

Lochana of the Library

“Why here?” Lochana whispered to herself as her brown eyes looked through her pair of large, circular rimmed glasses to stare across the library lobby. “They couldn’t let me have a single spot for me to find some peace?”

The sight that filled the young woman with such despair was something that brought joy to most of the other college students. With the big game approaching, members of the football team and cheer squad had made it their goal to ensure everyone was giving their full support. This took the form of them setting up an impromptu pep rally in the lobby. Anyone that had come to study was swept up in the celebrations, leaving their notes behind in favor of joining in with their own cheers.

It was moments like this that reinforced how out of place Lochana felt at school, or everywhere else for that matter. Glancing at the cheerleaders’ flashy uniforms and comparing them to her own outfit made up of grey sweatpants and a similarly dull, oversized hoodie made this differentiation painfully clear. Fixing her glasses balanced upon her light brown nose, she assured herself that she wasn’t going to find a peace and quiet in her usual spot. Tightly clutching the mythology textbook in her hands, she turned away from the cheerleaders in search of a place to be in peaceful solitude.

Though Lochana started to walk towards the exit, she was soon reminded why she had taken sanctuary at the library in the first place. All across campus were similar displays of school spirit that were intended to make everyone feel welcome and included. Everyone, save for her, who couldn’t help feeling out of place no matter how many classes, clubs, or other social events she attended. At the end of the day, the only thing she truly desired was a place where she could lose herself in her books without anyone to bother her.

Slipping out of the lobby without anyone noticing her was easy enough. It was typical for no one to really pay attention to her or her head of disheveled, dark brown hair that reached just below her chin. Avoiding eye contact with every person she passed, she kept walking through the halls to get away from the pounding music and obnoxious cheering. Further and further she delved into the library, partially becoming lost amongst the shelves.

Her retreat from the loud noises came to a halt as she reached a set of double doors. The make of the rich, brown wood looked far beyond the budget of a university that seemed to value athleticism over intellect. Across the surface were runes and symbols that she couldn't even attempt to decipher. Sitting above the door upon a stone plaque was the engraved symbol of an eye with white sclera and a black iris. The unflinching pupil seemed to look straight through her, filling her with a sense of morbid curiosity. Keeping her sight firmly on the eye, she grasped the golden knobs and opened up the door.

Lochana's jaw dropped as she pushed through the entrance to reveal a long corridor. The typical drywall she had seen throughout the library was nowhere to be seen, replaced with solid, grey stone. The passageway was lit by a combination of electric lanterns along the sides and chandeliers that hung from the high ceiling. Any sign of the typical smell of disinfectant had been replaced with a rich smell of freshly printed pages being turned. The question as to how the university could afford such an elaborate wing of the library was pushed aside in the wake of her obsession making her focus on a specific aspect of her discovery.

Walking a short distance past the entryway, Lochana swiveled her neck back and forth in an attempt to glance at the uncountable number of books lining the wooden shelves. The tomes ranged greatly in terms of size, shape, and age. Some were simple, thin paperbacks that could be

found at a convenience store while others were made of hard covers that looked meticulous crafted by an artisan.

Surrounded on all sides by the massive collection, she instinctively began to pull books from the shelves to load them up in her arms. Her curious fingers grabbed at anything she considered even remotely interesting. By the time she couldn't carry any more, she was left with a wide variety of literature. With her precious treasures carefully balanced against her torso all that remained was to find a suitable place to sit down and read.

Lochana's wish was granted as she shuffled further down the corridor. In-between the seemingly endless book shelves were a number of long tables made of ornately carved wood. Each table was equipped with differently sized chairs and dim lamps perfect for reading. Considering how magnificent this place appeared, she took a single moment to ponder why no one else was around. Any questions she had concerning the wing were considered something that could be answered later. For now, her main focus was choosing the perfect place to sit. Selecting a chair at the head of one of the tables, she organized her books into a neat pile before picking one from the top to start reading.

Lochana's first choice was a light romance novel, full of corny lines, but with enough heart to keep things interesting. Wanting to make up for indulging in the book equivalent of junk food, she picked her way through the biography of a general from an ancient war. Getting her fill and then some of real world tragedy, she moved on to a fantasy novel to remind herself what it meant to be mesmerized by whimsy and magic. The variety in her readings was a major factor in making her lose track of time as her eyes went through page after page.

