

## Within

The world of the Umé was not bound by lines or forms, but instead flowed in endless waves of color, sound, and light. The valley where they lived was a realm without solid ground, where the air shimmered like liquid crystal, and where light danced between the stars and the earth without distinction. The sky was a moving canvas, rippling with hues no eye could name, and the earth beneath their feet was not earth at all, but a pulsating energy that rose and fell like the breath of the world itself.

The Umé did not speak, for they had no need. They communicated through the movement of their bodies, through the way their forms shifted and the light within them—*oku*—shone brighter or dimmer depending on their emotions and thoughts. Each Umé was a vessel of light, their forms as fluid and changing as the world around them.

And among them, Nyala moved like a quiet ripple, their *oku* flickering with a subtle dissonance that only they could feel.

Nyala had always flowed with the others, their light blending seamlessly with the rhythm of the valley. But now, they sensed a restlessness within themselves, a pull toward something undefined, something beyond the shifting spirals of light and sound that shaped their world. They had no words for it, but it felt like an unfinished note, a quiet disturbance in the song of the valley.

As Nyala moved through the spirals of light that danced around them, they felt the world shift in response to their inner state. The smooth, fluid patterns of the valley became jagged, the spirals

breaking and reforming in erratic ways that unsettled them. The stars above dimmed slightly, their shimmering colors dulling as Nyala's light flickered with uncertainty.

They reached out with what was not a hand but a shimmering extension of their light—and met one of the spirals. It vibrated under their touch, sending a pulse through their *oku* that only deepened the sense of dissonance. Something was missing, but Nyala couldn't understand what it was.

They turned their gaze toward the horizon, where the valley's spirals dissolved into a formless expanse of shifting light. No Umé ever ventured beyond that point, for there was nothing there but chaos—an endless swirl of unformed possibilities that held no meaning, no rhythm. It was a place where the song of the valley could not be heard, where the light of the Umé would scatter and dissipate into the void.

Yet, as Nyala stood there, staring at the formless edge of their world, they felt the pull grow stronger.

Behind them, a gentle glow approached—Wera, one of the eldest Umé. Their light was calm, steady, glowing with the wisdom of centuries, and as they approached, the patterns around them smoothed out, the jagged spirals reforming into gentle waves.

Wera did not speak—no words passed between them—but their light pulsed in rhythm with Nyala's, a subtle questioning thrum woven into the hum of the valley.

Nyala's light flickered in response, dimming for a moment, then brightening again as they tried to convey their confusion. The pull within them was strong, but they did not understand it. Their

form shifted, losing its smooth, flowing lines, becoming erratic and jagged like the spirals they had touched.

Wera's light softened, their form bending toward Nyala with a sense of reassurance. They extended their form toward the horizon, where the light of the valley met the edge of the unknown. Their pulse became one of acceptance, a rhythm that said without words: *You must go if your light calls you there.*

Nyala hesitated, their *oku* flickering with uncertainty. The valley was their home, a place of endless harmony, where every light had its place, its rhythm. What lay beyond the edge was chaos, formless and without song. No Umé had ever returned from there.

But the pull within them would not be silenced. It vibrated through their being, a growing hum that resonated deep in their light, telling them that something lay beyond the chaos—something they needed to understand.

With one last flicker of hesitation, Nyala let their light pulse in gratitude toward Wera, and then, they turned toward the edge. The horizon shimmered before them, its light dissolving into a formless sea of shifting colors, and with a deep, resonant hum, Nyala stepped into the unknown.

The world beyond the valley was not what Nyala expected.

As they crossed the threshold, the spirals of light and sound that had shaped their world disappeared. The air stilled, heavy with silence. The ground beneath them was no longer a pulsing energy but a void, a weightless expanse where nothing existed—not even the hum of the universe. For a moment, Nyala's light flickered, dimming as they floated in this formless space.

But then, something stirred.

A soft vibration echoed through the void, faint and distant, like a heartbeat hidden deep within the darkness. Nyala's *oku* pulsed in response, and they felt the pull again, stronger now, guiding them toward the source of the sound.

They drifted through the void, their light flickering with curiosity and fear, until they came to the center of the silence. There, in the heart of the emptiness, was a single point of light—a faint, pulsing glow, steady and constant, unlike anything Nyala had ever seen.

It was the same light they had felt within themselves, the same dissonance that had driven them to the edge. And now, here it was, outside of them, waiting to be understood.

Nyala reached out, their form trembling with the weight of the moment, and touched the light.

Their world ignited.

Colors burst from the point of contact, spiraling outward in a cascade of sound and light. The void around them shifted and reformed, shapes and patterns forming from chaos, swirling together in a new harmony. The light within Nyala pulsed in rhythm with the world, resonating with the same energy that had once been formless.

And then, they understood.

The light they had sought was not something outside of them—it had always been within. The dissonance they had felt was not a flaw, but a part of their own song, a note that had not yet found its place in the greater rhythm of the universe. Now, in the heart of the void, that note had found its resolution, and the harmony of the valley had expanded to include it.

Nyala's *oku* glowed brighter than ever before, their light blending with the patterns of the world around them. The spirals of sound and color reformed, not as they had been, but as something new, something more complex and beautiful.

They were still in the valley, but the valley had changed. The harmony had grown, expanded, to include the dissonance that had once troubled them. And Nyala knew, as they returned to their people, that their journey had not been about leaving the valley—it had been about finding the missing note within themselves.

The world had always been vast and infinite, filled with waves of light and sound, but now Nyala experienced it in a new way. Their *oku* pulsed in perfect harmony with the rhythm of the universe, no longer searching for something beyond. The endless possibilities had always been there—what had changed was Nyala's understanding of their own light, now woven seamlessly into the eternal flow of the world.

They had found their song.