

***Moth Season***  
**Word Count: 2774 words**

Before my mother died, she would open the kitchen window every evening, no matter the season. Even in the middle of July, when the cold settled like damp on your chest, she'd crack it open just enough to let the air speak. "The wind has memory," she used to say, standing barefoot on the tile, arms folded against the chill. "It carries things. Feelings. Bits of people. You've just got to listen closely."

Sometimes she'd sit on the stool beside the window and strum her old guitar with two fingers, slow and out of tune, humming under her breath. She didn't know many songs, but she said you didn't need lyrics when the wind was already listening.

I used to think she was just being poetic. I'd laugh, pull my hoodie tighter, and ask if the wind ever told her anything interesting. She'd smile without answering, the kind of smile that made you feel like you were missing the punchline to a joke that wasn't meant to be funny. On those nights, the kitchen always smelled like cut ginger or chamomile or the faint trace of whatever candle she'd lit earlier, something earthy and old. The breeze would drift in—soft, deliberate—and the room would shift just slightly, like it was listening too.

Some nights I'd sit under the table with my back against the cold tiles and close my eyes, trying to hear whatever she heard. The hum of the fridge, the clink of her spoon in a teacup, the occasional bark from down the street. And beneath all that, the wind itself—threading through the gap in the window, brushing past my ears like a whisper I wasn't fluent enough to understand. I never told her, but I believed her a little more each time. Not because the wind ever spoke to me, but because she listened so carefully, it had to be saying something worth hearing.

I was eleven the first time I asked if that meant ghosts, and she laughed like it tickled her heart. "Not ghosts, sweetheart. Just... echoes."

After she died, the house went quiet. Not in the obvious way, like when someone turns off music. This was the kind of quiet that presses on your skin. The kind that seeps under door frames and into cutlery drawers. We stopped opening windows. The air grew stale and tight. My aunties kept bringing scented candles and doused everything in disinfectant, as if grief was a virus we could bleach out of the walls. They vacuumed aggressively, cooked in bulk, and spoke in quiet voices like they didn't want to disturb whatever was coiled in the corners.

But the moths came anyway.

They came like dusk—silent, soft, with no real agenda. Pale brown, sometimes grey, barely bigger than a thumbprint. They clung to windowpanes and bathroom tiles, floated around the hallway light like they were lost in orbit. One morning I found a crumpled one pressed between the pages of Mum's old cookbook, resting beside a handwritten recipe for lemon pound cake.

They gathered in corners no one paid attention to—above doorframes, behind the folds of curtains, tucked into the edges of lampshades like secrets. Their wings were delicate, patterned like pressed leaves or old lace, and when they moved, it was slow and drifting, as if the air had to remember how to carry them. I started noticing the way they seemed to appear only when the house was still, when everything was between moments—just before the kettle boiled, just after the hallway light clicked off. One morning, I found one resting on the rim of a glass left out overnight. Its wings trembled slightly, not from fear or motion, but like it was vibrating with some quiet purpose I wasn't meant to understand.

I didn't tell anyone. It didn't seem like something they would understand.

The first time I saw the one in the bathroom mirror, I'd just gotten out of the shower. Steam still swirled in the air, thick enough that the mirror had only cleared in patches. And there it was. Just above my right shoulder, in a dry corner of glass, a single moth. Still. Perfectly still.

I froze. I didn't feel fear. Just a strange alertness, like the room had shifted its shape.

The moth didn't move, even as I leaned closer, even when my breath fogged the mirror and then cleared again. Its wings were symmetrical, the colour of tea-stained paper. It sat there like it had always been there.

That night I dreamt of Mum. Not her face, not her voice—just her scent. Warm eucalyptus, like the hand cream she always kept in the side drawer. I woke up before sunrise, confused, heart thudding. I padded across the hallway and flicked on the bathroom light.

The moth was still there.

Same position. Same wings, half open, like a breath paused mid-sigh.

From that night on, it kept returning. Always in the same spot. Always when the mirror cleared after a shower or brushing my teeth. I never touched it. Never even raised a hand too close. There was something sacred about it, something delicate that might break if I tried to force it to react. Sometimes I whispered to it—just a word or two.

“Hey.”

“You came back.”

“I missed you.”

I didn't say Mum's name. I didn't have to.

My father noticed I'd started leaving the bathroom fan off again. “You're going to fog the mirror,” he said one evening. “It makes the tiles slippery.”

