

Vira's Mirror

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I used to write a lot for the Neopian Times back in the day... this is probably my favorite Neopets story I've written.

Be gentle, this is not only old, but I am a visual artist much moreso than a writer. :)

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Chapter 1 - Part One	2
Chapter 2 - Part Two	7
Chapter 3 - Part Three	11

1 - Part One

Vira's Mirror[br]

By thegreenmooseofdoom[br]

Part One[br]

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Fireflies dance and flit in the deepening dusk around a figure cloaked in black. One flies by and illuminates her face, revealing a hideously mutated female Acara. She cups the small glowing orb between her paws and brings it close to her face.[br]

"Such beauty..." she whispers softly, and then crushes the delicate creature ruthlessly in her clawed fist. When she pulls her paws apart, a few traces of glowing powder stick to them. A slow tear trickles down her face, but she wipes it away quickly and flies silently away on a pair of midnight black wings.[br]

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"Good morning, Moosey!" Starseek the female blue Lupe padded down the stairs with a big grin.[br]

"...Mornin'." Starseek's owner, a teenage red wolf girl, grunted over her Twisted Roses coffee mug.[br]

"I think I'm gonna go for a walk around the block with Growlithe, I'll be back in a bit." The Lupe whistled for her Gruslen and stepped outside, feeling energetic and ready to face the day. Growlithe barked happily and ran in circles around Starseek, excited about going on an adventure. Little did they know that they were being watched.[br]

Starseek began to walk down the street, but stopped when she noticed that her petpet wasn't following.[br]

"Growlithe?" Starseek turned around and saw her Gruslen staring at a strange light. It hung just over his head, a shimmering ball of colors, like a strange alien soap bubble.[br]

"Whuh- what is that?" Starseek stared in awe. Slowly, before her very eyes, it began to take shape, shifting and warping until it took the form of a tall shining Lupe. It looked at Starseek and her Gruslen, then turned tail and sprinted away.[br]

"Hey you! Wait!" Starseek bolted after it, Growlithe struggling to catch up.[br]

The shimmering Lupe seemed to want Starseek to follow it, for it often would stop running long enough for it to look back and see if Starseek was still behind it.[br]

"Come back!" Starseek panted as she tried to catch up to the apparition. Finally, the Lupe leaped over a thicket and altogether disappeared, to Starseek's dismay.[br]

"Sorry, Growlithe. I couldn't wait up for you, that other Lupe was going way too fast. I wonder what he was anyways. Do you suppose we've seen a ghost?" Starseek wondered.[br]

Suddenly, Growlithe began to bark loudly at a squat tree in front of them.[br]

"A ghost? Not quite." An unfamiliar voice called down.[br]

Starseek darted her head up and found herself staring at a brown mutant Acara with long red claws,

leathery bat wings, and cruel green eyes. She brought to mind a cold wind through a cave deep beneath the Earth, long forgotten by man or Neopet.[br]

"V-Vira!" Starseek gasped.[br]

"Yes. That Lupe you saw was a mere illusion- like so many other things in this world." Vira formed the same shimmering ball in one paw. She studied it, looking bored. "I'd say it worked pretty well if it managed to bring you here."[br]

"I've read all about you in the Gallery of Evil, how you trick Neopets into believing the bogus promises of beauty and glory you toss at them, then you corrupt their souls forever. Well, that's not going to work on me, so you can just forget it!" Starseek yelled, snarling. Growlithe barked at Vira for good measure.[br]

"Oh dear, you don't really

mean

that... do you?" Vira smiled craftily. The glowing orb in her paw turned into a black mirror.[br]

"Why not take a look into my mirror, dear?" Vira tossed it down to Starseek. "Surely one look won't make any difference, and I know you're very curious. Like you said, you're not going to fall for my tricks anyway."[br]

Vira watched with an evil smile as Starseek made a step towards the mirror on the ground. As she slowly reached down to pick it up, a low wind blew through the woods, scattering the fallen leaves about. Starseek began to look very unsure and backed away.[br]

Growing impatient, Vira decided to take matters into her own hands.[br]

"You WILL look now!" she waved her paws and Starseek was dragged to the mirror by an unseen force.