Getting to the bottom of the pile and cracking open the mythology textbook she had come in with, she finally realized that something felt off. Sure she had always been a fast reader, but

she never recalled going through so many books in one sitting. Then again, she didn't have the luxury of a clock anywhere in the room to tell her what time it was.

Saving her place in her book, she pulled out her phone to see how long she had been inside the library. The only thing she got was a blank, black screen. Repeated attempts to turn the device on defiantly flashed the no battery signal. Though she was certain she had charged her phone before she left her dorm, the lack of any power was a sure enough sign that she should probably leave.

Picking up her books, Lochana began to walk back along the corridor. She made it a point to put back each tome exactly where she had found it. She amazed herself as she seemed to recall the positions of the books, perfectly fitting them in their former slots. Down to her original textbook once more, she made her way back to where she had entered the wing.

Retracing her steps, Lochana attempted to head towards the entrance only to come to a stop as she neared a wall of blank stone. Clenching her fingers around her book, she took a deep breath to keep herself calm. At first she thought that she had merely gone in the wrong direction. This comforting notion was disproven thanks to familiar looking books flanking her on both sides. Fighting against the irrational idea that the door had disappeared into thin air, she made her way back towards the reading area to find a different route.

Arriving back at the tables, she poked her head between the shelves to see if she could find an exit. Her search was momentarily stopped as she noticed a book sticking out of place. Pulling out the tome, her eyes intensely studied the strange symbols on the cover. Opening up the book and skimming through the pages revealed paragraphs written in a language she couldn't even begin to understand. Interspersed between the indecipherable text were illustrations

depicting strange creatures and humans with unusual proportions. A reoccurring image was the same, black, and white eye she had seen posted above the entrance.

Lochana's exploration of the strange book came to a jarring halt as she ran into something large and soft. Picking her head up from the pages, she discovered that she had wandered into another reading area. Acknowledging one of the crimson red, beanbag chairs she had stumbled into, she looked around to try to see how far she had deviated from her original path.

Her attention became focused on a sizable vending machine pressed up against a nearby wall. The bright glow emanating from the monolithic device partially obscured the wide collection of snacks and drinks inside until she was right next to it. As she looked over the impressive spread, she unconsciously smacked her lips. A growl from her stomach led her to believe that perhaps she would have a better chance of finding a way out if she had a bite to eat.

Pulling out her thin wallet, she rummaged around for a dollar to feed to the machine. Though she looked high and low, there didn't seem to be a way to make any payments. Putting away her cash, she curiously tapped her fingers across the keypad. A moment later, the machine came to life to push out a granola bar. Repeating the process granted her a bottle of tea and the assumption that everything inside was free.

Fearing that being too greedy would bring upon the fury of the staff, she settled for her small snack and made her way over to one of the beanbag chairs. Unwrapping the granola bar and taking a bite, the low price tag betrayed an amazing flavor that fulfilled just what her body was craving. While the tea had a more modest impact on her taste buds, it was just the thing she needed to quench her thirst. Finishing off her impromptu meal, she could feel her eyelids become

heavy. Though she managed to stay awake long enough to eat up the last of the granola bar, she inevitably drifted off to sleep.

When Lochana awoke from her impromptu nap, she was still comfortably sunken into the beanbag chair. Pulling herself out of the cushion, she stretched out her arms and let out a long yawn. Brushing away the lingering sleep around her eyes, she took notice of something that wasn't in the area before. Stacked neatly a few feet away from where she had been sleeping was a pile of new books.

“Hello!” Lochana called out, trying to find whoever left the books behind. When no one answered, she went against her own social anxiety to get straight to the point. “Is someone here? I need some help getting out of here. I can't find the exit.”

The only response she heard was her own voice echoing back at her. She suspected at first that the books had been left behind by another student. That didn't make sense since the library was typically cleared out during football games to avoid the inevitable partying from damaging any of the books. If it had been a librarian, she found it hard to believe that they would allow her to sleep in one of their lounges.

Hoping to figure out what was going on, Lochana began to peruse through the stack of tomes. Though there wasn't much at first, she did have to fight the urge to stop what she was doing to read through the more intriguing volumes. She found a semblance of what she was looking for as she reached the very bottom of the pile. Waiting for her there was another thick tome adorned with more strange runes and the same eye symbol.

