

**Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change**

**Available Power : 5**

**Authority : 2**

**Bind Insect (1, Command)**

**Fortify Space (2, Domain)**

**Nobility : 2**

**Congea! Glimmer (1, Command)**

**See Domain (1, Perceive)**

**Empathy : 2**

**Shift Water (1, Shape)**

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**Spirituality : 3**

**Shift Wood (1, Shape)**

**Small Promise (2, Domain)**

**Make Low Blade (2, War)**

**Ingenuity : 2**

**Know Material (1, Perceive)**

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**Tenacity : 1**

**Nudge Material (1, Shape)**

Wakefulness comes in with the distant sound of rain. I keep both sets of eyelids pressed shut, willing the morning to pass me by. Here, curled in my nest of blankets, my scales are warm, and the horrible nature of the world is far away. I do not need to do anything, if I stay here. I certainly do not need to somehow finalize a trade deal started by a fool of a husband who did not understand that we do not have the artisan contacts to come close to filling that quantity of blades without compromising on quality. Yes. Here, warm, is the right place to be. I close my eyes, and will the outside world away.

Wakefulness strikes me sharply. Old memories compare it to the sensation of taking a rapid breath, but I do not breathe, and my reflexes have been remade with my new form. I do not have scales, I do not feel warm or cold. My second awakening is instead filled only with the purity of the spells turning inside my body, and the anxiety for the humans.

As much as I would like to spend my day in quiet contemplation, especially in light of the fact that I have just felt a dream that was a memory, I have work to do.

And I am blind once more. But it is a blindness I can rectify, easily. **Bind Insect** has refilled itself to the brim of the dark reservoir in the aftermath of the loss of my fallen honeybee soldiers, and knowing where their hive sits, it would be only a small touch to replenish my ranks. But I hesitate.

They are just bees, I tell myself. Across six lives, I have killed a number of bees. Whole hives. I've killed other things, too. Beasts. Shades. People. Some of my lives were less inundated with grand violence, but even the simple life of a dedicated farmer has accrued a toll of insect lives. So what, then, is another handful of bees, really.

But it is something. I didn't simply swat them away, I took their lives and traded them like coin for fruit, and now I settle myself to do it all over again.

They were just bees. But I spent a good deal of time watching them and their hive, seeing through their eyes. When I was not in control, they were... I would not call them intelligent, exactly. I don't think I'd say they were people. But they had their own form of compassion for each other, their own organized lives and helpful habits. And they are gone now.

I do not think that, when any of me were alive, we would have mourned for simple bees. But I cannot draw my mind away from it now. This is death both personal and culpable. *I did this.* My actions, no matter how small, triggered the avalanche of changes that led to this outcome. There is an unphysical pain from it that I cannot resolve, that spins over and over in this new version of my mind, and that will not let me find purchase with my thoughts. It calls upon me to acknowledge this responsibility, before my own body will let me continue.

That *I am not isolated.* I am not alone, and even if I were, every touch of my spellwork upon the world is outside influence. If I so wished to be free from this, I could dig deeper, bury myself in truth, and simply play with stones for the remainder of the world's life. But that does not appeal to me, and so, I must accept that I am going to cause problems.

But then, my memories sing to me, why should I be different now than when I lived and walked and breathed? Sometime in the past, a lost cow topples a passing knight, a friend who followed me suffers their first battle wound, a half dozen spurned lovers surround my inn, and a doge raises tariffs on just my word. Not a single one of my lives is exempt from this. Sometimes accidental, sometimes with deliberation, causing problems is the extant state of *living*.

I am sorry, bees, but I have need of your eyes. But this time, I think, I will remember that I owe you and your hive a debt. And while I cannot share this now, a simple one sided **Small Promise** is enough for me to tell the hive as a whole that I will do my best to do right by them.

The honeybees I tether to **Bind Insect** slide into the spells workings far easier this time. But there is no time to doubt my past choices, not when the future is uncertain.

It is morning, the barest hint of a sunrise beginning to cut through the quiet cold peace of dawn. The fires have long since gone out, except the one campfire in the middle of the clearing that is at a low smoulder. The humans are mostly asleep, many of them tossing and turning in fits before waking as if startled by sudden noises. One person remained on watch, leaning against a tree and staring out at the softly brightening woods, and it took a peer through **See Domain** for me to realize this was the armored woman.

