

## GLEAMER THE AYE-AYE WHO TAPPED AT MIDNIGHT

In a forgotten crescent of the Madahollow Rainforest, where the trees grew like ancient cathedrals and vines hung like sleeping serpents, there was a hush unlike any other place on earth. The moon, high above the shrouded canopy, stitched the night together with threads of silver — lacework moonlight that draped over mossy branches, glinted on the slick bark, and danced upon the mist that hovered like breath above the forest floor.

And within this shadow-kissed wilderness, there lived a strange little lemur named Gleamer. Gleamer was an Aye-Aye, but no ordinary one. His silhouette alone sent ripples through the underbrush — a sleek, spindly creature with a coat of inky black fur that drank in the starlight and long and bushy tail. His enormous ears, shaped like cupped leaves, turned at every rustle and rumor in the dark, catching secrets from the wind. And there, at the end of his sinewy hand, was his most haunting feature: a single long, skeletal finger, jointed like a spider's leg, tapping always... tap, tap, tap... against hollow logs and ancient trees, like a heartbeat heard through wood. To the other forest dwellers, Gleamer was a whisper, a warning.

"He taps to summon misfortune," muttered the bush babies, shivering in their nests.

"His eyes catch the light and steal your dreams," croaked a tree frog hiding behind a fern.

"Where Gleamer walks," hissed a civet with a twitching tail, "shadows linger longer than they should."

But what they didn't understand was this: Gleamer was not a curse. He was a question. He wasn't cruel — only endlessly, achingly curious. Even as a tiny kit clinging to his mother's back, he had felt a strange ache in his chest — not fear, but a hunger for something unnamed, not just because of his eerie looks or how the night birds fell silent when he passed. No, it was deeper. A strange pull in his bones, a trembling recognition

had once known but had somehow forgotten. He often dreamed of lights buried deep in the earth, of voices older than language, of a pattern in the tapping he had never been taught — but somehow knew.

By his side traveled his two cousins, both vibrant and alive in ways he envied and adored: Ringling, the ring-tailed lemur, was all color and motion — his tail curled like a question mark, bouncing behind him like a banner of mischief. His amber eyes sparkled with mischief and ideas that came faster than his words could catch. He told jokes to fireflies and debated philosophy with beetles. He was a walking chorus of joy and chaos. And Lipkin, the Sifaka, moved like wind-gilded silk. Her pale fur, her face a black, framed with a white coat to give him a dork face, as if from constant surprise, shimmered in the moonlight, catching silver with every leap. When she danced through the trees, it was as if gravity bowed to her. She spoke little, but when she did, her voice was the hush between raindrops — calm, strange, and full of distant stars. The three of them made an unlikely trio — the strange one, the loud one, and the silent one — but they were bound by blood and bound by wonder. They had no map but followed where the wind twisted, and the stories deepened. And somewhere in the folds of the rainforest's forgotten veil, Gleamer hoped to tap his way back into the truth of who he was — and why he had been born with a finger that sounded like secrets. Something waited in the jungle. Something listening.

Lately, the forest had begun to shift — not with thunder or uproar, but in quiet disquiet, in whispers that clung to the undersides of leaves and signs half-hidden in plain sight. The leaves no longer danced freely in the breeze as they once had; instead, they curled inward, like sleeping hands clutching secrets, rustling with a brittle, uncertain voice that seemed to carry warnings only the wind could hear.

At midday, when the light poured harsh and still through the canopy, the great baobab trees — ancient giants known as the Trees of Life, with their swollen trunks and mythic stature — began to show signs of unease. These trees, revered not just for their haunting beauty but for the lifeblood they offered to their world — shelter for birds,

hollows for mammals, fruit and moisture for all who needed it — had stood for centuries as symbols of endurance. It was a standing oasis, a rest stop for life.

Now, they were weeping. From their bark, thick amber sap began to seep, bleeding in uneven rivulets down their furrowed sides. It gleamed in the light, catching dust and sorrow, clinging to crevices like old tears. It did not gush or run. It oozed slowly, deliberately, as if each drop mourned something only the trees remembered — as though some invisible wound had opened deep within their hearts. They were crying from places no eye could see.

