

Temptation

by,

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Genre:

Fantasy Literature

Effucal slammed his hands down on the desk and at the same instant his shoulders slumped. Exasperated he looked at the two books that lay in front of him. His gaunt features reflected the strain a warrior shows after a long battle and the anticipation of another. He wanted this next battle to be the last but all he could do was stare. After several moments his fingers twitched on both hands; they were eager to grasp the books that lay in front of them. In front of his right hand lay a white book that seemed to shine, taking in and enhancing the waning light of the setting sun coming in through the window across from the desk. By his left hand lay a black book, which seemed to try to smother the remaining light cast by the setting sun, eager for the impending darkness.

Effucal's gaze lingered on the black book for a moment, and he felt like it was sucking him in along with the vanishing light. He found the emotion seductive and intoxicating. He ran his fingers across the black book's cover, tracing the arcane markings that penetrated the smooth leather. At the same time his tongue ran across his upper lip and he drew in a deep breath. He took a short pause that stretched on. His eyes widened slightly. He felt pleasure and a rush of exhilaration that couldn't be felt any other way. Effucal often spent many hours during the day longing for the book. To touch it, feel its power and to drown in the richness of its words as he committed to memory its precious spells. To study the book also brought on a feeling of filth. He would drink his fill like a dying man drank from a muddy pond. He would take in gulps and be replenished by the water but repulsed and soiled by the dirt. He would spend hours and days within that volume. The world and time would pass. He would gain in power and knowledge, yet never be satisfied. He always needed more; the pleasure would be there, but eventually the need would be too great for the pleasure. He would look deeper, memorize more, but the need

for power and gain would grasp him like a whirlwind. Finally exhausted and frustrated, he would hurl the book across the room.

He hated the black leather book. He hated himself for participating in the loathsome exertion of emotional and mental energy that left him hollow. He glared at the book with utter abhorrence. Despite all his strength and self-control, this book held him. Though he despised the book and the inclination that he would ever look at it again, a murmur arose deep within his mind and he knew he would. "A few days will pass," the murmur said, "and you'll forget the frustration." He knew he would forget, and in his desire to feel the pleasure and power of the black book, he would create the disturbed illusion that this time he wouldn't be left unfulfilled. He knew this would happen like he knew of the blood that would come from a pierced heart. He knew it, and with the knowledge came a spasm of regret that throbbed in his chest. He accepted the throbbing like he accepted disease inevitability.

"NO!" he sprang back from the desk, "Not this time." Oh, how he wanted it to end. He wanted this night to be over. Before the new dawn he wanted the black book out of his life. He fell into a chair and crossed his arms on the desk and lowered his head into them. As he reflected on the bitterness, he became conscious of his hand touching the white book. He tilted his head to gaze at its whiteness. It too was made of leather and had arcane symbols of protection. He felt a sense of hope and peace etch into the frustration and longing that was a residue from the black book. This white book was in every way the opposite of the black. To study its pages and memorize the complex spells was rejuvenating. It did create a desire for more. It wasn't a controlling influence but a liberating, rewarding one. Not an overpowering yearning for more, but a calm reassurance of peace. Not a mass of confusion but order. Not

turmoil and struggle but stillness. Not the terrorizing of the soul but the reconciliation of it.

“Why would I ever desire to turn from your precious pages and look to the black book?” Effucal whispered. As in answer to his question his thoughts took him back to his cycle. After spending so much time in the abyss of the black book, he felt unworthy to touch and relish in the tranquility of the white book. He would spend a day or two looking at the white book on the shelf, and after the effects of the black book had faded and the darkness was not so fresh, he would finally grasp the pages and find peace. The words were like honey to his lips, like lighting a candle at dusk, not realizing how dark it had really gotten and being excited at the new found clarity.

Time would pass and he would continue to study in the white book. Slowly he would get used to the light he received and it would become the norm. But eventually he would remember the black book. He had spent so much time away from the book that the emptiness and darkness was hard to grasp and truly remember. He knew the outcome if he studied its poisonous pages, but the more he pondered it, the more he wanted to feel the exhilarating pleasure it brought.

Reliving the thought process that always brought him to study the black book caused him to consider studying it right then. He glanced over at it, reached, and just as his hands were about to touch the cover, his face contorted and he screamed, “Arrrrhhh!” In complete frustration he grabbed the black book and hurled it into the fireplace at the other end of the room. He spoke, “*Incendie.*” Flames erupted in the fireplace. He felt an instant feeling of triumph, but it passed quickly. He knew that the fire could not hurt the magically protected book. He felt ashamed because if he really were trying to destroy the book he would have. The spell to destroy the book was complex; the slightest mistake would result in death as penalty for those

not strong enough in the art. Effucal had gone over the spell many times—there was no spell he knew better. But he would convince himself that he could not destroy anything magical, no matter how entrapping it was. It was against all that he believed in and lived for.

Effucal walked slowly over to the fireplace. “Tonight it ends. *Sans tirer.*” The flames vanished. He leaned over and grasped the black book. Pleasure and promises of power engulfed him. Falling back, his head filled with blood and he felt light-headed; he paused a moment until it passed. He looked at the book and scowled, but there was also a longing in his eyes. His heart raced and his lungs tightened. Overcoming the feelings of suffocation, he reached a trembling hand toward the book. He took his finger and traced for a second time the symbols on the cover. This time he spoke the cryptic words of magic. “*Se pedre paraitre.*” The words were difficult to say, but he pushed through them as if he was trying to wade through a thick, murky swamp. He continued, “*Ailleurs.*” Tears streamed down his face; his whole frame trembled. His voice faltered. There was no going back now; he must finish the spell, destroy the book, or become ash himself. “*Devier frene torchon.*” He jerked his hand back and watched the arcane symbols fade and vanish from the cover. When the last trace of protection was gone the book deteriorated, leaving only a pile of dust. He fell to the ground with sobs that wracked his soul. Half of his heart had been torn from his body, and it seemed as if there was no way to recover it.

After a long period when Effucal’s tears dried, he pushed himself off the stone floor, walked to his chair, and collapsed. He raised his head and his eyes rested upon the white book on the table. The sun came up over the horizon and the first rays of light reflected off the brilliant cover. The symbols glittered silver and penetrated into his breast. Reaching out he grasped the white book and opened its cover. He sighed and smiled.

