

Metanoia

by Ma Yan Tung Roni

The leather suitcase sat on Lenna's bed. Her heart pounded as she traced its worn, red leather with her fingertips. Lenna picked up the letter that had come with the suitcase.

*Dear customer,
Thank you for your purchase of the one-way ticket. We ensure that our product will take you to happiness.
To activate the product, simply say this word three times:
We wish you a pleasant journey!*

Lenna carefully examined the letter again. And again. She could see no word. She sighed in disappointment as she slowly dropped the letter onto the suitcase. Admitting that she had spent her money on another scam, she pushed the suitcase under her bed. She quickly changed out of her school uniform and into her supermarket uniform. She was running late for her evening shift.

Lenna got back home just before midnight, exhausted. She grabbed a mug of tea and curled up on the sofa for a rest. Her calves were throbbing, and her arms were shaking as she held her mug. Before she was able to take a sip of her tea, her mother came in holding her baby brother in her arms.

She said quietly, so not to wake him, "Hey, welcome back, honey. Can you help out with the laundry?"

"Sure..." Lenna put down her mug.

Lenna threw herself onto her bed and lay face down. It had been a very, very long day. She tilted her head and looked at the clock. It was 2:00 in the morning, and the pile of school assignments sitting on her desk reminded her that today was yet to end. The summer air was suffocating. She closed her eyes trying to hold back her tears, and began to push herself up from the bed to start doing her homework.

It's alright, she told herself. This is no different than yesterday, and the day before. I can do it.

Lenna sat back down on her bed and put her face in her hands. The thought of doing this all over again tomorrow and again the day after overwhelmed her.

She reached under her bed and pulled out the suitcase. Lenna put the letter on her lap and looked for 'the word' once more, checking every mark on the suitcase. The golden lock on it was tightly shut. She examined it and saw her face reflected. For a second she thought she saw a distorted Lenna in the reflection smiling at her. Trying to rub the lock for a clearer view, she suddenly felt a sharp pain on her finger, and slowly a drop of blood came to view.

She stared at her own finger as the blood welled.

"I'm so sick of all of this," she murmured.

The drop of blood fell on the letter on her lap and slowly spread out and then faded. Lenna rubbed her eyes and looked again, but the blood was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a word in red had appeared.

Metanoia.

“Meta...noia?”

As if it heard the command, the golden locks flicked open at once. Lenna slowly opened the suitcase. A gentle breeze brushed her cheeks.

“Metanoia.”

The wind, now stronger, moved her hair.

“Metanoia!”

With the third chant, the suitcase came to life and glowed. Its mysterious light seemed to glow stronger as Lenna leaned closer. Before she could stop herself, she fell into the suitcase and into darkness. She tried to grip the edge of the case to stop the fall, but her hand missed and the lid of the case closed behind her, leaving her bedroom quiet and empty.

Lenna got to her feet and found herself in a grassland. The sky was clear, the sun shining, and she felt a warm breeze on her face. It was the same breeze she had felt earlier from the suitcase. Lenna picked up the suitcase that had fallen beside her, now no longer enchanted, and tried to figure out what had happened.

“Hey!” a voice cried. “Hey you!” Lenna turned to see a boy about her own age holding onto a branch of the only tree in this grassland with his clothes torn and pierced by the branches.

“Hey, you over there come here! Help!” he shouted.

Lenna looked up at him, dumbfounded.

“What are you looking at? Help me!”

“Sure... How?”

Lenna managed to grab his ankle and pulled. He crashed onto the grass, and she stared at him as he sat up and brushed leaves from his body.

“What are you looking at?” the boy said as he pulled a twig from his hair. “Never seen someone crash into a tree before?”

“Um... No?”

“What do you mean ‘no’? Everyone crashes into one or two trees when they fly.”

“Fly?”

He frowned at her. “Yeah. You know. Fly.” He floated a few inches from the ground.

Lenna’s eyes widened. “How?”

“What do you mean how?” he laughed. “Like this!” He floated higher.

Seeing Lenna still staring at him, he sighed. “So you don’t know how to fly. Here, let me show you how.” The boy took her hand and led her to the grassland. “Hold on tight!” He floated again, bringing her off the ground too. “Don’t think about gravity. Relax!”

And that was the last time her feet touched the ground that afternoon.

They lay on the ground exhausted that evening, both delighted. Lenna rested her head on the suitcase.

“I’m Elymas,” he smiled.

“I’m Lenna,” she replied. Although flying was fun, Lenna still couldn’t understand what the suitcase had done to her.

“We’re going to be good friends, Lenna. It’s been a long time since there was someone to talk to.”

“Don’t you have a family?”

“Family? I can’t remember.” He looked into the sky, which had become darker. The wind now carried a slight coolness.

“But how could anyone ever forget their family? And their home?” Lenna asked.

“Family doesn’t matter! I’m happy now!” he suddenly snapped. Seeing that he had startled her, Elymas smiled and said, “I’m free! I’m magic!”

He took a deep breath and continued, “Magic brings happiness, but the price of staying is to forget.” He stared into her eyes. “And that is what I have chosen. Happiness.” His eyes seemed darker now, observing, reading, testing.

“Wait... Will I forget about my past too?”

“Lenna, how long have you been here?”

“I...” She thought and thought.

“Do you remember who your best friend is?”

“Kaitlyn... or, Catherine?”

“Look, it’s alright. You’ll just have to answer ‘Elymas’ next time I ask.”

