

FROM: NARIA  
TO: INA

My dear Ina,

How are you? Here's a written letter, so herstorical! Have you ever held one before? Ask mom if you need help reading.

Here at the Moonaster, I'm surrounded by such things: letters, books and even bots that you have to *read from*. Makes my brains boil. Moonbots are not allowed here, nor is any other telepathic technology, not until we go on the pilgrimage. At first I wanted to send you a voicemail, but isn't it more fun to pretend it's, like, the middle ages and we have to *write* to communicate? I'm inspired by all the strange things I read here. I need to find a way to still have fun. It is so *silent* here. It made me realize how teletech keeps us from ever being alone, for better or worse.

Don't get me wrong, I think our bots are...everything. I do miss my Lalita so much. But there are thoughts I would have never had if she had been here with me. Things I would not have learned. Or cared to learn.

At least the food here is glorious, and the doorways are grand, and in the mornings, we sing in a huge room, and the reverb of all our voices makes my body tingle, and my head feels light and ecstatic, like a crystal bell ringing from a cascade of pearls. It's really something.

Reverb is when sound is thrown against a wall and bounces back into your ear, layering beautifully. Like in that cave, remember? The one we swam to last summer. Or when you scream at a cliff.

Please give my love to mom, and keep some for yourself.

Your sister,

*Naria*

FROM: NARIA

TO: INA

Dearest Ina,

Do you remember early mornings in the yard, when the chicks are so alert (up since daybreak and waiting for their grain) and we, floating right out of bed, would stretch and yawn, amidst the golden dust rising in the sunlight? I miss you. I loved feeding the chicks with you, the power the first handful of grain had over the flock, how they would gather and chirp and signal the beginning of a new day. The smell of the sun warming everything.

Even though we must pilger alone, and I knew this, I always imagined we would walk this road together. Or at least at the same time, on parallel paths. But in your last letter, you told me you still haven't bled, whilst my bleeding is getting more regular and selene. (Selene: a word I learned, it means moon-synced!) And I find it odd to be separated, desynced, when we were always so alike, right down to our DNA. Nature's ways are laced with random mistakes, and Her interferences keep life alive and interesting. At least this is the way I've chosen to understand Her: every event that's out of place opens up a new path into a future previously non-existent. That's how I understand our separation: a differentiation. We part, difference is created, and possibility is born. And so, I walk away from you, my sister, my same, away from home, and it is painful to know that I might come back to you changed.

I bet you'll find this letter annoying. Like I'm so selene and well-read now, big words. To be honest, I think this is just a side effect of my time at the Moonaster: since they took my bot away, my Lalita, my thoughts are getting longer and more intricate. I guess this is Womoonhood creeping up on me! No telepathic exchange here, just words, spoken, written, sung. Surrounded by books, records, and circles to attend. I am one of the few girls here, living with elders aplenty. And away from you and mom, cut off from any familiarity or girlish thing, some other parts of me have started to emerge. When I come home, I hope you will not find me so changed that we cannot feed the chicks together anymore. And although I will not see you before I'm done with the rites, it feels so good to write to you.

Tenderly, always yours,

*Naria*

Dear diary,

In the book section of the archive, I found an artifact that was written in this way. As though the book were a person, someone to talk to. To write to. And since I feel so lonely here, without my bot, I thought I'd try it out. I'll use this notepad as some kind of archaic teletech. Inert and unresponsive, but mine.

Dear diary,

Last year, in the fall, I bled.

I'm scared. I will not show it, but it's true. From the moment I found the blood, I knew I was on the cusp of radical change. Playtime is over: it reminds me of the moment when, having practiced calligraphy for months with a pencil, we were given ink pens.

And I was given a pack and sent on the path. Everymoon must go on a Pilgrimage... I have to confront myself to Nature in her rawest form, they said. I need to know Her. It's the only way to know for sure that I won't carry shards of girlhood into my Womoonhood. Those shards would distract me, give me trouble. *We need rites*, I was told.

So, I was sent here to change: study what's to be known and prepare for the long walk. It's a beautiful place, which I can appreciate. I always dreamt of living in a castle and the Moonaster's pink walls of thick stone are as close to it as it gets. This place feels ancient and very solid. I feel so mortal, living in stone buildings, more than back home in our houses of wood and clay. These stones will certainly outlive me, and whereas our house feels like it serves our family, here, I serve the stones. Or whatever they *stand for*.

Dear diary, I digress, but really, I've got no one to talk to, to truly tell all the new things I've been feeling. Of course, I wrote letters to Ina, but rarely got an answer. Here's how my days go: up at sunrise, I rinse my face at the fountain in the yard and join all the Womoon and other girls to sing. Before the sun reaches the top of the sky, we serve the food, eat, then clean the kitchens. After that comes the actual study. What we learn changes from day to day: sometimes we go on long walks to observe Her and learn directly from Her source; sometimes, we sit in the library and go over artifacts, books, and so on. There's a lot of sitting involved, eyes closed, hands on the body. I've learned how to pray, dear diary, and it is phenomenal.

