

The Curiosity Shop

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It's a shop I must have walked past a million times before, but have barely noticed until now, and have never thought to enter. A nondescript, little, drab brown brick building, crammed between a hair salon and an upholstery store, with a tiny window display offering an assortment of forgettable items that are of no interest to me. But I have some extra time on my hands today and decide to take a quick peek.

The interior is cool and dark, and it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust. An overpowering rose scent hangs thickly in the air; it's nearly enough to turn me away. Instead I continue further into the store, eyes scanning the shelves for anything interesting. Indeed, there are a great variety of items – and yet none whatsoever appeal to me.

"Can I help you?"

I look up to see an elderly woman behind a counter. She looks vaguely startled, and I wonder when she last saw a customer enter her shop.

"Just browsing," I reply.

I make a full circle of the place and confirm that there is indeed nothing here that I wish to purchase. I wonder how the old woman manages to stay in business. I head towards the door, but pause when I notice one interesting item. A large old book, perched on a wooden stand.

There is no visible title on the well-worn leather cover, and it is held shut with a thick metal clasp. Upon further inspection I see that a combination lock is affixed to the clasp.

The numbers read: 02-11-32.

I try the latch with the current combination, but it does not open. I am now even more curious to discover what lies between the book's pages. "What is this book about?" I ask the old woman, who has been staring at me quietly the whole time. "Do you know the combination?"

"I do," the woman replies, but adds nothing more.

I am annoyed by her response, and decide that I've had enough of this place. I turn to leave and am almost out the door, when I hear the woman say, "Try your birthday."

I give her an odd look as I wander back over to the book. She's crazy, I think. And yet, I am compelled. With my index finger I swipe the numbers into place so that they now show my birth month, day, and year.

To my astonishment, the latch clicks open. I pull back the heavy cover and flip through the pages. "This can't be right," I murmur in shock as I realize the book is a biography... about me!

I look up to question the woman, but she is gone and the shop suddenly seems different, brighter. The shelves are now stocked with all my favourite things. I wander through the aisles again – how did I miss this before? And this? I would buy any of these items, gladly!

Gone is the cloying fragrance of rose, replaced with my own favourite scent.

I sit behind the counter and wait for a customer to come in and buy something, but they all walk past the window as though the place were invisible. The few that do enter seem uninterested in what I have to sell, or complain that the fragrance in the air is too strong.

Until one day, a young woman takes an interest in the book. "It won't open," she notes, smacking on her gum.

"Try your birthday," I say.