

Acceptance of the Self

Book 1: Attunement of the Hearts

Chapter 40.m - Morning Visitations

ღ♥ღ

Madelaine

•,•,•

[- content warnings: trauma in the context of a dissociative system, parental abuse -]

[- Monday, September 16, 2019 - 8:19 am - Anderson Game Room-]

Our body lies still on the couch under the blankets, as we listen to Violet's soft snoring coming from the air mattress to our left.

This is nice, Ellie comments in headspace.

It is, I agree from beside her.

The both of us are taking a morning stroll along the beach of our shared headspace, enjoying each other's company. The quiet stillness in reality lends itself well to our serene mental scenery, and we walk up and down the available beach space, chatting about the day ahead.

As we arrive back at the root bridge to Anialah's mind, I find myself thinking about the mysterious magical girl system that's been helping us so far. I'm trying to get in the habit of referring to Anne's system by their chosen system name, Anialah, because I know all of her system members like and respond to the name, whereas only Anne responds to Anne. I want to be inclusive, to honor each and every one of the system members that have helped Ellie and I find ourselves. Also, I feel like I would be annoyed to learn that someone who knew about me ignored my existence and only referred to us as Ellie in their head, so I want to get in the habit of not *only* thinking about Anne when I think about her system.

To my surprise, Ellie doesn't stop when I do at the edge of the root structure of the bridge. Instead she walks out onto the root and takes a few steps out towards the mists.

Thinking about trying again? I ask.

Ellie shrugs as she stares out to sea, the salty gusts of air plaster her pale green scoop neck t-shirt and black jeans outfit against one side of her body and whip the loose ends of said shirt

about. She looks hot as hell without even trying, and I love that for her.

I'm still thinking that the root looks dried-up, like it feels kinda dead to me, and I bet that's tied to the connection being cut off for the moment. One of them must be causing the other, Ellie thinks to me with a frown on her cute rounded face.

I don't really notice changes in the root's appearance so much as in the energy it gives off. Sometimes it feels and looks like a brilliant stream of light to me when I'm traversing the Aether, like a giant glowing underwater lighthouse guiding us to Anialah's mind, I reply, putting a hand to my chin in thought. Now it feels dimmer, and it fades the farther out from our mind we get.

I might try one more time before we get up? she decides.

Be my guest, I say.

We'd been trying for about the past hour to contact Anialah, but so far neither of us has had any luck in following the bridge to its other end. The connection seems to get weaker the farther we get from our own mind. It's almost like we've lost the frequency that Anialah's mind vibes at, and we need some way to remind ourselves of it. Or they need to try and contact us from their side at the same time we're reaching through from ours perhaps? It's a mystery to me, and I'm pretty sure it's as puzzling to Anne as it is to Ellie and I. Our connection is so well defined at times, why does it seem to be nonexistent now?

Ellie disappears with a soft 'pop!' and reappears at the edge of our mind on the root bridge standing just before the mists of the Aether. She plunges into the grey-white vapors and vanishes from sight.

I step onto the root myself, and zoom to the edge of the mists like a roadrunner cartoon character. I think about stepping in for a moment, but decide against it. Who knows what would happen if both Ellie and I left our mind at the same time?

As I stand there contemplating the mists, I feel a shiver travel down my imaginary spine. I have the distinct feeling of being watched, and I'm about to turn around and try to spy my spy when a frantic childlike voice echoes out across the calm ocean.

"Don't go!" the voice says urgently.

I spin around and behold a young androgynous-looking version of me, probably no more than nine or ten years old, scampering back into the forest beyond the shore. I'm surprised I could hear them from here, they hadn't seemed to be yelling particularly loudly. I could've sworn they were right behind me in fact. But no, they duck out of sight behind a tree at least a hundred meters away as I debate how to approach the situation.

Hey! I call out with my mind voice, *I'm not going anywhere, you can come out if you want to. I*

won't hurt you.

I hear a distinct sniffing sound from the tree they're hiding behind. *You promise?* they ask in the same mental manner.

I pinkie pie promise, I say seriously, holding out my pinkie finger to the empty air in front of me.

I blink and suddenly the kid is right in front of me, shaking my pinkie with their own, a serious frown on their face.