The animals felt it — not in words, but in the weight of the air, the way dusk arrived too early and light lingered too long. They moved differently now as if walking through the ghost of something that hadn't fully passed. The sunbirds, once bright flashes flitting between blossoms, had quieted their songs. Their wings still beat fast, but now in nervous pulses, zigzagging from tree to tree without ever landing too long. The older birds no longer called out to dawn — they watched the baobabs from afar, chirping soft warnings to the young ones who got too close to the weeping trunks. The bushbucks grazed in tighter circles, ears flicking at every snap of a twig, even those made by falling fruit. Their steps were measured, hooves pressing the ground as though it might shift beneath them at any moment. The rock hyraxes had stopped their midday sunbathing atop the warm stones. Now, they huddled in crevices even when the sky was clear, blinking anxiously toward the shadows as if they expected something to emerge. Nocturnal creatures, such as the cat-like civets and genets, stirred earlier in the day, their golden eyes flickering through the underbrush far before twilight. They sniffed the air repeatedly, scenting for something that wasn't there — something they could feel but no trace. Even the termites had changed their patterns, building narrow, twisting towers that spiraled oddly, as if reaching away from the forest rather than rising from it. And the owls — the elders of the treetops — no longer turned their heads slowly in calm surveillance. Now, they turned sharply, often twice, scanning empty spaces with a

troubled stillness. When they hooted, it was brief, clipped, with none of the echoing gravity they were known for. Some had stopped hooting altogether. There was no predator here. No roar or shriek, no feather or fang. Yet all the animals behaved as though they were being hunted by something invisible — something older than teeth, older than fear. And still, the baobabs wept.

Even the air had changed. It hung heavy, like a breath held too long. Creatures who once greeted dusk with whistles and twilight songs had grown silent. Instead of lullabies, the forest was filled with the low, restless shuffle of unseen paws, the nervous twitch of feathers, and the distant crackle of branches breaking for no wind at all. Something had crept in. Not with a roar but with the hush of something ancient and wrong. It slid under the roots and behind the bark, slow as rot without scent and cold as silence with teeth.

They called a gathering beneath the oldest stone fig, where the lichen glowed faintly in twilight, and the moss grew in the shape of forgotten gluphs. The elders — antelope, owl, pangolin, and others so old their names were more gesture than word — sat in a circle of root and shade.

“It is the forest’s grief,” the eldest intoned, eyes half-clouded. “An ancient wound reopened.” But Gleamer knew something else. He felt it — in the hollow tap of wood beneath his fingers. He’d been testing bark all week, tapping along trunks and branches by moonlight. Usually, the trees echoed back their secrets — the slosh of sap, the groan of age, the whisper of beetles. But now, he tapped and heard only absence. Not silence, but a space where life should’ve been. A thin, eerie void that made his fur rise. Beneath bark and bark again — there was hollowness where there should be life. He told the others. Warned them. Pleaded. But the elders turned away.

All except Ringling, with his spiral tail and mischievous grin dulled by concern, and Lipkin, whose pale fur bristled at talk of sorrow but whose heart always leaned toward truth.

“If we follow your taps,” Ringling said, hopping forward with a wary glance at

the trees, “we might just map what others miss.”

Lipkin’s eyes gleamed. “And if the forest is crying, it might cry in a voice only you can hear and understand.”

So the three cousins packed what little they needed — a spool of baobab bark string, a glowing beetle-lantern, and a pouch of ashberries delicious red berries — now slipped into the trembling green. The deeper they went, the quieter the forest became. The canopy thinned into clawed silhouettes. The moss grew darker. And somewhere, not far off — a baobab sighed as if it were dying in its sleep.

Under a moon carved from silver mist, and through monsoons that stitched the canopy with rain light, the three cousins ventured into the forgotten corridors of the wild — a realm where maps dissolved and instinct became the only compass. They moved along the Spine Fern Ridges, where serrated fronds rustled like breathing blades, their edges catching moonlight like rows of ancient teeth.

Below the ridges, the whisper-bushes huddled in dense, muttering groves. These strange shrubs only spoke during storms — leaves shivering with static, branches quivering as if possessed. Their murmurs were thick with old forest warnings, unintelligible to most, but not to Gleamer.

Gleamer the aye-aye, his great, skeletal tapping finger outstretched, moved with purpose. Every few steps, he paused and tapped — a rhythmic, gentle percussion against the trunks and roots along their path. The sound that returned was never random. It was healthy wood thrummed deep, like a slow drum played underwater — resonant, grounded, alive. But when his finger struck blighted bark, the response was hollow, brittle — a broken whisper, like wind through cracked bones.

