<The endless night on the galactic railroad>

First Loop

Nella opened his eyes. The feeling of oxygen depletion in his body stroke him. He choked and breathed heavily. The sweet taste of air calmed him down. Although his back still hurts like somebody just threw a stone onto it, the soft feeling of velvet is enough to calm him down. Wait, velvet? Nella looked around. He was sitting in a well-designed coach, and the lights on the wall of the coach were glowing in dimming amber lights. Nella looked out of the window. The sky was as black as an obsidian ore, but some stars shined and pierced through the darkness to show their existence. It didn’t take a long time for Nella to realise that the train was travelling in space. He was surprised to find that he was not scared by the situation. Instead, he felt relieved when he learned that he was travelling in space. There were few passengers in the coach, most of them were looking out of the window silently. So did Nella, he placed his head on the edge of the window and started to look at the stars. ‘Maybe we will be recognised as a star by the people living on the planets.’ Nella mumbled. ‘What kind of stars have a soft and comfortable blue velvet seat?’ An old man’s voice appeared behind Nella. Nella turned around. There was an old man with a pair of black glasses. His legs and arms were as thin as twigs, and Nella had a feeling that this old man would be blown away by winds. Thank god there were no winds in the coach, Nella said to himself. ‘My name is Stephen. Would you mind if I seat beside you?’ ‘No, not at all!’ Nella moved further towards the window to make a room for Stephen. Stephen? Nella stopped. He had a feeling that he knew this old man, but he just couldn’t figure it out. Stephen flattened the velvet on the seat and sat down gently. ‘My name is Nella, and I’m a…’ Nella suddenly froze. He realised that he couldn’t recall anything except his name. ‘Have a problem recalling your memories?’ ‘Why… Why can’t I remember anything?’ ‘It’s possible for that to happen, especially in this train.’ ‘In this train?’ Stephen replied with a mysterious smile. Feeling uneasy and angry, Nella looked out of the window. His anger disappeared immediately. ‘Hey, is that…?’ ‘Northern Cross!’ Nella and Steven spoke at the same time. Some egrets were flying above the plain of the sky. They were silver in colour, and they were gleaming blue lights like fireflies in the summer night. ‘It’s beautiful, isn’t it?’ Stephen said in a charming tone, ‘I began to watch into the skies when I was a little kid.’ Nella replied, his voice was shivering, ‘I never thought that I would get this close.’ Tears were running down Nella’s cheek. ‘I’m... I’m sorry.’ Nella quickly wiped out his tears. Stephen nodded.

They started to approach the Southern Cross. ‘Well, I guess that this is the place where we need to say goodbye.’ Something popped up in Nella’s mind. ‘I’m sorry to ask, but is your surname Hawking?’ ‘Yes.’ ’You are the great cosmologist Stephen Hawking! I... I couldn’t remember anything about myself, but I remember about you! I was fascinated about the universe, and I attended almost every talk you attended! I didn’t recognise you in the first place because I didn’t know your original voice! But…’ Nella suddenly went silent, ‘You are dead.’ ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘Does that mean…’ ‘That is probably the case, Nella. I lived a happy life. I did research about things I love, and that is what makes me complete. I’m glad that I spent my last trip with you, Nella. Now, it’s time for me to live another life.’ Stephen stood up and faced the door of the coach. A strong light surrounded him, and he disappeared. The train kept travelling towards the Coalsack Nebula. All of a sudden, there were nothing but silence.