

The Seamstress Who Wove the Moon: Part One

By Lisette Alvarez

Once upon a time, there was a poor young seamstress who lived in a city. She worked in her uncle's shop, a tailoring and clothing shop which was situated precisely to attract the wealthy foreign dignitaries and visiting business folk that frequented this part of the city. Her uncle was very proud of his shop, and regularly relayed the importance of their reputation to keep the flow of money into his business, where it would eventually trickle down into the young seamstress's tiny purse.

The seamstress did not focus too much on her lack of coin, however. Instead, she made it a point to dream of escaping her lowly position on the coattails of one of the many dashing eligible clients who graced the shop with their requests. The young seamstress was comely by many standards, and was occasionally able to pull the heartstrings of one or two of their customers. Her hands, though perhaps a little larger than her peers, were nimble and clever as they draped silk and brocade over shoulders and around waists. Her face, with a jaw a little sharper than her peers, was expressive and open and easy to trust. Her voice, a pitch lower than her peers, was kind and regularly filled with flirtatious compliments—a skill her uncle begrudgingly encouraged. After all, a flattered customer was a happy customer. A besotted customer...well, they had even more motive to return for more custom-designed cloaks, trousers, and dresses now, didn't they?

Her luck in pulling coin from clients, however, did not extend to love. Oh, the seamstress had lovers a-plenty. But they were all from outside of the city. Temporary visitors to the tailor and the town. No matter how passionate they were, no matter how much her lovers promised, no matter how long they managed to extend their stay in the city, they would always need to return home. The seamstress mended her broken heart as frequently as she darned socks. The other seamstresses tittered behind her back, wondering whether the poor young woman was too blind to see that she was simply being used or if she was too cynical to stop such a useful cycle.

Truthfully, it was both. Truthfully, it was neither. Still—she did not wish to give up hope. One day, certainly, there would be someone to love her enough to stay, to love her enough for eternity.

In the depths of a particularly cold and long winter, the seamstress was sulking and nursing a particularly bruised heart. She had recently been spurned by someone she truly thought was the one this time! However, he just turned out to be lying when he said he would take her back to his boat, and sail away to the islands far south. She assumed he was probably a pirate. Still, he bequeathed her roses and jewelry alike. She assumed she should probably hide them—perhaps they had been stolen. The seamstress spent her evenings working at the shop, something her uncle was pleased about, as that meant that orders were completed in record time.

During one of these nights, a stranger arrived at the shop. This was not unusual, as I mentioned before this shop catered to strangers. Wealthy ones in particular. What was unusual was the fact that the stranger arrived close to midnight, when the streets were dark and the seamstress

was the only one left in the shop. She was just finishing the hem of a recent order when a knock came to the door.

The seamstress carefully put away her work and opened the door.

“I’m sorry, we are closed. We open again for new orders at dawn.”

“Good evening, ma’am. I understand, but I’m afraid my liege is on a tight schedule.”

“And who are you? Who is your liege?”

“I am just the steward, ma’am. Here on a special request from my liege, a visiting diplomat to the city.”

“All the same, I am just closing up. We can have you in first thing in the morning.”

“The material won’t last, so it is important to get it started now. It was my mistake, I should have come earlier but I was delayed. I really don’t want to upset my liege, you see, and I will be doubly grateful if you could help. Cost is no issue.”

Curiosity piqued, the seamstress opened the door a little wider.

“What material cannot last more than a night?”

“If you allow me, I’ll show you.”

The seamstress hesitated, but allowed the steward inside. The stranger pulled back the hood of the cloak, a powder of snow shaking loose as they did so. The seamstress offered to take it, but the stranger politely refused.

“I will only take a moment of your time. I must return to the capitol shortly to let my liege know I’ve completed this errand. Please, sit, and let us discuss the request.”

The seamstress cleared off one of the workbenches for the two of them to sit.

“Alright, so what is this request?”

“My liege would like to commission a custom cloak. He has heard of your skills and believes this is the right place to create such a garment.”

“Well, that is simple enough. I’ve made hundreds of cloaks. Why is this one so urgent?”

The steward pulled something from an inner pocket of their cloak and placed it on the table for the seamstress to see.

[shining, glowing sounds]

“What is that?”

“Thread, ma’am.”

“That is no kind of thread I have ever seen!”

“That is because it is made of moonbeams.”

“Moonbeams?!”

“Yes. They were very difficult to procure, and to bring back to your realm, and when they are brought down here I can only carry a single spool and only in the dead of night.”

The seamstress shook her head. “That is not enough for an entire cloak.”

“I know—which is why every night until the new moon, I will bring down another spool of this thread. You will have until dawn to safely weave it into silk.”

“What happens after that?”

“You will be paid handsomely for the inconvenience.”

The seamstress examined the spool more closely. As she did, she felt something odd come over her. A pull, like the moments before you fall asleep. She reached out to pick up the spool of thread...

[SLAP]

“Ow!”

“Be careful. It is...powerful material for the likes of you. I would recommend wearing gloves, if it won't obstruct your work. Like I said, you will be paid handsomely for the inconvenience. Once you complete it to my liege's satisfaction. When I return each evening, I will check on your progress. Do we have a deal?”

The steward reached out their hand again, this time without violence.

“How handsomely?”

After the steward left behind the correct measurements, a surprisingly large advance payment, and a promise to return the following evening, the seamstress locked the door behind them and return to her work bench. She examined the spool once more. She felt the pull again, but with

the steward's warning stinging the back of her hand, she attempted to ignore it as she imagined what kind of cloak would be the kind to satisfy someone with this kind of power.

