Quick, A Portal Opened! **Britnie Hocking | 7:00pm - 9:00pm**

In the eerie half light between night and day - it wakes from something akin to sleep. The blue of the portal lingers as it begins to wake and stretch. It's muscles begin to wake, the cells of its tiny, translucent, scaled wings cinch together and it wails in pain as it shakes from its old skin. Shedding the layers of feather and scale as it cranes to see the light of the moon fading. The morning edges its way into existence and, with it, the primordial desire to eat. Standing on its stronger legs now, it arches to sky, outstretching it;s body finally.

It's wiry and small, almost skeletal, the size of a Kowari. This small, marsupial-like creature doesn't have skin or fur, more like a combination of both. It doesn't "sit" well on its skin, it's more like prickles on a wrinkly onion. It is patchy and underneath looks more like scales that have turned in on themselves. The way it moves is disjointed but mesmirising, skuling in and out of the shrubbery and bending around the trunks of trees. It's wiry and thin "wings" are nearly invisible, except for the glint of the light as it refracts and bends as it moves. These "wings" which reach from its back down to its tail look like old leaves, with veins of black and blue, they look like they would break in a second if it were to take flight and from the way it hops around, it isnt seeming to desire to fly. The tail is long and black and gives its stabilty as it jumps and moves faster now towards town. It can smell what it wants, senses it like there is string tied to it's long, pointed teeth, pulling it along to the destination.

The animal's desire to feed, the intrinsic need to survive leads us today, to a small house in the bush. Set back from the road, ivy-covered walls and warm fireplaces. Bricks and mortar and love and story telling and lullabies by moon light. This innate knowledge of what it means to consume and feed brings us to our heroine. She has the soul of a warrior, the heart of a traveller, the spirit of a story-teller… and she has her first wobbly tooth.

Princess Olivia** wakes to the sound of something breaking, she cant tell if its something close or far away, she can't even tell if its something inside or outside of her own mind. Maybe it was a dream?

She looks at the crack between the curtains, and can't see if the sun is up yet. Although her glassy eyes and the tingle of the warm of the blanket against her toes tells her she doesn't think it's time yet for the world to be awake. The scent of her blankets, like lavender and clean clothes beckons her to close her eyes for a little while longer. Even her five year old brain knows it will be a blink of an eye before the world will descend back into the the chaos that is the start of the day…

Something else inside her stirs though, she feels a pull, like a piece of rope being pulled in water to see what the sleeping world has to offer today. Tonight? She doesn't yet really know the difference but she knows she is living somewhere in between.

She sits up in bed, pink and blue curls bounce off her shoulders as she rubs her eyes , removing whatever was left of the dreams that the sandman left behind when he lulled her into worlds of make-believe and mermaids the night before. The coloured hair had been a request of hers that she had been dismayed against for many months before her parents finally gave in. Grown ups often think we won't remember the thing we ask for if they say maybe for long enough. She thought to herself as she asked the final time before finally

being granted the yes she had waited so long for. They say next week a lot to me, she thinks, i dont know how long a week is beut it feels like forever.

The sound of scratching and something like a fly stuck inside beating against a window breaks her train of thought. The sound is coming from the window to the kitchen. All the doors are closed and locked - as they are every other night but something about this in between feels magical. And magical things don't listen to locks, she ponders as she pulls herself free from the tuck-ins she got from mumma last night.

"Stars shining right above you…" as she drifted off to sleep. The lull of her voice pulls her so slumber like nothing else. Eyelids heavy she falls to sleep. Her mummas chair by the bed as she traces her face over the space between her eyebrows over and over until her breathing feels heavy.

Tip toes feel warm against the cold wooden floors she tries so hard not to squeak as she sneaks out past the rooms until she reach the kitchen, a bookshelf filled with plants sits in the void between rooms and she uses it to hide her body as she peers her eyes around the corner until she has full view of the noise-maker in front of her.

The creature has found the pantry and is darting somehow between the glass jars the fill the shelves, as it peels itself from behind half-full mason jars of herbs and wholewheats, it almost disappears in the half light meeting the glass until it stops suddenly. Princess Olivia takes a quick breath as it turns it head towards her hiding place, pulling back into the shadow, hoping her silence is enough as it sniffs the air. Turning its black eyes to the ceiling and closing them, it skulks forward. The bones in ts skeletal frame protruding as it saunters, seeking its prey.

