

In Between: Why Can't It Be Both?

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

This novella delves into the psychological landscape of the protagonist, Luna, a young teenage girl navigating the blurred boundaries between memory, imagination, and reality after moving into a haunted house. Through encounters with spectral figures – Lily, Arthur, and the Seer – Luna confronts unresolved trauma, existentialism, and the concepts of Fate and Free will. The narrative unfolds in a fragmented, introspective style characteristic of psychological fiction and postmodern literature, blending elements of magical realism and gothic undertones. As Luna delves deeper into the architecture of the house and explores her mind, the story unfolds how grief, guilt, and the desire to be understood shape the human consciousness. Ultimately, the novella is not just about the ghostly occurrence, but also about the ghosts we create within ourselves to survive. It portrays the journey towards self-acceptance in a world that has trouble comprehending individual variations as abnormalities, and it challenges the conventional notions of sanity, memory, truth, and the boundaries between reality and perception.

Dedication

To the anchor I lost to my inner storm, yet it returned—and steadied me once again.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Jahin Kaiissar, who has guided me with care and patience throughout this whole journey. I could not have done it without her.

Table of Contents

Declaration	2
Approval	3
Abstract	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgement	6
Table of Contents	7
Chapter 1: Arrival	8
Chapter 2: The Yin and The Yang	12
Chapter 3: Growing Leaves	18
Chapter 4: Pebble	24
Chapter 5: Discord	31
Chapter 6: Solace	40

Chapter One

Arrival

I wish it had taken longer. I needed more time, but it would never be enough. Six hours felt like 30 minutes. I've been listening to Opeth the whole time—just one song. And yet, I wish I could listen to it forever. It took me a moment to collect myself before stepping out of the car with my parents, who were feeling the complete opposite of what I was feeling.

The house.

I stand motionless.

“Luna! Hun, pick up the boxes, and let's go. We have so much work today,” Mom called out, her voice filled with excitement.

The boxes feel heavier than when I loaded them into the trunk. The closer I get to the house, the heavier they seem. The air is chilly and has a certain smell. I can sense sorrow in every breath. The more I inhale, the more suffocated I feel.

An old, cosmic crooked house. It stands hollow, a void rising three stories high. An elm tree looms over the house, its branches looking like ribs around a heart. The house is darker than the color of a raven's wings. It stands fractured, and the paint is peeling like the fallen leaves from a tree in autumn.

“We can work with this. It just needs a little bit of fixing,” says Dad, who seems very optimistic about it.

But why fix something that doesn't want to be fixed? Why is it so necessary to make it the way you want it? Why did you take it then? Why couldn't you have something that is already the way you want it to be? Maybe because people see fixing things as an achievement. The closer I get to the house, the heavier I feel. My feet drag like anchors. But this anchor has no surface to hold on to that would save me from drowning. Why do I feel like I'm drowning?

Inside. A narrow hallway. Long and winding, just like a throat. Torn carpet on the stairs, gathering dust like old, untouched books on the shelf. The lights—dimmed yellow. Flickering and changing. The shadows are different. Lights and shadows have a bond. But in this house, they don't. They feel detached.

“Luna, your father and I cannot do all the work alone if you don’t tag along,” says Mom in a very strong tone.

“Let’s just open the boxes that we need in the kitchen, and the rest can be done tomorrow morning,” says Dad, trying to calm Mom down.

While both of them work in the kitchen, I decide to go upstairs. As soon as I touch the banister, my whole body feels a shock as if I just touched a block of ice, and it makes my hands numb. I instantly remove my hand. I climb the stairs. The wood is creaking under me. Somehow, the air is different than the air downstairs. It has more depth and is colder. It smells like rain. The smell of rain always makes me feel calm, but this time, it’s different. The smell is the same, but my feelings are not. The hallway is dark, and there are just two rooms on the second floor.

I went into my parents’ room to put their boxes away. The last glimpse of the sun is peaking through the window, stroking the room in soft gold and crimson, as if the world itself is bleeding out the day. It is ending. And it is beautiful as all endings are—quiet, cold, inevitable, and fragile.

Dinner is quiet, as always. Dinner time with my parents is always a very intense moment. The silence is so thick that I can hear a ringing in my ears, which is strong enough to crush my skull. I’m not good with silence when I am around people. The voices in my head try to communicate, which is usually not a good idea.

Mom and Dad are trying to fill the silence with meaningless conversation. Or maybe for them, it is something worth talking about.

“One of the legs of the dining table is crooked. It’s having trouble balancing,” says Dad.

“Oh, that’s fixable. Not a big issue. It’ll be good as new,” replies Mom.

“But what if you can’t fix that one leg? The whole table will stay off balance. How long can you tolerate that? Aren’t you going to get frustrated? Just because a lot of time passes doesn’t mean that you get used to it.” I say it out loud, but very calmly.

Dad gently asks, “You okay, Luna?”

I say, nodding, “Just exhausted.”

I look at Mom. She tries too hard. She thinks everything is her responsibility, and if she can't do it, then we will fall apart. But she fails to focus on what truly matters.

I look at Dad. Completely detached from everything. The fact that he asked me if I was okay is something that happens once in a blue moon. I believe it's because he is really happy about the new beginning. They both are. They are content.

"Luna, you've barely touched your food. Look at yourself! You're getting skinnier every day, and your skin is so pale. That's because you're not getting enough nutrition," says Mom in a very frustrated and exhausted tone.

I just stare at her with my drowsy eyes for a couple of seconds and then put a piece of broccoli in my mouth, struggling to chew.

After dinner, I go upstairs. I've only seen my parents' room. Didn't get much time to explore the rest of the house. Guess I'll do that in the morning. The architecture of this house is very peculiar. The second floor only has two rooms, but the third floor has five. And one of those is mine.

I enter my room for the first time. It's huge. I do like the wallpaper. It's green, matching the color of my eyes. But it seems to be peeling off a bit, revealing a gray paint underneath. The bed is big enough for three people. The cabinet is large enough to fit the clothes for all three of us.

Lying on the bed, I look for my phone to check the time.

1:11 am

Of course. Whenever I see the time, it has to be that. But it's just the time. I never think too much about it. I just wish I could get some sleep.

The air feels denser now; the weight of exhaustion clings to her breath. Her mind circles the same restless thoughts, but already the focus begins to shift quietly, like a hand passing the weight of the story into another waiting grasp. It is no longer bound to Luna's thoughts; it opens into a wider gaze that watches her from a careful distance, seeing what she cannot grasp.

Her eyelids ached with the weight of exhaustion. It's strange how sleepy she is around people, but now that she is alone, she cannot sleep. She is hugging herself like a dead hibiscus flower.

Time passes.

3:33 am

Failing to fall asleep, she decides to explore the house. She swung her legs over the side of the bed, her bare feet brushing against the cold floor. It feels sharper than it should have, as though the woods are biting back. The hallway feels longer and denser than before. The house is changing its appearance. At least it feels that way.

Her steps are slow and deliberate, but each one seems louder than the last. The wooden floor beneath her is smooth in some places and splintered in others. Sharp edges poke her feet, as if a forgotten bad memory was trying to find its way back to her. The air is becoming colder, each breeze cutting through her face, causing pain. Her bare feet are going numb. The hallway narrows ahead, its walls closing in with quiet peril and lined with faded pictures with broken frames that are slightly tilted. Pictures of people that she does not recognize, but she feels watched by the crooked eyes in the dark. There is a sudden sense of others being present in this house. But she doesn't give it much thought. She believes it's just the ambience that is making her feel a certain way. The dimmed light in the hallway flickers, its glow unsteady, faltering like a dying heartbeat. It is as if the light is hesitating, unsure whether it wants to hold on or completely submit to the darkness. Each flicker reshapes the hallway, a new depth until it feels as if the house is breathing.

