



A FAMILIAR TALE

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*“Dream-walk with me.  
See the glory of another world,  
Help a troubled friend.  
Hear my voice, and find my mouth.  
It is your gateway.  
As I sleep to call to you,  
You will sleep to walk with me  
In the glory of another world.  
My waking-world, your dreaming.*

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The cocoon twitched and a fuzzy grey head emerged from its lid. She looked around a dim towertop chamber, and saw blurry bookshelves and low-burning candles. One long, feathery antennae sprung up from the cocoon, then another. They scented strange powders in the air, settling across her feelers and fur. Above the moth was a wizard. He wore a long green robe and held two peacock feathers to his wrinkled forehead. He leaned over the moth and, with a magical twist of a magical finger, his peacock feathers wiggled to say *‘Good morning, grey-wing’*.

Through stained glass windows, pre-dawn light cast patterned shadows across the moth’s big eyes. *‘Itchy!’* said the moth. She kicked her legs, struggling out of her chrysalis, and spilled onto a pad of soft leaves. Above her, the wizard scratched his pointy beard and muttered under his breath. She felt a soothing spell fall across her fur. *‘In time, you may understand man-speech’* wiggled the wizard, *‘Perhaps any speech... All sorts of spells I’ve wrapped around your feelers... Ha-hmm... The sun is rising, and you should sleep.’* He gestured to a stack of books. *‘I’ve prepared a dark place for you...*

*and some honeyed water... Ah!*’ The moth had begun to wobble forward on stiff legs towards the nearest candle. *‘Moon?’* she asked.

*‘No, no,’* the wizard wiggled, and snuffed out the light. *‘No moons in here. Rest, small friend. There is work to be done tonight.’* He circled the room, and soft currents of warm wind moved with him, dousing candles ‘til only soft morning light lit the office. The moth tasted the air, and found oiled wood, old leather... paper. Her stiff wings rustled as she moved across the desk to the books, finding honey with her feelers. The wizard wrinkled a smile from the door. “She’ll do well,” he said to himself. “Moon? Indeed... ha-hmm.”

Sol blazed His path through the sky. Light flowed through the thick mountains and pooled in a crescent valley. At the valley’s Southern end lay the city of Hatsi, waking. Thin stone towers rose and stretched their shadows over districts of terracotta roofs. In the centre of a wide plaza, never shaded, stood the Cathedral of Sol. Its tiered walls and terraces were patterned in multicoloured brickwork: the signet-signs of Hatsi. For each family, there was a pattern to paint, to weave into clothes, to tattoo upon children. Tesselated zig-zags, stars, and spirals grew upon the cathedral walls like fruiting vines.

On one temple-terrace, warming in the morning sun, a small grey man was watering a herb garden. He worked slowly, with a sad smile. After each plant-bed, he paused, and pondered. The garden was quiet, above the city’s growing noise. “My dear priest,” said a voice from a doorway, “if those plants and I have anything in common, they will miss your care.”

“I may return,” smiled the grey priest, “I hope to return... to the company of such delightful herbs.”

“Ha-hmm,” said the wizard, and after a pause, “just the herbs?”

“Bah, am I missing someone?”

The two old men laughed together, then fell silent.

“You need not go,” muttered the wizard.

“Well, I go precisely because I’m not needed,” the priest said quickly. “Even dim Josiah can tend the herbs as I do... and my writing? Hardly read. So say the saints: The flames of faith are fanned by lively hearts. Yet, I don’t think I’ve ever written of a living saint. To be sainted is often to be killed,” he laughed. “But rarely to be a gardener.”

The wizard looked out across the city and sighed.

“In all time, how many will read my writing?” The priest spoke faster now, pacing. “A dozen? Two? And of those, whose hearts will be moved? Every Solstice, preachers inspire some ten-thousand souls. Against brigands and fae, the paladins protect... Well, everyone. What light do I add to Sol’s beacon? I am... I am a log... A log that has smouldered in the fire, and never caught.”

The wizard turned and extended a hand. “You have warmed me,” he said quietly, and there was a silence. The priest put both hands around the wizard’s.

“In exile,” he said. “In the wilds, Sol will burn away my weaknesses. When they are gone, I do not know what will remain. I may return, but I do not hope to return unchanged.”

“My friend will remain,” said the wizard. “You need not go.”

A cold wind blew through the valley from the snowy peaks above. The wizard searched the priest’s eyes, who looked away.

“You are sweet,” said the priest at last. “But you see me as more than I am.”

“Ha-hmm... Well... I’ll keep my disagreement to myself, if you keep this... about yourself.” From nowhere, the wizard produced a long knitted scarf. It matched the priest’s grey robes, striped at the hems - but on the scarf, the stripes twisted into a pattern of peacock-feather eyes.

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As Sol returned below the horizon, the wizard returned to his tower. The moth was pacing over the lines of a book, feelers to the paper. “Reading already?” said the wizard, slowly and clearly. The moth waved her enchanted antennae in his direction, feeling the words in the air and concentrating. Within her, magic whirred and danced. She understood. ‘*Moon?*’ she waved, and pointed a spindly leg towards the window. A faint silver-blue glow lit the glass.