Growlithe whined and tried to pull Starseek back by the tail. Starseek struggled against the invisible hold, but in vain. She was held in place over the mirror by Vira's dark magic.[br]

Starseek screwed her eyes shut, not daring to even take a glance.[br]

"LOOK! NOW!" Vira was practically screaming. She waved her paws once more and Starseek's eyes snapped open on their own.[br]

Starseek looked about wildly, then froze when she saw her reflection in the black mirror. Slowly, she began to relax and stop resisting. Vira grinned and released Starseek from her psychic hold. The Lupe was hers now.[br]

"I..." Starseek breathed as she stared at her reflection. "I'm beautiful..." Indeed, her reflection looked quite magnificent. Her fur was thick and golden, and her eyes shone like rubies. She was positively breathtaking, the very picture of femininity.[br]

Vira flitted down from her tree and crouched behind Starseek.[br]

"You could be the most beautiful creature to walk this earth. People would bow to you, revere you. You could have anything.

Anything.

You could have it all. And why not? You deserve it. You are better than the rest of them all. You could have true beauty and live forever as an icon of grace and splendor." Vira purred into Starseek's ear.[br]

"Yes..." Starseek murmured, enthralled. "Make me beautiful. Make me the most beautiful Lupe to ever live."[br]

Vira grinned. "Very well. Just sign this form." The mirror transformed into a long scroll of parchment.

Starseek looked up bitterly at not being able to gaze at her reflection anymore.[br]

"I don't have anything to write with." Starseek growled impatiently.[br]

"Here." Vira made a pen appear in her hand. "It's empty though. I need you to fill it for me."[br]

"How do I d- AARGGHH!" Starseek howled in pain as Vira slashed at her paw with her long claws. As the wound dripped, Vira collected the liquid in the pen's reservoir.[br]

"Here. Now sign." Vira handed the now-full pen back to Starseek. Starseek began to look doubtful again.[br]

Vira narrowed her eyes. "Do you not care about eternal glory? I can take beauty as easily as I can grant it, you know." The parchment turned into the mirror for a second, then turned back.[br]

With all former hesitation now gone, Starseek signed her name on the bottom line, scarcely glancing at anything written on the sheet. She handed it to Vira, who studied the dripping red signature with grim satisfaction.[br]

"Congratulations on your new cursed life!" she cackled insanely and waved her paw, sending Starseek and Growlithe into an instant dreamless slumber.[br]

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"Starseek? Hey, wake up!" [br]

"Mufffr." Starseek groaned and slowly opened her eyes. Moose stood in front of her, looking anxious.[br]

"Are you okay? It looks like you two totally passed out!" Moose bit her lip. "I should have warned you two not to overdo your walk- the heat must have gotten to you." [br]

Starseek looked around. She and Growlithe were laying down on the concrete, only a few feet from the door to their Neohome. Growlithe began to slowly and groggily rise.[br]

"You guys should really watch yourselves... pacing and breaks are key!" Moose said concernedly but unhelpfully, rubbing Starseek affectionately on the head as she spoke.[br]

"Yeah... okay..." Starseek mumbled, trying to remember what happened after she first left the house. She shook her head, drawing a blank.[br]

Moose looked worried. "Here, c'mon inside, I'll get you a glass of water and you can lie down for a bit." [br]

"Kay." Starseek let herself be lead inside, mentally struggling to piece together what had happened.[br]

"Mornin' Starseek!" Nibbles_the_Cow, Starseek's adopted sister, greeted from the table as Starseek entered the kitchen. Nibbles was munching happily on a bowl of Sugar Frosted Coco Bites. Suddenly, she dropped her spoon and squealed.[br]

"Eeewwww, what happened to your paw, Starseek? Gross, ick, ick, ick!" Nibbles hid her face behind the cereal box melodramatically.[br]

"Eh?" Starseek held out her paw and saw three long red gashes going down it.[br]

"Whoah, how'd that happen, Stars?" GenkiGenki_Neko the Halloween Aisha walked in the room casually, peering at Starseek's paw with mild interest.[br]

"I... don't know actually. Mustave scraped it on something." Starseek pondered. "And don't call me Stars. You know I don't like that nickname." [br]

Genki stuck out her tongue and went into the fridge to get a juice box.[br]