Her gaze shifts to a room in the corner. Leaving the other two rooms behind, she feels drawn to this one. The air thickens as she moves towards it. It feels as if the house is holding her back. But she feels this calling from the room. She stops in front of it, her hands hovering over the doorknob. She can smell an earthy scent coming from the cracked doorframe. It makes her feel relaxed as she takes a deep breath just to have that smell again. She brushes her fingers over the cold metal of the knob, and for a moment, she swore that she heard a sweet humming voice, not from the room but from somewhere within her.

She turns the knob slowly, quietly. The door creaks open, and before she can even see, the earthy scent, now sweeter than before, floods her senses. Her eyes are closed as she enters the room, and the sweet, earthy scent fills her lungs, making her feel warm and anchored—evoking a breath she did not realize she had been holding for so long.

And then she opens her eyes.

Chapter two

The Yin and The Yang

A beautiful garden appears before her eyes, not a room with peeling wallpaper and rotten wood, but a lush, vibrant space filled with flowers blooming under the sweet moonlight, a light that seems to exist only here, nowhere else in the house.

The flowers are unlike anything she has ever seen. Vibrant and mesmerizing colors of petals rose from the ground. The serene view is so captivating, it fills her eyes with tears. It feels as if she has been here before. Each petal oscillates with a glow so surreal that it feels like it is from another realm. It looks as if they are alive and breathing. The flowers are swaying gently in the wind, as if welcoming her inside to play with them. This is something far from the grasp of the waking world. The soft grass beneath her feet feels so smooth, like she is walking on clouds. The wind is flowing gently through the garden, making petals drift from the branches, softly, weightlessly, deluding like rain but more gently, as if the sky itself has chosen flower petals instead of rain.

As she explores the garden, Luna notices something behind the bushes. The sudden movement startles Luna, but she goes inside to look behind it. As she removes the bigger leaves, she sees a little girl sitting beside a corner filled with the dark pink marvel of Peru, a flower that only blooms at night. The little girl is counting the flowers like a toddler, her fingers brushing over each flower as if she knows them by name. Luna watches her, a strange ache settling in her chest, as though the girl is mending pieces of her that she has long forgotten. Luna moves closer to her and observes, like a cat walking on fallen leaves—silently—trying her level best not to cause any hindrance.

The girl is very skinny and tall for her age, with silky, long hair cascading down to her hips like a waterfall. She is wearing a white frock with blue lining and little blue flowers embroidered on it. Luna notices several scars on her hand.

Luna stands still and observes what she is doing. The little girl seems to be enjoying counting the flowers. And suddenly she stops. Without looking at Luna, she says, “So...finally, you are here.” Her voice is not eerie, nor is it hollow. It is deeper than a child’s voice but so much more soothing and calm.

Luna is surprised by her confrontation. The little girl lifts her head and looks straight into Luna's eyes. The girl's green eyes are deeper than the forest. Luna feels that she knows her. She has seen her before. They've met before. But she just cannot recall when. It's like a déjà vu foretold in time yet mystified by clouds of doubt and uncertainty.

Luna asks hesitantly, "What's your name?"

She replies, "Lily," in an exuberant yet skittish tone.

She doesn't seem to grasp that there is a midnight garden unveiling around her, and Luna becomes more curious about this little girl.

Luna: Have I seen you somewhere before?

Lily: I think...you know!?

Luna tries hard to remember. These eyes—she has seen these eyes before. But when? Where? How? Luna stands there cluelessly, trying to figure out what to say. But she decides not to focus on that. Not everything in life requires urgent or essential demystification, she reassures herself.

Luna: Can I count the flowers with you?

Lily: You've always loved doing that.

Luna: And how do you know that?

Lily: You know that too.

Luna: Why would I ask you something that I already know?

Lily: Isn't it obvious?

Luna: I wouldn't be asking if it was.

Lily: Why do you always need to hear it from someone else when you already know the answer?

Luna: I don't know!

Lily: Don't you?

Luna: Ugh! Could you at least give me a hint?

Lily: Close your eyes and you shall see.

At this moment, Luna decides not to ask her any more questions. Does she always speak in riddles? Riddles! Luna recognizes that familiar pattern in Lily's speech, as vivid memories of her childhood start to resurface— she sits beside Lily—feeling as if she has finally been reunited with a long-lost friend whom she has been searching for a very long time. They were like two peas in a pod, always together, a threadbare distance between them—two kindred souls lighting each other up as the darkness crept in. The yin and the yang, the shadow self of Luna, coincided within her. And suddenly, she wasn't there one day. Where did she disappear to? No one knows, yet. Perhaps this is what Luna wanted to know, thinking to herself, “Where did you go? Why did you go, and why have you returned after so long? Questions—all these questions and no answers to be found. She is hesitant even in asking, so why even bother? They sit and start counting the flowers, exemplifying childlike innocence. Just like a baby counting stars, they would only count up to single digit numbers, as if that is all they know. Lily plucks a flower and places it on Luna's hair. The gesture annoys Luna a bit, but it is what follows that calms her senses, yet again. “You look beautiful,” says Lily with a smile. Luna thinks, “That smile—I've seen that before, too.”

Lily: How are you feeling, Luna?

It is the exact phrase Lily would use. Lily—Luna's childhood companion. They both have the same name. Is it a coincidence? I think not. It comes as a shock to Luna as she never told Lily her name, yet she refers to her as ‘Luna’. “How did she know?” Luna thinks to herself. “A simple guess? Aren't beings like her supposed to be all-knowing?” Luna does not understand how to make sense of this. But the explanation is something so obvious, something so in front of her that she cannot, or does not want to see it. Perhaps she knowingly suppresses her insights, as they often lead to unpleasant experiences. This is the first time that someone has genuinely wanted to know how she is doing in a very long time. She feels that she could be honest now. Luna replies with a sense of comfort. “I... I'm trying to explore. I'm trying hard to comprehend. But it is not that easy. Life is not that easy.” They used to count the flowers—Marvel of Peru. The flower is unique in the way that they dwindle in the morning and blossom at night. They counted and recounted the flowers every morning and night just to see if they all had blossomed or some of them had withered. If the latter, they would pluck the dead flower and bury it within the realms of their own—that sacred garden—garden of Eden. Luna is lost in thought, and meanwhile Lily grows restless. She toddles around and even pouts sometimes. With a smirk on her face, Lily asks with a very strong voice, “Do you feel life is difficult to be in? Or do you feel that your mind is? Which one is more hard for you to

comprehend?" This baffles Luna. She wasn't expecting such a philosophical question from a child. Luna stares at her but doesn't say anything. After some contemplation, she hesitantly replies, "I am exhausted." Lily is determined to get an answer right here and right now. She pursues adamantly, "But what exact emotion are you feeling right at this moment?" Lily asks, knowing what the answer is going to be. She just wants Luna to say it. Accepting is the first step we take towards healing and moving on.

Luna takes a deep breath and replies, "I feel at peace—serene."

Luna looks around and sees the greenery, the bushes, and little white butterflies flitting from one flower to the other. The light of the full moon illuminates everything around her. She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She can smell the earthy scent of the wet grass and the beautiful aroma of the flowers. She focuses more on the sound and can hear the symphony of the butterflies' wings. There is no concrete, no door, nothing to trap her inside. She feels alive, she feels free. Just as the butterflies are unaware of the hurricane occurring on the other side of the world, Luna isn't aware of the fact that these minor incidents are going to compound into something drastic in the future.

Lily: Why specifically at this moment? Is this feeling going to last forever?

Luna: Like all good things in life, this, too, shall come to a halt as soon as I leave this paradise and enter my prison.

Lily: Are you a bad person? Is that why you are in prison?

Luna: I am not sure. Maybe I am. But I am not imprisoned by outside forces. It is how I feel inside, trapped, caged in exile forever, without someone, anyone, all alone. It gets dark, and I lose myself in it again.

Lily: Why do you feel that way?