Her armor was almost completely gone; she was left with a swath of slightly singed hardened leather that covered at an angle from a shoulder pad, across half her chest, to under her right rib. One tattered patch of leather plate was all that was left of her leg armor, the ripped short pants she was wearing having miraculously survived the fight that her shirt finally hadn't. Some of my old lives would have admired her form in this moment, half-naked and framed in the rising sun, the triumphant warrior who stood against all opponents. But as I am, I mostly only think she is probably very cold.

I also notice from the rise of her breath that she is, while still standing against that tree, asleep. Lightly, but still, that is very impressive. She sleeps like I do; burning everything she has and then recovering no matter the situation.

The camp is as at peace as it can be. But it is still only a camp. Nine people that do not feel like this patch of dirt is anything resembling a home. And why should they? It makes sense to me now why the children did not roam and explore outside the small area; if the world contains more things like the monsters from yesterday, then none of my old lives would have left their homes either.

At least I can help more. Extended range on **Shift Wood** and **Shift Water** both allows me to reach father, and complete a few select chores before any of the refugees have time to get to them themselves. But it is the extended stock of energy that comes with **Shift Wood** that I wish to put to the most use.

I pull in to the base of the tree that I have buried myself among the roots of a few disparate scraps of wood. Sticks and branches from around the area. I do this in what I think of as a clever way, casting out **Shift Wood** to latch onto anything at the edge of my range, and then *pulling*, giving one firm yank with the magic and then letting go. If it works, it works, and **Know Material** shows me an increase of wood within my vision. If not, it costs me next to nothing, and I try again.

When I have enough, I guide two of my new bees down, and I set to work through their eyes.

The farmer used to work with wood every day, building and mending barns and fences and the like. The soldier was a whittler, carving with a favored knife small pieces of useful craft. The singer was an artist, who carved very, very bad art. But it was art nonetheless. And all of them are me, and I was all of them, and so I know a thing or two about the way to make wood dance to my song. More, now that the magic lets me work with it.

I pull wood together, curling it, **Shift Wood** letting me blend the edges of different pieces that should by all rights not fit together. The untreated wood moves like water in my grasp, and I smile as my increased control lets me do what I am almost certain this spell was not meant for.

I have to send a bee a few times to the less-armored-now woman, to check something, and a lot of my work is based in guessing, but before she wakes, I have finished what I set to do.

Wood makes poor armor, but when a swipe of your magic can polish away the splinters, it is strangely easy in a comfortable way for me to make a set of arm guards. Inflexible, perhaps, but at the very least it will be better than nothing.

I look at them, measured for the woman who I have come to trust more than the other humans, and realize that she is *not* the only one deserving of recognition for what they did. And then, I realize that **Shape Wood** is still over half full of power. My tricks and knowledge, as well as my increased level of **Empathy**, have made this creation far less expensive than I had expected.

With a personal grin, I set to repeating my process, stealthily stealing measurements from the other two who fought the fiery monsters and making them their own pair of bracers.

As a final touch, pulling a memory from the scholar, I find an old wordline from the ancient people of the lobi Dunes, that speaks of guardianship, and curl the artistic word around the base of each brace. Then, in the much more common script, I add my own words.

“Thank you.”

It is a simple gift, but it is one I am proud of making. Also, it is one that teaches me a valuable lesson; nothing is stopping me from writing words. Communication is perhaps going to be easier than I had expected, especially as my powers grow.

I leave the bracers for them to find, along with a fourth stone from **Congea! Glimmer**, and set about performing my own mystical chores. I am acutely aware of the stockpile of power building within me, of my increased awareness of the flow of motes from the glimmer I have created and the people within my domain. But now is not the moment where I wish to pour my time into pondering my growth and future. There will be time for that later in the day, when I have little to do but watch and consider. Now is the time when I wish to remember what it was like, to wake slowly and start my day, performing simple tasks that added up to a life lived.

This is just a camp, and not a village. Not a city, or a library, or a company. It is just a handful of people who are barely holding on.

But perhaps, if I help, and if they continue to surprise me, they can hold on long enough. And we can see what we can accomplish together.