"Hey, what's the commotion?" Jhonen_C the Shadow Gelert entered the kitchen. Moose entered the room with a glass of cold water for Starseek and a doggie bowl of water for Growlithe.[br]

"The kitchen- it's where it's happenin'." Jhonen mused to himself as he noticed that every member of the household was in the room.[br]

"Here you go guys, get nice and hydrated!" Moose waved her arms in the air enthusiastically.[br]

"Starseek's paw is all yucky!" Nibble whined from behind the box of Coco Bites.[br]

"Yeah, I think I scratched it on something." Starseek held it up for Moose to see.[br]

"Wow, that looks really nasty! C'mere, we'll clean that right up!" Moose ran to the sink and got a washcloth and a bottle of disinfectant.[br]

Starseek winced as the wound was cleaned. Moose dried it off and put a big ugly pink bandage on it.[br]

"There you go! Feel better?" Moose smiled.[br]

"Kind of..." Starseek smiled a wincing smile, trying to ignore the stinging of the cut.[br]

"Hey, Moose, can Voltaire come over today?" Jhonen asked, sitting down at the table with a sketchpad and a pencil.[br]

Starseek groaned. Dark_Voltaire was possibly the most snooty, arrogant, and annoying Kougra she'd ever met. He and Jhonen seemed to be the best of pals, so naturally, he was over at their place a lot.[br]

"Hey, I know you don't like him, but can you cut me some slack? He's not been over in a long time and he's my friend." Jhonen began to sketch a Darigan Cybunny lightly in pencil in his sketchbook.[br]

"Yes, I suppose he can come over." Moose grabbed a Neocola from the fridge and wandered out of the room. [br]

"Ooh, I hope Voltaire brings his Ona! He's so cute and cuddly and adorable and friendly and fun to play with!" Nibbles squealed, hugging her Tyrannian Babaa close to her.[br]

"Uggh, that thing's annoying." Genki piped in, leaving the room. "Always squeaking and squealing and making other equally obnoxious noises." [br]

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Somewhere deep within the darkest part of the Haunted Woods, Vira sat on a large moss-covered stone by herself. It was noon, but you'd never know it- the trees and vines grew so thick there that no light was able to penetrate the canopy and the forest was perpetually trapped in darkness.[br]

Vira's mirror materialized out of thin air and into her paw. She gazed into it dreamily.[br]

"I am the prettiest Acara ever. That stupid Lupe thinks she can possibly be prettier than me... Oh no, I think not. It will not be long now... not long at all." Vira cackled to herself. "After my magic's through with her, no one will want her!" [br]

The image in the mirror changed to show Starseek playing fetch with Growlithe in the yard.[br]

"Not long at all..." Vira grinned.[br]

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"Catch it, Growlithe!" Starseek flung a small branch across the lawn. Her excited Gruslen raced after it, bushy tail wagging furiously.[br]

As Growlithe trotted back with the stick in his mouth, Starseek heard a familiar and very unpleasant voice behind her.[br]

"Hello, Starseek. We meet again." [br]

Starseek mentally groaned and turned slowly to face the voice.[br]

"Hello, Voltaire." [br]

"Might I note that you are looking splendidly today." The green Kougra arched his eyebrows, hoping to look suave, but in effect looking ridiculous.[br]

"Err... thanks." Starseek rolled her eyes and turned to pet Growlithe.[br]

"I just got nominated for the Neopian Book Award yesterday. Turns out I've read 784 books so far." He paused, waiting for Starseek's response. None came, so he continued unabated. "Of course, I could scarcely believe it... I mean, I just fly through those books so easily, it never occurred to me just how many I had read." He let out a high-pitched laugh.[br]

"Hey Voltaire! C'mere, lemme show you the new comic books I got yesterday!" Jhonen called from the door.[br]

Starseek felt a great surge of thanks for her adopted brother saving her from Voltaire's dilettante dribble.[br]

"I regret that I must leave now. Good day to you, Starseek." Voltaire bowed dramatically and headed for the house.[br]

"Good riddance." Starseek muttered under her breath. She really despised Voltaire, but she kind of liked the idea of him swooning over her so. He tried to impress her so much, he just came across as absurd. Starseek giggled meanly, thinking about how stupid Voltaire looked as he bowed with those impossibly high eyebrows.[br]

