

## Story 4

# Needs, Wants and Priorities

Luna flew into work, not even noticing the grey sky, the dripping downspouts, the screech of the overhead CityLinX train. She burst through the diner doors.

“Check this out!” She whipped up her sleeve, revealing her wrist-pod, its display flashing green. “MetroBank1 downloaded my first pay voucher today. I’m rich!”

Her first job, her first paycheque. The biggest wad she’d ever had at once.

“All right! Party time!” boomed the voice of Rio, the dishwasher. He gave Luna a hug. She squeezed him back, tingling. The guy was gorgeous. As in drop-dead. Fun, too. He’d already asked her out.

Nikos, nursing a cup of coffee at a corner table, scowled. The eighteen-year-old was an Omega regular – or at least he had been for the last two weeks. It was obvious to everyone – except Luna – that there was only one thing he wanted at the Omega, and it wasn’t on the menu.

“So, Luna,” Rio went on, “what’re you gonna do with all that beautiful cash?”

“Spend it!” she said with a laugh. “I wanna download that new music file from Scorched Earth and buy some great new shoes I saw, and – ”

*Don’t do it*, Nikos told himself. *Don’t say it. Don’t* – He couldn’t help it. “Uh... Luna... you sure you want to spend it all? Maybe you should – ”

*I blew it*, he thought as soon as the words were out of his mouth.

Luna looked at him. Funny thing about Nikos. He always sat at the same corner booth with a flat-port unit in front of him. Only he never seemed to be studying. Shaggy hair, stubbly chin, big dark eyes. Cute, in a starving-artist sort of way.

“Hey, it’s Mister Fun,” Rio said. “ ‘Don’t spend, don’t splurge, don’t have a good time.’ ”

Luna giggled. Rio put an arm around her shoulders. “Come with me after work. I know this terminal that gets all the new music before any of the others. You can get any tune you want.”

Luna grinned. “You’re on!”

Nikos glared at his coffee.

“You look bummed,” Gaia said a week later as Luna walked into the Omega. “What’s up?”

Luna pushed up her sleeve. Her wrist-pod’s screen flashed red. “I’m broke!”

Gaia watched the cascade of numbers, each smaller than the last. “Didn’t take you very long, did it?”

“Thanks for pointing that out, Gaia,” Luna snapped.

“You big dope,” Gaia said fondly. “You think you’re the only kid who blew her first paycheque?”

## Story 4 (continued)

# Needs, Wants and Priorities

“No.” Luna sighed. “But now what am I supposed to do? Some of that cash was supposed to pay for animation files for this coming semester. I’m in trouble!”

“Maybe I can help,” said a voice from the corner booth. Nikos.

“Help how?” Luna said irritably. “You got some cash you wanna lay on me?”

“No, but... I could maybe... umm... like, go over what you spent...”

“I know what I spent. Every last cent. All gone.”

Nikos reddened. “Yeah... but I could show you how to avoid... uh... the same problem the next time you get paid.”

*What a romantic offer*, he thought. *She’s gonna jump at that one*. But to his amazement, she nodded and slid into the booth next to him.

*Do not blow this*, he told himself. *Do not turn this girl off*.

“First thing, you’ve got to write down everything you spent money on. Every virtual magazine, every cup of coffee, everything,” he said.

“That is so lame.”

His heart sank. “I know, but it’s the only way to see where it all went.”

“I know where it went – away,” Luna grumbled, but she started scrolling through her wrist-pod, writing stuff down.

When she’d finished her list, Nikos made her go through it and mark each item as a Need or a Want. “You gotta know the difference between what you need and what you want. And then control the wants.”

“I know the difference,” Luna said smugly. She went down the list.

- Computer upgrade for school: Need.
- Lunch out with Feliz: Want.
- Green eye makeup: Want.
- Open-backed high heels: Need.

Nikos raised an eyebrow.

“They *are* a need!” Luna said.

“Get real. Food’s a need, MetroLink service is a need. High heels are –”

Luna pushed the paper away. “Look, I work hard and I deserve those things. What do you want me to do, never buy anything?”

Just then Rio emerged from the back, getting off shift.

“Hey, Rio,” Luna called, jumping up, “this place is bringing me down. Let’s go out and have some fun.”

They left.

With a curse, Nikos swept the paper and pen off the table. ■