

Nature of Being

A novel

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Contents

1	Night of Existence	5
2	Voyage in Solitude	7
3	First Steps	11
4	The First Arrival	13
5	Crossing the Great Water	17
6	Cold and Starry	21
7	Coming to a First Conclusion	25
8	Running Words	29

1 Night of Existence

The last rays of the sun had long been gone when he exited the house he lived in; his eyes searched the sky, and soon they found the singular star he loved, and his heart rejoiced. This was the moment of each day that was to himself, and he appreciated it.

A big bird crossed the sky, her tail just touching the little star, and he knew that everything was alright — as far as that is possible.

‘Simetra, come here,’ he said in a low voice that could only be heard by that gigantic bird. It was the only creature that would never betray him, and the partnership that connected the two unequal beings wouldn’t end until one of them died. All these thoughts in his mind, he raised one arm for the bird to sit on; then, his eyes searched the moon, and it was still there, hanging high above in the sky, and shining brightly on the grey, majestic feathers of the bird that had safely found the right place on his arm.

The bird followed his friend’s eyes and stared at the moon, and suddenly, she rised up again and started to fly towards it; the wonderful picture of the big creature in front of the moon gave the impression of clarity, stability and the wonderful dream of a fairytale.

This was the Night of Existence. The night when he had been born, and the same night when his parents had bought this bird; and the very same night when they both had died.

Slowly, tears ran down his cheeks, but he didn’t try to stop them. Simetra knew better than return to him now and explored the sky once more, as she felt she’d better leave him alone for some minutes. Twenty years had gone by since that day, and now, the two of them were the last survivors.

The next minutes would pass in silence. Then, Simetra would return, crossing the sky in the front of his eyes, giving him the power to hope once more, and the energy to stay alive.

With a movement of his left hand, he made the tears go away; but the pain would stay, though it would now subside for some time. He took a deep breath, and his arm was shaking when he rised it once more; his broken voice called his last friend for another time, and she came. Finally, when she had sat down once more, their eyes met. Simetra felt the strong emotions and the powerful soul that was there inside him, and he felt the power of the bird; they would never leave each other alone.

Two minutes had gone by when Simetra rised once more, and he took a walk around, thinking of the years that had passed. They had been happy, as happy as they could have been when you had to live on your own amongst alien people; he didn’t have any friends, and only some of those strange beings around him had taken care of him. They seemed to fear that bird, the single creature that was — and had always been — his friend.

The only creature that had saved him that night, and the only living being that knew

what had happened. There must have been an attack, and the young Simetra had been found sitting on top of him who was hidden beneath a piece of cloth. Thus, the bird had saved his life, endangering her own.

His eyes followed the wonderful lines his only friend painted at the sky; then, he realized that this night was not only a night of the past. The strange people that had taken care of him had only promised to do so for twenty years.

This time had passed right now. He wondered whether this would be a chance or the moment which would lead to his death; His companion would protect him, but she couldn't do a thing against fate.

Nobody could. And nobody could know about his or her destiny in advance. If he was doomed to die, he would; if he wasn't, he wouldn't, and no power could change that. Fate could decide whether somebody was invincible. It had decided his parents weren't. Nobody could go back and change that.

Tomorrow, he'd have to leave this part of the country, and he'd do so with more sorrow than happiness, as even though these people hadn't liked the boy who had attracted so much aggression he had grown familiar with them and this land. He decided to take a last glance at those houses around here; the next day, they would provide him with some food and send him away. He'd already organized a horse to be able to reach another city.

Another city — he'd never been anywhere else, and all around this place there was deep wood. This meant that he'd not be able to ride on his horse, but he'd figured out that this wood must end somewhere. However, nobody in this city had ever left it and came back to tell the others about it; the only pieces of information he could get were the ancient books of those who had travelled out there, and the things he'd learned by watching Simetra, who seemed to be awaiting that day eagerly, as she felt the growing tension of his.

The cold of the night was becoming apparent to the bird, and she felt that it must make his friend shiver, but he noticed nothing of it, as the real cold was inside. When Simetra sat down next to him for another time, he felt the warmth of hope once more, and suddenly realized how cold it was. After some seconds of contemplation, he decided that the two of them should go home to sleep, as they'd have to leave early tomorrow.

However, he knew he couldn't sleep, and it was not until Simetra had reassured him by sitting close to his bed that he closed his eyes, sleeping the exhausting sleep of an orphan of fate. Soon, Simetra would also close one of her eyes and join in to a half-sleep; however, she would always be alert if any danger would arrive.

But this night, the only danger were the nightmare-like memories that chased him through his dreams, and Simetra could do nothing about it, though she longed to chase away any danger out there.

2 Voyage in Solitude

The first rays of the sun had just touched his still closed eyes when one of the villagers was on his way to the house he resided in, bringing some food, the last gift he would be given by these people. Simetra noticed the person, but she knew that she'd better keep silent until he was gone; A tamed animal was something unnatural to them, and an animal that took care of a human being and showed emotions was something that could only be achieved by using evil powers.

Thus, the villager seemed afraid when opening the door carefully, but when there was nobody to be seen downstairs, he sighed, entered quickly and silent, dropped the food on the table and was gone even more quickly than he'd arrived. The food was the last sign he'd left, and it would also be the last significant symbol of that village for the two friends. No letter, no word was left, and one may wonder whether the villagers gave a party because the two demons were gone; We won't ever know, as we'll accompany those two fellows without returning to that place which we won't ever see again the way it is now, with its high-climbing trees and the small huts, the fire and the belief in evil spirits; all those details will be lost for us, and among these the superstitious villagers, which couldn't do a thing against their belief.

Right now, Simetra touched his nose carefully, and he woke up slowly, as he felt the presence of his friend and the feeling of safety and peace the bird brought with her. No danger would come near him right now, but he knew he had to leave. All his bags had been packed days ago, and it would have taken him no more than ten minutes to get ready; but he had to take a look around once more, keeping these pictures of the beloved house in mind. He felt that none of the villagers would ever dare to touch it or live in it, and he realized that it was another friend of his who would wait for his return if he ever decided to come back.