And why shouldn't Voltaire admire her? She was, after all, quite, well... admirable! She looked down at her paw and snorted with disgust at the bandage on it.[br]

"Such an ugly thing..." Starseek ripped it off with a wince, "...does not belong on me!"[br]

Starseek stared at the wound. It was starting to heal up a little, but was still very red and tender. She noticed for the first time that it looked like three claw marks raking across her paw. Suddenly, a flash of memory raced across her mind. A glint of glass, three red claws scratching her, and two evil green eyes.[br]

"Grruff?" [br]

Starseek was roused from her visions as Growlithe nudged her back leg, wanting attention. Starseek bent down and patted Growlithe, her mind elsewhere.[br]

"Hey Starseek!"[br]

Starseek turned and saw Nibbles trotting up to her, many different colored bows in her mouth.[br]

"What's up, Nibbles?"[br]

"Moosey says I can enter the Beauty Contest tomorrow, and I was wondering if I could have your advice on something. You're always so smart, I knew you could help me." Nibbles dropped the ribbons on the ground. "Which color ribbon should I wear, pink, purple, or rainbow? Jhonen said that I should wear red, since it's a comple... compel..."[br]

"A complimentary color?" "Yeah, that's it, a compli... whatever, to my green skin. What do you think?"[br]

As Starseek studied the ribbons, she suddenly was overcome with a strange sort of rage, spurred by reasons she couldn't identify. As she lifted her head to answer her sister, the blood was pounding in her ears, and her lip curled in a small snarl.[br]

"What to know what I think, Nibbles?"[br]

"Oh, yes!" Nibbles smiled.[br]

"I think they'd all look positively wretched on you. Why are you even entering that contest? You're just a big Kau, no one could find you pretty!" Starseek raved on, barely knowing what she said, but relishing in every hateful word all the same.[br]

Nibbles took a step backwards, her face fallen. Big tears began to well up in her green eyes.[br]

"Y-you don't mean that!"[br]

"Of course I do, now get out of my sight, you brat." Starseek snarled, feeling fierce joy in seeing Nibbles's brokenhearted face.[br]

Nibbles burst into tears and ran into the house, crying all the way. Starseek stood for a second triumphantly, then suddenly snapped out of it.[br]

"What in Borovan's name have I done? I'm such a horrible monster!" Starseek began to choke back tears. "Come back Nibbles, I'm so, so sorry! I don't know why I said those things, I didn't mean it!" she ran into the house after Nibbles.[br]

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2 - Part Two

Dinner that night was forced and awkward. Voltaire kept trying to impress Starseek and would often give little ridiculous winks at her at random intervals during the meal. Nibbles wouldn't talk to Starseek, despite Starseek's numerous attempts to apologize, and pretty much everyone could sense the raw tension in the room. Only Voltaire didn't pay any mind to the bad vibes, and kept talking loudly about some philosophy book he's reading, and how he's teaching his petpet to read, and all sorts of other braggart topics. Jhonen C would occasionally pipe in with a comment or a "that's cool, Voltaire!" but the rest of the room was mostly silent, except the occasional grunt to pass a dish across the table.[br]

After the meal, Starseek tried to work things out with Nibbles again, but every time she approached, Nibbles would turn away and pretend to be busy doing something. Soon afterwards, Voltaire left, much to Starseek's relief. She lay awake on her bed pondering all that had happened that day, from passing out on the drive to the weird cuts on her paw, to her sudden and vicious outburst at Nibbles.[br]

"I'm not myself today... I feel absolutely awful about yelling at Nibbles like that. I just wish she'd forgive me." Starseek paced around her room. Growlithe watched her sleepily from his petpet bed. She stopped pacing.[br]

"Auugh, I can't stand this anymore. I need some air." Starseek left the room and slipped out the back door into the cool, crisp night.[br]

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Over the next few weeks, things took a turn towards the worse. Starseek's outbursts grew more frequent and subsequently more vicious each time. She started to apologize less and less and would spend hours locked in her room, staring into a mirror. Any shred of humanity Starseek seemed to have was gone. There was a nervous, anxious air in the house that kept everyone quiet and on edge. Even the petpets seemed less chipper than usual.[br]