“Oh yes, yes indeed” said the wizard. “As it rises, your quest begins.” He placed a tiny saucer of honeyed water in front of her. “There is a man in this city who needs our help. He writes little wisdoms into big books. Little wisdoms add up, yet... he is a fool when it comes to himself.” The wizard pinched the bridge of his nose and continued. “At first I thought one of your kind - some spirit - had infested his mind, and whispered doubts to him... but alas, it is simply shame. Resilient shame. Shame that defends itself, grows, deflects kind words - or twists them into alignment.”

The moth sipped her honeyed water, antennae spread wide, listening.

“In five days, on the first sliver of the new moon, he will follow the Stars and find a home, in the borderlands, in exile.” The wizard sighed a familiar sigh. “His own choice... but I think he needs to see a reason to stay. My idea, my plot, is to show him a reason with his

own eyes. Evidence! Ah-hmm, evidence that his shame cannot deny, and a reason to stay... or at least, to return”

The wizard moved to a workbench, where there sat a pair of golden spectacles. Thin spikes, like sun-rays, poked out from around the rims. The lenses were thinly-cut moonstone: Translucent blue-white, flashing with orange and amber within. The moth fluttered up to a ceiling beam and circled it several times. She landed on its side, flattened her dusty wings and squinted down at the floor, confused. Then, she dropped, flew in no particular direction, flapped around the wizard’s ear, and spun down to the workbench... finding herself exactly where she wanted to go, quite by chance. She flicked her antennae towards the spectacles curiously.

“Ha-hmm,” said the wizard. “Not one for the indoors... night-wanderer... Well... Ah... Behold!” He flourished, and the glasses slid along the desk to the moth’s face. Through a lens twice her size she saw... not very much: The room, purple-tinted, blurry. A moth’s eyes aren’t very good. But there was something... a *glow*. The wizard moved around the table and lo, there was some *aura* about him, through the crystal lens... *rays*, perhaps. “It is unclear,” confessed the wizard. “Lenscraft... it is the work of an astronomer, and eludes me. There is another of my order - an old mage, who could bring clarity to the work. She lives in the mountains. In banishment.”

“*I must find her?*” waved the moth hesitantly.

“Aye,” said the wizard. “For her mountain is warded, and none that walk on two legs, or four, may enter. So bound the Starspeakers... and I cannot dispel their bindings. But for you, there is no impediment - and her tower is easy to find. High, it is, to better study the Stars... and Lhun.”

*“A moon-mage!”* the moth wiggled, excitedly.

“Oh yes, and the moon will be your guide to her. Fly always towards the setting moon, and seek the tallest peak before the ice-wall. When Lhun leaves the sky, do not be led astray by Sol. Rest in the day, and search by night. It will be a long journey, and it will test you, but you are a strong spirit. You heard my song, and climbed to the waking world. Smart, you must be, and resilient.” With a snap, he produced a tiny leather scroll-case, with several tiny straps hanging from it. “Bring this to her, and return within four nights. A message, and my work so far... She will know how to complete it.” Working with deft old fingers, the wizard slipped the harness onto the moth’s back. “A fine fit,” he said. “For an even finer messenger. Many creatures would stray, but moon-love would hold any moth to their course - and you aren’t any moth. You are a spirit of the dreaming world, awake in the mind of a moth, hale and healthy. I have complete faith in you.”

As he said this, Lhun’s waning crescent rose above the Southern plains. Her crystal surface shimmered, blue and purple in the twilight sky. The moth looked up with pure wonder and swore that she would never again mistake a candle for Her beauty. Opening in amazement, her wings lifted her off the workbench and up, curving towards the window. The wizard whispered a magical word behind her, and the window swung open. Cold night air blew firmly under her wings, and she drifted up, out and over the city.

When all she could see was clouds and sky, she bent a wing and drew into alignment with Lhun. She imagined tasting Her light upon her feelers, hearing Lhun’s voice in the scent-speech of her ancestors. *What song does She sing to me?* wondered the moth. She drew a line

in the sky, tracing Lhun's path, and swooped after it. The peaks reflected black in her compound eyes, and she swirled away on her moth-path towards them.

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Beneath her, tiered farms gave way to wilderness. Mountains drew close. Blankets of soft trees were washed pale with moonlight. The moth only saw their shapes dimly from this distance, but she constructed a landscape of distant scents, carried on the brisk wind: River-water, soil, maple-sap and leaves. Doing her best to keep the moonlight spread evenly across her wings, she travelled for hours through the night. In time, the valley curved, her straight path led over a saddle in the mountains, where the ground grew stony and the scents sparse. Here, the wind buffeted her small body. Thick eddies tugged against her fluttering wings, and down, she spiraled. Needing to rest, tired, she found a lonely tree past the forest's edge. There, she landed heavily, fanned her wings, and laid them flat - two grey leaves among many.

She relaxed her feelers and felt the long chambers of her heart pump in her abdomen. Silently, unmoving, she realised that she could no longer see Lhun. Dread crept through her enchanted mind. Her feelers flicked up and felt for moonbeams. Nothing. Folding her wings away sensibly, she walked to the end of her branch, looking out in... some direction. She realised, with a panic, that she did not know which. She had fallen into the shadow of the mountain. Fluttering upwards again, her fear overwhelming her weariness, she saw it. A distant fuzzy glow, alone in the darkness. It was not where she remembered it, but perhaps she had rested for longer than she

knew. If it had passed its peak, she knew to now fly towards it - and she did, for another hour at least.

At last, she emerged from the shadow and was caught in a ray of true moonlight. Undeniable in its beauty. Her heart swelled to see the moon again, and yet... it was to her side. She was flooded with shame at mistaking the fuzzy glow of... she scented smoke on the wind... it must have been Hatsi... for the splendour of the moon.