Half an hour later, he'd walked through most of the now empty rooms, remembering all the tiny little memories that were connected to them; Now, he stood in front of the room he'd never opened again. The room where his parents had died. He knew he had to open this door today, as he could probably find some signs that would explain what had happened and who was responsible for it.

But for a quarter of an hour, he just stood there, staring at the door and the old, rusty handle which had not been used for twenty years. Furthermore, all windows had been shut tightly, as the villagers had feared the dead spirits to hunt them at night; thus, he had never taken a look inside this room, and even the keyhole was shut tightly. He had received a key with the food, a key to that room, as the villagers knew he wouldn't leave without having taken a look inside it.

Slowly, he took the key and put it into the keyhole. It fit. A minute later, he was turning it, and the old lock still worked with a 'click'. Now, he could not go back anymore.

It took seconds until his right hand touched the cold, rough handle. Slowly, he pushed it down, and the door showed only weak resistance.

For the first time since twenty years, rays of sunlight touched the floor of the room which had been the place where a brutal crime had taken place. Two brutal crimes, to be exactly. The only thing the villagers had ever done was to take the corpses away to bury them somewhere in the deep woods, far away from their houses; then, they had sealed the room tight. The first thing he saw was the blood, the blood of his own parents on the floor. Of course, it was just a stain of blood, as bacteria and other creatures had cleaned most of it away; but time could never eradicate the horrible strength of the symbolic link between this blood and him.

He sighed, then he took one step into the room, closing the door behind him. Simetra had to stay outside; this would be a voyage into his past, and it would be a voyage in solitude. Up to now, he had not noticed that there was still light in this room; he searched for the source and found a golden medal, just lying next to one of the red stains. It was sending out a warm, yellow light, and he couldn't remember having seen this light before he'd opened the room through the cracks of the door; it must have started to emanate this light just at the moment when he'd opened the door. Still, he felt very nervous when he realized that he had not wondered why there was light in here when he'd opened the door.

He decided to think about this later, and he picked up the medal. The same moment his fingers touched the (warm?) metal, a surprisingly strong feeling took hold of him; This was something he'd never experienced before. He *remembered* something he'd never seen, and he couldn't help but watch what was going on without interfering into this magical process.

Light flooded through the room, but not the cold, white light of a bulb, but the warm rays of the sun; the windows that had been shut tightly were open, and it was summer. The buzz of all those insects in the woods became present as he realized he wasn't alone. A woman was standing in front of him, and he didn't waste any time trying to find out who she was; he *knew* his mother though he'd only seen her as a baby. The vibrating, emotional connection that linked the two beings made their eyes glow; but both of them knew this wasn't real. The urge to step forward and embrace her became his dearest wish, but he couldn't do so, as this was a holography. He wondered where this word had suddenly come from, but he understood that it was simply there, and he understood without any explanation. Then, his mother started talking, destroying the painful and yet wonderful silence that could not yet last forever. 'I can see in your eyes that you know who I am, and that you've realized that I am dead,' was the way she started. He was startled, but he didn't flinch, as he heard the voice of the creature that gave birth to him. 'You must listen carefully now; please don't ask any questions, I cannot answer them. What has happened, is done, and cannot be changed neither now nor in the future, even if it was completely wrong. On the other hand, this is probably the only way to make our vision of the future come true. You must know that powers are working, evil powers of unknown strength; I imagine you must look quite self-confident now, but know you cannot face up to them. There is one person who can; this girl is your sister.'

A sister? Now, he indeed began to tremble. He had a family, even if it was only small;

but he was not alone, though he'd never really been. Simetra was still there, and she would accompany him for the rest of his life. 'I feel you must be astonished now. I would give anything to be able to take a look at your face, but it is impossible for me to come back. My life wasn't taken for nothing; you have survived, and your sister is well-hidden. She doesn't even know what she is supposed to do, nor has she realized who she is. It is your task, my son, to find her and to give her all the protection you can offer. Don't ask me where you should start to search for her; I cannot tell you, for anyone could find this record and listen to it. Trust yourself; your heart will guide you, and your companion will help you to accomplish your task. I must leave now; I can hear they are coming, and you shall not see how your own parents are killed. We will meet again, please know that; but don't look forward to it, times will have changed then.'

Loud footsteps could be heard, and as quickly as the vision had appeared, the room was empty again; and this time, it was completely dark. He knew he'd seen everything; there was nothing more to do. The medal hanging around his neck as if it was a normal necklace, he exited the room. After he'd closed the door, he breathed again, suddenly realizing he hadn't done so for a minute. Still, his eyes were fixed and he could hear the words of his mother; He checked the medal, but it was cold now. It would not be opened yet; he had to think about everything, and Simetra would be with him then.

The weight of a feather dropped on his shoulder, and he didn't need to turn his head to know she was there. Nothing had to be said right now; He took the things he'd packed long ago, and left the village, not looking back once more. The time of being subdued was gone. Now, he had a task, and he was to do something important: He had to find his sister, the only relative that was left now.

3 First Steps

A light breeze cooled his neck when Simetra dropped on his shoulder again. There was nothing she could report; After they had passed the ancient gate that guarded the village, everything had become silent. No single animal seemed to be alive round here, and the trees to each side had grown so high that the sky was not to be seen. Simetra had been up there several times, and she had just returned, but there was nothing she could do. The end of the forest could not be made out, and even for her, this was a new sight, for she had never been so far away from the village that she couldn't see it anymore.

The path he was treading upon was completely covered up with branches and leaves so he could hardly go on, but he was decided to do so. At least three hours must have passed by now, but the surroundings hadn't changed since the time they started, while his mind told him that the scenery was even darker and more dangerous. Simetra was unnaturally nervous, and the silence that was only interrupted by breaking branches below his feet seemed to hamper his breathing, for it was a weight much heavier than his backpack could ever be.