Finally, one day, Moose had enough. She walked over to Starseek's closed door and looked at the large "Go Away" sign taped to the front. She reached out a paw and knocked on the door.[br]

After a long pause, a bored voice answered. "Who is it?" [br]

"It's me, Greeney. Can I come in?" Moose pressed her face against the door. After another uncomfortable pause, Moose heard several locks being undone. She wondered since when Starseek had owned locks. The door opened with a rusty squeak.[br]

Moose walked in and looked around. To her great surprise, the room was dark, lit only by a couple of candles. Thick piles of dust coated every surface. The curtains over the window were shut, and she could have sworn that she saw several long claw marks running down it. The whole room was in a state of disarray and neglect, and fragments of a broken lamp lay in a dark unused corner. It was shocking to see the transformation.[br]

And even more shocking yet was the appearance of her Lupe, who sat slumped over in a tattered armchair. Her once glossy blue fur was now dirty and dull, and her whole body seemed lifeless, except for her two blazing eyes that glared at Moose in the candlelight as she sat down next to Starseek.[br]

Moose thought for a second, cleared her throat and began.[br]

"What's going on, Starseek?"[br]

No response. Only those two glowing red eyes glaring at her hatefully.[br]

Moose continued. "You're not yourself anymore. You've only been coming out of your room to eat, and now you've stopped even doing that. It's not healthy. Even your appearance has changed. What's wrong, Starseek? You can tell me."[br]

Starseek bared her teeth. She didn't need this tripe.[br]

"Of course I've changed." Starseek finally spoke. "I've become fair and beautiful. Stop pretending like you care... You're just jealous! You always have been! The first time something GOOD happens to me, you just try to take it away! That's so like you, you grubby little nit!" she snarled with rage.[br]

Moose looked hurt. Tears began to swell in her brown eyes.[br]

"Starseek..."[br]

"You don't know anything! You'll never know true power because you're too weak and stupid to seek it! That's why you'll never be happy- you're constantly in fear of seeking it! You're just a stupid little fool and you always will be!"[br]

"This isn't the Starseek I know. What's... what's happened to you?" Moose looked into Starseek's eyes solemnly, feeling her gut wrench.[br]

"Then maybe you never knew me at all!" Starseek snapped and stormed out of the room, leaving Moose hurt and confused.[br]

Jhonen was waiting for Starseek outside in the hall.[br]

"Hey Star, c'mere a second." He said calmly.[br]

"What do

you

want?" Starseek asked sourly.[br]

THWAP! THWAP!

Jhonen suddenly slapped Starseek with unsuspecting force.[br]

"What in Faerieland was that for, you idiot?!?" Starseek roared, rubbing her cheeks.[br]

"Look at yourself, Starseek." Jhonen quietly held up a handheld mirror. Starseek looked, growling and muttering under her breath.[br]

"I'm more beautiful than ever!" Starseek grinned vainly as she admired her reflection.[br]

"No, Starseek. Look harder." Jhonen said, unmoving.[br]

"What do you expect me to see? I'm the most divine creature there ever was!" All the same, Starseek stared closer at the mirror.[br]

To her horror, the image began to shift and melt, revealing Starseek's true form underneath. Her fur was dingy and coming out in clumps, her ears were bent and ragged, and hard skinless bumps speckled her face like lizard scales. Her whole face was gaunt and thin, and the flesh sagged from her bones pitifully.[br]

"N-no!" Starseek wrenched out a sob. "No! It can't be! I was beautiful, you saw me!"[br]

Jhonen shook his head. "No. It's all been a lie. You're under a spell of some sort, an evil spell."[br]

"It can't be... you're lying! You're trying to trick me, make me weak." Starseek grew exceedingly hostile.

