

## The Girl from North

I

Overhearing that a few kilometers to the north there was absolutely nothing had sent a chill down her spine. Cecilia had been waiting for a valid reason to go there for quite some time. No one had taken the initiative, which made her wonder why. They were actively exploring new territories every day; they had ventured east and discovered one of the largest lakes known. They even stumbled upon a new species of animals they named "E-2102," due to the complexity of their biological structure and nature.

During their eastern exploration, they came across numerous dormant volcanoes. Although their fires had long extinguished, a faint yet vibrant flame persisted within the caves. It was said that this fire could potentially ignite an entire city, urging them to preserve it.

They journeyed far and wide, covering every direction except the north. The northern territory remained uncharted, a mystery that enticed Cecilia to embark on a new adventure. She found herself with ample time and a need for solitary contemplation. The constant busyness of the others, focused on building a new civilization and pondering the future, contrasted with her desire for solitude.

Cecilia decided to explore the uncharted north in search of discovery. The question of "why" echoed in her mind. What kept everyone away from this direction? Was it the cold or the fear of the unknown? Whatever the reason, she felt compelled to fill the void left by their absence.

With her familiar bag, she packed water, food, and her coat for warmth. A layer of uncertainty surrounded her preparation – "What if it's hot?" She opted for her desert hiking coat, as she didn't know what to expect. As she readied herself to step out, Hippie, her Hippo companion, tugged at her leg.

"What's the plan, buddy? You can't come; I don't even know where I'm headed." Hippie emitted a playful growl, gripping onto Cecilia's leg. She affectionately picked him up and placed him inside her bag.

"Seems like you want to be my bodyguard, huh?" She chuckled, giving his nose a gentle pat before leaving.

"Why is it that whenever trouble's afoot, you're eager to accompany me?" While Hippie munched on some food, he attentively listened to her, responding with a sweet growl.

Cecilia ventured a few miles away from the camp, already feeling a bit fatigued. However, she was aware that her destination wasn't too far. Sitting on a rock, she retrieved her water bottle and took a long sip. She'd have consumed the whole bottle if not for Hippie, who tapped her leg.

"I know, we're not there yet, and my water's almost gone." Cecilia paused, contemplating her next move. The unknown territory ahead intrigued her, yet she was fully aware that it hadn't been explored by her people without reason. Doubts crept in; perhaps there was a good cause for their restraint. For her own sake and that of others, she wrestled with the decision. She gazed at the partially empty bottle before storing it in her bag and turning back. Hippie emitted a mournful growl.

"I know. Another day, perhaps." Cecilia retraced her steps, but then, an astonishing sight captured her attention.

Amidst strong winds and a seemingly barren landscape, an unexpected phenomenon was unfolding. The previously empty horizon had taken on a new hue, and the scent of smoke filled the air. Cecilia's determination resurfaced; she knew she needed to keep going.

"Those are trees," she affirmed aloud, her gaze locked on the horizon. "They're massive trees," she noted, feeling a shiver in the air. She swiftly donned her winter coat and set off, determined to uncover the mysteries that lay beyond.

## II

She walked for a few more miles until the realization of what lay on the horizon struck her. A massive ship, appearing as though it had been parked beside the road by a sizable lake. It was evident that the ship was old, its rusted and worn appearance revealing missing parts.

Although initially hesitant, Cecilia's curiosity got the better of her. She desired to get closer, to examine any markings that might shed light on the spaceship's origin. Its design differed significantly from those of her country's fleet, something she could discern due to her exposure to various ships.

"I'm unsure about this, Hip," she murmured, glancing at the lake and a river intersecting the path near the ship.

"Yes, I realize. The bottle is empty now. We can refill it while we investigate," she spoke to her companion before casting a final glance behind her and continuing forward.

The distance to the ship didn't matter much as she walked toward it. The ship's enormity dwarfed any she had encountered before. She took a deep breath. "It's truly incredible," she marveled.

Hippie emitted a growl as he nibbled on a piece of fruit she had offered him. Fatigue was setting in after hours of walking, and Cecilia longed for a brief respite. Time seemed different in this land, with daylight lasting exceptionally long.

Finally reaching the ship, she found herself at its side, where peculiar symbols caught her attention. "I don't recognize these letters or symbols," she murmured, puzzled by their unusual and disorganized appearance.

