

Sarah Mornhinweg

This is all because David learned that he could buy stars on the internet. In even this, David was wrong. You can't buy stars. You can only buy their naming rights. This is the way in which stars are most like football stadiums. David is often wrong, almost always.

But David has the great advantage of being beautiful.

David started small with his star-name buying. He chose one and named it *Sarah Mornhinweg* after our friend Sarah Mornhinweg. He gave her the big faux-calligraphied Star Title certificate, which she then framed and hung above her sofa.

David was pleased with this response. He began to name more stars. He gave them names like: *Sarah Mornhinweg 2*, *Sarah Mornhinweg 3*, *Sarah Mornhinweg Is Beautiful*, *Sarah Mornhinweg Will You Go To Dinner With Me On Saturday?*, *Please?*, *How About Next Saturday?*, *Ok You Work On Saturdays But What About Friday?*

Sarah agreed to go out with David on Friday. The star thing, she decided, was more winning than weird.

Remember that David is extremely beautiful.

So Sarah and David shared a handful of dinners and soon after traded greater intimacies.

Their relationship's happy stage was as dully charming as the movies to which they went on weekend nights. For a time everything proceeded according to the appropriate beats. And then David strayed from the script.

A few weeks into their courtship, David showed up at Sarah's door with his arms full of new Star Title certificates. He'd gone for more poetic names this time: *Sarah's Luminous Smile*, *The Light Refracting Through A Glass of Malbec When We Sit Across From Each Other At Dinner*, *The Way I Feel When Sarah Mornhinweg Touches My Skin*. There were dozens more. Sarah realized that the star names documented everything, the places they'd travelled, the things they'd done to one another, the private names they called each other in bed.

She stopped reading. It wasn't just the names that were upsetting. Worse was the total matter-of-factness with which they had been presented, the even smile that stayed on David's face, the expectancy there. Sarah took a breath and smiled back just as evenly. She placed the mostly-unread pile of certificates on the corner of her bed, laced her arm in David's, and walked with him to the little restaurant that they had started to call *our cafe*.

That evening's dinner was less pleasant than those previous, but David seemed not to notice. To be fair, this wasn't necessarily his fault. David is neither a cruel nor insensitive person. The fact is that Sarah typically hides her emotions, this case being no exception, and so perhaps David is not to be blamed for his obliviousness. It is also a fact that Sarah

did not resist David's advances and, by her own admission, could even have been described as the aggressor when they returned to her apartment after dinner. In her mind the night was a last-gasp, a going-out-with-a-bang beneath the impossible weight of David's obsessive astral diary. David was convinced they were in love.

The next morning they woke to star names crumpled and strewn across Sarah's apartment, names that constituted a disordered and fragmentary account of Sarah and David's time together, a torn and beat up love story beneath the framed certificate that announced *Sarah Mornhinweg* as a celestial body.

David woke first that morning. He put a pot of coffee on to boil and began to tidy and smooth out the mess of certificates. He hummed sweetly in the work. When the coffee finished, David took a short break to order a new star name and then returned to the kitchen to soft-boil a pair of eggs. He roused Sarah gently with a forehead kiss and breakfast-in-bed. She told him that he ought to go home.

The last star David had purchased was named *Sarah Mornhinweg Will You Marry Me?*

David, though very frequently wrong, was not stupid. He knew what Sarah's *You ought to go home* had meant. Still, he bought a proper frame for his proposal certificate, packed it under his arm, and wore his finest suit to Sarah Mornhinweg's apartment. He was gorgeous in that suit and absolutely sincere as he dropped to his knee to present the proposal.

Sarah's *no* was unambiguous.

David placed his arm in Sarah's doorframe before she could shut him out.

“I just want to show you one thing.”

Sarah assented. David logged on to the website of the International Star Registry and navigated to the Maps section. There, if you zoomed in to the right coordinates, you could see a cluster of stars whose names revealed – through the lens of David's ardor – the details of their entire relationship. At first, Sarah thought she was looking at a disordered collage of memories and moments. Then David took out his felt pen and began to sketch the lines between his stars. The image was perfect. David had purchased a constellation in the exact shape of Sarah Mornhinweg. He thought, perhaps, that she would understand.

“What about now?” He pointed to the proposal certificate that leaned against the door.

Sarah opened her hands in gentle bafflement. Her *no* remained firm.

“But now our love is written in the heavens.”

“The thing is, David, only you wrote it there.”

Sarah had meant her rebuke to be stinging or at least melancholy, but instead David took heart from it. It *was* only he who had written their love into the sky. Sarah Mornhinweg did not need to write a word for that to be so, and she could have no effect on the bright permanence of his inscription. David was the master of his image-love. Sarah's rejection could have no bearing on that. David smiled as widely as he had in weeks. He squeezed Sarah's shoulders and thanked her. Then he went home and again began to name stars.

These new stars continued the account of David and Sarah's great love affair. In the sky's version, Sarah responded to David's proposal with cries of *Yes yes, a thousand times over!* and the pair were wed precisely one year later. They honeymooned somewhere tropical, they rarely argued, they went on anniversary dinners on the eighteenth of each month. If David's account of marriage seems exaggeratedly blissful, it may simply be because he was genuinely happy during this time. He carefully chose each name, spent hours crafting the cohesion of events in the idyllic life of his astral alter-ego. And it was out of nothing but a sense of pride that he once more carted his certificates to Sarah Mornhinweg's door.

This time, Sarah let David into her apartment out of a mixture of resignation and curiosity. David beamed at her. He lay the stack of certificates on her sofa and watched quietly as Sarah began to page through them. As Sarah read, David pulled a large star chart from his backpack. On it was the traced-out constellation of Sarah as well as second cluster of stars whose names he had bought since the breakup. He tapped Sarah on the

shoulder.

“You can finish reading those later. I've got something I want to show you.”

Sarah turned and watched as David laid out the star chart on her kitchen table and began to connect the newly-named stars. A second constellation began to emerge beside her image. This new constellation, naturally, was a portrait David. David sketched his constellation's face first, then his body, and then his arm as it extended towards and joined hands with constellation-Sarah.

“You see,” said David, “I never stopped buying stars. I think we're going to have a baby soon.”