It continues moving forward now, it's moved from the pantry to the benchtop, pushing glassed and discarded jars as it moves, threatening unknowingly to wake the rest of the sleeping household if a glass was to shatter. Catching sight of the animal, the pull feels stronger now. The little warrior take a deep breath and make a decision. Breathing in and setting her chin out, she steps out from the safety of the shadows as the creatures moves again. As she rounds the corner, she comes face to face with the snarling marsupial as it steps the edge of the counter. It jumps suddenly to the kitchen stool, grasping it precariously with hind limbs as it sits to look Olivia in the eyes, and for a moment she thinks it might just be more scared of her than her of it's wild, snarling albeit small figure.

They stand and stare in stalemate for what feels like a million years before Princess Olivia dares to move. Taking a step forward, it retreats immediately, the scales on it's back standing up higher that they already were. She notices its slight frame and thinks perhaps things that are hungry usually arent as angry as they seem. Her mum calls it hangry and it probably makes sense to grown ups.

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I*somehow we communicate here and know what each other want - cutely and in a heartfelt way -still keeping it scary-ish?
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Moving slowly she grabs for the apple from the fruit bowl situated on the counter, bringing it to her lips, she breathes deeply before opening her mouth to sink her teeth in. Taking a bite, she feels the familiar twinge of the loose tooth pulling against her gum, this time, instead of transitioning to a less painful position, she completes the bite and as she pushes her teeth further into the sour/sweet flesh of the fruit, the loose tooth pulling free from her gum as she chews. The creature on the chair beside her starts to twitch and dart in place, transitioning between invisible translucence and flourishing opacity, sensing the feed is near. Princess Olivia opens her mouth, half chewed apple spilling free as she empties the contects into her hand. Presenting it to the creature she watches as every scale on its body prickles, patiently awaiting its prize. She quickly tips the apple shards and the tooth amongst on it on the counter. She turns for a moment to reach for a cloth to wipe her hand in in that second, the creature lurches forward to snap up the whole selection of masticated goodness. Apples and all, the creatures snaps up the tooth from the counter, she hears bones grinding between its own teeth as she turns quickly back around and jumps back from the feasting animal, hoping it does not want for more “bones” before they are ready to be taken.

As if hearing her thoughts again, they immediately answer her.

The bones must be given freely, we make not take what is not given willingly.

Eyes meeting, they stare at one another once more, another deep breath from our valiant heroine and then the change begins to take hold. The creature, twitching again but almost shaking now, sheds its old, rotting skin like a snake, the coat-like covering that forms in its place is shiny and smooth like silk as it moves in the morning light that now shines through the crack in the venetians. Another shake and the scales that were once the main aspect of its skin, come free, shiny and golden as they gluten on the counter top. Taking a final, valiant stride forward, it unfurls its wings. Which, like its skin have been shed and regrown. The wiry and leaf-like appearance is gone now and has been replaced by an iridescent veil, like thin satin, pulled tight over a frame. It take a step forward and leaps from the chair, the wings now guiding its glide downwards and its tail, now silky and wet-black, like a snake, guide it towards the front door.

Princess Olivia takes a step forward. “Will I see you again?” She asks as the morning light starts to stream through the front curtains too. “Friend?”

On all fours again, it turns to face her, *I will see you again,* it’s voice rattles her brain once again.

“When-” she goes to say to the morning light as she heard a splinter and crack once more, that she cannot confirm nor deny, that anyone else could hear. Before she hears a voice behind her. She wheels around to see the vision of her bleary-eyed mother, stretching in her pyjamas, to greet the morning, “you’re up early nugget.” she sighs, looking down at her daughter.

“My tooth came out.” Princess Olivia states, pulling her lips down to she the missing item.

“Oh it did!” Mumma exclaims, leaning closer, still tired from interrupted sleep, “and the tooth fairy left you a coin!” she looks confusedly, assuming someone else stepped in in the middle of the night to perform the changeover, at the coin on the counter.

All Princess Olivia sees though is the small scales, discarded by her dawn friend with the scary smile, squashed together to make something almost round.

“I guess they did.” she smiles as she climbs up the chair as mumma goes for the toaster. She looks out the window, wondering the next time will be that she will see her friend the tooth fairy.

In the distance it as put between the house and itself, the creature too, turns to look at the house, still hidden amongst trees and ivy covered walls, but more visible now than hours before when it found it’s way by hunger only. Looking back at the window its human stares out of now, it stretches its wings once more in the warmth of the sunshine before curling up under a small shrub and hearing the crack once more as the cool blue light opens and welcomes it in to sleep.

**as per the request of the small child this story is inspired by.