

THE DREAM-KEEPER'S ECHOES OF HOLLOW GLEN

THE NIGHT PRESSED in around Earvyn, an aspiring artistic soul, who laid heavy with the weight of unanswered questions. As an artist for most of his life, he couldn't understand why, in his aging later years, he was still struggling with issues that should have been confronted in his youth, when he was just beginning his creative journey. His studio, once a sanctuary, now felt stifling. The scent of resin, paint and turpentine, which used to bring him joy — much like the fragrance of frankincense, myrrh, — now clung to the walls, like ghosts of unfinished visions. Brushes lay abandoned, sketches half-formed — expressions of truth just beyond his grasp. He had spent countless hours searching for the essence of something vast and unspoken, but his hands couldn't shape what his heart struggled to define. Restlessness gnawed at him, and the confines of his studio felt too small, too rigid, unable to contain the swirling questions within. So, he left — stepping into the cool, unlit night, drawn by something unseen, something waiting beyond the reach of reason.

As he wandered from the familiarity of his workspace, the air shifted, carrying with it the deep, earthy breath of the Hollow Glen. Shadows stretched long beneath the towering trees, their gnarled limbs entwining like the fingers of ancient storytellers whispering secrets to the wind. The ground beneath his feet softened, damp with the night's quiet weeping, and the hush of the Glen deepened, wrapping around him like a velvet shroud. Moonlight filtered through the dense canopy in fractured beams, illuminating drifting motes of silver mist that wove between the trunks like restless spirits seeking their way home. The air was thick with the perfume of damp moss and unseen blooms, a fragrance both grounding and otherworldly. Here, beneath the sheltering boughs, the questions that had tormented him seemed to quiet, their urgency dissolving into the hush of the land.

Earvyn moved forward, guided by instinct more than intent until he reached the base of an ancient tree — a sentinel of the ages, its roots sprawling like a great beast at rest. With a weary exhale, he lowered himself against its sturdy bark, his fingers brushing the rough ridges carved by time's patient hand. One twisted root rose just enough to cradle his head, its surface softened by a thick cushion of moss, embracing him with the warmth of a well-loved pillow. As he surrendered to its gentle hold, the world around him softened. The whispering leaves, the sighing wind, the rhythmic pulse of the earth — each wove into the lullaby of the Hollow Glen. His breathing slowed, his eyelids grew heavy, and as the last conscious thought slipped from his mind, the world around him blurred, shifting at the edges.

And then, the dream began. It was here, in this dreamlike realm where the earth hummed with forgotten whispers, that four unlikely creatures found themselves drawn together. They emerged from their separate paths, each one a fragment of the world's untamed soul. Solmir, the Glass Serpent, slithered with liquid grace, his translucent form bending moonlight into fractured rainbows. Brindle, the Woolen Jack, a jackrabbit, shuffled forward, his tangled fleece gathering twigs and leaves like a traveling forest. Igroth, the Ember-back Toad, flickered with the embers of his own inner fire, casting a warm, wavering glow upon the damp earth. And Vestra, the Stone-Winged Moth, heavy with the weight of her own doubts, moved in slow, deliberate steps, her slate-colored wings barely stirring the mist around her. Together, they stepped into the unknown — drawn forward by the same quiet pull that had brought Earvyn here.

Legend had it that the Hollow Glen had a peculiar way of calling those who least expected it, pulling them from their wandering paths and binding them with unseen threads. Fate had woven its own design, stitching together four creatures as different as the elements themselves. And though none of them had sought such companionship, neither could they turn away from the force that had drawn them here, a force that defied

all logic and reason.

Solmir, the Glass Serpent, was a sight to behold. A ribbon of shifting light, he coiled around the low-hanging branches of an ancient elm, his translucent body bending the moon's glow into shimmering rainbows. His form was both beautiful and unnerving — his skin was neither truly solid nor truly liquid, an ever-changing reflection of the world around him. Some called him "Gardener," though even he had forgotten who first placed that name upon him as if it had been stitched into his very being without his consent.