Luna: I don't know... I used to think that I deserved to be with someone who would take care of me. But as time passes, I only become a burden, and even though my only wish is to make their life peaceful—to fill it with joy, I end up ruining it. No matter how many chances I get—no matter how good my intentions are, I always destroy the blessings with my own bare hands.

Lily: Why do you think you do that?

Luna: At first, I couldn't find the reason behind it. I always thought the effort and the intentions matter the most. But do you know what matters the most?

Lily, with curiosity filled in her eyes, asks, "What Luna?"

Luna: Your worth. People will only stay with you if they believe that you are worthy of their love, even if you cause them pain.

Lily: Is this why you have imprisoned yourself?

Luna: Yes. Because this is what I deserve, even though I hate being alone.

Lily: But you have me now! I can be the key you've yearned for. All you have to do is let me in.

Luna: I believe I can, yet something inside me tells me that you are not real. For example, the house that I live in is real. I am basically standing inside it now. It is an actual space that exists. I can touch it, feel it, and know for sure that it exists.

Lily: Do you like your "Real" house then?

Luna: No! Not at all. It feels all-consuming, caving in on me every chance it gets.

Lily: How do I make you feel?

Luna: You make me feel heard, like I am someone who is important, and my words are of actual value. You could say that you are my very own shadow. At least that is a bit more real.

Lily: See? I can be someone real. All that you have to do is let me in.

Luna: Where do I let you in exactly? You keep on saying that as if I am a place and not a person.

Lily: Why can't it be both?

Luna: If it is, then come with me to my prison. We can be inmates together.

Lily: But only if you let me in.

Luna laughs and takes Lily's hand. She can finally feel it! Her hand feels real. So, is that all she had to do? Just believe that Lily is someone real? If so, then she has done a splendid job. She now has a friend who listens, plus a person to hug when the night gets dark. Lily and Luna try to exit the garden, which is guarded by a doorknob. At the gate, Lily is suddenly

drawn back abruptly by an invisible force, as if the air around her is stopping her from moving forward. She freezes mid-step, held in place by something unseen, yet sharply felt by Luna — cold, dense, and heavy. But Luna does not let go, her grip firm with hope, still trying to lead Lily out—back with her, to where she believes she belongs.

Lily: I cannot come with you.

Luna: Why not? You wanted to earlier. Did you change your mind?

Lily: Something like that. You did not tell me that there were others inside as well.

Luna: Others? As in my parents?

Lily: No. Others, just like me.

Luna: So, you are trying to imply that there are others in my entire house?

Lily: You haven't met them yet, have you?

Luna: No. Should I?

Lily: I couldn't say. Would you let them in?

Luna: I let you in, did I not?

Lily: Not yet. You actually have to say it. Say something that you mean out loud for once. And see the magic prevail!

Luna: Lily, I want you to come with me. I AM LETTING YOU IN.

Lily prances around the door like a deer, reaches for the hand Luna is holding out to her, and accompanies her to her bedroom.

Luna feels drowsy tonight - an increasingly odd phenomenon for the insomniac. Why is it so? Can she actually fall asleep at night for once? Perhaps. What could she even be afraid of now? Her thoughts being too loud for her to find some peace and fall asleep? She finally found a companion who understands her, and she feels comforted by the fact that she is not alone.

Chapter Three

Growing leaves

An ocean of silver mist. Waves crashing in. Luna stands near the shore. The first wave sweeps around her feet. The cool, rejuvenating touch spreads a sharp shiver down her spine, awakening a tingling emotion that — like an echo — lingers, as if the silver mist carries a long-buried memory. It feels surreal, like remembering something she never knew she'd forgotten.

Another wave rolls in. It is more gentle, but deeper and comforting. It is not stingy, nor is it salty like sea water. Luna lowers herself onto the sand. She dips her feet in. The waves come in, and the water in her skin makes her feel as if she is levitating. The misty, dewy, wave-softened earth holds her in place. She feels content and at peace. She closes her eyes and listens to the sound of the waves crashing in, feeling the misty sand in her body and breathing in the chilly air through her nose. Her body is filled with ecstasy.

A sudden sound of footsteps. Someone is approaching. Is it someone? Or something? The sound is strange – heavier than a person's steps, yet graceful. Four beats instead of two. A soft thud-thud, pause, thud-thud, like something roaming around the sea without any hurry.

Luna opens her eyes and turns her head to the right. That's when she sees him. A mystical creature. Drinking water from the sea. He stops and stares at Luna. Luna is mesmerized and also curious. He is no ordinary creature. What is he doing near the ocean? What does he want? Is he looking for something? Or someone? Or is he just thirsty? Luna observes the creature carefully. She realizes he's a stag. But not any ordinary and natural-looking stag. He's not solid, not in the way living creatures are. He seems to be formed from the same silver mist from the ocean, his body glowing faintly, radiating like moonlight. The glow from the silver, mystic stag illuminates his surroundings, the way a full moon lights up a dark sky. The presence of this mystical creature makes the ocean and its surrounding area even more surreal. His antlers stretch like bolts of lightning – bold and ablaze. As he shakes his head, silvery glitter seems to fall from them like stardust. But Luna notices that his right antler is slightly broken, just like a broken tree branch. Perhaps he has been in a fight. To survive, one

must fight. Even with a broken antler, he looks so beautiful. The broken antler makes him even more sublime. Luna feels a pull, an irresistible urge to go near him. She rises from the sand and takes a step towards the silver stag. Before Luna can get any closer, the stag himself begins walking towards her. For some reason, they both feel this connection to each other. The creature is not startled by her presence. Nor is Luna afraid, despite his size. He comes close to her, and Luna reaches out a hand to hold his face. As she's about to do that, this beautiful, luminous creature lowers his head and rests it against her palm. Such comfort, such attachment, such love. All deeply felt, woven into this very moment.

Luna is quivering on the soft, silken bedsheet, like a goldfish in a bowl, drifting between sleep and wakefulness. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, she finally drifted into the gentle embrace of sleep. She had slept—really slept. This sleep was different from any she had ever known. It was not fractured, and she did not wake up feeling exhausted from running from something. Something terrifying. She could never remember what she saw or what it was. Always, without fail, she would wake to the echo of a woman's scream. For the first time, she did not feel like her heart was going to burst from her chest. She isn't gasping for air, like a goldfish yanked from its bowl – thrashing and convulsing.

Gently, she opens her eyes.

For the very first time after waking up from sleep, she is feeling content. She starts noticing everything around her in her room. The morning sunshine is pouring into her room like liquid gold. The sunlight reflecting on the wallpaper makes the green color even brighter. Specks of dust float in the air like shimmery glitter. The air smells fresh and flowery. Luna takes a deep breath. Just as she's about to get up, she remembers. Where's Lily? She looks over at the bed to see if she's there, but there's no one. She feels alone again- what a lonely thought to have. Ghosts are a no-show; she tries communicating with the next best entity—humans! She strolls down towards the common space and finds her parents talking about something important in the kitchen. How does she know it's something important? They start whispering as soon as she's within earshot. They always do that. "Leave the important stuff to us grown-ups, you go play." "But I need someone to play with," Luna wants to say, yet feels reluctant every time. As usual, she confronts her parents and asks to be included in the conversation, "What are you guys talking about?" "Grown-up stuff." The predisposed phrase disgusts Luna, so she makes her exit right after. "She is growing distant day by day," says her mother. Her father

nods in approval and adds, “And what might be the reason?” “I have no idea,” says Trish. Matthew softly exhales and says, “Maybe she just needs a bit more time to adjust.” Trish agrees, and they continue their conversation.