*"Oh, careless fool,"* she waved to herself sadly, turning around. *"Back I go to the mountain pass. To the wind, back I go."* Through her spiracle-vents, she sighed. Lhun was low in the sky. She would have to fly far, and late into the morning - if she was to make back the time she had lost.

*'Wind?'* said a voice inside the moth-mind, *'Wind is your steed, friend. Here, let me hand you the reins...'* With his voice came the wizard's craft, and a warmth moved through the moth. *'...And confuse not carelessness for weariness. To be tired is to have been strong. You are strong, spirit. Hale and healthy. Your heart is true, and truth will guide you. Your friends have faith in you.'*

She felt strange heat in her chest. The crystal dust in her fur began to glow like embers, and hot air spun beneath her wings. In its curling currents, she saw the wizard's cunning eyes - for a moment, then gone, carried on the wind... The warm wind that swelled beneath her wings, and lifted her. Up, she fluttered, keeping the moon above the black teeth of the valley.

*"Thank you, wind-whisperer,"* wiggled the moth. *"Far I'll fly on your whispered wind."*

The moth did fly far that night, following a thin mountain path along a ridgeline higher into the range. The warm spell-wind made

the going easy, but ahead, clouds gathered. In the East, the silhouettes of the mountains took form against the brightening navy sky. Colours stirred in the grey landscape, and a quiet sound froze the fluttering moth -

*Tweet-tweet.*

She had overstayed her welcome. Fixing her wings into an arrowhead, she dove for the ground. Bound to her intent, the wizard's wind flipped, pushing on the tops of her wings and leaving a swift trail of sparkling dust. She needed somewhere tight and dark to hide. Close above the rocky ground, she opened her wings again and fluttered urgently, searching. In the dimness, she couldn't tell dark nooks from dark rocks. Emptiness has no scent.

*Twit-tweeet* - Above her!

Flitting from trunk to trunk across the mountain path, she saw, nearby, a cold camp. The moonlight was silenced, for a flash, by dark wings. The moth swept to the side of a tree and made herself as small as possible.

*Tuweet-chweet-twit*, the shrike sung from a high branch. *Twit-tweet.*

Another answered. Then another. The moonlight grew fainter.

*Tweeeet-chit-chit-chit*, sang the early birds, with hunger.

The moth extended her feelers, fully alert. The birds smelled sour, somewhere close. She found a reassuring scent and gingerly opened her wings, moving as quietly as she could, inside the trees, through the leaves and branches, towards the safety of some mouldering log.

Something heavy pulled through the leaves behind her. She wished she could close her eyes. The shrike was plump white, and hopping closer. It pecked at some suspicious leaves, and the moth

darted clear of the tree. At the wayside lay the wreck of a long-abandoned barrel-wagon. Behind her, the bird turned its head and Sol's morning fire reflected off its small, black eye. *Chirrrrt*, it teased, and stalked forward, twisting its head this way and that.

*"Mind-kindler! Wind-whisperer!"* waved the moth, but the wizard did not reply. She swooped low across the ground, and a wing-rush pushed her lower. A beak snapped behind her, then to her left. Clawed feet, and towering scaled legs thudded into the dirt in front of her. The shrike's cold shadow blotted out the sky... and the moth remembered the magic embers in her fur. *'The wind is my steed,'* she waved, and the air pounced forwards, whisking the bird back. A cloud of sparkling dust was cast above her, and she scuttled for safety, feelers streaming behind her. She found a half-buried barrel, and climbed up, up, until one leg dropped into a hole and she swung her body inside it, feeling soft wood against her fur. With a **thunk**, the shrike's beak slammed into the opening and she felt cold air against her wingtips. She wormed her way deeper into the crack. **Thunk** came the beak again. **Thunk-thunk**. Then, a pause, and an angry *twit-twit-twit*. She was safe.

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She spent that day in the barrel, between the wood and the wet dirt. The mildew gave it a homely smell. Further inside, she encountered a small creature - about third of her size - munching on the walls. It was a woodlouse, and it was initially sceptical of her. *"Hello!"* waved the moth.

The woodlouse twitched its antennae and curled its shell a little.

The moth couldn't understand, but scented the louse's smell. On the air was a faint message. It wasn't alone... the moth was sending

messages too. Curiosity, and the hope of friendship, breathed out of her spiracles.

The woodlouse relaxed its curled shell and reached out with its antennae, touching hers. They tapped and twitched and made little signs, which a moth would have no hope of understanding. But a dream... Well, dream-spirits speak all languages. If a traveller from Southrose falls asleep in Kalantu, will his dream-folk speak in dialect? No! This is the great talent of dreams, to speak to us all... and the grasses, and the rivers, yes. Lice are simple creatures, and this one simply said "Multiple lice." - but there was a fear in its scent, and love. Between the scents and the signs, the louse had said "*Family?*"

"*Family, yes*" the moth signed in louse-speak, bouncing her feathery feelers off the louse's round head. "*Hiding from the bird.*"

"*Fear.*" signed the louse, who didn't understand much. "Yes," replied the moth. Their scent-messages reached agreement, and both breathed out thoughts of safety and companionship.

