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## **Star Crossed and other Stories**

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Star Crossed Starcrossed is a Collection of Five Great Stories

Star Crossed

Ashes to Ashes

Made for Each Other

Shark's Tooth

Video Death

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Star Crossed

Wedding Day: The Groom

The digital calendar Starcrossed on the control panel told Captain Martin Quince that it was 007.23 hoon June 20th, 2043. At least that was the date back on Earth.

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He veered the nose Starcrossed Starcrossed of the Traveler shuttlecraft into alignment with Diaphaenesia 2, hovering above the fourteenth planet of the Andromeda Cluster. Waiting for the threads of his landing vectors to steady he glanced to his left where the Starcrossed Earth lolled in the black ink of space, reaching for his glasses to see the light refracted from the distant planet because his vision was not what it used to be. Not much about Martin Quince was.

From this distance even a man pushing fifty could feel pretty damned cocky because that speck of light seemed so ridiculously tiny, insignificant enough to rub out with his thumb like a kid might squash a bug on a window. Inside the small cabin of the Traveler shuttle several million miles from home Quince felt a sense of power over every man and woman down there on that sorry excuse for a planet. Maybe he even pitied them.

“Men and women, women and men,” he whispered to the cosmos. “Now, what’s wrong with this picture, ladies and gentlemen?” The captain studied his thumb as he pressed it Starcrossed against the thick Plexiglas of the side window. Blotting out the Earth was almost like making it disappear. Maybe if he applied a little bit of pressure, just a little.

Beneath Martin’s thumb was every female of his species, every beautiful woman he had known the perky cheerleader (and future Starcrossed congresswoman) who practically bit off the Starcrossed tongue of the sixteen year old future NASA space fleet captain when he had gone for her tonsils in front of her gym locker; the prom queen who Starcrossed called herself Cherry, who made him pay for the formal chiffon gown Martin had ripped Starcrossed while snatching at her ass in the back seat of her father’s Turbo the night of his senior prom; the ‘older woman’ (of twenty-four!) who, during his first space mission, initiated him into manhood during a zero gravity blow job. The faces were blurs now, but he remembered they had been beautiful.

These were good memories, and yet painful to recall because each nubile young woman no longer really existed anywhere except in Martin’s Starcrossed memories. Time had seen to that.

And, of course, there was Barbara.

The captain’s wife was no different from the rest of them, not when he really thought about it, and maybe his uneasy life with her had not been entirely her fault. After all, wasn’t every woman cursed with the same fatal flaw caused by the one irrefutable law that governed that entire pathetic planet, a law often defied but never broken?

Gravity.

On earth, down was the only way Starcrossed to go. Smooth flesh wrinkled and withered. Gravity and time were thieves, and together they conspired to rob anything that was encased in human flesh of its beauty and dignity. Although his own body was not entirely immune to this vandalism, Martin Quince felt especially infuriated to see its effects on the women. Infuriated, and a little sad.

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Gravity. The word Starcrossed was so damned appropriate, Quince thought. Any pocket dictionary defined it as something heavy and very serious. Who could argue that logic? Gravity was about as serious as you could get. When a woman got heavy enough to play tether ball with her tits that was pretty serious. When a woman got old, that was really serious. Getting heavy and old, now that was the real law of Gravity.

Lifting his thumb from the window Martin shouted to the planet of his birth, "Hey, down there! Your poets are wrong! A thing of beauty is not a joy forever. When it comes to your women, my friends, the warranty soon expires!"

Especially the warranty on one woman! A familiar voice inside him scolded in a woman's tongue. Martin's smile twisted itself into a snarl.

"And for you, the wife of my bosom, a quotation from Yeats! 'I carry the sun in a golden cup, the moon in a silver bag, and a stiff cock that reaches out to the cosmos!'" he shouted, wanting to blot out the earth forever and wanting even more to silence that damned Starcrossed woman inside his head. "All I need do is give old mother earth one good smear with this thumb and squash."

But Quince resisted the temptation. His actions did not befit a man about to take a new wife even if that man had not rid himself of the wife he had back on that tiny dust speck. The matter did not upset him, because in space there were many laws that did not apply. Gravity was only one of them.

"Barbara."

Quince spoke to the empty cab, testing his ability to utter her name. The captain's Starcrossed lips distorted sourly as if he had just bitten into a nail.

Space allowed much time to think and Quince's thoughts sent an ice floe up his spine despite the temperature-controlled suit he wore. The woman appeared inside his mind's eye as vividly as if he had taken a memory capsule to conjure her. Starcrossed He pictured Barbara standing before the bedroom mirror shapeless and ugly in her faded terrycloth robe, the deep crevices of flesh that cracked her face making her seem even older and uglier in the yellow lamp light. She must have read his letter weeks ago, and he envisioned her shredding it into confetti along with the stacks of photos they had taken together during the earlier days of their twenty-five years of marriage, maybe Starcrossed even setting fire to the lot of them.

And why not? Hadn't everything else between them turned to ashes?

All right, so maybe some women aged less gracefully than others, that still was no excuse. Barbara had aged downright clumsily, almost as if growing older were a willful act of defiance of him. Her refusal to bear his children eventually became an inability. There was no law on Earth that said a man who was still vital had to spend his life sleeping with a barren hag. Nowhere in the shriveled prune that had become his wife's face could Quince find a trace of the lovely girl he had married, and he saw no reason to continue trying.

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The ancient Greeks had an expression Quince remembered from college. Deus ex machina, the “God-Machine.” It meant that when mortal man’s circumstances got so fucked up that he was incapable of solving the dilemma himself, the gods would suddenly intervene to clean up the mess he had made. For Quince the gods had intervened Starcrossed two winters earlier while he watched the Dallas cheerleaders doing their bumps and grinds during Super Bowl LXXV. The holographic image of the girls high kicking in his living room suddenly metamorphosed into the most bizarre cheer he had ever seen.

“Mar-tin! Mar-tin! Maaaaaar-tin ! Leave her! Leave her! Leeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeve her !” they sang, and he knew he had hoisted one beer too many. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen suddenly stepped out of Starcrossed line and walked over to the contour-chair in which he sat. “I’m Lena,” she told him and Quince felt as if he were suddenly inside one of those commercials to come on up to the Moons of Tyros 3 for some gravity-free volleyball. She whispered to him about a Starcrossed tiny planet in the Andromeda Cluster where the women made those kicking cheerleaders look like old ladies with walkers, a planet that amazingly was along the exact course of his flight schedule that same month.

Awakening from a deep sleep, this Starcrossed had been the closest Martin Quince had come to a religious experience. Who was he to argue with the gods? During his first visit to Diaphaenesia 2 he met Lena.

## Starcrossed

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