These tones spoke to Gleamer like a language half-remembered. It was as if the forest trusted him to hear what others could not. Lipkin, the nimble Sifaka, moved beside him in leaping arcs, leaving behind a trail of scent-marks at each infected tree. He pressed crushed bark into the wounds, mixing it with the soft shimmer of moonflower

pollen, which clung to the bark like stardust. The marks were part memory, part prayer.

Above them, Ringling the ring-tailed lemur performed delicate aerial acts among the branches. From each treetop, he flicked and curled his tail in practiced rhythms — bright white bands flashing in the moonlight, sending silent signals to distant kin who watched from the shadows of the next valley. These were not mere messages. They were part of a living map, passed body to body, tail to tail — a language of urgency and hope, painting the shape of the blight across the darkened land. Together, the three wove something sacred: not just a survey, but a story the forest could feel. The story of sickness. Of resistance. Of a chance for renewal.

Then, one night, as thunder receded into distant hills and the rain fell in whispers, they entered a hollow veiled in mist: a natural arch formed by the strangled embrace of Bone vines — pale, calcified tendrils that looped overhead like the ribcage of a long-dead giant. Beneath this eerie gate, all sounds stilled. Even the whisper-bushes held their breath.

Gleamer stopped. A stump lay before him — old, almost fossilized, laced with silver fungus and the faded glyphs of some forgotten clan. He raised his finger.

Tap.

The sound that came back was unlike anything he'd ever heard. It was not hollow. Not rich. It was... A chime like memory.

Clear. Fragile. Timeless.

The note vibrated through him — not in his ears, but in his chest, his bones. It wasn't just sound. It was invitation. He froze, eyes wide, pulse thudding in his long, trembling fingers. And then, from somewhere deeper — not outside him, but within — a voice rose like mist from warm earth.

“You have the fingers of a seeker, my child...”

“One day, you will find where the old truth sleeps.”

It was his grandmother's voice. Soft, melodic, scented with the smoke of old ceremonies

and the rustle of braided fur. A seer, long passed, who once saw further than the trees. She had told him stories once — ones no one else believed — of the First Root, the heart of the forest, buried in a sacred grove hidden by time.

Of Vainga, the Deep Bloom: a guardian spirit with petals that opened only for those who asked the right question, not with their voice — but with their essence. And now...The tone. The voice. The stump. The chime of memory. It wasn't just coincidence. Gleamer's tapping — his strange, ridiculed, nocturnal gift — wasn't strange at all. It was a key. And the grove — the place of origins, the resting place of Vainga — was real. And it was calling him.

They followed the tone like pilgrims following a forgotten hymn — night after night, deeper into the breathing lungs of the forest. The world narrowed. Branches arched like cathedral ceilings overhead, and moss thickened underfoot until it felt like walking atop the backs of sleeping creatures. Even the whisper-bushes no longer spoke. The wind grew reverent. Shadows leaned inward as if listening.

And then — after a final descent through a ravine veiled in mist — they came upon it. A clearing opened like an inhale, and the grove revealed itself. It wasn't grand in size, but it hummed with presence. The very air seemed denser here, swollen with an ancient stillness that settled into the bones. Above, the stars blinked gently through a webbed canopy, their light drawn in but not reflected — as though even the constellations held their breath. In the center of this hollow, nestled among the roots of trees older than memory, lay something impossible and sacred: — The Heart Root.

It pulsed — not with blood, but with light. A slow, aching luminescence flowed through it like a heartbeat captured in sap. Its tangled tendrils rose from the ground like woven serpents, intertwined and luminous, a tangle of amber, rose-gold, and pale jade. From the knots and curves of its body, fine trails of glowing mist lifted into the air — weeping. But not with water. The Heart Root was crying light. And not all of it was pure.

Along its arteries, black veins had begun to creep like fractures in stained glass —

dark, unnatural lines that pulsed in counter-rhythm to its glow. The rot was here, threading through the forest's ancient core like a whispering wound. The cousins stood still — awed, unnerved. The hush was so deep it felt like stepping inside a dream.

Gleamer moved forward alone. He knelt before the Heart Root, the earth warm beneath his feet, the air humming like distant thunder in his chest. Slowly, he extended his elongated tapping finger. Tap. Then again. Tap — tap.