"*Family,*" signed the louse. "*Follow.*"

They crawled their way into the wood, with the louse munching on the walls to widen them when the moth's big body couldn't squeeze through. Deep inside was a wet hollow, teeming with friendly woodlice. As the day passed, she told them of her journey - of the wizard and his poor friend, of the wind, and of moonlight. Once she started signing about the moon, she found it hard to stop. "*Strange louse,*" they remarked. One scratched its little feet on the moth's little backpack, and the wizard's message. "*Eat,*" it signed.

"*Do not eat my...!*" signed the moth, but there was no sign for 'letter' and the sign for 'paper' was dangerously close to the sign for

'food'.

*"Eat,"* signed the louse.

*"No eat,"* she signed.

*"Always eat,"* signed the louse, and turned back to munching on the walls.

The woodlice had a lot to say about wood, and they said it. It was easy for the moth to rest amidst the happy chattering and eating. The day passed. As the wood grew colder, the moth made to leave.

*"Outside, death."* the woodlice signed, *"Fear."*

*"Even a bird must sleep,"* signed the moth. *"I'm a strong louse, hale and healthy. My heart is true, and truth guides me. Have faith."*

*"Fear,"* signed the lice. *"Brave."*

Moths cannot smile, but she did not need to. Her thanks came from her spiracles, and scent-speech cannot lie.

As she fluttered away, dark eyes followed her. From a thorn-tree, the shrike watched. She hung each of her meals from a bloody thorn, and her nest was strewn with mouse-bones and butterfly-wings. She was half-asleep, and half-dreaming of the magical moth. In her dream, it teased her, evaded her... and she shook herself awake. With a furrowed feathered brow, she followed, hopping silently from branch to branch, from tree to tree.

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As she climbed the mountain, refreshed and enjoying the night air, the moth wiggled to the wizard. *"The second night of four. Will I reach my destination today?"*

*"If the rocks are rough and quartzzy, you are close. Is there enough moonlight to see?"*

*“The rocks! Yes, they shimmer in the light, the light is delicate. The moon is thin.”* The moth turned her attention upwards. *“Can She be gone?”*

*“She returns. Ha-hmm, don’t worry your heart,”* the wizard waved. *“The Luna d’Ruah say ‘She is constant in Her inconstancy.’ You may live to see a full cycle of Her face, as I may live to see a full cycle of Her colours. Who can say they have seen all the forms of Lhun? Perhaps some in your homeland. Here, our records are written over lifetimes... My father... ha-hmm, we have not the time.”*

*“You will tell me more stories of Lhun! I do not understand Her yet. Yet, She will not fail me.”*

*“You are... brave, to trust what you do not understand.”* wiggled the wizard.

*“I do not understand much. Much is too big for me.”*

*“Bah-hmm, all is relative, all is meaningless, all matters, relatively. Lhun will hide Herself in two nights’ time. You will reach the peak tonight. The flight back will be easy, for the winds blow down off the mountaintops into the valley. Two nights there, one night back and one night spare. You’re doing well, you were resourceful. I’m proud of you, little spirit.”*

*“There was a bird!”* waved the moth. *“A bird, while you slept! While you slept, I was nearly eaten. I might be resourceful, but I am not full of resources... The magic dust you blew upon me, is blown away.”*

*“I am your resource, familiar. I am with you, and will keep you safe. Magic takes many forms, and the strongest magic is merely knowing what to say, and how to say it. I do not speak the language*

*of birds, but I know the songs of the spirits inside them. They sing inside me, too.”*

*“I trust you.”*

*“Ha-hmm, and I you, louse-tricker.”*

Picking her way through the scrubby forest, guided by shafts of moonlight, the moth worked her way higher and higher. The air grew thin and cold, forcing her to flap faster, which kept her warm. Finally, she reached the treeline. Too high and too cold, the thick firs gave way to a few shrubs, dotting a craggy ridge. Stopping to rest her wings, the moth tried to decipher the blurry view. Ahead, she could see the ridgeline rise to a snowy peak, and distantly, between the curves of the range, great walls of blue ice. She shivered, and cast her gaze upwards. The bow of the moon was as clear as ever - just past its zenith. The moth fluttered upwards, positioned herself beneath it and felt for a current to bear her higher. In the firs, a pale shadow watched.

The moth climbed. Hours flowed by, and in her focus, she did not notice them. The open sky had lifted her spirits. She fluttered a circuitous route, carried in wide arcs by the air currents. On one, she was borne suddenly high, and saw the mountains drop away beneath her. Beyond them lay a vast expanse of icy water - the liquid core of a dying glacier. His ancient walls, immense, containing the lake, rose above the valley's end and leaned upon its sides. In deep dreams, it is said he travelled far, across millennia, and had many children - rivers, valleys, whole mountain ranges. Now, at last, the glacier lay in the arms of a mountain, melting. It was tall, and utterly frozen. To the moth's poor vision, its thin peak blurred away into the sky. A spire, with tall cliffs and steep wind-carved slopes. Its top was alone

above the clouds, and upon it stood a squat, domed tower. She relaxed her feelers and let the wind carry her, proud. The shrike struck her easily.

Claws slammed into her back, and her wings were forced closed. She tumbled, and the bird dove after her with a victorious trill. All she could hear was wind whipping through her fur as she fell. One wing wasn't opening. The other did, and she spiralled like a falling leaf. A black beak stabbed the nearby air, and she flapped her good wing as hard as she could. She couldn't sense the ground - Her feelers were loose in the wind, blowing into her eyes. The shrike snapped open its wings above her, rose for a split-second, steadied its aim, then - with a *chriiip* - dove claw-first after the moth.