"Okay. Thanks," they mumble just loud enough for me to hear them.

We both let our hands drop to our sides, and I find myself examining them more closely.

Mini-me has the same dark brown vaguely wavy androgynous shoulder length hair style that Ellie and I used to have when we were in elementary school. They're wearing one of our favorite outfits from back then too: a generic store brand orange shirt with a stylized longsword angled across the front of a shield on their chest, tan cargo shorts, and a pair of white and blue running sneakers. They have pretty hazel eyes and stand maybe four feet five inches tall.

"You're welcome," I say softly, not wanting to scare them. They seem on edge being out in the open like this. "I'm Madelaine."

"I know," they say, looking down and to the right and frowning. "I'm um, I'm lulu."

"Lulu?" I ask curiously.

"No, lulu," they say. It sounds exactly the same as how I said it, but I get the understanding that the lowercase nature of their name is important and I need to be conveying that when I speak and think about them.

"Okay, lulu it is," I say with a friendly smile. "What pronouns do you like people to use for you?"

They smile back at me for a brief moment, before that little frown returns to their face.

"I want, um, she? Sometimes? Sometimes I like what you have though: they. Maybe both are okay? But she right now," she says cautiously, seeming to choose her words carefully.

I feel self conscious about my choice of dress: my black *Invocation Array* tshirt and black jeans. I feel like my current fit is too casual for the level of adulting I'm being asked to do, and a blush rises to my cheeks.

"That's wonderful lulu, thank you so much for telling me," I say gently.

“course,” she says, kicking one of her feet a little. “Sorry I’ve been hiding.”

I smile at her. “That’s perfectly okay, thank you for introducing yourself now, it’s really wonderful to meet you.”

I take a deep breath, then ask, “So how long have you been around?”

lulu stares at the ground with a furrowed brow. “Um, I guess since we were nine years old, at least?” she says uncertainly. “I’m nine years old. I’ll always be nine years old. I broke mommy’s favorite cassette tape when I was nine years old, and I’m still hiding from her.”

[- content warning: parental abuse -]

I get a flash of memories that I haven’t thought about in a decade at least. Us staring up at our mother’s fury in the living room of our family home. Her complete implacability as we apologize over and over and over again. The pain of the beating that comes next is fresh and raw and filled with self loathing and shame.

[- end cw -]

lulu must have been fronting when this happened, and she ran to the only place she could go back then: deeper into our mind.

I stare down at her with my heart in my throat. I want to hug her so bad, but I don’t want to scare her.

She’s looking up at me with fear in her eyes. “You’re not gonna tell mom about me, are you?” she asks nervously.

I kneel down as I shake my head, tears threatening to spill, and offer her that hug as I say, “Of course not, Ellie and I will do everything we can to protect you, lulu. Mom’s never gonna be near you again.”

She practically throws herself at me, her arms encircling my torso as she sniffles.

“Thank you!” she says into my shoulder.

I wrap my arms around her and say soothingly, “You’re welcome lulu, I love you.” I stroke my fingers slowly through her hair, trying to put the love I feel towards her into my touch.

We stay like that for a few more minutes, before I realize I’m getting that tingly feeling of being watched again. I look up, but see nothing out of the ordinary towards the shore. It’s only when lulu pulls back and flicks her eyes past me that I realize the newcomer is behind me.

“Eep!” lulu yelps.

“Hello there,” Ellie’s voice says kindly, “and who might you be?”

I wave her over and share what I’ve learned about lulu with a thought.

“I-I’m lulu,” lulu says.

“Hello lulu, I’m Ellie, but you already know that it seems? Have you been watching us for a long time?” Ellie asks gently as she walks over to us.

lulu nods. “I’ve been watching from the background for the whole time since Maddie woke up. But I don’t want to front again, and neither does anyone else, so I had to make sure Maddie stayed with us.” She gets a determined little frown on her face.

“Everyone else?” Ellie echoes uncertainly.

“I take it there are more folks like you hiding in the ‘background’?” I ask.

lulu nods firmly. “I dunno how many more, I don’t think anyone does, but I’ve seen a couple others at least.”