Solmir was a creature of logic, of precision, of careful detachment. He did not speak in riddles, nor did he waste words on sentiment. Instead, he observed, calculating the patterns of the world with an intellect as sharp as the cold river stones. He could see through layers unseen — through the roots of things, the hidden threads of intent — but he never quite knew what it meant to feel them. Emotion, to him, was a puzzle he had yet to solve. And so, he watched, curling himself into the questions he could not answer.

With each step, Brindle, the Woolen Jack, gathered the forest upon his back as if the land itself sought refuge in his thick, matted fleece. Twigs wove themselves into his wool like forgotten melodies, leaves nestled against him as though drawn to his quiet warmth, and petals clung to his coat in delicate whispers of every meadow, glade, and riverbank he had wandered through. He carried them all, never shaking them loose, never minding their weight—for what was a burden if it meant offering shelter, even to the smallest thing?

His large, dark eyes, wide as autumn nights and soft as gathering mist, held a kindness so deep it seemed to stretch beyond the horizon. There was nothing he would not give, no burden he would not bear for another. If a sparrow needed a resting place, he would stand still until its wings found strength again. If the cold pressed too cruelly upon the Hollow Glen, he would turn his fleece outward to shield the shivering. He asked for nothing in return, his silent devotion given freely as the rain gives to the roots of the earth.

Yet, for all his generosity, Brindle often forgot himself. The roads he traveled were always for others, never for his own rest. His legs ached from walking too far for those who needed him, his shoulders bowed beneath the growing tangle of the world he carried. His wool grew heavy, soaked with morning dew and burdened by the weight of things not his own. Still, he smiled, believing — perhaps foolishly, perhaps bravely — that kindness alone could keep the cold at bay.

Where Brindle was gentle, Igroth, the Ember-back Toad burned. His skin, dark as charred wood, pulsed with an inner glow, the smoldering heat of something both ancient and untamed. He moved with slow deliberation, his every step leaving tiny embers in the moss, only to be swiftly swallowed by the damp breath of the Hollow Glen. If Brindle was the hush of a snowfall, Igroth was the crackle of a fire just before it catches — waiting, watching, always on the edge of ignition.

Igroth was a force of passion, of raw creation—untamed, relentless, and full of fire. He dreamed in grand strokes, spoke as if the world itself needed to hear him, and leaped before the ground had even formed beneath his feet. When inspiration struck, it was as if the very stars conspired to set him ablaze, and he surrendered to the flames without hesitation. He worked feverishly, his hands shaping visions from nothing, his words painting worlds unseen. But passion is a beast with two faces, and when left unchecked, it devoured him just as fiercely as it once lifted him. The same fire that drove him to brilliance could consume him whole, leaving behind only embers of exhaustion, the ruins of his unchecked ambition.

Brindle had watched this cycle more times than he could count. He had seen Igroth at his heights, where his confidence was unshakable, his presence like a rising sun. But he had also seen him in the aftermath — ashen, hollow-eyed, drowning in the silence that followed his own storms. There was no middle ground for him, no place to rest between fire and void. And yet, despite the wounds left by his own recklessness, Igroth feared not the flames. No, what truly terrified him was their absence—that unbearable emptiness where inspiration failed to strike, where the fire refused to spark.

Brindle understood this fear, even if he did not share it in the same way. He was the steady hand to Igroth's wild heart, the quiet tether to his raging wind. He admired his friend's brilliance, even envied it at times, but he also saw the toll it took. And so, time and again, he stood at the edges of Igroth's inferno — not to douse the flames, but to make sure they did not leave him in ruin.

Vestra, the Stone-Winged Moth, moved carefully, deliberately. Her wings, unlike those of her kin, were not light and gossamer but heavy slabs of smooth, dark stone. She was a creature meant for the sky, yet she remained tethered to the earth, each step slow and cautious — too cautious. She yearned for the freedom of flight, to move without the burden of her own weight. But doubt, like the mist of the Hollow Glen, whispered fears into the crevices of her mind. — “You are too heavy. You are too weak. You were never meant to fly.” And so, she hesitated, watching the others move, feeling the ache of longing in her wings but never daring to lift them.