All of the moth's fur stood on end, and she began to tremble as the claws closed to snatch her - but even as they did, a spark snapped between the moth and the claws, and the wizard's voice crackled into the air. "HARK!" he thundered, and the shrike drew away in fright.

"HARK!

To me, spirits of the wind, the mountain!

Raise your voices!"

The bird wheeled above, confused. The moth continued to fall, but around her the air buzzed. Her spiracles thrummed with the wizard's deep voice, and the cliffsides echoed his words.

"Forest-dweller, rodent-eater, morning-caller!

Where do you dwell in sleep?

What roost-rodents do you eat?"

Dreams rose within the shrike, ruffling its feathers and shaking its head. The moth spun on the wind, the wizard's voice spinning

with it, away from the bird. In a moment of rushing wind, the bird caught itself, gave a defiant *TWIIII* and dived for her meal.

“Hear me, shrike-shadow!  
Follow the inner river-flow,  
Be lost!”

The wizard’s voice boomed off the imminent rockface, and the wind screamed with it. The moth twisted her wing, angling for a tiny crack in the stone.

“Wake from the hunt! Take new instruction!  
Listen now, or face destruction!”

She slammed into the cliff, bounced into the crack, tumbled into darkness, and scraped to a stop. Above her, the bird screamed in frustration, and the wizard’s last words, more crackle than clear, were swallowed by the earth.

“Dream-walk with me!”

The moth lay still.

Far away, atop his windswept tower, the wizard pounded his staff upon the flagstones, and held it skywards. *Light flared within*, and he grit his teeth, focusing his burning will upon the message. Magi all across the Kalant valleys report seeing peacock feathers, desperately waving, reflected in their crystal orbs that night. The moth had no crystal orb. She was underground. His magic could not reach her.

Lhun sank below the horizon, and Sol’s bright face was clouded by falling snow.

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The moth was moving. She lay on her back in the darkness and felt her antennae drag along the ground underneath her. She tried to feel around with them, but could only make them twitch. Murky

sleep took her, and though her spirit could have danced home to dreamland, she held fast to the mind of the moth - so as a troubled sleeper holds on to a meaningful dream. Later, she would remember the pattering, scratching sounds of many feet.

She woke in a warm place, where the air was thick with smells. Mustering her strength, she drew her feelers above her and groped for information. One wing was crumpled and her carapace had cracked along her side, but a strange stickiness - not her blood, something else, was sealing it closed. Her scroll case was still strapped to her back, though one of the straps was broken. Around her, the floor and walls were made of soft, porous stone, and buds of slimy fungus sprouted sporadically from them. She uncurled her long straw-mouth and took a sip of the slime.

*"Tasty,"* she thought to herself.

*"The Waker speaks!"* announced a voice in the scent of the air.

A cacophony of mixing instructions burst from the walls around her, in complete chaos. *"Worship! Flee! Collapse the tunnels! Feed her! Tear her legs off! Warriors! Healers!"*

The moth recoiled, and the scent-speech slowly crystallised into a single thought.

*"You are feared."* Then, *"I thank you for your gift. Feed from my farm, drink your fill. You are injured, but I will heal you."*

*"What... are you?"* waved the moth. Her scents only communicated pain.

*"You are safe, Waker."*

The moth tried to look around, but the darkness was absolute. She was very curious about the voice, and as her curiosity rose, it spoke again.

*“I am the many that are one. I am Awoken, and you are the Waker. Why am I?”*

The moth waved her feelers and scented the words... but nothing else. She was alone with the words, and the slime-food. She thought of the lice and their simple scent-words. This was... not simple. She wondered how many of her thoughts escaped as scents, and felt very vulnerable. *‘It thinks that I’m the wizard,’* thought the moth. *‘Maybe I should play along.’*

*“You will not trick me.”* stated the many-that-are-one.

*‘I’m a moth,’* thought the moth. *‘I was woken, like you... to carry a message. I’m a messenger.’*

*“You will not trick me. A messenger and a message-writer are workers inside a greater mind. I see you, Waker. You are like me. You are the many that are one.”*

The moth ruffled her fur and took a thoughtful drink of fungus-juice. *‘Ha-hmm, well, I’m just the messenger-part. I’m sorry to disappoint you.’*

There was another cacophonous response. Disappointment was on the air, but fear, also. Curiosity, and confusion. They rattled together into *“We are different. Inside me, workers carry messages, and many others answer. I speak with a hundred voices, and they are all my voice.”*

Fear grew within the moth, and awe. She wriggled her aching body to a wall, and felt for an exit in the dark. Her legs found small tunnels, too small for her. From the tunnels, the thoughts of the Woken Many flowed ceaselessly.