She chose a bolt of silver silk, soft and rippling like moonlight over the water. Expensive, but she was certain her uncle would approve the use considering the caliber of their new commission. Besides, it was the perfect match to the softly glowing thread on her work table.

Initially, she focused on cutting the pattern of the cloak and ignoring the magical thread. But then she remembered what the steward said: that the thread must be woven before dawn. So she found a pair of thin gloves—ones she had used before when dealing with particularly rough fabrics—and pulled them on. She decided to start with embroidering the hem.

The seamstress still felt the pulse of magic as she threaded her needle, but it was dulled by the gloves. She focused on the pattern and the rhythmic pull and push of the needle through silk.

The thread unspooled bit by bit, and she found herself at the end just as the sky began to grow pink with the sunrise. Indeed, as soon as the sun peeked over the horizon, the remaining thread disappeared and the eerie shine of the embroidered hem dimmed.

The seamstress rolled up her work and set it aside to begin to open the shop. She was tired from being up all night, but she needed to at least tell her uncle about their newest customer. He was skeptical, to say the least, but impressed by the upfront payment.

“A steward, you say?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Show me what you have made with this magical thread, girl.”

The seamstress showed him the unfinished fabric, and he scoffed. In the light of day, it seemed like just a pretty piece of embroidery.

“Well, if they are going to pay you that much every night, go ahead and focus on turning out this moonbeam cloak.”

“You believe it, then?”

“Do you?”

“Well...you weren't there last night. It...it glowed.”

“Young ladies and their fantasies. You've been up too long. Go on, get home. Get some sleep so you can impress this well-heeled client.”

The seamstress obeyed. She was exhausted, and barely made it through her doorway and pulled off her winter coat before she collapsed on her bed, her eyes drifting to sleep in the dead of noon.

[eerie music, flexing and floating, until we get to a stream of water, birds chirping like spring]

“I was hoping I would find you here.”

“I thought you had left? Across the sea, you told me you could never return...”

“How could I ever leave you, my dear? I was hoping you would join me on a stroll. It is such a lovely day, isn't it? A lovely day for a lovely stroll with a lovely girl.”

“Oh, well, I...”

“Come, my love. Let us enjoy the fresh air, and let me tell you of my adventures. Have I told you of that time I encountered mermaids?”

The seamstress, faced with the latest love of her life, felt herself drawn to him like she was the spool of moonbeams. She did not think about how it could be that he had returned to her, after he had definitively rejected her. She did not think about how the air was so warm, even though it was the dead of winter. She simply held his soft hand in hers and allowed him to lead her along the bank of the unknown river, which shone silver.

She allowed him to touch her, kiss her, and she was pulled down into the grass, bees buzzing lazily about their bodies. It was slow, and sweet, and thick like honey.

She found herself on his ship, then, rocking back and forth—the planks under her feet and his crew shouting around her and him barking orders. Funny, she remembered that he was simply the helmsman, not a captain.

His arm snaked around her waist.

“There, my love, that is the direction of our next adventure. Where would you like to go? The islands? Or perhaps you would like to climb the mountains in the west. Wherever you wish, I will command.”

The seamstress fell into his arms. “I just want to be here, with you.”

“I am here, always.”

The seamstress closed her eyes, smelling the sea salt, and opened them to a cabin and another lover.

[children laughing]

“My love, have you seen Junior’s socks? He’s hidden them again!”

“They...Under the bed. They are always under the bed.”

“Thank you, dear.”

“What about your ship?”

“What about it? Junior, get back here! Come, we must hurry or we’ll be late!”

“Late for what?”

“To the feast, of course.”

[knocking]

“Do you hear that?”

“Yes. Young miss, you better not be sneaking your mother’s jam cookies again! We will eat when we get there”

[knocking]

“What...what is that?”

“Just a visit, I promise.”

[loud knocking, a gasp, stumbling to the door and opening it]

“Oi! I said you could sleep, not abandon your duties!”

“I’m sorry, I lost track of time.”

“That steward of yours just arrived with your special thread. Not that he will show it to me. Odd duck. Are you just gonna stand there?”

“I’ll be right there, uncle. Let me...change.”

Her uncle grumbled, but left to go back home. The seamstress changed her clothes and splashed water on her face. She blamed the radical change of sleep pattern for her strange dream. Her heart ached, though, as the emotions of belonging and love faded.

She arrived at the shop a few minutes later, and found the steward standing at her work table, examining the unfinished hem.

“Apologies for the delay. I overslept.”

“Oh? Strange dreams?”

“Yes, actually. How did you know?”

“It’s no matter. Erm. Ah. Yes. Here. Your next spool. Your reputation is rooted in fact, I see.”

[fabric shifting as the steward handles it]

“Oh. Thank you. Will it be to your liege’s liking?”

“I trust your judgment, going by what I see here. I will return tomorrow. And...miss?”

“Yes.”

“Take care of those dreams. That’s all they are.”

The steward left before the seamstress could ask anything more. She sighed and got back to work. Again, the thread glowed as she pulled it through silk. She was not fantasizing about that, at least. Again, the sun rose just as she was about finished with the spool and any remaining thread disappeared. The cloak-in-progress dulled into a normal-looking fabric. In the late morning, the seamstress returned home once more to get some sleep.

As soon as she closed her eyes, however, she dropped into another dream. This time, it was her old beau, from about a year ago. A beautiful raven-haired woman who was visiting her dowager aunt for the summer. Her beau was sitting on a bench in her garden, where the two of them visited each other in the dead of night. The stars were shifting overhead, reflected in the shine of her beau’s plated locks.

“Hello, darling. Are you ready for your debut? I’ve been waiting.”