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— Voice Agency Comics Presents: —

THE LUNAR ALCHEMIST

“
When
knowledge
blossoms
into wisdom
it loses speech
and gains
sorrow
”

“
One half of
the human story
of Moon is
contained in
the films and
archives at NASA.
The other half
rests in
eight graves
”



STORIES
THAT SPEAK
IN SYMBOLS

DIRECT EDITION

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It was thirteen years ago when we last spoke and I told you what happened to me in New Orleans. I was fifty-two then, if you recall. I'm sixty-five now, which is pretty old to be finding a new way to live. Funny thing about being a man my age. You've been ridiculous enough times to know how to avoid it. At the same time, you know in your gut that it's usually being ridiculous that saves your soul.

I have not been idle since the dark Prophets of New Orleans case me out into the darkness to wander, soul-less it seemed to me, in the wild places. I have been from one side of the metaphysical world to the other, and I have learned one of the deep truths that all the masters teach.

On the other side of fifty, nothing of worth comes from the conscious side. That side is first-half-of-life bullshit. After fifty, seek instead the sweet marrow of life, the pull and push from the deepest parts of your Unconscious.

After fifty, stop trying to control and start following.

Now you can say you will follow. You can pray for the strength to follow. You can sit in Quaker silence and contemplate the deep wisdom of following. You can read expensive books that make clear the spiritual importance of following. And you can purchase beautiful leather journals to record the first shy murmurings of your soul as it learns the wisdom of following.

But all the while, you're probably still steering the ship. It's what men do.





I had learned, after thirteen years of costly absurdity, that the trick is to stop lunging at meaning. Meaning is skittish. It will bolt if you come at it directly. You have to let it wander into the clearing. You have to lie there like a tiger sunning in a

meadow, confident that in time something warm and living will pass close enough to notice.

Which is how I came to notice the sign.

I do not mean that I saw it for the first time. That would be a cleaner story, and therefore not true. I had seen it many times, as it is on one of my favorite walks. I had passed by that door again and again, reading the words without receiving them, which is one of the more common ways we miss our lives. Then one day the letters arranged themselves properly in my mind, and I saw them.

Lunar Alchemist.

And even then I did not open the door. I looked at it

I don't know how many times I passed by the Lunar Alchemist's office before curiosity finally tipped some inner scale and I opened his door. The day I did, I discovered that it's not so much an office as a laboratory.

I am under strict orders from LA not to reveal the location of his office, workshop, lab, or whatever he calls it, but I can tell you it is in the Montrose area of Houston, tucked away in one of those little neighborhoods with cool houses and adorable shops here and there. Find the most perfect Montrose





intersection, start looking for unusual doors, and you might find the Lunar Alchemist for yourself.

The place did not announce itself. That is the first thing to know. No crystals in the window. No purple cloth. No painted moon with a serene woman's face in it. No pewter dragons or incense burners or laminated certificates in cheap frames. It was a narrow little room in an old building with a door that had been painted many years before by someone who had not cared for painting doors. The paint held the memory of green without actually being green anymore. The glass was old enough to turn the afternoon faintly yellow.

Inside, the air smelled of paper, dust, machine oil, coffee gone bitter in the pot, and some faint mineral tang I could not identify. Shelves leaned against the walls with the tired dignity of old men who have carried too much for too long. There were boxes under tables, charts rolled into tubes, pieces of brass equipment whose purpose was not obvious, and everywhere the sense of work interrupted but never abandoned.

The Lunar Alchemist looks to be about sixty years old. I didn't ask him, though. His clothing always looks the same. Soft but durable work pants that have been worn so long they seem to have taken the shape of his body. Soft, faded t-shirts under flannel shirts that sometimes had a few of the buttons fastened. His shirts seemed more like smocks to me. In warmer weather he wore t-shirts, shorts, and sandals.

He did not look mystical. This disappointed me for about two seconds, which is a measure of my remaining stupidity. We want our holy men marked for easy identification. Robes. Beads. A staff. Eyes like caves. Something to let us know we are not wasting our time.

He had none of that.

A bell tinkled when I walked through the door, and he turned his head away from a pile of items on a work table to look at me.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'm not sure. It's just I never heard of a lunar alchemist before, and I found myself curious about it."

He recited a practice speech in a bored monologue.

"I can teach you everything you need to know about lunar geology. That's geology, not geography, though I know more than most about that as well. I just don't care for the human labels, that's all. They get in the way of my work.

"Lunar geology. I can only account for the current epoch Moon is in. I don't give a shit or know anything about how she was formed. I have some predictions about how she

might die, but we're only interested in how the present-day face of Moon came to be and how it is changing and progressing during this epoch.

"I can teach you everything you need to know about that.

"And I've never read a serious book about the moon in my entire life. Nor will I. Ever. Don't even allow them in the shop."

He stopped speaking and stood looking at me.

There are silences that are invitations, silences that are accusations, silences that are punishments, and silences that are merely the absence of sound. This was none of those. This was a gate.

I looked back, thinking he was playing some game with me, and I thought to see how far he would take it. We looked at each other for some time.

He smiled, but said nothing.

Finally I broke.

"Okay, I admit this sounds very interesting and I'm interested in at least learning a little more about it. Was that some pissing contest we were in where whoever speaks first loses?"

"No. I pause because most people leave either during that speech, immediately after, or after a few moments of awkward silence. And it's good that they go. It isn't smart or clever people who need to work with me, and I'd not want to waste their time or mine. The few who stick around get to see my lab and hear my terms. Still interested?"

"Absolutely."

Of course I said absolutely. What else was I going to say? I had been spiritually hungry for thirteen years and had just found a man in a shabby shop in Montrose who claimed he could teach me lunar geology without knowing anything useful about the Moon. A reasonable person would have left. But reasonable people are often preserved from the most interesting mistakes.

He locked the front door and beckoned me to follow him as he walked to a door at the back of his office. It opened into complete blackness.

"Aren't afraid of the dark, are you?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I like darkness very much."

"Good. Moon likes people of darkness."

You have to understand how that landed in me.

Moon likes people of darkness.

Not "the moon." Not "lunar symbolism." Not "night people." Moon. As if she were not an object but a person. As if she had preferences. As if she had been waiting, with that cold milk light of hers, for those of us whose souls had learned to see by absence.