Opening up the book revealed a similar collection of unreadable words mixed with bizarre illustrations. Though she still couldn't understand a single word, she could figure out from a few of the pictures that they had something to do with pleasure, albeit in forms she never

considered. Continuing through the pages to try and make sense of the books purpose inevitably brought her to the inside of the back cover. Though she still couldn't identify the language scrawled on the material, something inside of her seemed to lurch out to place a phrase in her head.

“This is a test. Prove to me why you should be here.”

Using her shaky fingers to place the book down, she turned her attention towards the first strange tome she had found. Flipping through once more did not reveal any new information. It was when she reached the back cover to find the same phrase as before printed there did she decide to close the book to focus on her main task.

Now more than ever, Lochana felt a dire need to leave the library. As creepy as they were, she picked up the strange tomes along with her textbook. The ominous feeling she got from them did not cancel out the fact that they were the closest thing she had to a clue about what was going on. Rather than sit around and wait for whoever was watching her to appear again, she began walking down one of the corridors in search of an exit.

Picking out a single direction, Lochana proceeded to walk in a straight line. Not daring to take any turns, she assumed that she would eventually hit a wall or find a door that led outside. She kept her eyes firmly on the path ahead, fighting the urge to stop and peruse the collection of books that surrounded her. On and on she continued to walk, passing by countless shelves. Though her mind was intent on searching for a way out, there was only so much her body could take before she had to slow down.

Feet sore and legs aching, Lochana leaned herself against one of the book cases. Physical activity had always been one of her least favorite past times, a fact she cursed about herself as she gasped for air. Glancing down the corridor only to see more books, it seemed that the only

thing she had gained from her escape attempt was sweat and frustration. While she desperately wanted to turn back to rest amongst the beanbag chairs she was aware that it would require quite a hike to get back. Sucking it up and drawing from her energy reserves, she continued to push forward down the path.

Upon passing by another shelf, her weary gaze beckoned for her to glance over to the side. Her heart skipped a beat as she beheld a door seemingly waiting for her there. Though it lacked any markings to identify it as an exit, the words “Employee Break Room” might as well had been a sign from the heavens. Too tired to care about barging into where she wasn’t supposed to be, she went inside.

Flipping a switch on the wall turned on the lights to reveal a cozy lounge. Aside from the couches and chairs, there were the basic amenities such as a coffee maker, a microwave, and a refrigerator. Opening up the fridge and seeing the wealth of food inside, she placed her books on a counter before taking an apple to regain some of her lost strength. Wiping away the lingering juice from her lips, she tossed the eaten out core into a trash can before turning her attention towards probably the oddest addition to the lounge.

Poking her head into the bathroom revealed the standard setup of a toilet and sink. These features paled in comparison to the bathtub that came alongside a showerhead and a variety of personal hygiene products. As much as she was certain that someone was watching her, the value of a much needed freshening up outweighed whatever perverse kick her tormentor was getting out of the exchange.

Letting herself soak in the warm water and fragrant soaps, she managed to step out of the shower with a cooler head. Drying herself off with a towel, she hesitantly accepted a white robe she found folded up beneath the sink. Putting the garment on, she was surprised at how well it fit

her. Stepping out of the bathroom with her clothes bundled up, she placed them in a washing machine and headed back to the fridge for a light dinner. While she waited for her outfit to go through the dryer, she spread out on the couch cushions and let her eyes close for a short nap.

When Lochana awoke, her clothes were dry, and any lingering feelings of exhaustion were gone. She took strange comfort in the fact that there wasn't a new stack of books piled next to her on the couch. Putting her clothes back on and perching her glasses on her nose, she helped herself to a pot of coffee before returning to the couch. Trying to hold on to a semblance of her typical morning routine, she cracked open her mythology book to wake herself up. Randomly skimming through the stories brought her to the tale of the minotaur and the labyrinth. Wondering if her attempts to leave the library would have been easier with a ball of yarn, she closed up the book and got ready to head back out.

As she chewed on some muffins she had found in one of the cabinets, she tried to think of what her next plan was. Casting her gaze towards the ominous tomes, her best guess was that her ticket to leaving the library was behind the strange letters. With that in mind, her short term goal was to look through the shelves to find something to help her decipher the text. Whether it was an obscure dictionary, or a working computer would be reliant on whatever deity saw fit to help her. Dreading the notion of having to haul her books along with her down the infinite hallway once more, she steeled her nerves and attempted to open the door to leave.