Simetra rose again, and broke through the roof the trees had constructed once more. For him, the silence became a load even heavier.

Five minutes or so, he began wondering where Simetra had gone, but he knew she would return; Probably, she was flying further away to find out about a way out of this graveyard of nature. Realizing that walking on wouldn't help for he didn't see the path anymore, as it was now covered up completely, he sat down and ate a bread and an apple. Then, he noticed what was so special about this forest: There was no water, and the bottle he had with him would only last for a few days. This forest must have been dead for ages, and one could wonder how it could still be there, for it seemed so thick as if it was still growing — but it wasn't alive.

It was deserted, in the literal meaning.

And water seemed as rare as it was in a desert. He'd read about deserts, in the ancient books, but they were full of sand, and this one was full of trees — However, the description seemed to fit perfectly. A cry of a bird disturbed his thoughts — Simetra returned. He answered with an equal cry, and she knew where to find him. After she had crashed through the rooftop, he offered her some bread, but she nervously moved her beak, pointing behind him. There was nothing he could see, but he realized that somebody — or something — must be coming. Simetra had warned him. Quickly, he hid behind a big, black tree, after he'd stored the food in his backpack again. Simetra sat on his shoulder, and the two of them stood there, behind the tree, watching the dead place in a million of dead places, waiting for it to reveal one of its secrets.

He watched to the left, for this was the direction Simetra had pointed out — the leaves began to move.

3 First Steps

Everything was silent, and not even a breeze could be felt, but nevertheless, the leaves moved.

And some trees seemed to fall down. *Silently.*

This movement originated from something he couldn't make out clearly yet — but it was coming closer. He decided to take a step back and choose another tree, now climbing on a branch so he could not be seen from below. And he was right to do so, for something gigantic was coming. Gigantic in matters of effect, not concerning the real size.

The movement came closer, and some trees nearby fell down to reveal the sight on a small, black, quickly moving figure that threw trees around and cleared a kind of path. Still, there was absolute silence, and he knew that if Simetra hadn't warned him, he would probably have been killed by that small figure down there, for it seemed to lack eyes and was simply going straightforward, destroying the forest in front of him, her, it or whatever it was. As quickly as the figure had appeared, it was gone, and he wanted to climb down to have a look at this new road, but Simetra stopped him.

He knew she wouldn't do so if this wasn't necessary, and thus, he decided to wait. This was a peculiar and dangerous forest, and for he hadn't seen such areas of destruction before, he wondered whether he simply had not come along such a small figure or whether something else would happen. He'd soon find out.

After this 'roadbuilder' had gone, a ghastly noise shook the earth. The silence that had been there before was now replaced by a noise he could hardly endure, and it felt as if thousands of termites were eating on a piece of wood. And this was quite close to what really happened: Blue figures of equal size arrived, eating the trees that had fallen down in a monstrous speed. They left behind a black, somehow moving liquid, that smelled as if... No, he couldn't compare this nasty smell to anything he'd ever smelled before. He was glad to see those figures go away, for this meant that he could take his fingers out of his ears again, for the noise must become less brutal.

But another, equally nasty noise would still be there, and the stinking mass was still moving. This liquid was the thing that made the noises, and soon, he saw why: Little trees began to grow in the middle of this mass, and he couldn't help but watch for some minutes until the area of destruction was filled up with trees and branches again.

The black mass was gone, accompanied by the foul smell and the loud noise. Now, he climbed down, and Simetra didn't stop him. No borders could be made out — The new patch of forest fit in perfectly. He wondered in which way this destruction and reconstruction was effective, but of course, this was the explanation why the dead forest was still alive: Those creatures rebuilt it steadily. And though he knew they were dangerous, he was happy that they were there, for it meant he wasn't the only living being here — with Simetra, of course.

And Simetra would now happily point out another direction to him, and he knew that he should advance in that one, for she seemed happy, as if there was a patch of green far, far away...

4 The First Arrival

Crack.

This was the only noise he'd heard for hours: The cracking of dead twigs beneath his shoes. And it was only for Simetra he went on walking, for something had took hold of her, a kind of nervous happiness. He had spent the time thinking: The black figure that had destroyed the wood only for it to be built up again; How could such a system have developed? And why?

It was a kind of steady state, based on steady change — it was *life*. The ups and downs of life had found their symbolic expression right here: Though the woods seemed dead, they were alive — half-alive, at least. And the processes of destruction and construction fit so perfectly as if they were made to be presented to somebody else to watch them.

However, it was all a system of steady-state, in the end. It didn't make any sense, destroying and rebuilding constantly. He'd sometimes seen the inhabitants of 'his' village fight each other, crushing their houses, only to rebuilt them shortly after — this had been senseless, too, and he couldn't understand the motivation for those fights.

Nevertheless, this left him to realize one thing: There was a lack of sense in life. There certainly was. But still, he felt that there had to be some motivation he couldn't understand in those actions.

A sudden burst of sunlight, the first since hours, and a shriek of Simetra told him that he was close to a clearing; he didn't know what was waiting for him, but he had to be very cautious, of course — these peculiar black and blue figures could have killed him, if it wasn't for Simetra's warning.

He was staring concentratedly towards the area where less trees were trying to suffocate everything else — the clearing seemed to be about one hundred metres in front of him. Slowly, and prepared to face nearly everything, he advanced, trying to make no sound though this was pretty hard to achieve with all those dry, dead twigs beneath your shoes. And the silence around him seemed absolute. Soon, he had reached the place where the clearing had to begin; He could hide behind two trees and overlook the area, where no dead forest was growing. And it was green.