"It's THIS that is the lie!" She screamed and threw the mirror to the ground, where it smashed into a thousand sparkling splinters. She looked down at the shards and saw one thousand tiny hideous Lupes staring back at her.[br]

"LIES!!!" she screamed as she ran away.[br]

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Starseek stormed out of the house in a blind rage, slashing at the walls and slamming doors as she

went. Growlthe ran away at her approach, terrified of his owner's transformation. Starseek walked by the mailbox and kicked it, feeling satisfaction as it fell over with a thud. Her foot was throbbing, but she didn't care. She marched out into the woods, not really going anywhere in particular. She loosed her claws on the trees she walked past, leaving a conspicuous trail of destruction.[br]

As she raged on, her mind raced. How could this have happened? How could she be so hideous? She didn't want to believe Jhonen, but that image of herself, so horribly ugly was burned into the back of her brain. [br]

Her kicking and clawing woke up a large Bearog from its resting place under a bush. Grumpily, it stood up and roared, all three heads baring rows of sharp pointed teeth. Starseek turned around and growled at it.[br]

The Bearog swiped a paw at Starseek, who jumped out of the way and head butted the feral petpet in the belly. The Bearog fell over backwards, yelping. It slowly got to its feet and studied Starseek for a moment. Then it turned tail and ran away through the underbrush.[br]

Starseek stood proud for a moment. There was no creature in the forest that could stand up against her. In her gloating, she didn't notice a black shape materialize behind her.[br]

"I bet you're feeling pretty tough right now, eh Starry?"[br]

Starseek whirled around to face Vira, who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere.[br]

"Who are you? And how do you know my name?" Starseek barked, ready to attack this new creature.[br]

"Tch, for shame. You don't remember old Vira? The one who gave you your beauty?" Vira grinned.[br]

Suddenly, the memories began to flood back. The mysterious orb, chasing the shimmering Lupe into the forest, meeting Vira, the mirror, signing the contract, waking up back on the driveway... it all became clear again. Starseek's eyes grew wide and she began backing away from Vira, horror in her eyes.[br]

"Now she remembers." Vira chuckled.[br]

"You-you... It...

you

..." Starseek gasped, backing away more. Then another flood of remembrance hit her. Everything always comes in two waves. She remembered all the pain and grief she had inflicted on her family and friends... How she made Nibbles and Moose cry, how concerned everyone seemed about her, and how she just lashed back and became a hermit in her room... poring into a mirror for hours, stroking her reflection, hearing faint whispers in her ears about glory and beauty and power... a broken mirror on the floor, her true form shining in the pieces...[br]

"It was me... it was me..." Starseek sat down and began crying. "I did all those things. It hurt those I care for the most... I... I

hate

myself..." she began to cry even harder.[br]

Vira looked very pleased to hear this. "Yes, it was all you. You're a rotten, ugly Neopet. How dare you pretend that you can be beautiful when true beauty cannot be matched. I am the most beautiful creature on Neopia, you were but a fool for thinking you could even come

close

to my glory."[br]

Starseek stopped her crying and looked up at Vira with red-rimmed eyes.[br]

"You. YOU MADE ME DO THOSE THINGS!" Starseek lunged at Vira, taking her quite by surprise. She was knocked onto the dirt, pinned under Starseek's large paws.[br]

Vira hissed and vanished. Starseek fell to the ground.[br]

"NO ONE," Vira apparated behind Starseek, shrieking, "DOES THAT TO ME!" Vira waved her clawed paws, and a glowing orb appeared in her hands. She threw it at Starseek. It wrapped around her like glowing ropes, binding her. Starseek slowly levitated off the ground, struggling fruitlessly to get out of the

bands. She yelled for help, knowing it was useless.[br]

"Shush." Vira waved her paws again and Starseek blacked out instantly.[br]

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...to be continued...

3 - Part Three

Part Three[br]

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"Starseek!" Moose called out. "Staaaaarseeeeeek!"[br]

"Yo! Stars!" Genki joined in the search chorus.[br]

Moose, Genki, Nibbles, and Jhonen were scouring the forest for Starseek. After she stormed out of the house earlier, no one had seen her for at least an hour. Quite worried, the gang went out looking for her.[br]

"I still don't see why we're looking for that poo-head. She's such a meanie-weenie!" Nibbles pouted.[br]

"Nibbles, I told you before... I don't think Starseek is in control of her own actions anymore. This smells mightily of a curse." Jhonen explained to the doubtful Kau.[br]

"Yeah, well, I hope you're right, or she's not going to be my friend anymore!" Nibbles frowned.[br]

Genki rolled her eyes. "You have such a masterful command of the English language, Nibbles."[br]

"Thanks!" Nibbles smiled, not having the vaguest clue of what Genki was talking about.[br]