When it's done, I escape to one of my favorite places, a little spice garden just outside the tall wall of the 'stery, where there is a pretty view of the lake, or, if it's rainy, between some spiraling columns in the cloister.

There I touch myself, or, as I'm doing now, sit down to write. *We need rites*.

*Later, same day*

Dear Diary,

That's just one of the many things that went awry in the Middle Ages. They lost all connection to any kind of rite and grown persons\* went on about their lives with shards of girlhood tearing them apart from the inside and the pain caused them to make stupid decisions on a daily basis. Like poisoning their water and so on.

I read about this in some diaries in the archive. I know I should have kept my focus on life techniques, how to keep cool in the heat and which bark to eat, because my time here is limited and I must get ready for my Pilgrimage. Soon I will be on my own, on a path for months. Not even a bot to assist me. Just a pack and your silent, sorry page recording my lonely thoughts. But herstory fascinates me, and this was my chance to discover more of it. Where else was I to learn about funny words like "person", "father" and "sex"?

There is so much I don't know.

All the Womoon walked, before they were Womoon, and we say the land made them. Once a girl starts bleeding, the rite begins. Every house does it their way, with different customs, but there are common threads. Bleeding does not a Womoon make; it only means one is ready to learn, ready to go to a moonaster to study with older Womoon. Everything surrounding our bleeding is very important. Many teachings come from it. We learn to care for plants and for ourselves, how each quarter of the cycle should be spent. Read the pain, what it may mean. Everything means something. We learn that we are tiny parts of Her, and how to live on Her. In some of the bigger Moonasters, there are archives with diaries and artifacts. I am lucky. But knowing herstory won't save you out there, in Her wild embrace.

When you've bled a few times, sometimes a whole year after you've left your home, the actual Pilgrimage starts. The Full Mother of the Moonaster decides where you go or should aim to go. Keep in mind, sweet diary of mine, that you might get lost or killed anywhere on the path! Anyway, you're attributed a Moonery or another Moonaster to pilger to. Your way, you'll have to make it there.

Now, off I go. Write you later, my dear diary.

\*Ancient word for Womoon, used by those who wanted to address *both sexes* at the same time. I'm not sure what sexes are.

*Pilgrimage, day 1*  
*At dusk.*

I can still see the moonaster, in the distance, perched on its hill, its tall windows emitting a pink glow. Here I've set camp for the night, atop a large cluster of rocks. It seemed safer to sleep on stone, higher up from the ground, but now that it is getting darker, I've started thinking about snakes. Wouldn't they love to slither onto a big pile of rocks like this one? I've gathered branches from nearby bushes and piled them between the cold stone and my body. I had a dinner of dried fruit and bread that I brought with me, but tomorrow I'll have to look for food from the land.

I'm writing in my logbook, lit by my earth-powered lamp. It's one of the few powered items I was allowed to bring: obviously, no bot. It's been a year since I had to leave Lalita, the sweetest bot there ever was. What's happening to her I don't want to think of. I've replaced her as best I could, with this writing - putting thoughts down on paper is a little better than to have them echo in my skull. I have to focus on the Now.

Now, on this rock, under stars, so many of them it gives the sky a gritty texture. Exposed, vulnerable, about to go to sleep with nothing to protect my body from snakes, or whatever is lurking around here. *You will understand that your body is your home.* Right. Its walls of cell-sized bricks will surely keep my spirit safe. Goodnight me.

*Pilgrimage, day 2*  
*Still light. Sun is just above the horizon.*

My body, my *moving house*, hurts even more from sleeping on the stone. I never knew walking and climbing could hurt so much. I walk like I'm a thousand moons old.

I had an early start, ran down from my rocks at daybreak, looking for water. I found some under the shade of trees, grouped densely, seeping a small creek through their roots. I saw some berries there but couldn't remember if they were edible. They didn't look like the ones I had studied back at the moonaster, yet they did look very common. Basic berries. With skin a dusty blue and leaves thick and small. I didn't eat any. I kept on walking.

When it got too hot, I stopped under a tree and ate the last of my bread. Stupid I know. But I hope to reach my first halt tomorrow, hopefully not too late in the day. I heard that girls used to walk their Pilgrimage with no pit stop, in the wild and on their own for the entire trip. I'm grateful I get to stop and meet Womoons on the way and, of course, I'm excited about a cooked meal and a roof and some conversation. It feels like I've been on my own for weeks. I'm not used to being alone, but I have to admit that it's been rather pleasant so far, save the pain in each and every muscle and the worries about basic survival, haha. I enjoy the landscapes, the plants, the endless discovery of the world that lies right beyond my sight. Tonight, I set up camp early. I'm hungry. I write to distract myself. Hopefully, tomorrow, company!

"They killed the future, we kill the past. Those who come after us must worship the present."  
Bots have no present, I've learned. Just another reason Lalita will never be like me.