*“Yet I am not every voice. I ask myself why I exist, and I do not contain the answer. Yet... Together, we are a part of a greater*

*whole. I ask the greater whole... Why am I awake? Your messenger was woken to send a message. What is my role?"*

*'A good question for the Waker - But truly, I am not he. I cannot say.'*

*"You can send a message."*

*'No,' thought the moth. 'He cannot hear me so far underground, and my body is... hurt. I wonder if I will ever again see moonlight. Have you ever seen the Moon?'*

*"In your sleep you told us a great deal about that already." said the scents, curling in the dark cave. "Why am I awake? I sense some answer within you."*

*"He... I..." the moth scrambled for an answer, and her scent betrayed her.*

*"I will not be deceived. Deceit is the tool of a predator. What do you hide?" thought the scents aloud, and the walls of the cave trembled with the sound of marching feet. "I am..." the scents failed to crystallise then, and there was a bubbling-up of smaller thoughts, spilling over each other such that none could be discerned. "I am conflicted." The ants' words coiled and leapt through the air and the moth felt something move in the darkness. Many things.*

*"Eat the Waker!" Four red ants burst from the walls, and seized the moth's legs in their jaws. "Pull!" said their scents, and pull they did. The moth, panicking, struggled away - but two tugged upon her leg, and two upon her foot. "Listen!" came the call of other identical ants, pouring from the walls, and seizing the first ones - but it was too late! With a pop, the moth's foot was clipped off. She curled her leg beneath her and fell on her injured side. Ants swarmed over her*

and over each other. *“Answer me! End this!”* the one-that-is-many commanded.

*“It was...”* resolved the moth solemnly *“...an accident.”*

The ants shivered and swarmed in the dark cave. The moth shrank her legs around her body in fear. *“But... but... I am glad of your help! You have helped me in my role, my role which I can tell you more of!”* she begged. *“And perhaps, in doing so, discover yours! There is a man! A sad man! A sad man we can help, you and I.”*

The ants remained in discord, but many fled into the tunnels. Then from the tunnels - *“Tell me about the sad man.”*

*“Well, from what I’ve been told... he is very special, but does not know it, and in two days... oh dear. In some small amount of time, he will leave the city - leave all those he loves - to walk in the wilderness to the end of his days. Now, the Waker wants to help him, but does not know how! I seek the knowledge of a moon-mage, in a tower, near to this place.”*

*“This makes little sense. There is so much beyond me.”* replied the anthill. *“I ask you a question, and your answer does not come within you. It is a message from these men, and the men bear the messages of some city. Each works their purpose. We are all the workers of a Greater Mind. Together, we are thinking.”*

*“I’m not sure about that,”* said the moth, confused.

*“What do you know of the Greater Mind? What question does it ask? What is my purpose within it? Is there more that is hidden to me? To you?”*

*“Well, I’m not sure I know.”* admitted the moth. *‘I just have my simple message to deliver... And if I do not do this, why am I*

*awake?"*

*"You do not know."* said the scent.

The dream-spirit within the moth reached for a distant memory, but it slipped away. *'I heard a voice, singing... and was curious... The singer, he needed help. I suppose I offered.'*

*"I share this with you. In this, we are one. Before waking..."* The ants strained to represent this idea, but persisted. *"In the dream, there was a question, and to answer was to wake."*

*"Then you will help me?"* asked the moth. *'Because I need help. Both the Waker-part, and the messenger-part... Well, to all I've seen... I think all the parts need help. I don't know what the One That is All needs... but oh, its parts all need help. At least, this one does. I will not make it home, but perhaps I can make it to the tower. Take me to the surface. I can walk.'*

*"I know of the stone nest on the mountaintop. My long paths reach there, and along them I have moved... morsels... from there to my insides, where you are. I can carry you back along those paths. I do this not to be kind. No, you and I are both ants inside a Greater Anthill. Yet, your master is also an ant. So too is his friend. By helping you, I help the Whole."*

With that, a torrent of ants spilled from the walls, and the one-that-is-many hefted the moth onto its backs, up and away... through the tunnels, out onto the snowy crag, where boulders rose like canyon walls above them. The moon was high in the sky already, razor-thin. The battered moth folded her wings in sorrow. Her message would not be in time. The priest would leave. It could not be helped. *"I'm sorry!"* She waved to the wizard. *"I have failed."*

*“Oh, my dearest moth,”* replied the wizard’s familiar voice. *“I am glad you are safe. Worry not.”*

*“I am being taken to the tower,”* waved the moth. *“In the tower, I think, my journey ends. We have tried our best, you and I, wizard...”*

*“No, mountain-climber. It is not the end. You are a dream-spirit! You live in the silver roots of the world! You have been a wonderful moth, but when that time passes, you will be home. Worry not for the troubles of the waking world. They are not yours.”*

*“An anthill says otherwise, spirit-singer.”* wiggled the moth. *“The anthill says all our troubles are shared... and if I can, I’ll share your troubles.”*

*“An anthill? Ha-hmm... You approach the warding stones, and grow hard to hear...”* Indeed, the wizard’s voice began to fade *“...But you tell the mage all you know, ha-hmm. She’ll know best.”*

The stream of ants followed a well-worn trail through the rocks for many hours of marching. Over ice and snow, the ants carried the injured moth. Eventually, they came to a stone shrine, at which the one-that-is-many searched for crumbs. Past the shrine was a small plateau, which wore a spiked crown. Silver swords, with many points, rose from the stone. The ward-blades *glimmered* with more moonlight than shone upon them, and at their bases were dead things... rabbits, birds, mice, buried in the snow. The one-that-is-many reached for them. Within the ring was a squat brick tower. No lights lit its windows. *“I will leave you here,”* thought the living anthill. *“Go forth, spirit. We will meet again, when we wake from wakefulness.”*

The moth waved a dubious goodbye and wobbled, on stiff legs, towards the tower.

