



THE FACE WITH LEAF-COLORED EYES

A STORY FROM THE WORLD OF MNEMONIC
by Dee Pennyway

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Shimmer was the name she had chosen for herself, when she knew she could no longer go home. It was the name of dew on the grass, of moonlight, of the waves dancing on top of the Wide Sea. Now, it was a name that contained her as well.

The morning was warm, and Shimmer's web glistened in the rising light, perfect and delicate and hers.

Then a boot came down from the sky, crushing the web into the leaves of the forest floor. The boot lifted, carrying strands of Shimmer's silk with it, and she watched silently as a night's work disappeared into the brush.

"Excuse you," she muttered, and got to work fixing it.

Her small nets were more than a home; without it, Shimmer would never catch her breakfast. It had been several days since she had last eaten, and she was hungry.

A shadow fell over her, but she ignored it as she worked. When the web was half finished, she glanced up to see a pair of bright, leaf-colored eyes staring down at her.

She stopped working. "Can I help you?" she asked, as politely as she could.

To her surprise, the face that surrounded the eyes made a smiling expression. "I'm just admiring your work," the face said, "but if my presence disturbs you I can leave you alone."

"By all means, stay," said Shimmer, and returned her

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attention to the threads of her new web. The sun was high enough that the dew was gone, and she had to strain her eyes to see the strands she'd already lain down. "If you want to feel useful, you could find whoever wore this boot and give them a stern talking-to about watching where they step."

The face bent down to examine the shallow divots marring the ground. "This boot?" The face's eyes worked their way back and forth across the imprint, as though committing every detail to memory. "I understand. I'll return soon."

The face lifted away, and the shadow disappeared through the bushes.

The morning grew toward afternoon, and the face did not return, so Shimmer went about her business, setting her silk threads just-so in anticipation of what she hoped might be an evening meal. The flies were buzzing in the air nearby, she could hear them swarming around something, and cursed her luck. "Maybe I should have made my web over there," she muttered to herself.

At last a small gnat wandered its way into her web's embrace, tangling itself among the threads. A gnat was hardly dinner, but after so many days without food, it was a small feast, and she savored it.

The flies were still buzzing, though a bit less loudly, as the day's light faded from Shimmer's little home, and she started planning her next web. She entertained a vain notion that maybe when the flies were done with whatever they were doing they might come over here and get caught

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in her web, and then she might have food enough to last through the summer. But as the daylight replaced itself with moonlight, she resigned herself to another night of mild hunger.

The face returned in the full light of the moon, smiling gently. "I found the man with the boot," the face said.

Shimmer looked up at the face. "Did you tell this man to be careful?"

The face bobbed up and down in an eager nod. "I did, yes. And he said that he would step where he pleased, and then he tried to hit me, but I was too fast for him."

Shimmer shifted her legs so that she could better see the face, and the body attached to it. But the face's body was concealed in shadows. "What happened then?"

"Well," said the face, "after he realized he couldn't hit me with his hands, he drew a sword, and I didn't have a sword, but then I remembered your web, and I used that instead."

"You used my web?" Shimmer tilted her head. "How? My web hasn't moved."

"I remembered the look you had when you were trying to figure out if your old web was salvagable," said the face. "I remember your sadness. This kind of thing happens all the time, doesn't it?"

Shimmer nodded. "More often than I'd like, certainly."

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"But I didn't use your sadness. I remembered the tattered remains of your web, and how the threads were torn apart. I used that memory."

Memory. Shimmer all but lost her breath. "You're a mage."

The face smiled. "The man with the boot won't be bothering you again. Have a pleasant evening, Shimmer."

Shimmer opened her mouth to speak, but the shadows around the face deepened suddenly, and in a gust of wind it was gone, leaving her alone with her kill and the distant buzzing of flies.

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A mage can use their recollection of past events to weave spells of energy through the world. Recall the memory of a roaring fireplace, and you can light the candles of your room at the inn, or set your campfire going without any flint.

Most mages can only shape energies that are similar to the ones in their memories. A precious, dangerous few can manipulate their memories to draw on the energy they need, calling on the cracking of a burning log to shatter an enemy's leg. These mages are formidable, yes, but their power is dangerous. To warp one's own memories is to lose one's grasp of reality. What vast evil could arise in that chaos?

—The Choirmaster, "Grey Sermons IV-XXVI"