Luna continues to explore the house. There is still so much that she hasn't seen. Loitering about aimlessly, she comes across another room on the third floor, which seems to be an old library with a broken grandfather clock. The air is steeped with the scent of aged mahogany furniture. The walls are lined with towering bookshelves, some books just peeking out ever so slightly, as if waiting for someone to pluck them out of their eternal slumber. While Luna is roaming around the library, she hears the clock ticking, but the clock hands aren't moving—a sheer coincidence? It is almost as if she is perpetually stuck in time, a temporal dimension where nothing moves, even of its own accord. In this realm of stillness, she sees a person moving about freely. “How absurd!” she thinks to herself. What draws her in, though, is the color of his eyes—silvery gray—resonating both captivation and limitlessness. His face is long and gaunt, carrying the weight of sleepless nights lost in contemplation, etched in fine lines of weariness, representing wisdom. His tousled white hair and unruly beard should make him look more eccentric, and yet his aura augments the presence of a scholar lost in time. Draped in a dark coat, he reminds Luna of nobler days as he slowly moves toward her with unyielding grace.

Arthur: Are you lost, child?

Luna: No, I'm just exploring.

Arthur: And what shall thou hope to find?

Luna: A friend, I hope.

Arthur: Ah! A companion is often hard to find, and yet harder to sustain. Shall I then tell you about the man with a garden?

Luna: I recently visited a garden and made a new friend. But how did you know?

Arthur: I simply surmised it from the description of your need. There was once a man who lamented that his field was barren, wishing for a garden to appear in its place. However, he took no steps towards his dream, and nothing happened.

Luna: What happened after?

Arthur: Wishes alone are not enough to shape reality. He then planted a seed, which he nurtured into a tree. Soon, others followed. The flowers attracted the bees, and the bees attracted the birds. Before long, he had more friends than he could count. And all it took was a little effort and persistence. That is how you make and sustain companionship.

Luna: But my friend vanished this morning—I didn't let her go.

Arthur: Did they leave of their own accord?

Luna: I have no idea. I think she wanted to.

Arthur: Shall I then tell you about Fate and Free Will?

Luna: The words seem pretty daunting. Could you explain them in simpler terms?

Arthur: I shall try.

Luna sits in a chair in front of Arthur. The yearning to understand is visible in her eyes.

Arthur: Tell me, Luna, have you ever seen a tree?

Luna: Of course I have. There's one just beside our home.

Arthur: Good. Now tell me, can a tree decide where it grows from? Is that within its control?

Luna: No...It just grows where it grows. The seed doesn't have the ability to choose.

Arthur: And does it choose where it ends?

Luna: No...it just grows.

"Exactly!" says Arthur with a gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

Arthur: Now tell me, little girl, between these two destined positions—its beginning and its end—what does the tree do?

Luna lifts her shoulders a bit and, with a confused look on her face, replies, "I don't know... it just grows?"

Arthur chuckles. He grabs a chair, places it in front of Luna, and sits. Both of his hands rest on top of his silver cane. He looks deep into Luna's eyes. Luna notices the depth of his eyes, which reminds her of the ocean of silver mist, just like the one she saw in her dream.

Arthur: It twists, it turns, it breaks, it changes directions, it reaches the sky, it breaks again.

Luna keeps listening to him, still staring deep into his eyes, and trying to understand what he is saying. Arthur continues to speak.

Arthur: It grows leaves in the process, and it grows flowers. Some flowers turn into fruit. The fruit falls, and the leaves dry up and fall. You see, Luna, there is so much that can happen, so much the tree can do, between the two fixed points. It holds that power. And that power, Luna, is what is known as free will.

Luna stares at Arthur with a sudden realization. “So you are saying that the beginning and the end are our fate, but what we do in between is our free will?”

Arthur: Precisely! You see, Luna, some things are beyond our control. You can stay still and not move an inch. Even hold your breath and stay exactly where you are. But you cannot control the passing of time. It will rain when the sky is filled with gray clouds. The seasons will change. None of it is in your control.

At this moment, Luna experiences a despairing feeling. She stares into the abyss. Arthur notices Luna's shift in emotion. He leans forward, his voice steady—certain that Luna holds the answer to his question. Arthur: Little girl, do you know what IS in your control?

Luna stares blankly at the grandfather clock, which is still, but she can hear its ticking. Luna feels numb, not showing any emotion; she just shakes her head.

Arthur: You know it. Come back from where you are now and just focus. Think Luna.

After hearing this, Luna looks back at Arthur and stares at him for a while. Her eyes get teary, but she's not sad. Then, Luna softly replies, “The moments in between.”

Arthur: Ah... yes. We are like trees. We do not have the will to choose where we are born, nor do we have any clue when our time will end. But we do have the free will to grow our branches and carve them however we want. And this, my dear girl, is what counts.

Luna's heart is full of hope now. She believes that even barren branches can turn green again. She gets up and then suddenly hears a deep chime echoing through the room, startling her. Luna looks at the source of that chime. The grandfather clock is striking the hour. The sound is so loud and deep that it carries the weight of the whole interaction that they just had. Luna looks back at the front, but Arthur is no longer there. Luna is left standing still in the enormous, empty library.

Chapter Four

Pebble

Luna leaves the library slowly, her thoughts still circling around her interaction with Arthur. A faint ray of hope lingers in her thoughts. It feels...auspicious! For the first time since moving into this house, Luna feels like going outside for a walk and not incinerating herself.

Her mother notices her as she heads toward the door.

Trish: Luna? Are you – Are you going outside?

Luna: Yes.

Trish looks at her husband with disbelief. Matthew is also in a bit of shock, but visibly pleased.

Matthew: That is great, Luna! Get some fresh air.

Trish (in a rush): Wait, but don't you want to get something to eat first? Have this bread.

Luna: I... don't feel like eating right now.

With a drawn-out eye roll and a harsh scoff, Trish snaps: Well, when do you ever? Her words land like a slap.

Luna walks toward her mother slowly, grudgingly. Every step feels heavy, like surrender. She knows another "no" would only fan the flames. She takes the bread from Trish's hand, forces a smile, and rushes toward the gate.

Trish: Don't go too far!

Luna slowly shuts the door behind her without saying a word.

Trish: Why is she always like that, Mat?

Matthew: What can you do, Trish? She's just a peculiar child.

Trish: I don't even know if she'll ever go back to school. She's falling behind.

Matthew: That is my concern, too. She's too weak. She can't just quit?!

Trish: This is just unexpected. Why is she like that? Where does she get it from? We're not like that. And I always try to take care of her. I'm very easygoing. Aren't I?

Matthew replies with a smirk on his face, "Yes, dear."

Lucky for him, Trish wasn't looking at him while he said it.

Matthew: Alright! I'm off to work. I'll see you at dinner.

Trish: Okay, honey. Drive safely.

Luna walks barefoot on the grass under the illuminating cascade, and the golden waves are mellow enough to soothe her but not sweltering enough to sting. She is not looking for anything in particular. Just roaming around as she used to when she was a kid. Still holding on to the piece of bread, she reminisces about how she used to feed bread to the ravens when she was a child. She is looking around in hopes of locating one, but couldn't find any. She has always felt a deep connection with nature, as if the grass, the river, and even the little pebbles along the riverbank understand her better than any person ever could. The grass reveals its fragility, the mud offers its cold touch, and the pebbles remain solid, never pretending to be as delicate as flowers. The river drifts, as time does—never pausing, never returning, relentless and unseen. She believes that there is a reason that nature can both create and destroy life, just like humans. But nature resonates with purity and reason, unlike human beings. It is simple and direct. It shows life as it is, neither wrapped in fake masks nor distorted. While roaming around the riverbank, she notices the pebbles. She kneels and picks up one gray pebble that seems to resemble Arthur's eyes. As soon as she picks up the pebble, something shifts.

She is somewhere else.

Somewhere familiar.

The soul of a place, a quiet emotion that lingers where the present meets the past.

A memory stirs behind her eyes, blurry at first as if a blue chiffon scarf is draped across her eyes. Slowly, the scarf begins to move away with a cool breeze—her vision sharpens, and it becomes clear.

It's raining. A haunting but beautiful melody of ghosts. The raindrops fall like a chorus of cherished memories, echoing through every drop, melting into Luna's skin.

