displayed upon the wall near the open door. Three framed Scottish landscape paintings of Edinburgh Castle surround a plaque bearing a crest of arms. Above these cherished items, mounted higher upon the wall, is a claymore, a double edged broad sword once used by Scottish Highlanders, brought back by my husband from Edinburgh, Scotland, slightly more than fifteen years ago. The surface upon which these treasures are hung is the only wall in the room where no furniture rests, but three chairs cluster together in the far corners of the room. Two are a matched pair, burgundy red chairs with high backs and thick cushions, a cozy place to sit for any guest who enters here. Opposite the doorway, tucked into the corner, is my little throne. This is where I read. It is a low, single-seater sofa of ivory cloth with a floral design. A dusty rose and dark wood footrest rescued from an antique shop takes up the space on the floor in front of it.

Yet while all of these elements are pleasing, none are the true essence of the room. Between the chairs and side tables, grand bookcases line the walls, the source of the musky scent that greets me whenever I enter my room. The shelves, which range in size from three to five tiers, are brimming with novels, a vast variety of hard cover and paperback, and a significant improvement over my childhood bedroom chaos. The room is filled with the smell of hundreds of books, some quite old yet tenderly cared for. Though I still enjoy the genres I read as a child, I have expanded my literature preferences to all forms of fiction. Once I lift the cover of any book to reveal the first pages, I become lured into the land of dark horror of *Firestarter* by Stephen King, enticed into the realm of epic fantasy of *Wit'ch Fire* by James Clemens, or flung into the future of science fiction of *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. Each book is a gateway into another world. This is my sanctuary, a place of quiet joy and relaxation. This is my library.