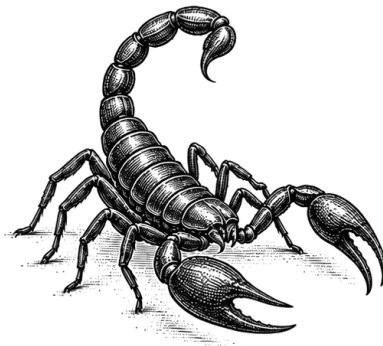


Before You Open This

In the drawer beside your bed lies a page of plans. You have folded it so the writing faces inward. Sometimes you take it out, change one word, and put it back.

This book begins there, with something cherished before it is shared. Scorpio's traditional fixed water and Mars offer its images: feeling held, a boundary defended, affection that stays. Follow them through private hopes and close relationships. They are symbols to think with; your own experience decides where they belong.



The Question You Don't Ask

Your friend mentions a dinner you weren't invited to. You hear the names, picture the chairs, and wonder where you stand. When they ask how you are, you say, "Fine."

Perhaps you want a little time before answering. Perhaps you hope they will notice everything that word is carrying and ask the right question. The two can feel almost identical from inside your own silence.

Privacy gives you somewhere to gather yourself. An unspoken test gives another person a task they cannot see. You might wait for them to mention the dinner again, then count their failure to do so as an answer.

The scorpion's armour offers a useful image here. Protection has a purpose. Notice when it begins deciding every movement for you.

Try separating what happened from what you fear it means. There was a dinner. You weren't there. "They are tired of me" is still a question, however convincing it sounds at midnight.

When you are ready, ask about the part you don't know: "I felt left out when I heard about Saturday. Can you tell me how that came together?"

Their answer may disappoint you. It may also give you something solid to respond to, instead of another evening spent arranging the evidence alone.



Something Small, Kept Well

You tell someone one thing. Days later, they have left it where you put it: between the two of you.

Trust can begin with an event that quiet. No grand promise, no account of how loyal they have always been. At the next gathering, there is simply no joke about the thing you confided. They let you tell your own story.

Scorpio's fixed water gives us an image of feeling held over time. Consider what is worth holding: the memory of someone taking care with a small confidence, the relief of a refusal accepted without an argument.

You can offer trust in amounts that fit the relationship. Someone may be good company without being the person you call in a crisis. You can enjoy that company fully.

Think of one person who has handled something of yours with care. What did they actually do? Let the answer be ordinary and exact. It can help you decide what, if anything, you want to share next.



Put the Request in Words

You have rehearsed the conversation while washing dishes. In every version, the other person understands before you finish speaking. By the time you see them, you have already spent an hour being understood. Starting again, with an actual person, feels exhausting.

At the kitchen table, you make one request.

“Please ask before telling that story about me.”

Your friend looks surprised. They remember you telling it yourself and thought they were joining in. For a moment, you want to make their embarrassment disappear by saying it doesn't matter.

You explain that choosing who hears the story was part of what made it yours to tell. You had wanted them to know something about you. The whole room was another matter. Their explanation helps you understand the mistake. Your request still stands, and they hear it.

Mars, Scorpio's traditional ruler, can supply an image of courage for that small insistence: the effort of protecting something without making an enemy of the person across from you.

Your friend asks whether you'd rather leave that story alone from now on. You say yes. At the next dinner, they let it pass. Nothing is announced. You notice.



The Things You Remember

You buy two apricot pastries on the way to your friend's apartment. They mentioned them last summer, before the bakery changed its window and moved everything with cinnamon near the register.

The surprise on their face is a pleasure you have been looking forward to since you joined the line.

You remember other things, too. The drawings they made before their job swallowed every evening. Each envelope had a little house along one edge, a lamp in every window. The small studio they described, with enough floor space to leave work unfinished overnight. You have kept that possibility in mind through months when neither of you mentioned it.

Over coffee, you ask whether they have drawn anything lately. There is no deadline inside the question. You are interested in what they might show you, however small.

Fixed water can stand for affection with a long memory. A passing remark stays important; a pleasure survives the season in which you first shared it. Scorpio's persistence has room for this kind of keeping: remaining interested in someone as their life takes time to unfold.

Your friend gets their sketchbook. Somewhere between one page and the next, the coffee goes cold. You keep turning.



After the Apology

The apology arrives, and you feel an unexpected pressure to become easy to be around again. They have said they are sorry. Now you are supposed to put your shoulders down, hand back the key, tell them the news.

You may need longer. You may also need something to change before closeness is possible.

If you want to explore repair, make the next agreement small enough to recognize in daily life. A friend who shared your confidence can agree to ask before repeating personal news. Someone who keeps arriving late can tell you before you have left the house. You can decide how long you will wait.

Then watch what happens without creating another secret exam. A useful agreement is one both people can name. It leaves room to notice effort and to address a repeated failure plainly.

Mars supplies an image of defence; you choose where the line goes. Some relationships can continue with less access. Some need to end. You owe no return to a relationship that frightens or harms you.

If care does become consistent, let yourself notice it at your own pace. You can appreciate one better conversation without promising that everything is repaired. Tomorrow can have its own conversation.



What You Want to Protect



Choose one recent moment from a relationship you feel able to consider. A minor disagreement is enough. Write a few words under any prompt that helps; leave the others open.

What happened?

Describe the words or actions you remember. Separate them from the explanation you supplied afterward.

What did you need?

Name something specific: privacy about a piece of news, a direct answer, notice of a changed plan, time alone.

What is yours to decide?

Consider a request, a limit, or more time. You can write a sentence here without sending it. Return later and see whether it still says what you mean.

The Part You Keep

You can tell someone the truth without telling them everything.

Perhaps tonight you share the good news while keeping the plan unfinished. Perhaps you admit that something hurt and ask for a quieter place to talk. Perhaps you sit beside someone who has learned to leave a little room around your silence.

There is pleasure in being known carefully: a story remembered without being repeated, a question asked without insistence, your own words given time to arrive.

Before you close the book, think of one thing you wish someone understood. You can keep it here for now.