Luna is running behind someone. A friend, perhaps her childhood friend Lily. Two beautiful children, giggling, their laughter pure and light, just like the raindrops falling from the sky. They go near the river and start collecting small pebbles.

Lily: Mine will go farther than yours, you'll see.

Luna (laughing, playfully pushing her): I haven't even thrown mine yet, stupid!

Luna throws her pebble. It skips across the surface of the river, bouncing until it lands nearly three feet away.

Lily: Ah-ha! As always!

Lily throws her pebble, and it goes much farther than Luna's pebble.

They start laughing and playfully fight in the rain with the pebbles.

A voice calls softly.

Luna... Luna, come back. Luna!

The memory begins to dissolve, like dandelions in a breeze. The past slips away, and Luna notices Lily standing in front of her. Softly, and with a sense of relief, Luna says, "Lily."

Lily: I've been looking for you.

Luna: So have I, but I thought you left.

Lily: Huh?

Luna: At first, I thought you'd come back, but then I thought you abandoned me.

Lily: Oh, Luna... I will never abandon you, even if you want me to. You've let me in, remember?

"Yes," says Luna with a sense of reassurance.

Lily comes closer to Luna and grabs her hand, "Come on, there is a place that I think you will really like." They start walking toward the place, and Lily notices the bread that Luna is still holding onto.

Lily: Couldn't find a raven, could you?

At this moment, Luna could have been curious about how Lily knew about the ravens. But given the first interaction she had with Lily, she didn't even feel this to be even a tad unusual. She simply replied, calm but visibly upset, "No."

Lily: Do you remember the time you fed porridge to that raven with a broken leg?

Luna seems to have forgotten about it. She remembers parts and bits of it. But that memory is hazy. She tries to remember by closing her eyes. She can see something, but she feels as if she is peering through a window fogged over with morning mist.

A blue drum.

A little garden.

A guava tree.

Lily: It was one of your favourite memories, Luna. FOCUS...

Luna firmly grips Lily's hand, and every noise around them seems to fade away. She's pacing across a small, narrow garden, making sure that all the trees are in good health. Just as she gets closer to the lemon tree, she sees a raven standing and trembling on top of a blue drum where Luna used to store rainwater. Luna gets closer to him and finds it very strange that, even though she is approaching, he's not flying away. A soft shadow that refuses to move. Luna notices that one of his eyes is ink-deep black, just as it's supposed to be. But the left eye is as gray as a cloud right before a storm. She also notices that his right leg is hurt. That is probably why he cannot fly. He is ill. Luna feels upset and worried about the raven. She thinks to herself that even after having wings, he can't fly in the beautiful blue sky and roam around, see everything from above. She wants to see him fly again. Nothing happens without a reason. Perhaps this raven was destined to be here. Maybe the universe sent him to her because it knows that she can heal others. She runs to her kitchen, gets some porridge in a bowl, and rushes toward the raven, hoping he hasn't left. She goes close to him. And with a very calm and soothing voice, she talks to him.

Luna: Hey.... It's okay. I'm sick too. I made some porridge. We can have it together.

Luna puts the small bowl in front of him. He takes a moment, just looking at Luna.

Luna: It's okay, bub. You can have some. Mom says it's good to eat porridge when you are sick. It has veggies in it.

The raven takes a very small bite and eats it. It stays still for a second and then continues eating from the bowl. Luna is so relieved and pleased to see that he's eating. She can see how hungry he must have been.

Luna: I'm glad you like it. You can rest here for a while. I'll go get something to fix your leg.

Luna rushes inside the house and starts looking for the medicine kit.

Luna: Mom! Moooooooooom! I can't reach the cabinet. Can you please get me the kit?

Trish enters slowly and doesn't seem to be concerned at all. With a plain voice, she asks

Luna. "Where did you get hurt this time?"

Luna: I didn't. Void got hurt.

Trish: Void?

In just a few minutes, Luna had named the raven. She had this tendency to name almost every object or animal that she grew attached to. Perhaps a common tendency of children. Luna's enthusiasm can be noticed in her sparkling eyes like never before, as if she had found a purpose to live that day.

Trish: I honestly don't have time for your shenanigans, Luna.

Luna: But Mom, he's hurt!

Trish: Figure it out yourself.

Trish leaves the room. Luna stands there for a minute and then realizes she has to handle it on her own. She grabs a tool and stands on top of it. She successfully opens the cabinet but cuts her hand on the sharp edge. She doesn't seem to care about it. She grabs a Band-Aid and rushes back to Void. He seems to have finished the porridge and is now standing still, trembling on one leg.

Luna: Hey, Void. You really liked the food, huh? Here, I've got something to fix your leg.

Don't be scared, okay? I'll make it better.

Luna gently wraps the band-aid around his leg. It's astounding how a wild bird like a raven can put its trust in a human being. Was he that weak? Or was Luna that trustworthy?

Whatever the reason, he has chosen to trust her. Void is still sitting there, his wings tucked, his eyes calm. It seems he feels better now. This beautiful creature is unweakened. Whole.

And in some way, seeing this, Luna feels the same way. A small joy unfolds in her chest—not visible but steady. The kind that asks for no loud declarations—just quietly exists, known only to the one who feels it. She helped a part of nature.

As Luna is standing there admiring Void, she feels a gentle tap on her shoulder. She closes her eyes and listens, “Do you remember now?” says Lily. Luna opens her eyes and looks at Lily and slightly nods.

Luna: Thank you, Lily.

Lily: Not all memories are meant to hurt. Some memories are like a beautiful fallen flower, pressed between pages, preserved, untouched. Sometimes you just have to open those pages and look at the dried flowers. It might not be as fresh and alive as it was when you first picked it up. But it’s still beautiful. The beauty of a certain thing can change, but it doesn’t lose its beauty completely. If something is pure, you cannot take its purity away. It lingers... no matter how different it is now.

Luna is smiling at Lily. It’s not the kind of smile that hovers lightly on the face. It’s like sunshine peeking through clouds after a heavy rain, soft, golden. There’s beauty and purity in it. Yes, but there is also something else.

A quiet ache.

As if the smile had to swim through seven seas of buried feelings just to reach the surface.

Her eyes scintillate—not tears but the kind of twinkle that appears when the heart remembers something too mesmerizing to put into words.

Lily: Come on, we’re almost there.

They arrive at the far corner of the riverbank, where, like a secret the cosmos forgot to hide, stands the mystical purple willow.

Luna stands there awestruck.

The branches shimmer with a violet gleam, like something too fragile to hold but too sublime to look away from. The river mirrors the violet beauty of the tree, and it looks like a portal to another universe, which looks just like this one but upside down. The air smells like the color green - fresh, flowery, and a hint of the scent of moss.

Luna smiles at Lily—the kind of smile born from when something long lost is suddenly found. She runs toward the violet beauty. The willow opens up to her like a memory caught in the act of reminiscing. She goes beneath the tree and lies down.

Lily joins Luna. They lie there, not uttering a word, just staring at the beauty from beneath. Time is passing fast, but it sure doesn't feel that way. The orange tint from the sunset is peeking through the purple flower—such a serene beauty to witness.

When Luna realizes she can't stay here forever, it feels like a timer goes off deep inside her skull. Her heart pounds like a swinging pendulum, reminding her that this peace is borrowed—and time, her oldest enemy, is running out. She has to go back there—to that house. The thought of leaving makes her heart ache. Will she ever be able to escape the clutches of temporal divinity? For how long does she have to wait for deliverance?

Waiting...

Obnoxious waiting...

Heavy

Hollow

Suffocating

Hope—dying with minutes passing.

“I need to... I need to go ho...” says Luna, repulsed to even utter the word “home” because it sure doesn't feel like home.

Lily: Can't you just stay a little longer?

Luna: You know I can't.

Lily: Don't go?