Lochana leapt back as she heard something move outside when she opened the door. Peeking her head out, she spotted a small cart with wheels sitting a few feet from the entrance. Cautiously exiting the break room, she looked around the area to try and catch a glimpse of whoever or whatever had brought over the cart. Lacking any sign of the thing that was leaving

her these “gifts”, she moved to grab the book placed on top of the cart baring yet another image of the eye.

Though the book had its own varied collection of unreadable words and strange images, she beelined before the back cover. Yet again she found a single phrase printed there. The only difference was what it sounded like in her head as her eyes traced across it.

“This place will provide what you desire. You must merely wish it.”

Lochana scoffed at the claim. If the book was telling the truth, she figured she would have left the library by now. Reading the phrase a few more times to solve its riddle, she begrudgingly admitted that it would explain some of the phenomenon she had experienced. Everything from her stumbling into the break room when she was on the verge of collapsing or even the simple reading area that she happened upon when her arms were full books aligned with the theory. Curious to test out the supposed abilities of the library, she piled her books onto the cart to bring them along as she traveled the corridors once more.

Wondering aimlessly between the shelves provided Lochana a chance to contemplate how to best judge the book’s claim. Her answer came to her as she licked her dry lips. With her imminent thirst in mind, she thought back to the reading area with the beanbag chairs. Trying to keep her thoughts entirely on the image, she continued walking forwards until she came upon a gap between the shelves.

A familiar sight soon came into view. Arriving at the reading area she at first thought it was the exact same one she had found before. However, the chairs were in slightly different locations and came in a darker shade of red. These inconsistencies she attributed to her own hazy memory at the time considering her focus was more on figuring out an exit rather than absorbing the seemingly mundane scenery.

Strolling up to the vending machine, she got out a can of soda and popped it open. As amazing as her discovery was, there was still a bit of skepticism hanging in the back of her mind. It wasn't entirely impossible that she would stumble upon a similar room. What she needed was something more specific. Something that couldn't be based on pure coincidence.

Tossing her empty can into a nearby bin, she once more pulled along her cart to walk down the corridors. She thought back to when she first arrived at the library. Specifically, she focused on the books that had caught her attention and had acted as bait to lure her into the trap. Maintaining as exact of a memory of the books in her head as she could muster, she once more deviated from her path to go down another aisle.

Scattered amidst the book cases were the familiar spines of the books she had in mind. Everything from the trashy romance novel to the book of fantasy could be found. Skimming through the pages at lightning speed confirmed they contained the exact same stories. For just a moment, the concern that had plagued her thoughts was replaced with genuine joy for her discovery.

Lochana's next few tests were made to see the limits of what the library could do. It was during one of these experiments that she managed to get her hands on a copy of the nursery book that her mother had read to her as a child. More interesting were the splotches scattered across the pages that looked similar to the ones she had left behind when she had gnawed on them as a child. It was a melancholic piece, reminding her of her long lost parents, but still something that sparked a hint of appreciation. Partially for proof of the experiment's success and mostly for sentimental value, she placed the book on her cart.

Thinking back to the big release of a popular detective novel, she managed to bring about the lavish display for the book in question. This came in the form of a table laden with dozens of

copies, with a few marked as having the author's signature inside. She recalled the scene clearly as a mad rush to push through the crowd with no companions to aid her in the long wait outside the store beforehand. Admiring the cardboard cutout of the ace detective woman that was the protagonist of the story, she helped herself to a signed copy and put it with the rest of her collection.

Getting more abstract, she tried to conjure up the image of a fake almanac for plants that didn't exist. Moments later, she was pawing through pages depicting grapes covered in barbs and tomatoes colored to resemble zebra stripes. She felt a strange kinship with each of the odd produce, both bringing up the feeling that they didn't fit in with regular society. As completely useless as it was to any actual farmer, the almanac was interesting enough for Lochana to place it on her cart to look at her leisure later.

For all of Lochana's successes, there were a few desires that seemed to be disregarded. Anything absolutely ridiculous or that couldn't reasonably be found in a library either wouldn't be created or be made into something more manageable. For instance, the grand amusement park in her head was replaced by a small model placed in the middle of another reading area. Though she tried to be clever, her attempts to think of a book containing a map towards the library's exit only led to a long trek down a corridor that left her in great need for another trip to an employee break room.