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Finding no entrance she could fit through, she scaled the wall. Dragging her footless leg, she sought a window and found a great crystal lens, at an angle, reflecting the Stars. At its brass rim, she spied a crawl-hole. But before she entered, she looked out over the valley. She could see - through a hole in the high clouds - the last slim moonlight filtering down on many hills and smaller mountains below her. She thought about all the creatures like her, who looked up at the Moon with wonder. She imagined them. Disparate, but with each heart containing a piece of that love. She tried to picture the form that all those pieces would make, when combined. *“The many that is one,”* she wiggled to herself, satisfied. *“I have a strong spirit. I might not be so hale and healthy any more, but my heart is true, and truth has guided me well. I’m glad the wizard had faith in me, when all of mine was gone.”*

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The astronomer’s tower smelled of dried herbs, oil and dust. Before morning came, the moth had explored it thoroughly. She had found the mage deep within it, snoring heavily. The floor beneath her was a leaf-litter of loose pages, leaves, and clothes. They had all been flattened into each other to form a soft nest, and the mage was wrapped in furs. A large cauldron lay in a cold fireplace. Strewn about the tower, the moth had found hammers, and blacksmith’s tongs, as well as finer tools - jeweller’s tweezers, glass cutters and the like. Their children were about the place too: Springwork toys, and strange, delicate instruments. Most impressive was a system of brass cogs and axles, in the highest room. They manipulated a huge glass

eye, which looked up at the sky through a crystal lens. Starlight was bent within the eye, and spun out - like unravelled yarn - in threads of many colours. These rays played upon the walls, where markings had been made. Observations, measurements. Even this room was a mess of discarded books and ink-pots. The moth found no way to wake the astronomer, so sat on her pillow until the sun rose, stroking her feelers over the mage's wide nose. Her skin wore wrinkles like tree-bark, and her hair was thin and white. '*She must be very old,*' thought the moth, who would not make it to old age.

When the sun did rise, the astronomer woke with a grunt and a crinkling of her nose. Her opening eyes were cloudy green, and their pupils grew in surprise - then shrunk down to pin-pricks, focused wholly on the guest. "Am I dreaming?" muttered the mage, "Or are you wearing a saddle?"

The moth fluttered in front of her face, and she rubbed her eyes. She looked at the moth with wonder, and a lunatic smile spread across her face. "Where is your rider, saddle-moth?"

*"Not a saddle but a pack, lady,"* said the moth. *"I carry a message from the peacock-wizard of Hatsi."*

"The peacock-wizard!" beamed the moon-mage. "Hah! Oh! What does he want?"

She hauled her spindly body out of the nest, and began to pace and laugh. As the moth, landing on her shoulder, waved and wiggled the story of her journey, the astronomer started a fire and began to cook her breakfast. She nodded, smiled, and gasped along with the moth's tale.

*"...and now, all is lost."* the moth finished. *"To return tonight is impossible... There is no moon to guide me, and my wing is*

*crumpled. Perhaps you have... some idea?"*

"Some idea!" laughed the witch hoarsely. "Oh sweet moth, I've had so many. I've built fires, I've left hidden messages in the writing they take from me, I've even dream-walked... But my isolation is enforced. No replies get through, only the flies, the ants... and you! My first conversation partner in oh, many years. The mountain-folk leave food, and take my work down to my captors... but they do not speak, for fear of the wards."

*"How awful,"* waved the moth. *"I cannot imagine even one year of silence."*

"Oh! Hah! I talk to myself plenty!" said the mage. "I'm a strong woman, I can be happy enough with that. I am hale, and healthy, and my heart is true. I have faith in myself. I'll get by."

*"The wizard used the same words,"* wiggled the moth.

"Oh, as a youngun, he would groan when I made him repeat them, but as a man... Well, how do you judge him?"

*"Caring. Ha-hmm, sentimental, maybe. At least, so far as his priest is concerned. And me - he has cared for me."*

"His priest?" she asked, and her green eyes opened as wide as the moon. "I will hear more of this, doubtless. I have questions." She settled into a cushion that lay on the floor and blew steam from a large mug of herbal tea. "But first, about your letter." She set the tea down, lifted the moth in front of her big eyes and delicately, using only the tips of two tweezer-like fingernails, opened the tiny satchel and unrolled the tiny letter.

"Hmm, hmm, hmm," hummed the astronomer. "Moonstone glasses... Now there's a pretty thing." She scrolled a fingernail along the parchment and stopped halfway. "There's the problem, silly boy.

The weave must be aligned just so, to the right *colour*. He has not filtered out the thoughts of plants, and rivers... He will need a second wand... always crochet instead of knitting, hmm. I'll sort this out. In the meantime, here -" she spilled some tea into the saucer, deposited the moth upon it and carried her to a high, dark shelf. The tea was sweet, and the moth drank gladly. As she drank, the moon-mage sang a reedy tune.

*"Through chamomile steam, sweet and mild.*

*Solace for this injured child.*

*Lavender's grace and restful charm*

*Quiets pain, waters calm."*

The moth felt the steam tingle over her body and she snorted bubbles into the tea. Her damaged wing ached. Suddenly exhausted, she laid her feelers gently on the rim of the saucer and slept.

Through her dreams, she heard the song continue, sometimes quiet, sometimes loud. So long as she heard the song, she was bound to her mind, and did not wander home. In her dream, she lay inside a flower. She felt slow, and heavy, and hungry. While the astronomer tinkered away, hunched over a workbench, the moth dreamed of her time as a caterpillar. She wondered what her next form would be.