So green, in fact, that he was blind for some seconds until he had readapted to seeing a patch of nature so vivid. But this place was small, and he realized that it had probably just been left out by chance, as the black figure that destroyed the forest seemed to advance quite randomly. However, there it was. And he took a further look at it; But it still took him some time to notice the most special thing he'd ever seen: It (sat? stood?) in the middle of the clearing, on some big stones that had been arranged in a way that pleased your eyes, as if somebody had really done so on purpose.

And that — creature — was as green as the grass around those stones, and it still took him some time to make her out clearly, for she was a female — a fairy. He could

remember the things he'd read about fairies: Once upon a time, they must've been all around, and the book only said that they brought happiness to the people.

In some inexplicable way he was attracted by her — she was sleeping, and her head was lying on one of these stones, her hands put underneath to protect the bright, shining skin from the rough surface. She was emanating light, and her hair seemed to glow in a yellow colour, and now, he could even make out a glimpse of her shiny, translucent wings that were folded on her back. She was pretty, if you can say that about a fairy, and he still stood there, wondering how she might have come into this dead forest. It must have been her magic that had conserved this patch of green, or some other magic that had conserved both.

His hand moved to shove away another twig so he could see her better, and the light green of her dress began to move as she became awake. Quickly, the thin body moved and particles of white, glowing dust were emitted from her as her bare feet touched the ground. Looking around nervously, the small fairy couldn't make him out immediately. He decided to take another step, and the green fairy shrieked before she rose into the air displaying an abnormous speed. Simetra sat off quickly to follow her, but she was far too slow to do so and soon had to return to him for the fairy was gone, leaving behind only a trace of that white, glowing dust that dropped on him, giving this boy a warm feeling as it touched his skin and stopped glowing. He had quickly run to the stone in the middle of the clearing, but he could not see her anymore. He was amazed, and puzzled for a minute. Fairies had been inventions of that old books — they had been part of stories that had been written for entertainment. They could certainly not be real? Well, they were as real as that black and blue figures that 'worked' on the wood.

Astonished, he felt over the stone that seemed to be still warm — it was smooth, and more of that dust was lying on these rocks. He sat down, and felt quite comfortable, for the stone that was supposed to be hard wasn't. A splashing sound woke him up immediately: A small fountain had emerged from the middle of the stones, and it looked as if it had been there forever, but he was sure it had just developed. The water was very clear, and it seemed to shine with a light that resembled the light of that dust — then, he realized that the dust that was lying on the stones was still shiny, while the particles that had touched his skin weren't.

He recalled the prickling sensation he'd felt when they had dropped on him, and he realized that they must be important. Taking out a pouch of leather, he collected them, using a piece of cloth so as not to touch the glowing particles. Even if there was no magic about them, they would serve as a light in the dark. Simetra came down again and dropped on one of the stones, suspiciously analyzing the water and sneezing as she'd breezed in some of the dust. He'd just closed the pouch as he was shocked by a noise that must be part of his imagination, but wasn't. A — familiar — voice said: 'You may drink, it's not poisonous.'

Simetra was talking. If he wasn't subject to a sudden and inexplicable illness, this dust must be full of magic, indeed. And he decided to do what Simetra had told him, and he gladly swallowed the fresh water — it was sweet and vivid, remembering him of the fairy that had made this spring come alive. The flask he had with him was filled quickly, and after Simetra had drunk, the spring went dry.

All of a sudden, the tiny rests of the dust vanished, and the stones seemed to begin to move. The clearing seemed to go away. Simetra rose high with a shriek and came down again quickly, but he was already standing in the middle of the dead forest again that had filled up the space the green grass had filled before immediately.

Simetra told him that the clearing was indeed — moving away, shrinking against the horizon. He was still afraid to hear her talking, but he was getting used to it, as he had always imagined her talking to him — only that she really *did* so now. Irritating.

But she was right — as she told him the direction in that the clearing was moving, he knew he had to follow her. It was the only place he'd ever seen since he'd left the village which wasn't dead, and which was full of fascinating magic. He had to see it again. He had to see her again.

And he had to find out what was going on here, even if it took him hours to reach the clearing again. Or days. What else could he do? There was no water around, and he'd need more; And the only place where he knew water was to be found was the clearing. He took a step, and another one, absorbed in his thoughts and barely noticing Simetra, who was sitting on his shoulder quietly now. He was striving to *arrive*.

5 Crossing the Great Water

Silence.

Still, Simetra was with him, and from time to time, she beat her wings and rose up high in the air to try to make out anything that was different from that monotonous forest. And each time, she had returned telling him that nothing was changing, but that things looked the same in every direction. Finally, she just shook her head imitating the gesture humans used to tell someone else that something was wrong or not working out correctly.

Indeed, she had adopted some human traits when that pieces of dust had touched her, and she seemed to have become an even more important part of his life. But slowly, both of them felt that a wind was rising: First, it seemed as if the wood was breathing, but then, they could make out a direction, and they were advancing exactly that way. Though the leaves were moving now, silence was still all around.

He decided to go more quickly, and an hour or so later, Simetra told him that there was a sea in that direction. A grey, nearly black, dead liquid filled this sea, and Simetra added that she could not make out the end of it for it stretched to the horizon — at least.

He decided to take a rest right here, for it would probably take him another hour or so to reach this new obstacle. At least, something was happening — the monotonous forest would end somewhere. But where had the clearing gone? Had it crossed the sea? Or had the fairy simply taken the magic away, and tried to escape by flying over that ocean? He'd never seen an ocean. He just knew that it was a big, gigantic amount of water a human being could not cross so easily. In fact, he'd only read that this was possible, but he'd never found out about a way to do it. And probably, this ocean wasn't even filled with water, but he doubted one could walk on such a grey liquid, and Simetra told him that storms and strong winds were triggering off high waves that made it even hard for her to fly over it, for the wind would become even stronger.

