

# when a flame is lit, move toward it

When I met Lark, two critical ideas impacted my life: the importance of reading and embracing new experiences. Though I had always been a capable reader, I seldom indulged in books due to my upbringing—my parents had little interest in literature. This background made me somewhat of an outsider, lacking in finesse but not malice; I often embodied a friendly brute, reminiscent of the role I naturally played in a grade-school production.

At twenty-eight, I was a house painter and an amateur musician in Duluth. On one cold winter day, I sought refuge in the library for a quiet place to enjoy my lunch. Seated in a secluded carrel, I heard a woman at the help desk soothing anxious patrons with her calm, melodic voice. Her ability to address fears and confusion in others captivated me. Even as I sought to glimpse her, she remained hidden behind a peculiar character, further intensifying my curiosity.

Returning to the library daily, I began listening intently to her interactions. She not only guided patrons to resources but intuitively addressed their unvoiced questions and needs. Her discussions of literature—which seemed like a different world from mine—left me awe-inspired. I scribbled down recommendations like “Dickens” and “luminous,” marveling at her rich insights while secretly wishing to engage more with this enchanting figure who embodied grace and knowledge.

Driven by a desire for connection, I expanded my library visits to include actual reading—Dickens, Connor, and others pulled me into complicated narratives. I experienced an intense obsession with literature while neglecting my work, painting jobs fading into the background as stories became my escape. The timeless tales of Beowulf, Odysseus, and other literary figures resonated with me, igniting a passion for narratives of struggle and heroism.

In this frenzied pursuit, I stumbled upon Molly Thorn’s elusive work, often murmured about across the city. I eventually obtained one of her novels, intrigued by Lark’s reverence for her work. But amid the recent societal shift toward anti-intellectualism, there lingered a trepidation surrounding literature itself. Despite all this, my anticipated discovery of Molly’s book became a personal quest, one signifying the hope of cherished narratives against an ever-changing world.