Bound by fate, each of them, in their own way, had never truly belonged. Yet, in the Hollow Glen, something unseen had called them together. Solmir, with his cold logic. Brindle, with his boundless generosity. Igroth, with his consuming fire. Vestra, with her unspoken longing. They were as different as fire and ice, shadow and light, and their paths should have never crossed. Yet, the Glen had woven them into the same story, bound them to the same journey. None of them knew what awaited them in the mist ahead — but none of them could turn back now. Their shared journey, a testament to the Glen's mysterious ways, had forged a bond that transcended their individual differences.

As the unraveling and the awakening surfaced in the Grove of Dreams, they had been walking the path together for what felt like an eternity, drawn forward by the whisper of destiny — they looked at each other and said in unison “We are the Grove of Echoes.” It was said to be a place where one's truest nature was revealed, a mirror to the soul that did not lie, did not soften, did not comfort. Each of them had come with a secret longing,

a question they had carried in the quiet of their hearts: Solmir, the Glass Serpent, who had spent his life reflecting the world but never feeling it, sought to understand the emotions he could observe but never grasp. Brindle, the Woolen Jack, who gave of himself without end, needed to learn when to offer warmth and when to preserve it.

Igroth, the Ember-back Toad, who burned with purpose but had only ever known the chaos of consuming flame, longed to create without destroying. Whereas, Vestra, the Stone-Winged Moth, weighed down by her past and the fear of her own inadequacy, wished to shed the burden that kept her from taking flight. Yet, as they pressed deeper into the Glen, the tension between them frayed the delicate harmony that had held them together. The journey that was meant to illuminate their truths instead cast shadows between them.

The fracturing of the four, Solmir, cold in his clarity, saw Brindle's boundless generosity as a flaw, a dangerous unraveling. "You cannot give endlessly without breaking," he warned. "Compassion must be measured, or it will hollow you out." But Brindle, raw with exhaustion, flinched at the words. "You speak of measure as if love should be rationed. As if kindness is a thing to be hoarded."

Igroth, restless and relentless, burned hotter with every step. "Why do we wait? Why do we hesitate?" he demanded. "We should be moving forward, creating, acting, doing — not wasting time on questions." Yet Vestra, cautious and deliberate, slowed at every crossroad. "Not every step must be taken in fire," she said softly. "Not every answer lies in speed." But her hesitation, her careful pauses, only fueled Igroth's frustration. "You fear too much, Vestra. You could fly high if only you would try." His voice was fire and urgency, but Vestra turned away. "And you would burn everything down just to prove you could?"

Their bond, once effortless, had become tangled with resentment, expectation, and doubt. And so, on a night when the moon lay heavy in the sky, they reached their breaking point beneath the great whispering willow.

The branches of the Grove reckoning curled low as if cradling their silence as if waiting for them to break. Brindle sat with his head bowed, his wool damp with morning dew. His voice trembled. "I give, and I give, and yet it's never enough." He had always thought that love and warmth were endless, but he had never considered what would happen when he had nothing left to give. "What then?"

Solmir coiled at the water's edge, watching the ripples fracture his own reflection. "I feel nothing, no matter how much I try to understand." He had sought knowledge and had studied the patterns of emotion, yet they remained distant, untouchable like light slipping through his transparent scales.

Igroth, on the other hand, sat with fists clenched, embers flickering along his spine. "I burn with purpose, but what good is fire if it only devours?" He had only ever known one way to exist: in motion, in heat, in relentless pursuit of creation. But he saw now that his flames had seared more than they had shaped.

And Vestra, her wings of polished slate folded tight around her, traced the veins in the stone. "I long to fly high as the birds, but my wings betray me." She had spent her life envying the sky, believing she was meant for something she could never reach. Thinking to herself "What if I misunderstood my purpose all along? The wind stirred through the willow's boughs, carrying their confessions into the rustling leaves. The Grove of Echoes, silent until now, answered them — not with visions, not with riddles, but with a simple reflection of their truths. Their burdens were not curses. They were lessons.

In the awakening, Solmir turned to Brindle, for the first time, not as an observer but as something more. He curled a cool, glass coil around Brindle's shoulder — not as a warning, not as a restraint, but as a steadying presence. "You do not have to unravel to be kind."

Brindle, in turn, placed a paw over Igroth's ember-lit back, feeling the heat beneath his palm by not withdrawing. "You do not have to burn alone." And Igroth, for the first time, let someone near his fire without fear of scorching them.