She continued walking for minutes until she reached the ship's end. Upon turning left, the rear of the vessel appeared dilapidated and rusty. Adjacent to it lay the river.

Retrieving her bottle, she filled it with water and took a refreshing sip while still on her knees. The river flowed leisurely, its water surprisingly warm. Splashing some on her face, she felt revitalized.

"Here," she motioned to Hippie, placing him on the ground so he could drink directly from the river. "It's good, isn't it?" she remarked, taking another sip before refilling her bottle and securing it in her bag. Hippie hopped back into the bag, and Cecilia rose to her feet, resuming her journey, now along the opposite side of the ship, her gaze always fixed across the river.

On the other side, a dense forest with towering trees greeted her. The fragrance of nature triggered a sense of nostalgia, as if reminding her of a place she couldn't quite identify. It echoed a notion of home, despite her birth in a remote region. Somehow, that scent resonated with her spirit and heart.

Cecilia pressed on, the spaceship on her left and the flowing river on her right. Her intention was to explore both the vessel and the surroundings, searching for an entry point – a door or a bridge, whichever presented itself first.

After walking for several more minutes, she spotted it. A large door stood ajar, accompanied by a platform leading into the ship resting on the ground. Climbing plants had begun to encroach upon the platform and door.

"It's been here for a very long time," she observed quietly, acknowledging the passage of time on the ship's structure. Gathering her courage, Cecilia stepped inside the ship.

### III

Cecilia had to remove her lantern to navigate in the pitch-black darkness. The void seemed deeper than night itself. The lantern cast a dim, elongated glow that offered some visibility, allowing her to discern elements in her surroundings. The interior of the ship bore a semblance to the spaceships she had encountered before, albeit on a smaller scale. However, the materials and components were distinctly different. Everything felt distinctly "alien," a sensation she couldn't shake off. These features were unfamiliar, far from the design of Earth's spaceships.

"This is quite peculiar, Hip," she murmured, her companion, Hippie, responding with a humorous yet weary growl.

"Feeling sleepy?" she inquired, prompting Hippie's affectionate nudge as he settled into her backpack. She sealed the bag, smiling at her loyal companion. "Rest up, buddy. I'll let you know if anything interesting happens."

Moments later, she detected a faint light. "Perhaps it's a window," she surmised, moving towards the source. She identified a partially open compartment emitting the light. She attempted to open it, but the rusted materials resisted her efforts.

Using a piece of metal resembling a handle, Cecilia managed to pry open the window, allowing light to flood in like a torrential river. She squinted for a moment before her vision adjusted. And that's when she saw it – a shadow darting from one doorway to another, just a few meters away. It was small, possibly a child or a diminutive figure.

"It might be a child, or someone small," she speculated aloud. Slowly, she approached the area where the shadow had vanished, eventually discovering a partially opened door. Gently, she widened the gap, allowing light to seep into the room. And there she saw it – a person, but not quite as expected.

Cecilia hesitated, unsure of the figure's gender. The individual was child-sized and appeared to be a girl. Her hair was neatly tied in a ponytail, and she donned brown leather attire. Her eyes were mesmerizing, a vivid green resembling stars.

"She's radiating light," Cecilia whispered in awe. The girl's skin was tinted green, akin to the river's hue, bearing human-like facial features. Her skin glowed like a phosphorescent stick, adorned with delicate white freckles that shimmered.

Cecilia was witnessing something beyond her experience. The child-like entity seemed fearful. When Cecilia entered the room, the girl dashed past her. Determined to engage in conversation, Cecilia chased after her.

"Hey!" she called out, her pursuit matching the girl's pace. Yet, the girl seemed to know the ship's layout intimately.

"Hey, stop! I just want to talk!" Cecilia urged as they turned down a corridor, eventually reaching a window overlooking the surroundings. In the radiant light, the girl's skin glowed in shades of pale green, punctuated by the sparkling freckles. Just before leaping out of the window, she turned her head, their eyes meeting for a fleeting instant.

"Wait!" Cecilia shouted, but the girl plunged out of sight.