Luna smiles, looking at Lily with a hint of sorrow peeking through her eyes, and trying to comfort Lily with her words, she says, “If I don't go now, how will I come back here again tomorrow?”

Lily doesn't say anything. She gets up and offers Luna her hand. Luna's hands are shaking. Lily holds her hand tightly and says, “I'm with you.”

They begin walking toward the place Luna loathes. Each step is heavier than the last. But Lily is firmly holding her hand. Calm and steady. Like an anchor, she keeps Luna from trembling uncontrollably. And for now, that is enough.

Chapter Five

Discord

They reach the home and enter slowly through the door. Lily opens the door because Luna is too frightened to do so.

Trish is standing in front of Luna with her arms crossed. Her eyes are filled with rage and a hint of concern—she is furious. Standing behind her, Matthew watches, his face covered in worry and disappointment.

“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!” Trish demands to know. “We have been worried sick! You don’t leave the house for days, and the first time you do, this is what happens!”

Matthew gently places his hands on Trish’s shoulder, indicating that she needs to lower her voice as Luna is clearly startled.

Luna stands there, unable to say a word. She is shaking, and her eyes are fixed on her mother. Then she looks at Lily, who is now firmly holding her hand.

Matthew: I just.... I can’t believe you did this again. We shouldn’t have trusted you.

Luna remains frozen, not moving an inch. Her hands are cold. Her heart is pounding, and she can hear her heartbeat.

“I need you to answer me, Luna,” Matthew says, his voice is low, yet it doesn't obscure the fact that he's demanding an answer from her.

Lily: Tell them. Speak, for god’s sake! Say you’re sorry.

Luna looks at Lily and, raising her voice, replies, “But I’m not sorry!”

Her voice cracks through the room like thunder splitting the sky.

Both Trish and Matthew are stunned.

Trish: You’re not even SORRY?!

Luna looks back at her mother. Frightened but unable to speak to her. Matthew stares at Luna in disbelief.

“You care to explain what you just meant by that, Luna?” says Matthew with an enraged voice.

Luna, finally finding the power to speak, replies, “I... I wasn’t talking to you guys!”

Silence spread through the whole room. Matthew, in utter shock, instantly looks at Trish. Trish blinks and takes a step back. She is afraid and cannot comprehend what is happening right now. Both of them are completely baffled, unable to process the whole situation.

Lily pulls Luna’s hand, her voice filled with panic and anger, “You can’t just say that! They won’t get it.”

Luna: Well, I don’t know what else to say!

Matthew notices the movement of Luna and that she is talking to someone, but not to them. At this moment, Matthew also starts to panic, and it is visible on his face. His eyes tremble with fear. He opens his mouth to say something, but he’s unable to say anything. He looks at Trish and holds her arm, standing there, clueless as the reality of Luna’s world begins to unsettle his own.

Luna, realizing what she has just done, cannot figure out what to do next. She whispers to Lily, her voice shaking, “I’m scared.”

Trish and Matthew exchange a glance. They have noticed—again—that Luna is speaking, but not to them. Trish gives Matthew a silent nudge, urging him to ask. Matthew gently nods, his eyes filled with agitation. He is slowly moving towards Luna, and with a very calm voice, he asks her, “Honey, I need you to tell me who you are talking to.”

Lily is staring straight at Matthew and whispering to Luna from the side, “Make something up. DO NOT TELL HIM.”

Luna again looks straight at Lily, and says, “I can’t make anything up right now! I need to tell them. Can’t you just... can’t you just do something so they can see you?”

Lily: You know I can’t! You’re the only one who can see us!

Luna: I need to tell them, Lily. I can’t just live like this. There’s nothing wrong with them knowing, seeing.

Matthew: Luna?

Luna takes a step forward towards Matthew. Matthew flinches slightly, startled – he does not understand what is happening.

“It’s okay, Dad,” says Luna. Her voice is calm and soothing, as she tries to smile, hoping it will ease Matthew’s tension.

Luna: Mom, Dad, there is something I need to tell you guys. It might sound a bit crazy, but I need you to trust me. Okay? Umm.... Why don’t we just sit down?

Seeing Luna speak calmly offers some relief to Matthew and Trish, but both of them are still feeling oblivious.

Trish and Matthew sit on the sofa, and Luna sits in front of them. The room is filled with tension. Lily is behind Luna, pacing through the room. She’s not at all happy with Luna’s actions right now. Luna opens her mouth to start talking to her parents, but Lily is distracting her. Luna gets annoyed, and she looks behind her straight at Lily, “Would you stop that?! I’m trying to talk to them.”

Lily: I told you not to tell them, Luna. You were supposed to listen to everything I say. Now you’re going to face the consequences. You are going to regret it.

Luna: I thought you’d understand why I’m doing this and support me.

Lily: I want to support you, but you are the one who is not realizing the consequences. Once you tell them, they will take you away from me. They’ll make you forget me. What if I disappear then? What if the others do too?

Luna: You don’t have to be paranoid. I am not choosing them over you. They are confused. I just have to explain everything to them. Everything’s going to be alright. Just have faith in me.

Lily just stares at Luna. She knows there is nothing else she can say to change Luna’s mind. Luna looks at her parents, preparing herself to explain everything. Behind her, Lily fades—quietly, with unspoken sorrow—like a flame that tried to warn, but knows it failed—knows it does not serve any purpose anymore.

Trish and Matthew hold each other’s hands and sit on the edge of the sofa. Luna takes a deep breath.

Luna: I don’t exactly know where I should start. Okay...so it started the day we got here. I found out that there are other people living here. In each room. At least the rooms that I’ve discovered.

Trish (scared): Other people? In our house? Where are they? But I still don't understand why you are talking to yourself. I don't see anyone else other than just us.

Matthew is stunned by what he just heard from Luna. But he surely knows that there is nothing normal about this. He knows there is no one else other than them here.

Luna: Well...Mom, they are not really people. I mean... not like us. And the thing is, I'm the only one who can see them.

Matthew: Are you implying that they're... not real people?

Luna (calmly but steadily): Dad, I see beings that no one else can.

Matthew: You...what?

Trish (snapping): You see what now? Are you completely out of your mind?!

At this moment, Luna is no longer calm. Her feet are cold, and her right hand is twitching uncontrollably. She looks down at her hand, trying to stop it, but she can't. But this time she does not hide it.

Trish: Have you completely lost your mind, Luna?! Is this a joke to you?! Are you trying to drive us insane?

Matthew takes a moment to process the information. He takes a deep breath to calm himself down. Then he gently places his hand on Trish's shoulder. Gazing at his wife, Matthew says, "Let me try to understand this."

Trish: Understand what? There is nothing to understand. How are you even trying to make sense of this? This is absurd! This is insane! She is insane!

Matthew: Hun, please, I need you to calm down. Yelling is not the solution here. This is not helping.

Trish: Oh, so now I am the problem?!

She gestures wildly at Luna. "She's sitting there and telling us that she can see other 'BEINGS' who are currently living in OUR HOUSE! –And I am the one who needs to calm down?!"

She takes a deep breath, but her body is filled with anger and frustration.

Trish (barely holding back): “She needs help, Mat. This isn’t normal. There is no doubt that she’s sick. She needs professional help.

Luna (softly, but her voice shaking): I am not sick.

Her hands are still cold. Her right hand has been twitching for so long that the veins in her wrist are starting to hurt. She's in agony, as if a storm is struggling to tear itself from her hand. Matthew notices her hand but does not say anything. Is he still confused? Does he think that Luna is sick? Or does he believe her? His silence could mean any of those things.

Luna decides to speak for herself again. Tears are peeking through her eyes, but she holds them back like liquid wax clinging to the edge of a candle flame, trembling, but not ready to fall.

Luna (her voice breaking): I didn’t choose to have this power. I believe they chose me. And I don’t want to hide it anymore.

The room fills with silence after this. It creates an invisible wall between Luna and her parents. No one moves. They only stare at her. Moments pass.