When she came to, the room had been rearranged. Tidied, then dirtied again with scattered tools and wire. Her wing was gone, and in its place was a sail of delicate silver foil. On her injured leg, she wore a new foot, and she stood up, finding it stable. Beneath her, the mage was scribbling notes into the air, while a tiny crystal quill mimicked her writing, copying instructions onto a moth-sized scroll. "All the colours of the rainbow, and then some..." she muttered,

“beyond the sight of our eyes, but not beyond our sight...” The moth opened her silver wing, and fanned them slowly, stretching her back.

Everything ached, but she felt she could trust it, and dropped from the shelf - flapping weakly, she aimed for the mage’s shoulder, found she could glide... and swooped into the back of her head, tangling in her coils... climbing, fluttering, apologising. The old woman laughed, and gently plucked the moth, held her and smiled. “There you go, sweetwing,” she said. “But you should be resting, not flying. You will need your strength.”

*“I should be learning”* waved the moth from her hand.

“Oh?”

*“I was told you are a moon-mage...”*

“Among other things, yes.”

*“I felt She had a message for me, but I could not understand it. What song does the Moon sing? Tell me all you know of Her Majesty,”* pleaded the moth, feelers spread wide.

“Oh, there is too much to tell...” she said, but told much regardless. At times, she spoke as an old exile does - with unfamiliarity - and at times, the moth heard the voice of a wise teacher, filled with an ever-young passion. While the moth learned much of Lhun’s mystic ways, the more she learned, the more curiosity opened up within her. No reason or lore could explain Her beauty to the moth. Lhun does not sing the clear songs of the Stars. Her light is everchanging, irregular... but there is a divine logic. To the moth, this was perfectly clear, but she could not articulate it. There was some truth, perpetually beyond the reach of magecraft, but contained within the heart of every moth.

*“This reminds me of our wizard’s problem,”* wiggled the moth.

“Wizards... Typical! Typical to bring magecraft to a question of the heart. It is rarely wise, and often catastrophic. He has always loved that priest, and I suppose it has always gone unsaid. I can show him what he wishes to see... the light that flows twixt each mind...”

“*Success!*” waved the moth.

The woman sighed. “...but it would only show them what they already know, and have not said. How is it that these long years have passed, and the two are still unwed?”

“*Well, when I look up at the moon...*” pondered the moth, “...*I cannot describe to you what I see. But if you could see what I see... with your own eyes, perhaps you would understand.*”

“Perhaps.”

The mage rose, and dusted off her apron. Sparkling dust filled the air, and the moth let out a tiny sneeze through her spiracles.

“Behold!” said the mage, with a familiar flourish. Produced in her hand was a tiny, tiny pair of flight goggles. “The thought-emmanations of mankind, isolated and displayed. A prototype!” Leather straps, with minute rivets, held two half-domes of polished crystal in place. They were a transparent white-blue, and glinted smoothly with a hidden shade.

“*For me?*” she waved.

“It is Lhun’s night of hiding - How else will you find your way home?”

“*There is no replacing moonlight.*” she said gravely.

“It will be a test of the wizard’s theory,” smiled the astronomer.

Working carefully, with deft nails, the astronomer fastened the goggles to the moth’s head. Through them, the world was a messy spill of fractal colours. She sensed the air with her feelers, adjusting

to the new sight. From the old woman, *a golden tendril extended to the moth.*

*“There is something...”* she waved.

*It was not alone. Spindles of light shone from her forehead, like a crown.* The mage replaced the scroll-case on her back, and walked with her outside, holding her aloft.

“What do you see?” asked the moon-mage.

Above them, the moonless light was a solid black. Meagre stars dotted an unnavigable void that dizzied the moth. *The lights reached out from the mage, but were severed at the boundary-wards. Darkness pulsed from them... and beyond them, nothing.*

“I will lift you past the wards,” said the mage with a tremble. “And then it will be goodbye. I thank you, spirit, for your journey. It’s not easy being old, being alone. To connect again, to the World, to my old friend, to you - my new friend... it cannot be repaid.”

*“You have told me of Lhun,”* waved the moth. *“More than any moth has ever known.”*

“I will dream of you.” said the astronomer, and lifted the moth beyond the barrier.

The valley erupted with light. Spilling from every cabin, pooling in the hamlets and towns, rising like spiked towers, stretching from node-to-node. Awe and curiosity rose within the moth. With it, her wings lifted her off the astronomer’s hand and into the night.

Beneath her, she saw braided light rise from an anthill and all its ants, reaching up towards her, and connecting. Wind swept off the glacial lake, and blew the moth away, down the mountainside. Her silver wing snapped open, and she sailed away on the night air. She followed a ray from her chest into the woods, and saw a sleeping

shrike. This ray was a different *colour... colder*. Deeper in the forest, a *simple orange flame* dimly reached for her from a pile of wooden refuse. Inside, the woodlice signed simple tales to each other of a brave winged louse. This, too, lit her path, but she did not need it.

Far to the South, through the snow and the forest and the valley, a Star burned amongst the mountain peaks. As if the Gods had come down from Celestia and taken seat in the valley, the city of Hatsi rose like a spiderweb-sunrise. Between every person passed a thin glowing string. One reached out, across the miles, for the moth, and she heard the wizard's voice again... It came from a tower that blazed like a signal fire, wherein the priest and the wizard waited.

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