But he simply had to do it. He had to find out what was happening here. For now, he sat down and unpacked another piece of bread. When he wanted to get his flask out of his backpack, the leather pouch that contained the dust fell on the ground. Simetra told him for he hadn't noticed; but some particles of this strange, magic dust had already escaped the pouch and touched the dead earth.

And a small, green plant began to grow. He quickly grabbed the pouch so he would not lose any more of this magic memory; And then, the first nuts on the plant eagerly awaited the moment they would be taken off. He took one of them, and as soon as his fingers touched it, a voice in his mind told him:

Use the dust of fairies wisely —
it can save your life, and help you to continue your voyage.

He dropped this nut in his lap, and touched another one; another voice emerged from nowhere:

Don't ask for more —
this is all that is to be said for now.

He laid this nut to the other one in his lap, and those two became darker — the others seemed to be still green, and glowed a bit, but this could just be an invention of his mind for everything else around here seemed to be without colour.

However, he decided to touch the other nuts with a piece of cloth before he put them in his bag, for he wanted to take these nutritious counselours with him without using up their energy. It seemed to work, for their glow remained and they stayed green. The two he'd taken off — He felt they had to be cracked, for he'd need to find out whether they were really edible. He took the two stones that were lying below the tree (*he couldn't recall having seen them before*) and cracked the first one carefully. The shell could be opened quite easily, and the small and light stones found their place in his backpack together with the other, already 'used' nut.

Simetra hopped on his leg and analysed the ingredients of the just cracked nut with her beak; Finally, she tasted a small piece of it and seemed satisfied. Though she could speak, he didn't need to listen to her saying that everything was fine (though she said so); And he tasted it. The small and tiny bit of this nut suddenly seemed to grow in his mouth and filled it completely, but leaving enough room to chew comfortably. It was a wonderful, refreshing taste and he didn't become thirsty — in fact, his thirst vanished, accompanied by his hunger.

He was satisfied, and so was Simetra. The rest of the nut found their place in another small pouch, but he wouldn't need these in the next hours. Now, he had to make his way to the sea, and he felt strong enough to face everything that would come. Soon, the wind became stronger and very cold, but he was indifferent to that change, and so was Simetra: The ingredients of the nut seemed to protect them against some of those obstacles. Half an hour later, he reached the ocean. And it really was the way Simetra had described: A grey, dead mass of liquid, smelling a bit like the black mass that had been the strange dung that had made this dead wood grow. He took a branch from the ground and touched the water with it, and as he drew it back, the part of the branch that had touched the liquid was gone.

It seemed to have been cut off perfectly — as if the water had done so. Certainly, this was no water, or at least, not only water, and it wasn't only dead, but could kill. He remembered what the nut had 'said': The dust could save his life, and it could help him to go on. But did this mean that he was protected against the effects of that liquid? He doubted this to be true, but he had to find out. His fingernails were quite long, as he'd never had to think about anybody showing interest in him in that village he'd come from — and sometimes, long fingernails were useful. One of that 'sometimes' was now. He was lucky that the waves didn't come as close as he'd expected, because they seemed to stop just one metre before they'd reach the forest, as if there was some secret contract of fear between those two landscapes. Thus, he could give it a try. Slowly, his finger approached the surface, and as soon as his nail touched the liquid, a shot of pain raced

through his finger, his hand, his body. In a reaction of reflex, he drew his hand back and fell on the ground behind him. Some twigs cracked, and he quickly had a look at his finger: Nothing seemed to be wrong, though. Even the nail wasn't hurt; but he could still recall this killing pain, and he knew that this was the wrong way to cross the ocean.

He stood up and took a step back, sat down again and open his bag another time. Now, he took his time to count the nuts: There were 11 of them left. But he had to take one of them now. He waited for another moment: The 'dust of fairies' would save him. Yes! This was the solution. Not the nut alone could help him to cross that sea, but the dust itself must be used. But he didn't know where to apply it...

Simetra rose in the air, and tried to make her way against that storm. The power the nut had given her seemed to help, for she seemed to be able to advance. Quickly, she returned to the ground to tell him about her success... When he saw Simetra coming down, he realized he'd found the solution. He'd have to fly! And when she touched the ground next to him and said that she could probably make it now over the ocean, he took a piece of cloth and carefully grabbed some parrticles of that wonderful particles. He realized he'd have to take his shirt off. Simetra was watching curiously as he put the dust back into the pouch and dropped his shirt after having taken it off; then, he took the piece of cloth again, grabbed some particles of the dust and carefully dropped them on his back, being reminded of the fairy. It worked.

Simetra shrieked, as two translucent wings were growing on his back. A warm feeling went through him, and he closed the pouch carefully so as not to lose one of these particles. He closed his back again; he knew he'd found the right solution, and Simetra knew what he was up to before even one word had been spoken.

Before he could wonder how those wings were working, they unfolded themselves and he rose high in the air; and there was another voice, that asked him where he wanted to go, but his mind was still filled by that image of the clearing, as it had been since he'd lost it — and her. Thus, he shot forward, and Simetra could barely follow him. The wind around him and the feeling of that killing sea below was thrilling him — and he imagined that Simetra must feel like this all the time. He wondered how long the journey would take, but he enjoyed it; slowly, the sight of the wood behind was disappearing, and he wondered where they were going, if they were really going somewhere...

An hour later, there was nothing but that water all below, and it went up to the horizon. The wind was gone, however, and he imagined what would happen if this sea was infinite, and if he was to fly like this for the rest of his life. Simetra had already found a place on his shoulder some time before, as she was tired to fly at such a speed. No clouds were to be seen, and nothing seemed to be alive around here except the two of them.

Suddenly, the idea of a piece of land appeared in front of them; first, it just looked like an island, then, it grew steadily until he could see — that it was a landscape full of dead, grey trees. Had they finally just flew in a circle? Simetra knew what he must be thinking, and she told him they weren't; they had not changed the direction at any time, and she knew that for sure. She was a bird, and her orientation could not be doubted, but nevertheless, the landscape looked so similar that this was hard to imagine.