"Shush you guys! I think I heard something!" Moose barked suddenly, and the group stopped in mid-step.[br]

From the south, a muffled yell was heard.[br]

"Starseek!" Moose ran towards the sound's origin.[br]

As they ran, the sounds grew louder. Suddenly, all was silent. Uneasily, Moose looked around and listened. Only the sounds of the birds were present. And then... a sound to the right. An unfamiliar laugh.[br]

Moose put a finger to her lips indicating silence and waved her pets closer to the sound. They poked their heads through a fern and saw the back of an Acara, who seemed to be quite tickled, as she was cackling maniacally with her arms up to the sky. In front of her was a huddled form floating in midair, held in place by glowing silvery tendrils. It was Starseek.[br]

Nibbles gasped as she saw this, but quickly clamped a hoof over her mouth.[br]

Vira stopped cackling. There was a sharp intake of breath from all of them as they watched the Acara look around for the source of the small noise.[br]

Genki mouthed "Vira" to Moose, who nodded in agreement.[br]

Vira spoke. "Whoever you are, I know you're there. Why don't you come out and play?" she let out a little laugh.[br]

Vira turned and began walking in the opposite direction. Soon, she disappeared out of sight. The four let out a sigh of relief. [br]

"BOO!" Vira apparated right in front of them, scaring them out of their wits. "Come to save your precious Neopet, girl?" she swooped down, grabbed Moose, and threw her against a tree. [br]

Jhonen growled and lunged for Vira. She vanished and reappeared behind Jhonen and shot a ball of energy at him. He was pushed forwards and tripped over.[br]

Moose slowly rose to her feet, aided by Nibbles. Her side was throbbing something awful, but she wasn't going to give up now.[br]

"VIRA!!" She shouted.[br]

Vira turned and growled.[br]

"You are going to give Starseek back to us NOW."[br]

Vira chuckled. "And what happens if I don't?"[br]

Moose paused for a second and saw Jhonen and Genki creeping up behind Vira. They signaled for her to keep talking. Moose gave the tiniest indication of a nod and continued. "If you don't I am going to make you sorry. You are going to pay for what you've done to my friend... what you've done to all of us. This is going to end here, Vira."[br]

"I only gave her what she wanted. Is that so bad? Do you know what I think? I think you're JEALOUS of Starseek here. After all, wouldn't you love to look like this?" Vira made the black mirror appear in her paw and tossed it to Moose, who took it reluctantly.[br]

"Don't look, Greeney!" Nibbles whispered, nudging Moose in the side.[br]

Moose gave no indication that she had heard and instead looked into the mirror curiously.[br]

From behind Vira, Jhonen and Genki were furiously giving hand signals to Moose to tell her not to look, but it was in vain. She didn't see them. All she looked at was the mirror.[br]

Vira turned to see the two Neopets behind her. She snarled and flung them aside with a glowing ball of energy.[br]

She turned back to face Moose, but was startled by Nibbles suddenly flinging herself at Vira with her head down and horns out. Vira has no time to react and was tossed over the Kau's head and into a bush. Nibbles ran over to Moose and tried to pry away the mirror from her, but Moose held it in her hand like a vice.[br]

"No! Moosey! Please, don't look at it! You'll end up like Starseek! Please, don't do it!" Tears began to flow freely down Nibbles's face.[br]

A few feet away, Jhonen and Genki lay, dazed. Genki slowly got up and tried to wake Jhonen. Jhonen groaned and turned over, but didn't awaken. Genki looked up and saw Starseek floating over her head.[br]

"Starseek! Hey! Wake up, dude!" Genki reached out and tugged on Starseek's tail. [br]

"Mffrr...?" Starseek mumbled and slowly opened her eyes.[br]

Meanwhile, Vira was getting out of the bush, hissing like a kettle put on the stove too long.[br]

"That... was... NOT... nice..." Vira righted herself, and then threw a ball of energy at Nibbles. It wrapped around her and bound her in place.[br]

"Now, where were we? Ah yes." Vira glided over to Moose's side. "Do you like what you see?"[br]

"Yes..." Moose breathed, entranced.[br]

"Well, then- hey, wait a second, you're holding the mirror face-down." Vira blinked.[br]

