

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 3

Authority : 2

Bind Insect (1, Command)

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Nobility : 1

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

Empathy : 1

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Spirituality : 2

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Ingenuity : 2

Know Material (1, Perceive)

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Tenacity : 1

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

I wake up to an influx of power.

I'm getting better at recognizing the flow of it into my physical form, and so, I can take what I believe to be an accurate guess at where most of it has come from.

For one thing, draining my spells to near nothing, and then letting them refill, seems to pull something else into me. I know that is one source. But also, the actual use of my spells on the world around me is what agitates that same ephemeral spark. Moves it around, moves it toward me, loosens it for the spell mechanisms to pull inward.

When I **Know Material**, it is the most minuscule of flecks. So small that the merchant in my memories has me slitting eyes that I do not possess, the constant thought of 'is that really it?' bouncing around my mind.

But while I have slept, **Congeal Glimmer** has finished its process. The small pebble of a smooth stone, shaded hints of living brown and green, sitting just behind my bee's tree, has fully formed now. And in doing so, I have fulfilled my **Small Promise**.

I do wish I had been awake for that. I hadn't truly realized what the timeline was for that, and every part of my patchwork lattice of memory has a different self-chastisement for this situation. I should have planned, I should have tested, I should have simply powered through and stayed awake.

In truth, I am uncertain if 'simply staying awake' is something I can actually do in this body. But both the farmer and the scholar have many, *many* memories of sleepless nights. Albeit for vastly different reasons, usually.

Now that I am aware again, I realize something else that is different in my new body. There is no period of wakefulness. I do not drift back to conscious thought, I do not need to stumble to a latrine to relieve myself or summon a servant to bring me a light meal. I am asleep one instant, and fully functional the next.

I remember so many different morning routines, and all of them are nullified now. Merely old ghosts of how I once felt things should be. It highlights to me, once again, the disconnect between my memories and my old souls, and this new form. I am something *different*, even while I am a continuation of six other people.

The feeling is exciting, and scary, all at once. Though not the kind of fear of death or poverty or ruin that my old lives had. I have no heart to set racing, no skin to electrify, none of the physicality of fear. For *me*, it is nothing but a sensation of falling, and curiously wondering if I can build myself wings on the way down.

Well. As I am awake, there is no excuse for idling. I begin my checks, forming a new routine from the pieces of spellwork I have incorporated into myself. **Know Material** tells me that the terrain around me is, if not the same, at least the same ratios. Through **Bind Insect**, I check in with my bees, several of them having ranged farther than my spell can reach while I let them go about their business, but they are still tethered to me and I can command them when they return.

The humans are still encamped, as much as they have a 'camp' and not just a loose and disorganized collection of bedrolls and scattered backpacks. The children have regained some of the energy that children should have, since they have been resting here, but they are still too quiet and too still. Two of them, siblings I suspect, sit together, while the others are apart. They don't speak, or at least, my bees cannot 'hear' them speaking. The adults, meanwhile, have been taking more useful actions.

One of them has caught a fish or two from the nearby river, which is nice. It's actually *very* useful to know there are fish there. When I selected **Bind Insect**, I did so blind, not even knowing if there were insects anywhere near me. At least if I am offered bind fish at some point, I can be certain of having targets.

Another human has set to collecting firewood, and using some of the larger branches to construct a rather unstable triangular shelter. I land a few bees on the peak of it, and can almost feel through their tiny bodies how unstable this wooden tent is. Every memory I have is disappointed in this, though for different reasons. Still, a quick application of **Shift Wood** allows me the option to quietly embed the branches into each other where they cross, meaning it will at least hold up to a mild summer breeze, if nothing else.

I observe with interest as the wood I have altered begins to exude that soft lightless energy that I have been absorbing. I try to follow the feeling of more closely it as it passes into my crystalline form, but I become distracted as I realize there is another source that I had not noticed before.

Focus is required here for me to fully understand what is happening, but focus is something I have in abundance. I do not tire, or grow bored, or frustrated. My memories would find this unsettling, I find this to be... well, it would be a lie to say I find it useful and leave it at that. I find it different; different than I am used to, different than everything I know to be true about living. But it is who I am, now, and I choose to delight in the experience of being something new.