Simetra left his shoulder again, and he slowly began to descend; when he was close

5 Crossing the Great Water

to the top of the trees, he thought he could make out a patch of green some hundred metres away, but he wasn't sure, for he simply crashed through the treetops. The last thing he heard was a big and loud 'Thump!' when his body was smashed against one of the trees, and then everything went dark.

6 Cold and Starry

A light breeze was running through countless leaves over a forest that was full of silence. Everything was grey in the cold and starry night, and the sun had long been gone, only to be replaced by a full moon whose light didn't enlighten anything except a small patch of green. Slowly, the grass began to move as the wind went through it, and a tiny figure that had been lying on the stones in the middle of that clearing began to rise. The creature shook his head and searched for his backpack, which was leaning against one of the stones nearby. A peculiar, magic light was around him which emanated from the dust that was floating in the air, but nothing alive was to be seen around him.

He was alone, and for the first time in his life he didn't know where Simetra had gone and whether she would ever return to him.

He began to move towards the forest that enclosed the perfectly round clearing; What had happened in the last hours? A terrible headache was the misty cloud that covered his memories, and he could only wander around and wait for that memory to return to him. Suddenly, he stopped dead. Wasn't that a sound, as if majestic wings had moved the air nearby? He looked around, and then high into the sky, and finally, he shrieked to call Simetra; but there was no reaction. The wood was dead, and the air above seemed to be the same.

He wondered how long he had slept; Now, he was very hungry. As there was nothing he could do but worry, he sat down and opened his backpack, searching for something to eat. But before he could do so, he saw the nuts, and everything came back to him in a second. He had seen the fairy in the clearing; The nuts had grown, and finally, he had flown over the sea. The wings; his hands searched for them, but they were gone, and he was wearing his shirt again. The crash — there had been a crash. The sound of the crushing trees and his smashed bones was as vivid as if it had just happened, and reverberated in his whole body. He must be dead, nobody could survive such a crash.

Somebody must have taken care of him. No, this couldn't be; The fairy would certainly not have healed him? But Simetra could not have done, that was for sure. Where had she gone? He imitated her shriek again, and the sound echoed through his mind, but everything else was silent.

As deadly silent as it had ever been. But he had reached the clearing, he was still there; The shiny nuts were still in his backpack, and they seemed to ask for his questions. He took a look around — this certainly *was* a hopeless situation, and he would need some help. He counted the nuts once more, finding 11 of them — they were all there. When his hand touched one of the nuts, a question was rising in his mind, but it wasn't the correct one; He was asking why the fairy had helped him, and that was not of any real importance right now. But it was too late, and the nut told him:

Search your memory, the answer is there

asking things you know for long is not fair.

He was close to tears. Not only had he lost one nut, but he was also responsible for this loss, and he had even been punished for it by the nut's words. Of course, the dust that was around him was a kind of magic shield the fairy had set up as she had been here; Nobody could come near, at least not if he or her was no real magician. This was what he had read, at least. And he had just played with the magic the fairy had left. . .

He felt as if he was a stupid little boy, and his stomach told him he was when it grunted loudly because he was still very hungry. He could use some bits of the nut, at least, though there was still most of the last nut left.

Seconds later, he felt refreshed and wasn't hungry anymore. The rests of this new nut had wandered to those of the old one, and he knew that they wouldn't ever lose a bit of their refreshing powers. This time, he concentrated. What did he need to know? And once more, he was caught in a conflict: Should he ask for the place where he could find Simetra, his oldest friend, the place where the fairy had gone, or the way he should proceed? He wondered whether Simetra had followed the fairy. But he wasn't sure what he'd be told if he simply asked for the place they had gone to. Well, he was also wondering what he'd be told if he asked how he should proceed, but what else could he ask? And wasn't all that questioning about wondering what the answer would be?

He took another walk around the stones. He'd need an answer. The third option was the correct one. Yes, of course: The right way to proceed must be the way to find the fairy *and* Simetra, and thus, he could answer all those questions if he just decided to ask this one. He breathed in once more and felt the refreshing effect of the magic air around him; But he couldn't help but see the image of the fairy lying on the stone again, and he knew he would have to concentrate very hard. He sat down on the magically warmed stone and focussed his mind on the question how he should proceed. It seemed to work; now, he'd have to take the nut without remembering the way he'd come to own it. He opened his backpack, and his hand reached inside, carefully selecting another nut.

It seemed to work; the voice raised in his mind again, and it said:

You ask how to proceed,
and to be told what to do.
Do not search for an answer,
it is inside;
your mind has told you whom to follow,
just look inside: These nuts are hollow.

For a second, he stayed in this stunned state of concentration; Then, he began to wonder what this was supposed to mean. He took the two small stones and cracked the nut carefully, looking at the contents. Nothing seemed different with this nut. But then, he had a look at the inside of shell that had enclosed these nutritious ingredients: This was no normal nut. Of course, he had know this before, but now, he could make out a sign inside the shell: An arrow. The other half displayed the same sign, and soon, he was analyzing the other nuts: He found the symbol of two wings and of a clearing with a

kind of shield around it. Well, exactly the things he'd figured out earlier... But what was the arrow supposed to mean?

One of the two pieces of the nut he was holding currently fell to the ground. When he wanted to pick it up again, he realized that it was *moving*. It was turning into a specific direction. He laid the other piece next to this one, and it reacted the same way, pointing into the very same direction. But in which way had his mind told him whom to follow? Well, he'd probably find out when making his way in the direction he was supposed to follow. Still, he was wondering how he would escape the figures that were destroying and rebuilding that forest. He would think about that later on.

He had to leave the warm stones, the wonderful, magic clearing, and he had to do so with sorrow. He didn't really know where he was going, at least not consciously. But he had to find Simetra again; and the fairy, of course. As soon as he'd crossed the border to the forest, another wonder seemed to take place: The clearing *followed* him. This could probably mean that he was supposed to follow the fairy, but at least, it meant that he was treading the correct path in a clear and cloudless, cold and starry night.