Vestra, watching them, felt a shift within her, subtle but undeniable. Perhaps she was never meant to rise above them. Perhaps her wings, heavy as they were, were not a weight to be shed but an anchor — something to keep them all steady when the fire raged when the glass shattered, when the warmth waned. And with that understanding, she felt lighter — not because the stone had changed, but because they had. The harmony of four creatures that night forward in Earvyn's dream did not walk as fragmented souls seeking answers but as a balance of strengths. Solmir tempered Igroth's fire with reason, showing him that creation did not always have to be an inferno. Brindle nurtured Vestra's courage, helping her see that stillness was not weakness while learning from her how to hold onto himself. And Vestra, though she never soared in the way she had once dreamed, became the foundation upon which they all stood steady. Together, they walked toward the Grove of Echoes — not as lost travelers but as something more, As something whole.

As the echoes of their voices faded into silence, the dream itself began to dissolve. The Grove of Echoes shimmered, its ancient trees and whispering leaves unraveling into streams of golden light. The figures of Solmir, Brindle, Igroth, and Vestra did not vanish but merged into something greater — into him.

Earvyn gasped as if surfacing from the depths of a dream, his lungs drinking in the crisp morning air. A sudden warmth, wet and insistent, pressed against his cheek. His eyes flew open just in time to see a dog — a shaggy, golden-brown white chested creature with bright, knowing eyes — sniffing and licking his face with unbridled curiosity. Startled, he jerked his head back, and the dog recoiled just as swiftly. For a fleeting moment, they locked eyes — man and beast — each frozen in surprise, as if caught

between two worlds. Then, with a quick shake of its fur, the dog bolted, disappearing into the emerald embrace of the forest, its paws barely making a sound against the leaf-strewn earth.

A surge of awareness jolted through him, his senses sharpening like the edge of a blade. He rubbed his eyes, bewildered. “How in the world did I sleep so well out here?” His back had been pressed against the gnarled root of an ancient tree, yet he felt oddly refreshed, as if the very earth had cradled him through the night. “Oh... wow,” he murmured, running a hand through his hair as the cool, fragrant scent of morning dew filled his lungs. The dream’s lingering mist faded, replaced by the tangible world — the damp earth beneath his fingers, the golden hush of dawn filtering through the trees, the distant trill of birds greeting the day. No longer weightless in sleep’s drifting void, he felt solid, present, real. With a final glance toward the woods where the mysterious dog had vanished, he exhaled and pushed himself to his feet. The pull of the studio called him back, but something about this moment clung to him, a whisper of wonder trailing in his wake.

By now, the first light of dawn had entered his studio, spilling through the studio's high windows, painting his unfinished work in hues of amber and rose — calling to give them a voice and a sense of purpose. His tools lay scattered across the worn wooden tables, sketches curling at the edges from nights spent in restless pursuit. And yet, for the first time in a long time, he did not feel restless.

He leaned onto the workbench supporting his head by the chin and thinking of what just happened while he was resting in the Glenn and after some revelation – “I truly understood it now – WOW!” The journey had never been about finding something beyond himself. The Grove had not given him a new path — it had revealed the one he had already been walking. Every doubt, every sacrifice, every surge of passion and fear had not been obstacles but the very foundation of his artistry. He was not fractured. He was whole. Now rising from his seat of observation, he moved with purpose. His hands, the hands of a creator, ran over the rough surface of his sculpture, feeling not just the

material but the story within it. He no longer questioned whether his work was enough. It was — and always had been — a reflection of his truth. As the day stretched before him, he embraced it, not as a man searching but as one who had found clarity. His past, his present, his future — they were not separate. They were one, woven into the legacy he would leave behind. And so, as Earvyn stepped forward, he did not leave the dream behind — he carried it with him.

So, I ask you, the readers, to pause for a moment and wonder or even ponder — what are the creatures that dwell in your Glen, deep within the Grove of Dreams? What hidden echoes of yourself linger there, waiting to be heard? Do you trust in the quiet guides within, those unseen creature-like spirits that whisper to your soul, leading you toward something wondrous? Close your eyes, step into the hush of your own dreamscape, find your creature(s), or let them find you in the quietness of your dream and listen. They are there, waiting for you.

THE END