

Star Signs

By Rob Bullen



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The moon was a slim crescent, hanging just above the trees on the horizon. Stars were forming themselves into armies – the Scorpions and the Aquarians and the Great Bears – and preparing for the final battle that would seal the fate of the world and usher in the Age of Damnation. They formed columns across the sky and marched toward each other, but always turned away at the last moment, or else moved silently past without engaging. No army ever won, and none was ever defeated.

“An old man told me today,” said Maya as she lay on the damp grass, “that when we think we choose, we don’t choose at all. The food we eat, the work we do, who we’ll marry; they’re all patterns in the stars. The stars choose through us.”

“So whoever understands the patterns,” said Sami, “will rule the world.”

“When you grow up, who will you marry?” asked Maya.

“That lady there.” He pointed to a group of stars that had just formed into the shape of a woman.

“She’s very beautiful,” said Maya.

“She’s very strong and powerful,” said Sami. “See how the armies move aside as she walks past? Her name is Topaz.” Sami spoke with such assurance, as if he already understood the signs.

Maya tried to find her future love in the sky but couldn’t. The grass was beginning to make her feel cold.

“What house will you live in?” asked Sami.

“That one.” She pointed to a small cottage with stars at each corner and a bright star at the top of the roof. “I’ll live by myself and I’ll watch the river that runs past the door.” But just then, as they watched, the river of stars that flowed past the house became a torrent that covered the house and destroyed its walls. The bright star that had guarded it was swept away. Maya reached for Sami’s hand, and he held it tightly.

“Do you think my mother is in the sky?”

“Yes,” said Sami, “Look.” Just above the eastern horizon, a woman stood with her arms open and her eyes soft with love. She reached out toward Maya, but her feet were trapped. “Topaz is coming,” said Sami, still holding Maya’s hand. “She will set your mother free.”

Just then, from the north, a meteor burned a trail across the sky. Then came another, even brighter, and then many more from all directions. Soon the sky was filled with streaks of light, dancing and weaving, like the flares that lit the sky above the village when the artillery shells had rained down and exploded and left houses in rubble and mutilated bodies lying in the street. Two of the bodies were Sami’s brothers. One was Maya’s mother.

When the meteors were finished, Maya and Sami were silent for a long time. Maya began to cry quietly for her house that had been washed away by the river. She wondered where she would live. Perhaps nowhere. Perhaps she would wander the sky like a gypsy, searching for her mother.

Sami looked up and saw the armies scatter and flee as Topaz strode between them. Topaz, his love, strong and powerful, one hand a fist in the air, the other cradling a semi-automatic rifle.