Luna (quietly): I’m tired.

The exhaustion is visible in Luna’s voice. Her whole body feels like it is shutting down. She rises slowly, and just like smoke from a candle, she fades. While leaving the room, she hears Trish say, “She’s a curse! This isn’t over.”

The words hit Luna like needles, sharp and cold. But she does not flinch. She does not reply. She simply walks away, like wet footprints on the floor that vanish with the breeze.

Trish and Matthew remain on the sofa. They do not call after her. They do not even speak to each other.

Luna walks upstairs, and each step is heavier than the last. She has lost all her strength to carry herself—devastated, consumed by the negativity. The ache of being misunderstood and unseen has never felt so unbearably heavy. All the accusations, yelling, and the fear in their eyes are pressing down on her like air too thick to breathe. It had taken all the courage in her to finally share her secret, to open up to them, telling them about her truth, showing them this other side of her, the real side of her. And for a moment, just a moment, she hoped that they

might see it as it is—a blessing—a gift, and not see it as a curse, not see her as a curse. She yearned for them to be able to see how rare and sacred it is. But she has never been so wrong in her entire life. There is a sense of hatred in her, not for her parents, but for herself. How could she be so naive to think that they would understand? Lily was right; she shouldn't have been so careless about this.

Luna enters her room, and the air inside feels heavier now. Dense—almost suffocating. The green wallpaper that was once her favourite shade because it matched her eyes, now seems to be faded, drained, out of life, just like every good thing in her life. She lifts her gaze and finds Lily sitting on the edge of the bed, her eyes filled with sorrow and something more—an ache that comes from knowing that what she feared the most has finally come true. Luna does not speak. She walks towards Lily in silence, heavy with remorse. Then she slowly sits beside her and places her head on her lap, collapsing into her arm like the last candle in a storm, barely holding on to its fire. Lily gently runs her fingers through Luna's hair. As soon as she places her hand on Luna's head, the tears begin to fall. Her heart feels full with the weight of all. An infinite ache too vast for her chest to hold. No words, no gestures can even come close to expressing even a fraction of the pain that is unraveling through Luna's mind, body, and soul. The unbearable agony of simply existing.

Luna tries to apologize to Lily for not listening to her. But the tears and the pain are too much for her to handle. The pain is too thick in her throat, so even after several attempts, she cannot speak. But she does not have to. Lily knows Luna. She sees the guilt, the pain, and the regret written all over Luna like bruises no one else can see.

Lily (calmly): "It's okay, Luna. We'll talk in the morning. You just rest for now."

Luna holds her tight and closes her eyes, trying to get some sleep. Her thoughts drift like restless waves.

"I didn't even have to apologize to her. She just knows that I feel horrible. She knows I was just trying to make everything better. Instead of blaming me, she understood why I did it. She knows what my intentions were. She saw my heart before my mistakes.

Why can't the people in this world treat each other like that?

Why do they only care about the outcome?

Why is anything out of their understanding considered to be something strange or dangerous?

Why are they so afraid of their own truth?

Will they ever stop pretending? Hiding behind these masks just to win approval? Just to be liked?

Isn't that the most pathetic thing of all?"

These thoughts sift through her mind while the room around her darkens.

And once again, she appears at the ocean of silver mist. But there's something different about this place. It does not feel the same anymore. The serene scenery, the calmness, the mystic magic. She cannot feel any of that. The waves are no longer crashing in. The shoreline is frozen in place, still as sorrow. Like a painting abandoned mid-brushstroke. No movement. No breeze. No life.

She steps onto the cold sand, hoping to feel that familiar chill crawling up her spine. The one that made her feel alive. But there is nothing. No shiver. No spark. She is confused. Did she lose the ability to feel everything around her? Or did the mystic silver mist lose its aura? Luna wanders through the stillness, desperate and aching to retrieve that ethereal sensation that once enveloped her whole soul. But it feels as if all the happiness in the world is lost forever. She lowers herself into the sand, dipping her feet in. But she does not feel content anymore. She becomes restless. She closes her eyes to listen to the sound of the ocean, but she cannot hear anything. There is no peace. There is nothing. Just numbness.

Suddenly, a thought hits her. Where is the silver stag? He should be around. Is he gone too?

Panic strikes. She stands and searches, hoping to catch a shimmer, a flicker of silver in the darkness. And suddenly she notices something. There is something on the ground. More like a shadow. She walks towards it. The moment she realizes what it is, her heart skips a beat. It's the silver stag lying on the ground. At first, Luna couldn't recognize him as he had lost his mystic silver glow. But she notices the scars on his body and eyes and realizes that it's him. Luna sits beside him. Thinking that he might be sleeping. But then she sees the broken antlers – both shattered, fresh cuts bleeding. A deep cut on the side of his head. Tears are falling from his eyes. Luna is panicking, she thinks to herself, "How do I save him?!" She knows in her mind that there is nothing she can do. She gently places her hand on his head.

He is barely breathing. Luna is sobbing. She feels useless. A mystical silver creature whose beauty once awed her is now lying on the ground, helpless. Luna pulls him closer to her and places his head on her lap. The tears falling from her eyes fall on his cheek, and he breathes his last breath.

Luna (sobbing): “I can’t feel you anymore.”

Luna closes her eyes. Everything around her fades away like ashes in the wind. The sand beneath her, the stag on her lap, and the silver mist vanish as though they never existed. Just the cold aching in her heart clings to her chest.

Luna wakes, gasping for air. Her whole body is drenched in sweat. Her bedsheet clings to her, soaked with sweat and tears. For a second, she cannot fathom what just happened, where she is. She looks around, and the moonlight peeking through the window helps her notice the green wallpaper. She realizes she is in her room. Luna sits up straight. Her body feels heavy. The air in the room is stuffy. She tries to take deep breaths. Suddenly, she can sense that there is something else in her room. She looks behind to see if Lily is there but finds no one. She looks at the front, and there it is. Standing in the corner of the room.

A tall, ghastly figure is draped in a shifting gray fabric that is drifting around her like smoke in the water. It’s moving like waves of sound in the form of smoke. She resembled the figure of a human body—but barely. Her shoulders appear dislocated, her hands hang low, with fingers unnaturally long and thin, like twisted tree branches. Her eyes are hollow, not simply dark but absent. Empty sockets but with power to see. She sees everything and has always seen everything. She does not walk but drifts from one place to another as if gravity does not exist in her realm. She floats like smoke towards Luna and moves very close to her. She raises one long skeletal finger and touches the underside of Luna’s chin, making Luna look deep into her hollow eyes. Luna is petrified by this creature; her hands, colder than ice, make Luna shiver. But Luna feels that she knows her.

Luna (whispering): “What are you?”

The creature replies with a deep but unmistakably feminine voice. It is like a whisper, but it echoes through the room. “I am the Seer.”

Her voice scares Luna, but she is curious to know what purpose she serves. She does not seem like the others.

Luna (her voice shaking): Are you—are you with the others?

Seer: I am the one that you seek.

Luna (confused): What do you mean?

The Seer drifts towards the door. She suddenly looks behind and tells Luna, “Come with me, and you will find all the answers that you have been searching for.”

Luna follows her through the hallway. They walk towards a room. It’s a room that Luna has not noticed before. She is sure that it didn’t exist until now.

Whispers drift from the room, as if it is filled with countless voices – so many that Luna cannot make out a single word. Luna turns the doorknob to enter the room, but it is locked. She looks at the Seer standing behind her.

Luna: It’s locked. How do I go inside?

Seer: Once you enter, you will find all the answers. But are you ready to face the consequences?

Luna flinches. But she is eager to know what’s inside, so she firmly replies, “I am.”

The Seer conjures a key out of thin air and hands it to her. It is an unusual but beautiful black key with a rough gray pebble inscribed on its head. Luna slides the key into the lock with a metallic scraping sound. Luna pauses, her breath hitching in her throat, then turns it slowly. The click that follows is sharp—too sharp—like the house just woke up.