Following a thin trail of motes back to its source proves to be an exercise in patience, even for myself, though. But eventually, with the help of a pair of very good bees, I manage to place physically where the source is.

The armored human woman, standing outside the camp the humans have set up, on a fallen log. She is inside my range of control for my bees, but only just, and am rapidly reminded that honeybees do not have what many would consider to be good eyes. So it takes me more time than I am proud to admit to realize that she is performing some form of martial or acrobatic art.

I watch her for several motions of her routine, and feel a pang of concern as I see her through my bee's eyes start to slip. Her next step will obviously set her falling off of the old wood she is balanced on, and I experience a moment of sympathy for whatever part of her ends up bruised.

Then she plants her booted foot on the side of the log, in a position that should send her tumbling, and she simply *stays*. Stuck in place like she's on solid ground.

Her routine continues, but I am no longer focused on that. Instead, I am intently narrowed in on the mote of agitated glow that has freed itself from the small brown and green stone she is holding, and is making its way toward my body, joining the trail of other motes.

And isn't that interesting. I had wondered at why **Congea Glimmer** had produced less power for me than anything else, despite taking far more effort and time. And now, perhaps, I have a piece of the answer. The whole camp had seemed *quite* interested in the things, and it seems that I have part of the answer to the why of that as well.

Glimmer appear to be tools. Tools I cannot fully understand how to use, as I am now, but that at least one human has taken to easily. Tools that feed power back into me when they are put to work.

More information paints a growing tapestry of knowledge in my mind, but as the memories of being a scholar remind me, everything I learn will always generate more questions.

I think on what I've started to learn as I work through my arcane machinery. One thing that I find very interesting is that I never seem to be unable to process whatever I am doing with or learning from my spells. I can see through all my bees, know the whole of the material composition around me, manipulate the firewood the humans have collected, and understand an implicit list of my promises, all without *losing* anything. It is as if every spell I select adds to the whole of my self, in a way that is seamless.

Some of the vials of empty liquid that power my spells are full, which I have decided is a state I do not want them in. I **Shift Water** and **Nudge Material** just enough to make sure that those are working to refill themselves, using the spells for the most mundane task of stirring the pot over the fire, and trying to sweep bits of dirt off the children when my bees pass by and show me. I do an okay job. It seems **Nudge Material** is still somewhat inaccurate, and I consider raising my **Tenacity** to see if that helps. And also just to see what it will do.

I am interrupted, as seems to be becoming a trend in my new life, by humans fighting. Well, not fighting, but perhaps arguing? They have not come to blows, but the inability to actually *hear* properly through my bees makes this aggravating. The adults have gathered in the center of their small camp, and I bring my bees around to keep an eye on them as best I can, perching inconspicuously around the clearing and letting them sun themselves while we watch. The day is warm and bright, and I would say it were cheerful if not for what is obviously a tense situation.

One of the adult humans has attempted to destabilize the inexpertly built shelter, and I feel only the barest scraps of pride that it took him two kicks to undo my small improvements. All five adults now stand in a rough circle, moving and gesturing in a way that makes it obvious even to my limited senses that they're not happy with each other.

As I watch, I can see them slowly shift their positions. They divide into two groups, one the armored woman, the other the man who had been collecting firewood. The other is the three remaining adults, who are obviously pressing for something. My merchant memories make the process here clear; this isn't so much an argument as a negotiation. My cleric memories make the process here clear as well; this is a schism, happening in real time.

The armored lady says something, stomps her foot. The others make placating gestures, but clearly want them to start leaving. Their bags are already packed. Around them, the children watch, exhausted, but resigned to continuing to run from whatever they've been fleeing.

Then the woman holds out the glimmer she's been carrying. Both of them. She points at the tree, at the clearing around them. She's yelling, I think. But I don't know what.