Repeating her routine of eating, bathing, and sleeping, she tried to rest her mind for a few hours by going through the wide variety of books she had collected during her trials. Her less than favorable situation did little to take away from the impact of having whatever books she wanted at her finger tips. The thought lingered in her head that she could probably spend a

lifetime in this place and never read the same book twice. This idea was more than enough to get her back on her feet again to continue her efforts.

Emerging back into the library reinvigorated, Lochana tried to focus on what would put her on the right path. Thinking back to the unusual books still carried by her cart, she tried to think of a place where she would find more volumes from the collection. The result she got as she turned the corner was a very odd reading room consisting of a collection of office chairs gathered around a circular table adorned with a demonic pentagram. Placed in the center of the strange scene was yet another book adorned by the ominous eye.

Stretching herself across the table, careful not to incite any demonic wrath, Lochana grasped the book and opened it up. Rather than skip straight to the back, she pulled a chair away from the table and began to read through the tome. Though she still couldn't understand what was written on the pages, she could get a semblance of understanding based off of the pictures. This book seemed to be focused on showing humans going through different types of transformations. Everything from swapping genders, changing their entire personalities, and even gaining varying degrees of animal features. Looking past some forms that seemed to defy all logic, she reached the back of the book and found another phrase. More accurately, a single word.

“Continue.”

As small as the message was, Lochana took what little gratification she could get from the victory. Placing the book alongside the others, she began to walk away from the table with the intention of summoning a copy of it alongside another tome. Keeping the image in mind as she walked down the corridor, she couldn't stop herself from grinning as she spotted a familiar circle of chairs around a devilish table. It unfortunately became too similar as she arrived to see

the lack of a new book and the chairs pulled out in the same manner she had left the previous table. As much as she expected that it wouldn't be that easy, that didn't stop her from letting out a sigh as she sat down with one of her books to read while she tried to come up with her next plan.

Eventually Lochana managed to devise a strategy that brought her in contact with another tome bearing the eye. However, this was after multiple trips through the library with different destinations in mind. The more mundane concepts resulted in her finding private reading rooms that could be used for meetings or extracurricular clubs. There were even a few times she happened upon small cafes. Of course they were unstaffed, but that didn't stop her from helping herself to the various pastries and coffee on display.

It was during one of these explorations that she managed to locate a working computer. Booting up the device, she was disheartened to find a distinct lack of any way to access the internet. Aside from some basic programs, the main feature of the computer seemed to be to catalog books and provide electronic copies of literature to peruse at her leisure. As convenient as these features were, the bulky nature of the machines made them not the most reliable of options as she traversed the library.

These computer stations did offer up a chance for Lochana to finally plug in her phone and give it a charge. Yet again her plan to contact someone for help was foiled as her screen turned on to reveal a lack of phone signal. In addition, it appeared that whatever force was keeping her here had gotten around to installing the image of the black and white eye on her screen. Shutting off her phone after a few seconds of staring back at the unblinking pupil, she turned away to find yet another tome sitting next to the unplugged computer.

“Though you will not find others here, they will find you should you succeed in your test.”

Reading over the phrase again and again only succeeded in strengthening the theory that Lochana’s only hope of seeing another person was to play along. Perusing through the depictions of devices in the book that swung between advanced science and high fantasy in design, she once more set the tome alongside the others. After putting back a few books she had read that day to make room on her cart, she once more visited the break room to rest and rejuvenate herself before continuing her search.

Lochana began to fall into a routine with how she went about searching the library for the eye books. Upon waking from her slumber and putting on her freshly cleaned set of clothes, she would wake herself up by perusing the pages of something that had caught her attention. Energized, she would set out into the library with the intention of gathering more books in between trying out different ideas for ways to summon the strange tomes. At first she looked at the other pieces of literature just for inspiration, but in truth it was just a means of keeping her mind at ease during her stay. This back and forth of reading and searching would last up until she felt her body grow weary. Letting out a yawn, she would clean up the aftermath of her search before retuning to the break room yet again.

Repeating these actions over and over again, she began to lose track of how long she had spent in the library. Whenever she felt like she was running on her last legs, that was when she got the inspiration needed to try out something else. Though it rarely ended in a newfound tome, that rush of finding a new line of logic to follow was all she needed to keep herself motivated to continue her search.

