

Touched by Dreams

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Hike to Nowhere

You said you would be back
Before sunset, but now
You start to regret those words
As the sun descends towards

The horizon. That border of sky
And land, you once said you would reach it,
Promising the impossible.
Shoulders sink, as the cliffs breathe
A soft sigh when you remember why

You couldn't seek that vastness.

Eyes open, the world embracing you
You breathe the wind, know the foliage.
Stroking the cliffside, the rough smoothness
So clear, yet so fleeting.

Next time, you say.
You'll love the world before it's too late.

Scent of a Dream

Quiet morning, dark outside.
Unclear dreams, vivid yet
Hazy. A cold fog, pierced by
Starlight and moonbeams.

Half a second before you wake up,
That smell. What is it

That brings up such a memory, your body
Startles itself from sleep. There is
No possible way
You could ever know
A moonbeam's scent

Though, for but a moment,
You know.

What the Stars Took

The sun set behind the shattered mountains, the crumbling jags casting sharp shadows over the windswept plains. The view was not so different from my own house up on the cliffs, but this place had a special significance. The rock formed a bowl in the land here, where the winds would pool and swirl violently before flinging themselves upwards – up into the endless sea of stars.

The hike was a long one, even if one cut through the ruins to get here. My old mentor, who had once tried to help me learn the art of magic, told me that the ruins were of a city built by our species' precursors to be a place of researching astronomy and spellcrafting. When I asked, he told me that the city fell due to the leaders' ambition and lack of control over their own power. That was the seed of doubt that began to grow within me, both doubt of my own abilities and doubt of the stars themselves.

Not much could grow here, save for a few kinds of short grass and a couple errant flowers, their roots gripping desperately at the sandy earth beneath them. I distanced myself from the flowers as I paced around, looking for the most stable place to stand. Gravel started to replace rock, sharper points poking at my tail as it dragged over the ground, claws clacking against the harder surfaces. Finally, I found it: a small platform of rock, firm and unmoving. Probably a piece of the crags up above that had gotten itself embedded in the ground ages ago, I recognized it as soon as I stood upon it – decades ago, the one who tried to teach me stood right here.

That memory burned bright in my mind despite my efforts to focus only on my task. Both then and now, I raised my hands up to the sky, mirroring the movements of my mentor. Both then and now, my hands trembled as my mind wandered. Back then, I was young. I had everything to live for, and nothing to lose. Thinking myself ready, I had taken up the study of astral sorcery. My mentor – his face wizened, yet kind – had eagerly accepted me as a student. I was clad in silky robes, not as soft as my teacher's, but more than close enough over my skin. That soft fabric draped over my scales, sliding over me like water; my mentor watching with a peaceful smile as I eagerly pored over star charts.

My mentor was a kobold, the kind with hard scales and a round snout like myself. He would often laugh when I made a minor mistake and began to apologize, saying that I was just like him when he was but a hatchling. He spent long hours teaching me to draw star charts, memorize the positions of stars based on the seasons, and practice the movements needed for spellcasting.

When the time had finally come for my first channeling, I could barely contain my excitement. My future stretched ahead of me, my mind filled with visions of my mentor and I drafting new star charts, peering deeper and deeper into the cosmos as compatriots of the astral arts. My channeling would be a momentous occasion – letting the starlight occupy a small portion of my very self – but it would be just a preview to the sensation of spellcasting, a tiny mote of the power I would have rushing through me in due time.

My hands trembled in the present as I remembered my past – back then I hadn't thought about what giving oneself to the stars could mean until it was time I had to commit. Just as we'd studied, focus on what you want to keep, let the stars take just a bit of what you didn't. Like pebbles dropped in a brimming glass of water, I would let my jealousy, my anger, my unfounded

fears spill over the edge, and in so doing would give myself access to full potential. Though, at that moment, I hesitated. A fear I had refused to recognize gripped me so quickly that the breath was pressed from my lungs. Despite my mentor's assurances, my mind frantically brought up all the horrible possibilities of what could go wrong. If I gave too much, I could return home unrecognizable as myself – I could hurt someone I care for.

I curled up as I remembered the heart wrenching expression on my mentor's face. He looked to be on the verge of tears after he heard my explanation of what happened; disappointment would have been far less painful. We walked home together quietly, him promising that after we trained and prepared more, I could try again in a month or so. However, I was hot-blooded in my youth. That fear that gripped me made me resent my mentor, even to fear him. I began to imagine him as a conspirator with the stars, trying to trick me into letting them take control of my body. I started to avoid the poor old man, even when he came knocking on my door a few months after my incident. I could barely hold in the tears as I heard his scratchy, frayed old voice.

“... My dear pupil. Even if you no longer believe in yourself, I know well how much promise you hold. I'm leaving a note for you here, for you to open if ever you find yourself ready to try again.” A few minutes of complete silence passed between us, before he shakily spoke again.