But this time not just tapping. His motions formed spirals, circles, rhythms — deliberate, ancient. A movement-language passed not by mouth, but by memory, by inheritance, by pulse and nerve. This was not sound, but communion. The ground beneath his finger shimmered in response.

The Heart Root stirred. Its glow flickered, then deepened. Around the blighted veins, color returned — first a flicker of green-gold, then a sweep of luminous teal. The blackness quivered, then recoiled, drawing back as if scorched by truth. The light grew stronger. The grove exhaled. Leaves that had curled opened. Nearby ferns began to rise. The damp air, once heavy with grief, lifted like a veil pulled back from a long-mourned face.

And then — from within the root — a shape began to emerge. It did not walk. It unfolded. From the luminous tangle rose a form of impossible grace: a creature of woven vine and silken bark, dappled with blossoms that bloomed and faded as it moved. Its limbs were fluid branches, and its eyes glowed with the green fire of moss after rain. Starlight stitched across its shoulders. It carried no weapon, no crown — but its presence turned the air electric.

Vainga—the Deep Bloom. The spirit of the First Root. She stood before Gleamer like the memory of a forest dreamt into being. And then, she nodded — once — her gaze soft and endless.

“Your hands have awakened me.” — “Your tapping has been our protection all along.” Her voice was not spoken aloud. It moved through leaves, through root hairs and breath, through every living thread of the grove.

And in that moment, Gleamer — misunderstood, odd-fingered, night-tapping  
Gleamer — was seen.

Not as strange.

Not as foolish.

But as essential.

Before Gleamer could return, he stood beneath the earth, at the threshold of the Grove of the First Root — a place no map could draw. It was not a place one simply found; it was revealed, as if the land had blinked and allowed him inside. There, beneath twisted root-columns that curled like cathedral arches, bathed in the slow drip of glowing sap, stood Vainga, the Deep Bloom.

She rose from the very heartwood of the earth — a radiant blossom rooted in the sacred dark, her petals like pages of ancient text: soft, luminous, shifting with stories. Her scent was a memory of rain and fire, of lullabies sung into bark. Her breath made the soil stir. She did not speak with words. She bloomed a vision. And in that vision, Gleamer saw: The very first tree, cradling the world in its roots. A thousand creatures walking its limbs like veins of purpose. And himself, small but glowing, tapping gently along its bark — drawing forth truth with every note.

Then, she offered him a choice: A petal unfurled toward him — warm and trembling, glowing with golden script. It pulsed like a heartbeat. He could take it. Remain in this hidden grove. Become part of the root-song — a Warden of the Deep, no longer bound to the surface world. Or...he could return. Bear the vision. Become its voice above ground. The Grove fell silent. Even the roots paused their breath.

Gleamer, finger outstretched, hovered between wonder and duty. The hush that followed was deep — a silence full of weight, of becoming. And slowly, reverently, he lowered his hand. He would return. Not to be praised. But to serve.

When they emerged weeks later — their fur matted with clay, eyes aglow with silence

and storm — the forest had changed. The canopy, once sagging and sallow, now shimmered with new greens — sap-bright, singing, alive. Birdsong returned in waves, rippling like joy across the branches. Streams flowed clearer. The whisper-bushes no longer wept. Even the ferns swayed in rhythm.

And no one — no one — called Gleamer unlucky anymore. They called him Rootseer. Children followed him now, sticks in their tiny paws, tapping the ground like he once did — listening, wondering, learning to hear what lived beneath the surface. They danced to rhythms only the roots understood. Lipkin, ever light, taught rhythm through motion — leaping in arcs that mirrored the paths of growth, the spiral patterns of leaves and memory. Ringling, agile and theatrical, led gatherings of tail-flick choirs — each flick a note, each note a signal, each signal a part of the Living Map that now covered the land.

And Gleamer? He no longer needed to prove anything. He walked softly now, his smile gentle — like sunrise filtering through leaves. The chime he had followed, the silence he had honored, now lived in everything around him. What once felt strange, even burdensome, was never a curse. Not even a gift. It was a calling. A quiet truth for any who listen: Those who seem odd... who tap when others wish for silence, who move to hidden rhythms ...they may be listening more deeply than anyone knows. Their touch may not comfort — but it reveals. Their way may not follow yours — but it may be the first sign of healing. Not all tapping is noise. Some of it is searching. Some of it is saving.

“The fingers that disturb your peace might be the ones protecting your roots.”

**THE END**