“*Now sleep, Lenna.*”

As Lenna slowly closed her eyes, she saw Elymas’ eyes glowing in the dark.

“I wish you sweet dreams, even if it means forgetting one more thing from your past.”

Lenna woke up the next day as the sun shone brightly. She sat on the warm grass and enjoyed the soft breeze. Elymas came to her with fruit in his hands.

“Good morning, Elymas! Is the weather always this nice here?”

“Morning! Yes, but the nights are cold and lonely. The warm breeze brushes away all troubles, doesn’t it?” He smiled as he handed her an apple for breakfast.

“Oh my! This must be the sweetest apple I’ve ever had!” She took another bite, and tried to remember the last time she had an apple.

“Hey! Let’s compete and see who can fly higher today. The bet starts... now!”

“Wait! This is unfair!” Lenna cried as she flew into the air after Elymas.

The sky was clearer as Lenna went higher. It was the way she liked it. But she couldn’t remember it ever being different.

And suddenly she had an idea. She swooped toward the ground and searched for a place to hide to play a trick on Elymas. She saw a cave near a mountain and hid inside.

“Elymas?” a weak voice cried.

Lenna started. “Who’s there?”

“Wait, you’re not Elymas! Help! Help me!” It was a boy’s voice.

Lenna entered the dark tunnel deep in the cave. A little boy, his eyes swollen from crying, was sitting on the ground. He had the same complexion as Elymas and looked to Lenna almost like his brother.

“Who are you? Elymas told me he was the only person here,” the little boy asked.

“I’m Lenna. What’s wrong? Why are you sad?” Lenna said as she wiped away his tears.

“My name’s Sol... and I am locked up here... I want to go out!”

“Locked up? I don’t see chains or bars stopping you from leaving!”

Sol looked up at Lenna. “Elymas said I will be sadder and get hurt if I go out of this cave... I’m scared... I don’t want to be hurt anymore... but I want to go out...”

“Well. You cannot stay here in the cave forever! Where’s your home?”

“I don’t know... I cannot remember.” Lenna suddenly realised she couldn’t recall her own home either. “Lenna ... I want to go home, but I don’t want to get hurt.” Sol started crying again. “Maybe you should leave me alone... no one can help me.”

The cave echoed Sol's sobbing. It hurt Lenna to see the little boy crying. She pulled him into a hug and made up her mind.

"No one will be leaving here without you," she said. "I promise you we'll have so much fun outside! We'll find the way home together!" She wiped away his tears.

"Really? But..."

"No buts! Come with me! We won't be sad if the two of us leave the cave together! We can cheer each other up!" She pulled him up gently, out of the tunnel, and out of the cave.

Elymas almost lost control of himself when he noticed Lenna wasn't around. He flew around and searched for her as worry suffocated him. He could not imagine himself losing his only companion. High in the sky, he spotted her walking out from the cave. His face went pale as he saw Sol.

"Lenna! What have you done!" Elymas shouted in panic.

"Elymas..." Lenna looked into his eyes as he landed. "Why did you say that to Sol? He wanted to go home... Maybe we all should go home?" The confused feeling that lingered was finally understood. *Home. How did I forget my home? And my family!*

"Home? No! We are happy here! Why would you want to leave?"

"I must go back! Because..." She tried to remember. "Because... there is someone waiting for me!"

"It was me! I was looking for you, Lenna, and I found you!"

"Stop! It isn't you, Elymas! It's... it's my mom!" She started to remember her mother's voice. "My mom is waiting for me... oh, she must be so worried by now!"

"What about me? Are you going to leave me? Where am I supposed to go without you?" He grabbed her by her shoulder.

"Elymas, stop!" She pushed him away.

"I don't understand, Lenna. We've got magic here. We've got freedom! Surely you don't want to go back to that world? It's full of responsibility and stress! We're happier here, Lenna."

"Elymas, this isn't working! Look at Sol. Look at what you've ignored! Hiding doesn't change anything, Elymas." Lenna took his hand. "There must be a way to solve this unhappiness! Let's work it out together!"

Before Elymas could reply, Sol clutched his chest and his little hands hugged him tight.

"Elymas! I made it! I got out of the cave and I'm not hurt or sad! Lenna helped me out!" He smiled as he dug his head into Elymas' chest.

"You," Elymas hesitated, "you're sure you're alright out here?"

"Sure! Lenna said she'll be with me!"

"Just stay with me, Elymas, and we will find our way home together!" Lenna encouraged.

"Elymas... Can we go home now? Please?" Sol looked up with his big eyes fixed on Elymas'.

Elymas slowly put his arms around Sol tightly, and Lenna saw his eyes fill with tears. Sol closed his eyes as his body started glowing. Lenna saw the light entering Elymas' chest and then Sol was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Sol?"

"He is back in here," he pointed at his chest. "Lenna ... Thank you so much." Elymas pulled her into a hug, and she patted his back as she felt his tears on her shoulder.

"We should go home now."

The two walked side by side to the tree as Elymas carried the suitcase.

“So you really can’t remember how you got here?” Lenna asked.

“This.” Elymas raised the suitcase. “Just the way you did.”

They arrived at the tree – where everything started. Elymas held out the suitcase with his left hand, and placed Lenna’s hand on it. The suitcase glowed and the light surrounded them gently. Suddenly, Elymas’ eyes glowed and he exclaimed in excitement.

“Lenna! I remember! I remember everything!”

And the two vanished.

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