“I'm sorry I have failed you, my pupil.”

I opened the door a full hour after I was sure he had left, to find a message on a piece of parchment, neatly rolled up and tied with a piece of string.

Without reading it, I threw it into my fireplace.

Regret instantly filled my mind as tears lined my eyes. I shrieked in horror at what I had done, watching the flame eagerly lick the message, burning the ink beyond recognition as I grasped for anything that was left. In the end, I was left with charred, burnt fingers and a pile of ash. I never found out what was written in that message, nor did I see my mentor again.

Shaking on the craggy rock after that recollection, I stared off into the distance before slowly wiping my eyes. I was wearing my mentor's old robe – I didn't even attend his funeral all those years ago, but his mourning family had insisted that I keep it. In hindsight, if I had come up with an excuse good enough to justify my refusal, my regret over the years would have been far worse. The fabric was scratchy and frayed with age, more of a distraction than everyday clothes, but it was once his. That was enough of a reason to wear it. Besides, when I hid my eyes behind the hood I looked almost exactly like him. By now, I was getting close to his age, back when he taught me.

I took a deep breath and tried to ground myself, standing up and mirroring what I remembered of his movements once more. I clenched my eyes, my jaw, my whole body as I stood on the rock, trying not to feel the dust blowing around my feet, particles in the wind stinging my legs. The scratchy, stiff robe brushing over my scales. I breathed, my body kept tense as I focused on the absence of sensation. I thrust my arms skyward, fingers splayed out, not feeling the rush of air, nor the nip and sting of the dust despite the growling winds. I continued to breathe, filling my lungs with cool air, reaching out with my mind.

Tiny motes of starlight started to dance over my fingers, little flakes of embers tingling at my fingertips. As I felt its warmth start to spread, I gritted my teeth and did not recoil. A warm feeling began to flow into my fingers, then to my hands, and to my arms. I opened my eyes and

gasped, my fingertips aglow with little wispy streams, like a comet's tail. I could see bright starlight flowing downwards through my arms, making them glow from the inside. I couldn't help but laugh as joyful tears started to well at the edges of my eyes, the warmth and power of the stars spreading throughout my body.

The feeling was intoxicating. I knew that I only needed a little bit of this light within me for a beginner's purposes, but it was too late for that now. I wanted the stars to envelop me, to burn away the pain and regret of my many years. The starlight pooled in my chest, filling my body with the warmth of distant suns, coursing through me like a river as I finally realized what had been holding me back for as long as I knew – myself.

Song of the Cosmos

Listen carefully, on a cloudless night.
If the wind is calm, you can hear
The stars singing,
Crystalline voices ringing out.

The void bellowing silently about them,
They cry, shining out
Their light forming islands
Within the deep astral sea.

The voice of thousands,
Millions of years past as their light
Finally reaches our eyes,
Voices finally reaching our ears.

Their alluring lines, a play put on
For those who dream:
“Then fill my glass with tears, my love
And let us drink deep of your sorrow.”

Laid to Rest

Within the library of memory, the Dreamer sits at a desk and begins their study. Its body formed of smooth, polished black granite, its fingers tipped with fountain pen nibs, its head a clock of aged wood and tarnished brass that whirrs and clicks every half hour. Other beings walk within the building, each with a unique form of their own choosing, but none dare bother each other. This room, filled shelf to shelf with old, dusty tomes, is completely silent save for the ticking of the clock, the scratch of pen nib fingertips turning pages, and a soft whirr every half hour.

The Dreamer sighs as it reads over a tome bound in scratchy, frayed old cloth. A story of an old master and an eager student, and a message forever lost. A slight rumble can be heard as it adjusts its stone body, reading over the pages in the cold, sweet moonlight. As the hands of its clock turn and click, the being hesitantly reaches a fingertip to a nearby inkwell. The Librarian here certainly frowns upon visitors making changes to the tomes, but there are times when one simply cannot help oneself.

Spilling a drop of dark ink upon the table, the being writes a new first verse to the tale:

“Just before I jolted awake, I had a dream more vivid than I had in years. I saw my mentor’s smiling, compassionate face as he held out a parchment note, neatly tied up with string. Tears in my eyes, I opened it and read the words written within.

‘Whether now or years from now, I dearly hope you can find the strength to attempt your training once again. Go to where I first taught you, and I will meet you there if I can. Even if I cannot, please know that you always have my full support, my dear pupil.’

As I jolted awake, I sat in shock for a moment before packing for a hike, making sure to don his old robes.”

The Dreamer of course had no way of knowing what was originally written on the note, but this was a good enough guess. Its clock whirring in a way that almost sounded like a chuckle, it set the book aside for the ink to dry as it scoured the shelves for the next tome it would go through. A life was changed that day, and the being could only hope it was for the better.