Chapter six

Solace

Downstairs in the living room, the light flickered for a second, then steadied. Trish sits on the bed with a blanket wrapped around her, holding a warm cup of coffee. Matthew stands near the window, staring at the moonlit lawn.

“What are we going to do, Matthew?” Trish asks, tightly holding her cup as if it is going to hold her together.

Matthew doesn’t say anything. He seems distracted – either lost in thought or choosing not to answer.

Trish takes a glance at him and feels annoyed as he is not responding. She says, looking into her coffee, “She is sick. I’m going to take her to the psychiatrist first thing in the morning.” She seems very fixated on her decision and does not feel the need for Matthew’s approval.

After hearing this, Matthew replies, “Maybe for the first time, she’s showing us her TRUE self.”

Trish looks at him in confusion and anger, “What the hell is that supposed to mean?!”

Matthew exhales deeply, “It means...what if this isn’t a breakdown? What if this...what if this is a breakthrough?”

“Oh! So you’re romanticising her psychotic behaviour now?” says Trish while throwing off her blanket and putting the coffee cup on the nightstand with force.

“I’m saying,” says Matthew, slowly turning to face her, “I’m saying that not everything that is incomprehensible in a person’s behaviour is a sign of illness. Maybe some people are meant to bend the canon of reality.”

Trish looks extremely exhausted at this point. But she is also frustrated by Matthew’s behaviour.

“Meant to?” says Trish. “As in it was destined to happen? So you are telling me that this spiral that she is stuck in was in her fate?”

“I don’t know for sure, I thought it would be a fresh start. Ever since we got here, I felt like something was waiting. When she went out for a stroll, I thought that was it. She was getting better,” says Matthew while rubbing his forehead.

Matthew: What if this is better?

Trish: How?

Matthew: I think we are given roles, maybe even a setting, but what we do inside those scenes—that is ours to decide. Predestined perhaps, but not powerless. Fated, but not fixed.

Trish: She needs help, Matthew! Real help, professional help!

Trish’s voice—exhausted yet sharp—sounded like someone too tired to hope and too afraid to stop trying.

A pause follows – the long kind that fills a room with more than just silence.

Matthew speaks next. “Maybe this was always going to happen no matter what we did.”

Trish scoffs. “Oh, don’t you start with that 'fate' nonsense again!”

“Why not?” he says softly. “We’ve walked with her this far, thinking we were guiding her—when all along, it was this that was guiding us.”

Trish: That’s absurd! You act like we are just placed here to watch her fall apart. Then what are we, huh? Just puppets in her delusional fairytale?

Matthew: I don’t know. Maybe we are, maybe not. All I am saying is that we answer so many questions in our heads every day. Maybe—and just maybe—we don’t get to choose the questions we are handed, only the answers we give. Just like an exam!

She doesn’t respond. He continues, his voice lower now. “Fate plants the seeds. But it is still up to us whether we water them or let them rot.”

At this moment, Trish sees no point in continuing the discussion. In an act of utter denial, even though a part of her understands a few of the analogies, she cannot bring herself to agree. She leaves the room frantically. Perhaps she does not have the courage to accept the reality for what it is: predestination and free will, woven into one thread, fraying at the edges of their lives. Neither of them knew how close they had come to understanding Luna, nor how far away they truly were.

Upstairs, the house is no longer sleeping. Luna enters the room, and the door closes behind her. She is alone, but she does not feel alone. The room has no windows, and there is no light. It is as if this room is not even a part of the house. Completely detached from it and in another realm. Luna can only hear murmurs around. She feels as if she has entered a crowded place, and she feels suffocated. Even more terrified by the fact that she cannot see anyone but can only feel them. She tries to understand what they are saying. It sounds like arguments, apologies, and screams. Panic overtakes her, and she sinks to the ground holding her legs beneath her, her arms wrapped tightly around her waist. She is desperately trying to keep herself from falling apart. Hoping, silently, that someone will come save her.

And at that moment, A sliver of light comes from the corner of the room. Luna looks up and sees Lily appearing through that light. Arthur follows behind her. And lastly, the Seer comes through the other side of the wall. Luna is relieved to see all of them together. She does not feel scared anymore. But the question strikes her mind: “What are they all doing here together? I have never encountered all of them simultaneously before. What could this mean?”

Arthur is the first to break the silence.

Arthur: You have been looking—looking for the remedy—as if there is a cure for being yourself.

Lily: Or maybe you just want to be seen. Seen without being judged. Seen without being labeled. Seen without being questioned.

Luna: I wanted...to make sense of it all. Why do I always feel like I am out of place in a world where everyone else just blends in, accepted so easily?

Arthur: Because you never intended to fit in. All your pain and sorrows reshaped the architecture of your mind.

Lily (gently): And so you built rooms for every part of yourself which no one else could hold.

Seer: And now you are here, standing inside them, all of them, at the same time—the you that pretends, the you that forgets, and the you that remembers.

Luna looks perplexed, fazed by the severity of the question. And then asks, “Was this my destiny? Was this always going to happen? Was I always going to become...this?”

Arthur: Fate gives us the house. Free will gives us the choice of which door to open.

Lily: You opened the door where I waited, Luna – because you chose to. You chose to let me in, and also because a part of you never left.

Luna: I didn't want to lose you again.

Seer: You built us, ghosts, to carry what your waking mind could not. Archetypes of your guilt, your longing, your need to make sense of the senseless.

Arthur: This isn't madness, Luna. This is survival.

Silence fills the room. The Seer moves closer to Luna. Her face flickers, and for a second, Luna sees herself in the Seer. The Seer is floating very closely in front of her.

Seer: But tell me this, Luna...Did you push her?

The whole room seems to close in. Luna does not move an inch. She is just sitting there, staring at the Seer.

The Seer drifts on the right side of Luna and whispers in her ear. "You know what I am talking about, don't you, Luna? You and Lily were at the riverbank. Laughing, playing with the pebbles. Were you just playing? Or did you want to push her into the river?"

The air cracks with the weight of the question.

Luna (her lips trembling): I don't remember.

Lily: That's the point. You trained your mind not to.

Arthur: The truth isn't in what happened that day. It is in why you buried it.

Luna (her voice cracking): Because if I remember it, then it means it was real. And if it was real...then it was my fault. I can't live with myself knowing that it happened because of me.

Luna shouted on top of her lungs and said, "HOW CAN I LIVE WITH MYSELF?!"

Lily gently placed her hand on Luna's shoulder to calm her down. It took her a while, but her breathing came back to normal, and she stopped shaking. Luna looks at Lily, barely holding her tears back.

Luna: I was just a child, Lily.

Lily (softly): Exactly! You couldn't have survived if you had not made yourself forget.

Seer: They'll say that you are sick.

Luna: They already say that.

Seer: They'll try to fix you.

Luna: I don't need fixing! I am not something broken that has to be fixed.

Arthur: So what now? What are you going to choose?

Luna takes a deep breath and looks around her. She observes everyone and feels safe as if she belongs here.

Luna: Now I choose this. Even if it's beyond everyone's understanding. Especially then. What they think of as a curse, I see as a blessing. If being myself helps me to survive this cynical world, then why wouldn't I choose that? And if they think that I am not normal according to their understanding, then be it. That is on them. Why can't it be both?

The room is still. No more whispers, no more flickers, only peace.

Arthur fades like the flame of a candle in the library. Lily gently holds Luna's hand once and fades away like flower petals in a breeze. The Seer lingers a moment longer and whispers, "You didn't just open the door, Luna. You're the one who built it." Then she, too, vanishes.

Luna turns toward the hallway. It does not feel narrow or twisted anymore. It doesn't scare her anymore. Because she knows this place now. She understands it. It's just a hallway in her own home. And she is just a girl who finally found all the answers. The one who had the free will to choose, and she chose herself as she is. She feels content. And for now, that is enough.