7 Coming to a First Conclusion

Since two hours, rain had been falling down.

He was all wet, and the grass he was walking on didn't make things better at all. He had realized that the rain only affected the clearing, for the dead forest around it would stay dry; but still, he could not leave the clearing. Not that he longed to do so, but it was kind of peculiar that you moved and the grass followed you. Though the spot where his feet touched the ground was now quite muddy, for it followed him, too, he knew he was moving for the trees of the dead forest in front of him vanished there to appear behind the clearing again.

He had steadily followed the arrow he'd found on the nut, but now, he was getting tired. Turning around and coming to a halt, he saw the stones that would invite him to take a rest; And though there was the image of Simetra in his mind, and though he knew he had to go on, he couldn't resist. No sleep had come over him for long hours, but this time, as soon as his head touched the stones, he fell asleep, ignoring the rain and the roaring thunder around him. . .

With the cruelty of a smashing hammer, a loud, crashing sound awoke him. He jumped, and turned to see where the sound had come from; For a second, he thought that the 'roadbuilder' was close and that he could not escape him anymore; Then, he noticed a wooden sign that seemed to *grow* just in front of him. He checked the nut with the arrow; Yes, this sign had grown in the direction he had been advancing towards, and quite easily, he could even make out the muddy spot again.

Letters began to form themselves on the still growing sign, and he was eager to find out what he would be told, but for now, he could only stay here and wait. He sat down on the small rocks again, and realized once more how smooth and soft they were, as if not stones, but perfect pillows; Then, he heard the sound of a tiny fountain, and he turned around to see the spring again. His thirst became apparent to him now, and he drank with satisfaction.

If he wasn't missing Simetra and the fairy, and if he didn't have a mission, he would have loved this place; but thus, he could only admire it. An admiration full of sadness and sorrow.

But there was nothing he could do except sitting, drinking and waiting, hoping that this sign would sort things out. The letters began to become visible, and he stood up to take a closer look at them. Most peculiarly, he could read them without any problems; but, giving it a second thought, why wouldn't a magic sign know how to address him in his own language?

Slowly, he began to decipher the first words, and things got easier the further he got; the sign was still growing, and a lot of text was waiting for him:

Thou hast gone far,

7 *Coming to a First Conclusion*

though far from far enough;
Your origin is still untraced,
your destiny unknown to human soul.
The twigs and branches of life seem dead;
and death brings life to darkness' fellows.
Meaningful is the choice you are to make;
for neither love nor death will be to blame
for failure of your kindred soul.
The trees out there could be your guide;
the nuts of dust could tell you wisely
where to go;
Your instinct can never be proved to be right,
and your logic can be, neither.
Lighted magic seems alive,
but vivid is the darkness of death.
The easiest way could be right,
but none may tell you if that's true.
You do know this silent speaker,
though you don't know you do;
Thou shalt not search for answers,
nor reason, nor emotion;
Life is a search for the way
to search without searching.
Swing to the left, swing to the right
to reach the centre;
but do not stay where you are.
You must move to stay,
and stay to die.
Thou longest for a magic creature
and a fellow, but shortly lost soul;
both are close, but far apart;
He who tries to leave will stay.
He who wants to find shall not search.
Yet do not stay, for change lies ahead.
A decision must be quick and wise,
for it can be made only once.
The late creatures you long to hold are waiting
in a world not yours;
Their magic can not save them,
but yours combined with theirs can.
Time is gone,
and can never come back,
unless the magic of the *ONE*
turns its wheels again.

This singular being is me,
but I'm caught and bound to hide;
you are to find me,
as this is your mission.
I have been close to you for all your life,
but you have not been allowed to know.
I am with you now,
but you can not see me yet.
Your magic is still not known to you,
and I can not teach you.
I have told you who can;
be wise and go on quickly
without movement.
But don't you stay here;
get out!

Puzzled was the wrong word to describe the way his thought were racing through his young mind, crashing into each other to combine to an unknown mess. What did it mean? Was his sister talking to him?

He would have to figure this out later; he could take the sign with him. But — *WHERE?* What did these magic words mean? He'd rarely seen such a difficult tongue before, and even the most complicated books he'd read were easy in comparison with this here. As fast as he could, he scanned the lines once more, hoping for an answer to come to his mind; Then, he realized that he should not search for an answer, but wait for it. He should not move, but he should not stay, either.

What had he done the last hours? He had moved — and stayed. But how could he do the opposite? He had to *be* moved. What could move him? **Who** could move him? There was nobody here, and nothing inanimate could move on its own, unless. . . It was magic! That was the solution. But how could he make this magic of his come alive, if he didn't even know that he had any? And how could he know that this sign was real?

He had a closer look at it; Magic had made it grow, and growth was a movement. But it had stayed here. . . Suddenly, a burst of laughter reached his ears from far, far away. From the place where he had been coming from. And a loud, smashing, steady sound was coming closer. He had to get out, the sign was right. But how?

A shudder ran down his spine, and he was sweating more than ever. This was wrong: He was pushing for an answer again, as he was being forced to decide. He had to resist this urge to decide. . . If the sign had been made grow by the magic of his sister, then this was part of him; part of his magic. He took the sign and turned it around in his hands. Then, he closed his eyes, trying to become less nervous. When he opened them again, he was far from being calm, but he knew what he had to do. His magic would make him move.

The smashing sound must now be so close that it was only 100 metres away, but he felt no fear anymore. This decision was final. The first and last conclusion that would decide whether he was allowed to live on. He held the sign over the muddy spot, still

7 *Coming to a First Conclusion*

waiting for a second. Was he right? He had to be right, and if he wasn't, it was too late; He was not to search an answer, and this one seemed senseless; He could never have searched for it. It must have come to him, as the sign had predicted.