Over time, Lochana began to gather a collection of the eye books. Their location didn't always make sense, some appearing in random places on the shelves while others would only appear after she conjured a very specific area for the library to bring her to. Each new tome came with a phrase from whatever being was keeping her there, using it as a form of communication with her. While the messages varied in tone and usefulness, they all shared the same purpose of making her seek out the others. What truly drove her over the edge was when she came upon a book with specific phrase.

“There is only one left.”

That message cranked up Lochana's obsession to find the final eye book. She increased her efforts tenfold, avoiding taking breaks until they were absolutely necessary. Small snacks from the vending machines fueled endurance walks through the corridors as she tried out different combinations of rooms to find the tome. Multiple trips to the café were made to refuel her coffee to keep her brain active enough to try and notice any other clues. Through all of this the break room, the place that used to be her one sanctuary in the library, was almost completely ignored as she pushed herself to keep looking for the final book. Her efforts were not wasted.

Collapsing to the ground in front of the shelf she had just stumbled into, she reached out with trembling hands to grasp the final tome. Pulling herself back to her feet, she took a deep breath to try and keep herself calm. After everything she had been through, the key to her escape was in her very hands. Grasping the cover of the book, she swung it open in a hurry to reach the back cover and the final page.

Lochana's moment of victory was cut short as her frantic movements made the tome begin to slip out of her hands. Though she managed to keep the book grasped between her fingers, the jerking motion led to her glasses falling off of her face and towards the ground.

Through her vision was blurry, she could hear the sound of glass cracking as it hit the floor. Getting down on her knees, she reached out to have her hands explore the blurry expanse of the carpet beneath her. Clutching what remained of her glasses in her fingers, she brought it up to her face only to be met with the sight of cracked glass falling out of the rims.

She bit down her lip, her hands shaking as she tried to hold back tears. After searching for so long, it felt like her goal had been snatched away by a string. Calming herself down with a series of deep breaths, she tried to come up with a plan. Grasping on to her cart with one hand with the other pressing against the nearby shelves, she tried to shuffle down the corridor using the books as a guide to make up for her near sightedness. As she finally came to a corner, she kept her mind entirely focused on finding a replacement pair of glasses.

Lochana was stopped as she bumped into something around the turn. Tracing her fingers along the wooden pedestal, she was elated to feel a velvet pillow carrying a familiar shape. Without hesitation she placed the new glasses on the tip of her nose. The new spectacles were a far cry from what she had envisioned; made up of an unknown, silver material and with a rectangular shape to the rims. However, they would be more than suitable for her needs.

After making sure her new glasses were properly balanced on her face, she rushed over to her cart to pick up the final tome. Flipping through the pages, she paid a passing glance to the images depicting people in dark robes worshipping the symbol of the eye. As interesting as these were in conjunction with the still unreadable text, there was nothing that could stop her from reaching the back cover. Waiting for her there was a single word that echoed in her head.

“Congratulations.”

Lochana stared dumbfounded at the book for a while, unsure what to make of the disappointing message. Looking away from the tome, she expected a large exit sign to appear out

of nowhere to point towards her escape route. All she saw was the same rows of book shelves that seemed to go on for eternity. Clenching fingers, she was just about ready to tear the book into pieces. That was until she took another look at its pages.

The words that had perplexed her for so long might as well have been a language she had spoken since birth. Flipping through the pages, she was able to read each paragraph with ease. Opening up other volumes in the set let her delve into a world of strange rituals and forbidden knowledge that had eluded her since she had first set her eyes on the tomes. Engrossed by the wealth of information now given to her, she was pulled away from the moment as she heard something.

“Do you enjoy your gift?”

The words echoed clearly in Lochana’s head but lacked an actual voice. Looking around to see that she was still alone, she replied. “Yes. Who are you?”

“The owner of this library,” the presence replied. “The few that have been allowed into this place have referred to me as the All Seeing One. Those same individuals were only permitted here because I allowed them to. You too have been given a reason to be here.”

Fighting against her own fear, Lochana hardened her gaze and furrowed her brow.

“Whatever reason you might have, it’s not good enough to keep me captive.”

“You are no prisoner. If you ever wished to leave, then the library would have shown you the way.”

“That’s a lie,” she replied, crossing her arms as she looked up at the ceiling for lack of a better way to converse with the entity. “The only reason that I bothered playing along with your game was so that I could get out of here.”

