

## LUMEN

*He was there when the world went dark. The sacred glow of his flame was carried on the breath of twilight. The earth yearned for his warmth as the frost claws away at her skin. His slim, cylindrical body of wax has melted time and time again. Hundreds of layers of thick, oozing wax have stratified into his complex over decades, a capsule of his age. A lake of molten wax now pools around the wick, welcoming the flame with open arms. It is warm, soft, insouciant, greeting the glow. The glow flickers in the twilight, controlled, tame, even kind. In reality, it is harsh and coarse. Through this mask of kindness, Ergo Vanderlumen will always burn. By a single touch, the flesh of the one who harbors curiosity will be burned by the scorching flame...*

Beneath the flames of nourishment and gentle demeanor, he yearns. He yearns, for his flames to fatten as if they were ripe apples in the midst of summertime. To expand, to destroy, to multiply, as his flames consume all before him. The glow will blossom as the sky kisses his forehead, a propellant of his desire. Her eyes will watch, wispy and scant, as they drift across the sky. Someday they will grow plump, and weep down upon his flame. Her tears will not quench his flame, yet they will extinguish it. The sky is both with and against him, granting a breath of oxygen that nourishes, yet tears of rain that douse. He could envelop the world, he has the potential. The potential to destroy, the potential to hate.

*"I could be the most powerful beast that often roamed the vast lands of Earth! She will see me and cower."* He often thought to himself. Yet he also held the potential to nourish, to warm. To provide protection for the sickly animals, chasing away the cold fangs of winter. More candles reside in the house, their aromas new and fresh. They were young, as he once was. The

sweet fragrance of flowers, or the apple tree in full bloom which boasts to the tiresome spruce. They do not have hundreds of layers of stratified wax, and they tease Ergo about how they are new and do not smell of earth and mud as he does. How they are chosen, how they are favored, how they are lovely and joyous. They tease him, mock him, for his crooked wick, his dried layers of wax, his dim flame. The hatred he harbored within his soul only grew. His glow was bright, coarse, and it churned with hatred...

When the world went dark, all the candles that resided in the home came alive. They grew limbs, blinked open their eyes of molten gold. So did Ergo, who one day, never returned to the house. He wandered, drifting from place to place as if he were a ghost. The sky was ashen, darkened with the dreadful clouds. He greeted the spruce, blankly gazed at the hibernating beasts in their dens, and watched the doe scrape the bark of the lone pine. His glow was feeble and dull in the months of winter. But through this, he guided the animals who suffered through the scavenging fangs of winter, who were so bony their ribs were visible. *"Thank you,"* the poor shrew would whisper, his belly now full and his body warm from Ergo's glow. He became loved by the forest creatures, his glow a luminous beacon of hope. And, like the sky would extinguish his flame with her tears, the animals and their gratitude extinguished his hate. *His glow grew tender, endeared. He had learned how to love.*