Fenik's Story

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This is the introduction to a short story about an old man called Fenik. He is a rather plain individual, leading a rather ordinary life. Stealing a book from the local library, a rather uncharacteristic action, sets his life down a new path. One which he would rather he hadn't discovered!

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Chapter One

It was a particularly murky night, the air itself seemed unclean. There was a taste to it, like copper and old smoke. Light cast by the woefully inadequate street lamps did nothing more than to make the darkness darker. They hung from hooks driven into the stonework of the tightly packed buildings that lined the city streets, creating orbs of orange light that glowed in a sickly fashion.

It was somebody's job to light them, although Fenik couldnâ t remember ever seeing anyone actually do it. He pondered over this and other fleeting thoughts as he shuffled quickly through the maze of streets towards his home. His cold fingers held his coat closed at the front, keeping in some of the warmth he'd taken with him from the library.

He'd been there a long time this evening, probably later than he should have. Normally he would leave before the Librarians rang the brass bell they kept on the front desk. But the book he'd found in the archives had been engrossing. So much so that he'd almost missed the sound that ushered the last of the patrons out of the dusty aisles. He'd been so far back in the giant building he'd had to take one of the oil lamps from the glass cupboard with him to light the way. It had taken him a while to make his way out. Old Peters had been stood near the door with his hat and coat waiting patiently for him.

As he'd left, coat already wrapped around him, he had mumbled something ridiculous about it being a lovely evening and thanking him for the use of the archives. He didn't normally speak to anyone there, but he'd done it out of sheer nerves. The book had felt twice as big as it should have, hidden beneath the thick wool of his coat, and he was convinced at the last moment he would be caught. But to his relief, Peters had simply smiled weakly at him. As the great oak doors closed shut behind him he'd smiled to himself at his daring and hurried off down Parker Road.

Turning down a narrow side street, Fenik stepped over puddles and general detritus to arrive in short order at his own front door. He'd already taken the brass key from his pocket. Slipping it into the lock he gave it a sharp twist and shoved the stiff door open. He felt relieved as he closed it tightly shut and leant back against it, a long deep breath escaping from his ever so slightly trembling mouth.

The book was then placed carefully on his writing desk and thoughts of it were placed in a small box in his mind while he continued his routine. Small strips of bark used as fire starters were placed carefully in the iron cradle that sat in his stone fireplace. Taking the flint and steel striker from the hearth he set about lighting what was soon to be a nice warm fire. He mentally noted that he didn't have many logs left; he'd have to take a trip out of the city at some point to restock. He could get them easily from one of the shops on Market Square, but he knew a farmer on the outskirts who would take an order for half the price and deliver it right to his doorstep.

Warmth from the fire began to spread slowly through Fenik's home, which was mercifully small. The two rooms that made up his single story abode were cosy but cluttered. Stacks of books, manuscripts and bits of paper sat on the floor in disorganised piles around his ornate desk. A single cupboard that should have held crockery was similarly packed full of an assortment of literary necessities. They comprised of historical accounts, short stories by well-known authors, works of philosophy and religious diatribe.

Fenik had spent his life reading. It was his one true love. The world around him was a dark and miserable place bereft of wonder. His escape was to retreat into his own thoughts and the thoughts of others, in any way he could.

Sitting down finally in his wooden chair, by his desk, he glanced down at the book. Its dark leather binding was unmarked and untitled, barely hinting at the wonders he'd discovered inside. He'd come across it purely by chance, catching it as it fell from the stack whilst reaching for a volume by Jeffreys on 'The Morality of Religion'. Its plainness had caught his eye. Not seeing a title or author he had opened it to glance at the pages, to catch a few words and categorise it in his head.

It was the first few words he looked at that caught his attention, made him look around furtively and carefully. One word described what he had read, *Vodun*.

Taking a deep breath he carefully opened the cover and turned to the first page. There was no introduction, no foreword, or list of publisher's details. It simply began.

Fenik's eyes devoured the opening few paragraphs hungrily, skittering along each line, his mind reeling joyously at the forbidden text. It was so very wrong to be reading it, but no one would know now he was back in his house. No one really visited him, and certainly no one looked through his things, his possessions. He felt rebellious, like a child again doing something he shouldnâ t. His father had often said he had a wicked side to him, maybe he'd been right, he thought to himself with a chuckle.

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