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Seven Lost Sisters

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Seven Lost Sisters

November is the month when the Pleiades, a cluster of stars, can be seen the longest, from dusk until dawn. November is called “Frosty November,” which is funny, because it’s the middle of February and you can’t remember November ever being this cold.

You probably heard about the Pleiades from somewhere else. You’ve never liked astronomy; spotting the big dipper is the extent of your knowledge, and even then, you’re never certain. Your little sister Maia loves stars, but she mostly finds them aesthetically pleasing. Last Christmas, you bought her Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos* only to realize that she wasn’t interested in reading about stars; she just wanted to watch them.

By sheer coincidence, you are one of seven sisters from six different mothers, but you aren’t clustered like the stars. You are scattered across households and caregivers, different degrees of home and family. Yours is a now-single mother and a suicidal stepfather, but you live on your own, 200 miles from home. Your oldest sister Tess has the closest thing to a family, but her and her husband sleep in separate beds and your nephew’s room was rented out to a man working at the CVS down the street.

Unlike other constellations, there is no way to notice the seven sisters by their shapes, although claiming that the Pegasus constellation looks like a horse is really reaching. Instead, you just look for a V-cluster with some bright and some dim stars. Somehow, these are sisters.

Six mothers. One father.

According to the legend, the sisters were ice maidens who had cold hearts and couldn’t love, despite men being entranced by them. A man captured two of the sisters and, being disappointed at the thought of unrequited love, resolved to melt their crystal-ice bones next to a campfire. Their melted bodies quenched the fire, but they did not die; instead, they lost their brightness.

Five of you had some relationship with your father, but not you, and not your sister Maranda, who is only six months younger. You should have sent her a birthday card, but your fingers cannot reach out in all directions, towards every sister and every parental figure, aunt, grandma,

cousin. You and Maranda are the forgotten sisters, the dimmest as far as your father is concerned. You always bonded over your fear of commitment or abandonment, but in the hopes of gaining your father's love, or at the very least, respect, you seem to have forgotten how to keep in touch with her.

Even in a dark sky, you supposedly can only see six of the sisters. You have to commit hours under bitter darkness to hope and see the seventh. You're from Chicago, and light pollution probably makes it impossible to see more than the two that shine the brightest. Your father only really cares about the youngest girls, Livia and Abigail. Maybe because they have the same mother, but you imagine it's because he hasn't fucked them up yet. Maybe he's trying.

Abigail is still the baby, despite the fact that she is turning eleven. You were buying your own clothes with birthday money by the time you were ten, and you want to tell her to grow up, but you shouldn't have had to either. Livia was accepted to an elite academy in the Southwest Chicago suburbs, the one you couldn't make it into. You shouldn't hate Livia for her success, but you do. You do. You do. She's seven years younger and brighter than you can ever hope to be.

You wonder how your older sister Beth is doing. She got married last year. You skipped the ceremony because Livia and Abigail were the ushers and you didn't want to see your father walk her down the aisle, but you wouldn't miss the reception. You ran into your father's now-wife in the bathroom and she said hi. You pretended not to know her, but you've clicked through her Facebook pictures too many times to not recognize which of your sisters' features belong to her and which ones belong to him. It would have been Beth's birthday last month, but you can't remember if you told her Happy Birthday. She'll probably forget yours, too.

By April, you won't be able to see the Pleiades anymore. It will belong to someone else's sky.