

I wake up, both more and less confused than yesterday.

Yesterday being a convenient illusion that my mind allows me to make use of. The more I am 'here', wherever here is, as 'this', whatever this is, the more I am starting to think that a lot of reality is convenient illusions. The scholar memories show a lot of time spent thinking about exactly that idea. They also show a lot of time spent being very frustrated at the lack of available confirmation. I suppose now we have it, though maybe not in the way that was exactly expected.

Ah, yesterday. Right. I had fallen asleep, unable to even dig myself a proper hole. I asses my physical state as best I can. I am, it seems, still in one piece. And I'm thinking, so I must still be. This is good, I was just starting to get the hang of **Nudge Material**. I am not getting the hang of thinking words like that.

Speaking of, the reservoir on the spell has refilled itself. I had not noticed before, but it is there if I look. Something like a vial of liquid nothing, lashed to the side of the spell's mental mechanism like a particularly creative partner to the bed.

Ah, another old memory has woken up with me. Singer, tale teller, wanderer, bard. An adventurer, but not in the sense of one of the idiots that goes into dark holes and murders local wildlife. A misadventurer. I suspect a part of them has been with me this whole time. Either that, or all of my old pieces are just very similar in demeanor in some ways.

I focus on myself.

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 1

Authority : 1

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Nobility : 1

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Empathy : 1

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Spirituality : 1

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Ingenuity : 1

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Tenacity : 1

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Ah. I have grown. Somehow. Was it taking a nap? Depleting myself so fully? Or maybe I will grow more as I wake up the rest of my old minds. Maybe I cannot grow further. That ever

present lingering anxiety lurks, waiting for me to think about it. *What if*, it howls in the back of my head, *you have hit your cap?*

I don't like that anxiety. It feels like... not like something that comes from my thoughts and experiences, from my lives lived. Or maybe it does. But in a sideways fashion. It feels like hunger, like thirst, like cold. It feels like an *instinct*, not a thought or idea. A driving base need that exists to push me. To tell me that if I sit still, no matter how interesting what I am doing is, eventually *I will die* and it will be because I failed to save myself.

Interesting. Actually interesting. I am something new, I think. Or at the very least, something I have never heard of before. I can think so clearly, so quickly, compared to some of who I used to be. I can see the firmament of my soul. I can do magic, albeit very *small* magic. But I can do it! And so far, I have not felt hunger or thirst, pain or torment. Just some exhaustion when I pushed myself to my limits.

Is it wrong, then, to say that I accept this trade wholeheartedly?

A new life. A different one, but a new one, something exciting and different to explore.

And speaking of, I feel like it might be a good idea to keep that life a bit secure. I focus on the ethereal machinery that guides my influence on the world, and start pouring myself into **Nudge Material** once more, keeping an eye on **Know Material**, so as to get an accurate idea for if I am in fact doing this right.

Some time later, and a shift in my list of what is around me that includes the loss of some wood and the inclusion of more stone, dirt, and a smattering of metal, I reach the conclusion that I have become sufficiently underground. I've moved away from the top of the tree - I think - and toward the deeper parts of the earth below - I think - which will let me have at least some visual shelter from anyone passing by with eyes to wonder why there is a spinning geometric shape sitting on the ground.

I'm still spinning, though. I can feel it. The constant small tug of my own internals as I rotate on my point. I also still haven't fallen over. Now that I think about it, if I don't stop spinning even though I've effectively buried myself, then I'll eventually pack the dirt around me into a nice little shell. A small bubble of space to work within. Maybe. If I am underground.

I miss eyes. I said earlier that a new existence was not a bad one, but I miss being able to just look at something and see it.

To that end, **Nudge Material** exhausted and **Know Material** draining slowly toward the same, I turn my attention to spending that power that I have been granted.

And learn, as I consider taking **Collect Material**, that I cannot in fact do that. My **Ingenuity** lacks the aptitude and durability to hold another spell. And *that* feels rude. My ingenuity has dug me a hole without hands or eyes! I feel like that, at least, should be partially rewarded!

But no. I do not have that luxury. I have one open page of my spellbook for each of my soul aspects. Perhaps I can change that later, but for now, I won't be mapping the domain I don't have or inviting the mammals I cannot see.

Nobility has a spell called **Lock Portal**, which sounds like a nice security option. But I somehow doubt it would work on a sloped hole in the ground. In fact, I know it wouldn't, because when I think about it, I can know exactly what it does. It applies a small bar of solidified mana to a barrier over an entryway, that would take one strike of force to break.

I do not know what a strike is, exactly. But I compare to my memories and come to the conclusion that the scholar and merchant would have had a hard time with it. The others, not so much. Though something about the idea of breaking down a door and not taking a more elegant and flourished solution feels offensive to the memory of the dear departed singer.

Alright, here's the problem.

If I am going to have a chance of getting anything done, with actual agency, I'm going to need to do more than just sit here poking dirt and looking at dirt. I'm going to need to, perhaps, take a chance on something.

