

THE LIGHTEATER

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When the old bard walked into the theatre, his brother Uil and the King were already seated in the first row. As he took the stage for the last time he imagined it smelt different. The stage had been made to witness his crimes, hence it had always smelt a touch resentful. But now it welcomed him with a sweet scent, as if it already knew he was about to confess.

He flared his three nostrils and took a deep breath. Absorbing the lingering stories seeping out of every pore of the theatre he unfurled his plumage and began his dance.

The first memory he recreated was one from half a rose-bloom after he had been hired as Qix's apprentice. Aromas of Qix, as the unhinged mentor, genius storyteller and stingy employer wafted out from the bard's feathers. He carefully layered on the scents until the King and Uil were transported to that time. They smelt that Qix was only paying the bard one light pellet every rose-bloom. They smelt the omens of hatred in the bard's heart.

Next, the bard took the King and Uil on an olfactory journey to the doctor's chamber. The bard exuded the odours of the place, the instruments and the doctor. He exuded the odours of the doctor diagnosing a younger and sicker Uil. The doctor smelled that Uil's body could not store light; unlike everyone else he could not control how his body converted light into smells. He could not survive the fifty rose-blooms between each sunrise and he would have to be injected with light pellets every quarter rose-bloom to live. The King and Uil smelt the doctor offering the bard some medicine to numb his nostrils so he would not be exposed to the stench from Uil's plumage. The King shivered when he was hit with the smell of the bard's sadness.

The bard brought Qix before them again. This time, despair coloured every odour the bard emanated. Qix was concocting magical new smells for a story of fantastical creatures. Creatures that lived on a planet where it was always sunny, that had two nostrils and that communicated with sounds instead of scents; just as creatures like the bard, the King, Qix and Uil could not distinguish many sounds, these fantastical creatures could not distinguish many smells. Qix was wild with excitement and he was not prepared to smell anything the bard exuded. But the bard continued to stink of pleading and Qix continued to reek of the stories of these creatures that did not live off light and could kill each other. The bard needed light pellets to save Uil and Qix was not going to help him. He painted the scene with such vivid scents that the very air in the theatre struggled to support the weight of his past self's helplessness. Uil started to weep.

Suddenly the bard left the stage and went to the back of the theatre. He paused for a while before he unfurled his plumage again to set his story free. The King and Uil smelt the bard from many rose-blooms ago spray his numbing medicine into the theatre. When Qix came on stage, not a single member of the audience could catch a whiff of his story. They could not even smell his wrath afterwards.

The bard was running out of light to make smells with; feathers started to fall like tears from his wings and he struggled to remain standing. The blunt edges of buried guilt punctured him anew. Uil left his seat and ran to the bard, begging him with the fragrance of love to stop. The King did not leave his seat but he smelled of agreement.

The bard pushed Uil away and conjured the scene from the day he'd taken Qix's life. He emanated a smell neither the King nor Uil had ever smelt before. The odour of a lighteater. They smelt the bard precisely imitate the doctor's aroma and feed Qix the lethal lie. The bard, pretending to be the doctor, gave Qix the impression he had lost his ability to create smells. And Qix in his misery exhausted the last of his light. He left his body as the fragrance of failure.

The bard became famous and rich with the stories of Qix's magical creatures and Uil eventually healed.

At the back of the theatre, the bard fell to his knees and wept. There was a cacophony of smells spreading from him in dying light. Uil thought he smelt the bard blaming Qix's ruthless magical creatures for making him the first lighteater. The King thought he smelt the bard's love for Uil. They both smelt his blazing wish to be forgiven. But before either of them could move, the bard had left his body as the fragrance of lighteating.