Suddenly, Moose lifted her arm and smacked Vira on the head with the mirror. It connected with a loud crack and Vira fell to the ground, stunned. Moose cast the mirror aside and ran to her pets.[br]

"Jhonen's knocked out, but Starseek's come around." Genki pointed to Starseek, who was smirking with satisfaction at the unconscious Vira laying facedown in the grass.[br]

"Keep trying to wake him up, I have to tie Vira down somehow... keep her so she can't get away when she comes to." Moose looked around for something to use.[br]

"Kay. Oh, and by the way... that whole 'pretending to be under the spell' thing was really, REALLY awesome." Genki grinned, and then went back to shaking Jhonen_C.[br]

Moose pondered what to do. Vira could disappear and reappear wherever she wanted, so tying her might be kind of useless. Unless she could find some way to keep her from apparating... She looked at Nibbles stuck in the glowing ball.[br]

"I wanna get out of this thing... its tingly." Nibbles pouted.[br]

"Let me try and get you out then." Moose touched the shimmering orb. It felt warm and cold at the same

time. It gave her goose bumps. Despite its appearance, it felt quite solid. Moose pulled on the ball and it started to give. She pulled more and the whole thing slid off over Nibbles's head.[br]

Moose stared for a moment at the strange glowing orb and then went and placed Vira in it. Upon feeling the orb binding her, she awoke and glared at Moose with unparalleled fury.[br]

"I suppose you think yourself very clever. Defeat the enemy with their own weapon."[br]

Moose grinned and picked up the mirror. She tossed it to Nibbles, and gave her a little nod.[br]

Nibbles blinked, but then understood. With a sudden movement, her hoof connected with the mirror and glass shards rained down on the brown grass below. Starseek, still floating in midair, gasped and shook her head. Her face began to melt and shift and become youthful again. Her fur started to brighten and grow back in the bare spots.[br]

Vira howled in rage. "HOW DARE YOU? You have destroyed ALL that I have worked for, you INSOLENT BRATS!"[br]

As Vira screamed and struggled and sputtered, Moose ignored her and walked over to Starseek. She pulled off her magical binds and threw them aside.[br]

Jhonen was waking up at this point. He slowly got to his feet and looked around.[br]

"Is it over?" he asked.[br]

Starseek thought for a moment. "Yes, I think it is." Suddenly she began to cry. The tears poured down her face. [br]

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" Moose ran over and hugged her Neopet tight.[br]

"I- I- just... I was SO awful... These past few weeks have been hell. I... I was dead inside. And I made all of you feel so awful. I- I hated myself... yet I couldn't stop it, couldn't break myself away... And I couldn't even save myself, I had to have you guys step in and rescue me... I just..." Starseek buried her face into Moose's shoulder and sobbed.[br]

Starseek felt a gentle nudge on her back. She lifted her bleary eyes and saw Nibbles standing there.[br]

"Those things you said to me... I know you didn't mean it. It wasn't your fault. I forgive you, Starseek."

She said and then nuzzled her affectionately.[br]

Starseek laughed a little and hugged her sister, shaking from sobbing.[br]

After a while, she just couldn't cry any more and she lay down in the grass, collecting herself.[br]

"I'm sorry you guys. I wish that none of this had ever happened." Starseek sighed.[br]

"We forgive you, Starseek. It was not your fault." Jhonen hugged Starseek. Even Genki, who was definitely not the warmest of Neopets, came up and gave Starseek a little pat on the back.[br]

"Hey, speaking of blame... Where did Vira go off to?" Moose turned to find the spot where Vira had sat empty. The glowing bonds lay broken next to it.[br]

Starseek growled and shook her head. "We could search this whole forest and we'd never find her. Let's just go home. I need to sleep... for the next five months." She gave a little laugh and began walking home.[br]

"I suppose you're right, but I still would like to make her pay for what she's done to you." Jhonen scanned the tree line before turning and following Starseek.[br]

"I think we did pretty well, considering." Genki picked up a shard of mirror and examined it a moment before throwing it away.[br]

As the tired group trudged off towards home, Vira watched from afar, viewing their progress in a glowing ball. Looking disgusted, she waved her paw and the ball vanished with a poof. She flew off into the night, searching for a new victim to set her claws upon.[br]

[br]

The End