“You appear to be mistaken. Perhaps, more of an explanation will clarify.”

The sound of objects shifting got Lochana to turn around. Sitting behind her was a door leading to the break room. Entering her former sanctuary, she stepped inside to find a new set of clothes sitting on the couch she used so often as a makeshift bed. Picking up the garment, it felt brand new in comparison to the wear and tear that had accrued across her clothes during her stay.

“Why are you giving me these?” Lochana asked.

“Consider it a uniform for you to wear as you perform your daily tasks as a keeper of my collection,” the entity replied.

“Was that all this was for?” Lochana asked, tossing the clothes back onto the couch. “A job interview to be a librarian?”

“I had to properly test your abilities and resolve. You have passed and earned the honor of fulfilling this task.”

“I never asked for this,” Lochana shot back. “All I ever wanted was to go home.”

“That is not what you truly desire,” the entity replied, sending a shiver down Lochana’s spine. “If you actually wanted to leave, the door would have been revealed to you. Instead, you continued to be provided with everything you would need to live comfortably here. Have you not found comfort within this space?”

“I...”

Lochana trailed off, unable to entirely dispute the claim. For as long as she could remember, she always felt like she didn’t belong. In truth, never had she felt more at ease than when she was spending her time with a good book by herself. Whenever she broke from her assumed need to leave the library, she was reading to her heart’s content with whatever she could get her hands on. As much as she tried to deny it, she had to admit that the entity was telling the truth.

“What do you want me to do now?” Lochana asked, an elegant calmness taking over her as she accepted her fate.

“Get into your uniform. Then I will inform you of your duties.”

Picking up the outfit, Lochana made her way into the bathroom and began to change. Every piece of the outfit fit her like a glove, as if someone had taken her measurements when she wasn't looking. A button down, white dress shirt came paired with a bright red tie that was neatly wrapped around her neck. A thin, black pencil skirt covered up anything that her set of opaque leggings could not. Taking a few steps in her new, sensible brown shoes, she paused as she glanced at the bathroom mirror.

It had been some time since she had last looked at herself. In the wake of her push to find the final tome, she had avoided the break room in favor of sleeping in reading areas and freshening herself up with sinks from the cafes and water fountains. That made it all the stranger when she finally got a chance to see her reflection again and realized something was off.

“How long have I been here?” Lochana asked, her new set of glasses giving her a good look at her face for the first time in a while.

“You managed to pass my test in record time,” the entity replied. “Seventeen years is quite impressive for a mere mortal.”

Pulling her hair back, she leaned in close to the mirror to see the aged up version of her face staring back at her. Getting over the initial shock, there was a certain level of satisfaction that came with the more refined jaw and cheeks, as well as her full lips. Strangest of all was the silver coloring that had taken over her once brown eyes. As odd as it was to look at, the appearance brought with it a sense that it was who she was always meant to be.

“Please remember to keep that watch on at all times,” the entity said, referring to the silver, analog watch strapped to Lochana’s wrist. “It will prevent further aging and reverse any ill effects from any experiments you run in your spare time.”

“Experiments?” Lochana asked as she tried to style her hair into something more presentable for her position.

“Whenever you have time away from visitors, you will be allowed to use my tomes and any other books you find to satiate your curiosity. I assume that what little you have gathered so far of my collection should give you an idea of what I mean.”

“I’ll think it over,” Lochana said, finally able to put her hair into a neat bun thanks to the help of two red pencils from a pocket in her skirt. “There are a few things I have in mind that I will want to try out first.” Exiting the break room, she grasped her book cart and resumed walking down the corridor. “Before that though, I would appreciate getting a chance to settle in to my new role.”

“Your task will be simple,” the entity spoke, just as Lochana managed to reach a front desk overlooking a set of doors baring the same black and white eye that greeted her when she first entered the library. “Aid any being that enters this library with finding what they need. Though they may not know what it is themselves, my collection will lead them to their destination without fail. All they will require is a push in the right direction from you.”

Taking her spot at the desk and getting comfortable in her seat, Lochana paused as she heard a knock at the door. Watching as the entrance began to open, she leaned against the desk. Propping up her chin with her hands, she put on a wide grin as she looked upon the person stepping inside. “Welcome to the All Seeing One’s Library,” she said, the eye symbol reflecting off of her glasses. “My name is Lochana Jaanavar. How may I be of service?”