Here is what I know. I am in the dirt, in a place that has dirt, soil, plants, and presumably trees. A place like that is, without a doubt, going to have bugs. There is no way that it wouldn't. I can remember a dozen scientific explanations for why bugs are important for soil growth, but I can also remember a thousand hot and humid days turning over rich soil full of ants and neems, knowing that their presence made the crops healthier, as long as they didn't eat them.

I look at a part of myself.

Authority : 1

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Available :

See Rank (1, Perceive)

Shift Dirt (1, Shape)

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Drop Trigger (1, War)

And then, that part becomes something different, as I drain my loose power into it.

Authority : 1

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Here is a thing I am learning about myself. Most of the memories of who I was before, the pieces of my soul that have been weaved together in a way I do not understand at all but know has happened as surely as I used to know that I had a heartbeat, *most* of them would not have minded bugs at all.

Some of them would.

Merchant would have been... not squeamish, but *put out* in a way that makes me think now that she didn't so much worry about the insects but about what it would say about her to have them in her home. They were a sign of laziness, and a slow tongue. Singer, though, would have just silently seethed until everyone looked away and they could smoothly annihilate the insectile threat to their life without drawing laughs.

Me, though? I'm none of who I was, even while I am all of who I was. And part of the great thing about not having skin or the social expectation of eating all the mosquitoes in your home is that I don't feel any kind of visceral fear of being surrounded by bugs. Though I admit, I may take merchant's experiential advice and clean them out of the room beforehand if I ever manage to talk to another person again.

I miss talking to people. Even though "I" have never done it, I still miss it. Mixed memories and mixed thoughts make it seem like a jumbled mess of a thing to do, but I want to try. Maybe I'll hate it, but at least I'll know. And if I do, I can go back to digging myself a hole in the ground.

Bind Insect finishes seeping into my soul, and a new mechanism unfolds itself in my mind. Just like **Nudge Material**, this one has no sensory feedback, only an outgoing flow for the small spell. I know that I can bind insects up to one hundredth of a unit in mass, so, *small things* I suppose. And with literally nothing better to do than watch dirt, I throw myself into examining and activating it.

I've gotten used to directing things with **Nudge Materials**, so I aim this one straight up. I'm down into dirt now, past the soil, past where living things make their homes. It occurs to me that **Authority** offered me a spell called **Shift Dirt** as well, and I wonder if it wouldn't have worked on soil, since the magic counts it separately. But that's a question, hopefully, for later. For now, I try to grab a bug.

Nothing happens. I can feel it activate, but nothing occurs.

I try again. And again.

This is frustrating without eyes. I would like eyes. I'm quickly running out of the ability to see lists of material as it is, I feel like a backup would be appropriate. But no. It's just me, in the dark, with my potential mistake. So I activate **Bind Insect** again and hope it works.

On the twelfth try, something changes.

The small container of nothing-power tied to the spell drains by about a quarter. That hasn't happened before, and it can only really mean one thing. It has worked. An insect, bound.

Now, mysterious magic, *tell me what that means please?*

And, like a sprite's gift, it actually does.

Tethered to the main mechanism, an artificial mental root grows outward at a steady pace. Bit by bit, it moves until it is in a stable position floating near the spell. I use all of these words, root, grow, floating, even position, but none of them are right. There is nothing growing in me, only the darkness of thought; there is no relative position, only the knowledge of connection.

And now, there is *light*.

A tiny, *minute* spot of light in my thoughts. And not even a lot of it, either. But it's there.

I can see.

Not just see, either. I can feel. I can smell. The faceted and close range view of the world, distorted as it is, should make me nauseous, but it doesn't. The sensation of beating my wings a hundred times a second and knowing every one of them should mentally drain me, but it doesn't. The smell of... well, it's not really a smell. But it's something similar. I am processing the input of blossoming flowers, but in a way alien to how all my memories remember them.

I have bound myself to a honeybee.

I have never been more excited in my life.

As time passes, an array of new controls bloom like the flower overhead, attached through sympathetic links to my connection to this lone bee. It's not doing anything special, just bee things, but the new viewpoint is so welcome I would cry.

I cannot cry, because of the lack of eyes that I am already frustrated with, but I would if I could.

I examine the new controls, and find a host of options for my new bound insect. Direction, motion, interaction, these are commands. Orders I can give, like a particularly overbearing sergeant once gave one of my memories. Total control, if I want it.

I don't want to hurt this bee, so I only spend a little while playing with tying to get it to look around before letting go.

I was not on a table, after all. The area above me is alive, sunny, and lush. There's a stream nearby, an ashen limbed tree swaying in the wind, a riot of colorful flowers around a fallen log, and all around, green. I'm in a forest.

Well, I'm under a forest, now.

And I'm also learning that commanding insects through the bond is just as draining as activating **Bind Insect** to begin with. And the empty chunk of power further empties itself out.

I drift once again into exhausted sleep. But this time, a little more underground, and a little more confident that I'll wake up again.

Before I fade away entirely, I watch the tiny motes flow toward me. From the dirt I've moved, the space I can observe, and, in a line of dots brighter than all the others, from the bee I've saddled like an obok.

Possibility lays itself out before me. I want to do so much more.

When I wake, I'll do more.