He planted the sign in the muddy spot and sat down on it. He sat down on the sign. Nothing happened; what was wrong? The smashing sound was coming closer...

Yes! He would not only need his, but their magic, too! Where could he get their magic in a second? He could not open his bag that quickly, and he would risk to destroy the nuts. He searched for an answer again; As soon as he realized this, another burst of laughter was to be heard, **VERY** close this time. Closing his eyes and concentrating, he suddenly heard something else: The spring! Quickly, he ran to it, took some water in his hands and watered the post, then finally sitting down on it again. Before he even touched it, a mass of 'roadbuilders' approached the clearing, this was the sound he'd heard! They would smash him in a second... And a big, dangerous, black figure seemed to hover among them, and it laughed again, grinning with an evil face...

8 Running Words

Simetra was high in the sky, searching for her friend. As soon as he had been smashed to the ground close to the clearing, she had carefully approached the fairy, who was this time hovering above the spring, for she knew that something magic was approaching her. What she didn't know was the fact that the magic creature was using her own magic, to a little extent. As she saw the bird and realized that she could speak, the fairy sat down again to listen.

Help, help! You must help! Don't fly away, stay and help! He'll die!

The bird was nervously fluttering up and down; the fairy could see her own magic in the eyes of her, and she knew the bird was true. Pity was filling her mind, and she rose again to follow the small creature; a sphere of magic was accompanying her, and as soon as she got close enough to Simetra, she was also enclosed by this green sphere of light. A peculiar, but somehow... *GOOD* warmth was flooding her. And suddenly, if she ever had had any doubts, she knew she had done the right thing, for the fairy followed her. Only seconds later, the two creatures flooded by magic reached the place of the accident; The fairy shot down again, and as soon as her feet touched the ground, it became green; as green as the grass of the clearing. Astonished about this strange reality and her own action that followed, Simetra sat down on her shoulder, feeling as if she belonged there. Of course, she was now containing part of her magic, but she could not understand how she could have trusted her so fast without even realizing she was. As if done by magic...

The same energy that had made her speak seemed to be flowing through her friend now, and within a second, he was hovering in the air, his wounds closing and his skin emanating a strange, bright, green light. He was now in a magic sphere of his own... Then, shortly before he seemed to be normal again, this light around him changed; His sphere exploded in a dark blue with a bit of red, looking like an ultraviolet ball of energy, but the fairy had already turned around, as if her job was finished. Simetra, however, was still watching her friend.

The powerful, energetic sphere of him was growing now, contracting once more, and then... It exploded in a shimmering burst of light! Simetra was blinded, but the fairy didn't react in any way. The ultraviolet sphere began to manifest itself again, but it was much bigger now, somehow — touching the sphere of the fairy, mixing with it in a magic way the powerful bird could not understand. Such things were not to be understood by a purely logic brain, and Simetra was still learning how to use her newly gained emotions that added to her former instincts. She had become human, in a way, but she was still like an animal, though she was changing continuously.

The green and the ultraviolet sphere were still in touch and Simetra was in the very middle of it until the fairy moved away; still, she seemed not to have noticed anything.

It was a sorry sight if one knew what was going on, but nobody did. As soon as the fairy had flown far enough to separate the two spheres, the ultraviolet one shrunk once more until it was nothing more than the size of a tiny nut, hovering in front of him. Then, with a big ‘bang’, it exploded again; but this time, the majestic power didn’t stop after it had reached the fairy. The shockwave pushed against the green sphere, and the suddenly astonished fairy shrieked highly as she was thrown above the trees, followed by Simetra who couldn’t react, either.

Even if he had been awake, even if his closed eyes had been opened, he would not have been able to understand what he had done. His instincts had controlled him and only his emotions could realize what was going on. If he had been in control of his senses in that moment, an eternal sorrow would have grabbed his soul and the feeling of loss and bidirectional denial without having ever tried to establish a connection with all the power one of them could have used. Ignorance, this was the word to express his feelings.

But he wasn’t awake, and the fairy wouldn’t remember anything except a sudden idea of friendship with him. Then, a kind of magic yet unknown to him made him hover towards the clearing, and he dropped on the stones in the middle of it, where he should awake shortly after. Simetra, at the same time, was with the fairy in the light green sphere, caught in their own magic. The brightness of the sphere was becoming less apparent, and then, a minute after they had been shot right into the sky, it had gone.

Still, the two of them were accelerating. The fairy realized they had to stop, and do so quickly. Thus, she spread her wings and grabbed the helpless bird, trying to stop this unwanted Ascension. They had already been so high that their two pairs of wings became frozen, and moments later, they began to fall like a stone. The fairy aimed at the ground and formed a miracle with her hands, moving them in a way that was so strange that Simetra’s eyes could not follow these movements. Then, a green ball of light was flying even faster than the two of them, crushing through the treetops and hitting the ground. At first, nothing seemed to happen, but then, the trees shrunk away and a smooth patch of green was waiting for them.

He was now sitting on the sign, but still, nothing would happen. At least, not the thing he’d hoped for, as he wasn’t moved by any kind of magic he could see. The black figure had now stopped, realizing he was trying to escape, and even the ‘roadbuilders’ had stopped their movements. His thoughts were racing until he realized once more that he should not search for an answer. Then, the answer came. And the black figure was coming, too.

It was not hovering in the air anymore, but was standing on the ground, slowly approaching him. When it saw his fingers trying to grab some bits of grass, it could not help but laugh again. This creature was so helpless, it could never have been the cause of that magic wave that had been rushing over this land hours before! The creature grinned. In fact, it grinned until the grass had touched the sign. Then, it stopped and watched the spot where that — *MAN* — had been sitting just a second before. He was gone. and so was the sign, followed by the muddy spot, the grass and the water. A majestic roar was to be heard, and the ‘roadbuilders’ destroyed the clearing in a second. He had escaped on a plant of running words.