I don't really know, exactly, *why* I find myself caring so much here. I don't know these people, I don't need to be invested in them. And yet... I took a chance, trusting this woman. And instead of trying to hunt me down and hurt me, she has simply taken me at face value. She thinks that I can help, and I think I can too.

And... they have children with them. Tired, dirty, hungry, exhausted children. They deserve better than this. I have been a father, and I have been a mother, and I have been two forms of guardian or teacher, and perhaps it is those memories flooding me all together that remind me that *caring is not weakness*, and that I do not need to justify my compassion for it to be valid.

I refocus. The woman has made a motion that I realize might be aimed at me, personally. Something was said, which I do not know, but she has been looking around at the clearing. Not like she normally does, like a hunter watching for danger, but like she's searching for something she expects.

The conversation continues, and I notice my supply of **Bind Insect** starting to dip lower. I won't be able to pay attention through my bees indefinitely, as the humans argue. At least they aren't coming to blows with each other, but there is a clear shifting in their body language, that shows me that some of them are not confident in their choices.

Then the woman picks up a stick, holding up a hand to the others, as she starts to draw on the ground. To *write* on the ground.

I move a bee closer. She's drawn a line on the ground, and a word on each side. "Stay" on one and "flee" on the other. I can't hear voices, but I am reasonably certain the other man in ragged leather armor is giving her an amount of pushback on her word choice. Or perhaps on the fact that she seems to think they need a written vote for five people.

But I appreciate it. Because I am going to take another risk now.

I refuse, with an investment of will and conscious thought, to hide from the world. I realize that I am thinking this as I am buried under an amount of dirt and soil, but I will not let my protections isolate me.

There are people here. At least one of them has trusted me, listened to me, when perhaps she did not need to. They have stalled their running, when it might have been better for them to keep going. They have children with them.

I have decided to care.

I bring **Small Promise** to life. I try to make them an offer. Stay, and I will keep you safe.

But I cannot. And as I try to push the spell into the world a few more times, I realize why it is failing. *Small*. A *small* oath, backed by magically passed on certainty of trust, but a small one nonetheless. To offer sanctuary to someone who is tired, threatened, and hopeless, is many things, but small is not among them.

The people are voting as I think to myself. The lady who blindly trusts me has lost this argument. She is outnumbered four to one.

I try a few more promises, but none of them land. Until I stumble, almost by accident, into one that does.

Let me vote as well, and I will accept the outcome.

It's an actual **Small Promise**. Simply the offer to participate in a community, in one small show of voices. I don't think it's small, really; many of my past lives would find this to be something strange and uncomfortable. But really, what do I have to lose? A clearing, and some bees? I will miss my bees. But I can grow anywhere. I can meet more bees.

The humans I have made my **Promise** to have stirred to motion. There is a fresh wave of arguments. Expressions are still hard to see through my bees, but the armored lady wears a face that the singer and the cleric both instantly recognize as unbearably smug. Like she's holding back from saying 'I told you so'. She may actually not be holding back, she may have said it repeatedly.

She says something else. The humans shuffle, gesture more, but ultimately... they step back from where they've written marks and names in the dirt. Some of them look around, expectantly. One of them makes a sweeping 'go ahead' with his arm, presumably to me.

My offer is accepted.

Nudge Material comes to life, and I realize that I have no name, still. But that is fine, I've lived lives illiterate before, I know how to mark a line. I sketch out a six pointed diamond shape in the dirt, just under the line for "stay", next to the mark the woman made.

There is a pause in the clearing. And then one of the men steps forward, and scuffs out his mark under the "flee" side, using his foot to move it over to just under my own mark. The other hunter makes a motion, and his name is moved as well.

Just like that, they agree to stay.

And I will stay with them.

Small Promise echos silently as motes of dusty power shake free from the five people in the clearing, and the marks in the dirt. It's one of the larger influxes I've felt so far, enough so that I can actually *feel* a strange pressure within me, an almost physical sensation. Or maybe it *is* physical, maybe I have a body that can feel certain things after all.

I have four points of power available now. And if my new companions will be staying, I should put those to work.

But first, I need to rest my bees, and try to blindly rebuild a wooden shelter.

