

All the Light in the World: Chapter One - The Dreaming Eye

From high up in the steeped attic, all wind-lost, sun-kissed, moon-dreamed through countless seasons, Moth waits and watches. Not a lonely place, she had decided long ago, but an alone place. Her place. The dreaming eye of her world.

She ponders the spreading lightness of breath on the windowpane. Rimed with an early frost and creeping moonlight, the ancient leaded-glass frames the high view across a night-hushed yard and the forest beyond in the scratched curve of an imagined snow globe. Moth touches the frosted window and bleeds a large circle already running with tears.

“This is my world,” she whispers, her breath slowly obscuring the turn of this weeping world. She dabs a fingertip to its cold center, leaving a small but growing clearness. “And this is me.”

She sees the man, who will stand in the driveway, caught by the long-reaching shadows of a late autumn afternoon. His dress shirt will be stuck to his body, sweat stains rising to high tide around his collar and armpits. His dark eyes will search the house, his mouth setting in a tight line. Moth feels a moment of tenderness. She feels his slow-stepping uncertainty . . . all part of her empathic “treasures” as Papa liked to call these things. And she also feels his desperation like the last thoughts of someone drowning in an otherwise calm, night-mirrored lake—the hopelessness of struggle, the finality of being on the fine edge of letting go into uncertain darkness.

Moth smiles, perhaps sadly, or perhaps knowingly, for she knows this man will drown but not in a way he fears. It will be a dying into another life. A birth of sorts. All birth is painful, her Momma had told her, and so it will be for this man.

Moth turns from the vision, shivering, as her small hands dance through the cold-light spaces. Her fingers plucking a spectral harp heard only on the twilight plains of a dimly remembered borderland.

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It comes . . .

Other futures form with each distant note, as her fingers pluck the air, spinning imagined shards, some bright, some clouded, some smooth, some jagged, some cold, and some warm.

Moth chooses the bright and warm one.

The man will be sitting next to her, his hands folded neatly on his lap, his head lowered slightly, and cocked toward her. “Why are you called Moth?” he will ask. And Moth will smile softly. “Papa said it was a ‘Touch of Delight’ and not some genetic mistake. An intention of sacredness. But then Papa is like that, always seeing around corners and beyond the known.” The man will look at her with puzzlement, almost embarrassed at his lack of understanding. And then Moth will pull away her shirt collar and show him the purple birthmark on her right shoulder. The man will try to avert his eyes out of some misplaced sense of decency, but Moth will guide his eyes back with her words: “Some see only a shapeless aberration. Something to avoid seeing or mentioning—or worse yet, something to make fun of. A few see it for what it is. Momma said it was a moth. And Papa said it wasn’t merely any old dust-ragged moth, but a Grand Lunar Moth, come to me on silent wings, treading silver trails of moonlight.” The man’s eyes will open

wide, and he will suddenly laugh. A surprised laugh of delight. And Moth will touch her Lunar Moth and laugh with him.

Moth looks out into the night, feeling a sharp coldness sneaking through to her bones, and she sighs softly, her breath rising pale, fading away. “Everything changes now,” she says. “Everything.”

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This grand house and the land it sits upon have been in Momma’s family since the beginning. “The beginning of what?” is always the question both Moth and her brother Alex ask. Does there have to be a beginning? Can’t something just always be?

Papa once said, “There’s always a beginning to all things, but sometimes it’s hard to pin down. Like trying to nail water to the ground. But it’s my job to try.” Mysteries as such torment Papa like an itch that can’t be scratched. Momma says, “Some mysteries are better left alone.”

To which, Papa is defiant and square-on challenged. “Nonsense! That’s no way to live!”

But over the years, the big question of the beginning has become less interesting than the questions of the present. Papa declares: “It all flows from one to the other, this timeline, while the ghosts of unknown beginnings are always dancing in the background and singing about the folly of looking backward while rushing ahead. The answer to everything exists now!”

The beginning in question might be when this land was but scrub and live oak and brambles and wild horses running through high grass. It might be when the first travelers stopped along the sweet waters of the Penemue River, which still snakes parallel to the Old Town Road and through the nearby town of Cecy. Or it might be even further back—where Moth, in her dreams, has had glimpses of a great storm spreading across the barren land like

spilled ink, fracturing everything with spiked hail and clawed lightning, until everything is scoured down to bedrock by ravenous black winds. When done, the scarred land lay under starless skies, waiting for the first dawn of a new day.

It's a birth, Moth thinks. And an awfully painful one at that.

In any case, the house, the land, and the town beyond is but a small part of Moth's world, and few are invited to share it with her. But when the man shows up at their door, Moth will have the instant recognition of a kindred soul, and she hopes, and she wishes fervently that Papa will feel it too.

There's only so much of being alone that doesn't eventually turn to loneliness.

Mamma would be hardest to convince of course, Moth knows this without question. Her true nature is being protective of the mysteries and rituals and sheer uniqueness of their world. "We're only five miles from the town named after my great-great-grandma," she said once, "but we're forever a million miles away." Moth, even at a young age, had understood this but, especially now, she wishes it weren't so. It's not easy being fifteen. It's even harder when you want to experience everything beyond this insular world, including love.

Love is a subject that has been dissected by her parents like a biology experiment. And Moth remembers the looks they had traded, bordering on resignation, on the impossibility of stopping the inevitable. Beyond the physiology and clinical spreadsheet of all this, Moth, in her dreams and visions, aches to know love. Aches to see love in the yet unknown eyes of a beloved.

Moth once overheard her Mamma saying, "Trent, she's fifteen."

There was a sigh from Papa. "You always said it was going to be difficult, but now I understand. She's fifteen and so much more."

Moth hadn't understood this, and still doesn't, but her dreams have hinted at answers both wonderful and terrible.

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In the steeped attic, in the cold light of the rising moon, Moth waits and watches. This is her secret. This is her connection to greater worlds of immeasurable joys and terrible suffering. She sits among the travelers who drift through this high, ancient eye of the world, murmuring fitfully of their fears and delights and sorrows.

The most difficult of these visions concern her family and those she considers family. Uncle Attie she holds in the gentlest of hands--for he has the heaviest of secret burdens. And she must prepare him for what is coming. For all, she is their witness. Their memory. Their doorway. She is the record of their past, present, and future. It's not always an enviable task and sometimes she loses herself in these fleeting moments, taking on the lives and thoughts of others, until her own identity becomes blurred and questionable. But now she feels something else, a rising need to come into her own, to inherit a birthright long overdue.

What this meant was one of the things she sought to understand, that compelled her to sit in the darkness, feeling the world pass through her, leaving behind what were surely secret messages to decode and clues to gather. And then in the coming days, the man, Samuel Faulkner, will arrive, and she will recognize the power of his gift, the remnants of his dreams, the joyless relics of his nightly passage, and the fading hopes of his heart.

"Everything changes now," she repeats to herself. "Nothing remains the same."