“Thank you lulu,” Ellie says sincerely.

“welcome,” lulu says quietly.

She looks from Ellie to me and back.

“Does this mean I can have a chair in the big tree?” she asks, voice tinged with hope.

I smile at her and know Ellie’s doing the same.

“Of course you can hun,” Ellie says, kneeling down and spreading her arms wide. Lulu obligingly throws herself into my love’s arms, and Ellie cradles her gently.

Something about the moment feels tender, precious. I feel like things have gotten brighter around me, then realize I can sense the root bridge beneath our feet more clearly.

There’s a quiet, polite cough from behind me, and I realize the connection must be restored.

I turn and, sure enough, Anne’s standing there in a soft red blouse and a tan pair of leather pants.

“Eep!” Lulu yelps again, and this time she disappears into thin air, leaving Ellie, Anne and I alone on the bridge.

“Friend of yours?” Anne hazards.

“Us when we were nine years old, apparently,” I say, “her name’s Lulu.”

I send her a flicker of memories from the past few minutes. Lulu introducing herself, sharing her origin, etcetera.

“Got it, well I hope I didn’t scare her too bad,” Anne says.

“I’m sure she’ll be okay, we know you mean no harm to us, we’ll try to convince everyone else in here of that too,” I reassure her.

Anne smiles. “Thank you, Madelaine,” she says gratefully.

“Did you notice the connection was cut off for a while just now?” Ellie asks, hugging herself lightly.

Anne nods. “I came as soon as I was able to, but it puzzles me that I wasn’t able to find my way to your mind for a while there. I wanted to alert you that my system and Leah are reaching the free people’s town of Sorrowwood in a few hour’s time, and I’ll probably be busy for a while keeping an eye on things there when we arrive.”

I nod. “Understood, we’re not going to be infiltrating the warehouse until tomorrow afternoon, so we’ll try to leave you alone as much as possible until then,” I say.

“Well you better not leave me alone for the next hour or two, let’s see how you two are doing on those headspace control exercises I gave you!” Her eyes flick from me to Ellie and back.

I grimace, but nod.

“That’s probably a good idea,” Ellie says.

We’d been tasked with summoning our focus objects on command and then using them to rewrite the reality of headspace. Anne had basically created a training ground for using the magic of her world in the middle of our own head.

“Go to your headspaces, I’ll meet with you there individually. Whoever I’m not with can focus on practicing until I get there,” Anne commands.

I concentrate, focusing my mind on the details of the object I wanted to summon, and my forked birch staff teleports from my memories into my present. Once it’s summoned, I concentrate again using it as a focal point for my magic, my mind focusing in on my penthouse lighthouse sanctuary. I rip a hole through space and time in front of me just as Ellie does the same with her pink and gold pen, and together we go our separate ways: me into my lighthouse, her into her tower.

Once I step through the tear in spacetime I turn and will it to seal back up, which it readily does. I take a few steps towards the internal shelves, inspecting my surroundings. I note that the placement of some of the knickknacks I’d conjured up in the past on one of the room’s shelves has changed, they’re now positioned as if each pair of dinosaurs is fighting a one v one battle. Like a little kid had been playing with them.

“lulu, was this you?” I ask no one in particular.

To my surprise, she appears to my left out of thin air.

“No these are dinosaurs, this was little E’s doing I think,” lulu says.

“little E?” I echo.

lulu nods firmly. “They’re definitely not gonna come out until we’re far away from mom and dad,” she says.

I give her a pained look. “That’s completely fair, I hope they’re taken care of, wherever they are,” I reply.

“me too,” lulu says quietly.

I glance from lulu to the empty shelves on the wall before us. “Would you like to add any toys or anything to this room?” I ask.

lulu looks surprised, and then awed. “You really mean it!?” she asks with dangerous hope in her voice.

I grin. "Whatever you want," I say.

End of

Chapter 40.m - Morning Visitations

[author]

Hello fantastic funerrific readers!!!

It is we, the Coven of Kylie! And we want to say that not every system feels the same way that Maddie does here in regards to how to correctly think about someone who is plural. Generally it's best to just ask a system what they prefer to be called and go with that ^^.

[/author]