"Stop!" A resounding thud followed by a distant movement – the girl stood up and brushed herself off. Their gazes locked momentarily before she moved away, traversing the river using a fallen tree as a bridge.

Cecilia turned her focus inward, seeking the nearest exit. Five minutes of twists and turns within the labyrinthine ship confused her sense of direction. The expansive vessel resembled a compact town enclosed within.

"I'll lose her. I can't lose her," Cecilia muttered to herself, pushing forward to find the exit.

Finally reaching the exit, blinding light struck her once more. This time, the disorientation seemed unending. Dizzy and stressed, Cecilia felt utterly lost. Hippie's persistent movements inside her bag indicated his concern.

"I'm alright," Cecilia assured Hippie, who nonetheless continued to squirm and growl.

"I'm fine, Hippie," she repeated, unzipping the bag to let him out. Hippie gazed at her with worry, his eyes wide and gleaming.

"I'm fine, you goof."

Gradually, her vision stabilized. Hippie remained on the ground, his attention fixated on her.

"You want to go out, huh?" Cecilia interpreted his behavior. With a nod from Hippie, she continued, "We can't go back now. We need to find that girl."

Hippie emitted a frustrated growl, conveying his impatience.

"Let's keep moving." Determined, Cecilia pulled out a piece of fruit from her bag, but Hippiie refused. She shrugged and ate the fruit herself. "Mmm... not sharing, huh? I can't finish it all myself."

Cecilia held out a sizable piece of fruit, Hippiie's eyes bright and eager. He accepted the offering and began munching.

"Good boy. We'll be heading home soon." Hippiie looked at her attentively.

"I promise."

With Hippiie back in the bag, they embarked on a deliberate journey across the river. After refilling her water bottle on the opposite bank, Cecilia glanced back before entering the densely packed forest. Towering trees, deeper than any she'd seen before, greeted her. Although Hippiie was eager to explore, Cecilia recognized the gravity of the situation.

"We need to stick together and exercise caution, Hip," she whispered to her companion, an unspoken promise to face the unknown united.

#### **IV**

They walked through the forest for half an hour until a colossal mountain came into view. Its colors were predominantly grey and white, with snow descending from the skies to gently cover their surroundings. The mountain's peak hinted at even colder conditions further ahead.

Cecilia hesitated, her uncertainty evident. "I'm not entirely sure..."

She contemplated whether to continue their journey or not.

"What do you think?" she inquired, but upon looking behind, she realized that Hippiie had fallen asleep.

Deciding to press forward, Cecilia walked for approximately 10 more minutes. The trees gradually receded, making way for the mountain's base. The falling snowflakes

had accumulated on the ground, forming a vast white expanse akin to a colossal blanket.

Chilled to the bone, Cecilia's spine stiffened from the cold. Gazing at the mountain, she noticed a faint path etched on the ground. To her surprise, she spotted a multitude of figures, perhaps hundreds of people, all attired in brown garments reminiscent of the little girl's attire.

"It's like a tribe," she mused, trailing at the end of the procession. One individual among them stood out - the girl. Burdened by belongings, she walked with determination.

"That's her!" Cecilia exclaimed, her gaze locking onto the girl. Their eyes met once more, and an inexplicable warmth flowed through Cecilia's bones.

"I should approach her," Cecilia decided, her determination overriding the chilling cold. The little girl raised her arm and gestured towards something, drawing Cecilia's attention. Following the direction of her pointing finger, Cecilia's eyes settled on a massive, ancient tree.

"What is it?" Cecilia inquired, but before she could receive an answer, the girl simply smiled and continued her journey.

Driven by curiosity, Cecilia ventured to the tree, her strength waning and her body struggling against the frigid temperatures. Her vision blurred again, and the relentless cold gnawed at her core. Aware that her life hung in the balance, Cecilia made one last effort.

Upon reaching the tree, she noticed a carving etched into its bark. Within the carving lay an object that brought a smile to her face. It was a coat, a brown leather coat identical to the one the girl wore. Cecilia donned the coat, feeling an immediate embrace of warmth that contrasted with her previous shivers.

With newfound vigor, Cecilia retraced her steps. She had formed an unusual bond, a friendship with the girl from the north. As she journeyed back, her heart was light,



warmed not only by the newfound coat but also by the connection she had made in this uncharted territory.