“I like it like that,” I said.

He looked at me a long time before nodding. “Okay.”

My cousin Imran came to stay during the second week of the holidays. His mum said it was to give my dad a break, but I knew better. I was fourteen, old enough to understand when people were scared you’d stop speaking entirely. Imran was a year older than me, loud in a way that felt like a defence mechanism. He brought a PS5 and two hoodies with anime girls on them and an entire backpack full of snacks he didn’t offer to share.

He had a habit of tapping things—window panes, phone screens, tabletops—like he was drumming in silence just to keep it from settling. His jokes came fast and loud, even when no one was listening, as if the volume alone could conjure comfort. Once, I caught him watching a horror movie with the sound off while simultaneously playing Minecraft on his laptop. He said he couldn’t stand stillness.

There was something jittery about him, like a live wire without a socket. His voice carried through walls, but his presence never seemed to land. He’d stand in doorways like he wasn’t sure whether to enter, eyes flicking around like he was waiting for someone to make a decision for him. In a house full of paused memories, he moved fast-forward.

He had the kind of energy that filled a room before he even opened his mouth—always tapping his fingers, chewing gum too loudly, narrating everything he did like someone might be filming. He talked over loading screens, over dinner, over the end credits of movies we hadn’t finished. At night, he stayed up watching TikTok on his phone with the volume too high, laughing at things that didn’t seem funny, like he was afraid of quiet. He didn’t ask me anything personal—not about school, not about the house, not about Mum—and I didn’t offer. We existed beside each other, like strangers on a long bus ride, aware of the space between us but unsure what it was made of.

Once, when I was turning off the light, he said, “You okay, man?” without looking up from his phone. I didn’t answer, but I remembered that he asked.

He saw the moth on the second night.

“Dude, that’s gross,” he said, wrinkling his nose. “Kill it.”

I said nothing. I was brushing my teeth, watching the wings shift almost imperceptibly with my breath.

“Seriously,” Imran went on. “Moths are, like, just dust with legs.”

“It’s fine.”

He leaned in. “It’s literally sitting there like it owns the place.”

I rinsed and spat, keeping my eyes on the mirror. “It’s just a moth.”

But that night I moved my toothbrush to the laundry sink. I didn't want to risk it disappearing. I didn't want it to think I'd chosen sides, not that I'd ever agree with Imran for anything.

The night the moth didn't come, I felt the absence like a missing heartbeat. I stared at the mirror until the steam vanished completely, until it was just me and a pair of eyes that looked too old for my face. My chest felt tight, not in a medical way, but like I'd swallowed something too large and it hadn't quite gone down.

I dreamt of nothing that night. Not Mum. Not even the sense of her. I woke up hollow, and the ache followed me through breakfast.

Two nights later, the moth returned. I found myself smiling at it like a fool. I whispered, "Where did you go?" and it didn't answer, but it didn't leave either.

I started writing again. Not proper things—just half-poems in the margins of school worksheets, scraps of memory in the notes app on my phone. Mostly about wings. About paper. About the way shadows looked different when they moved.

Sometimes the words came in bursts, like something cracking open inside me. I'd scribble lines during roll call, between maths questions, in the gaps between one thought and the next. They weren't neat or clever—just fragments, like broken feathers. One was about a moth trapped in a lampshade, another about how silence folds itself around a room. I didn't show anyone. It felt like breathing through paper—thin, quiet, but enough to keep me going.

At school, Aria asked if I was okay. She was one of the only people who did. Not in that awkward, worried-adult way, but like she actually wanted to know—like she could hear the hollow echo behind the "I'm fine" everyone else accepted. We sat behind the science block at lunch, our usual spot where the concrete wall radiated just enough warmth from the sun to make you forget it was winter. The ground was always scattered with dry leaves and candy wrappers, and the air smelled faintly of printer ink and grass clippings.

We were eating sour worms from the bag, fingers dusted in sugar, picking through the colours like it mattered. Aria always went for red first. She chewed slowly, eyes half-closed, like she was thinking about something bigger than school. She didn't fill the silence with noise. She didn't ask for details I couldn't give. She just sat there, solid and soft around the edges, like the kind of person grief doesn't scare off. Like she could sit with it without needing to name it.

I think that's why I told her.

"I think it's her," I said, chewing slowly.

"What is?"

"The moth. In my bathroom."

Aria didn't laugh or call me crazy. She just nodded. "That makes sense."

I looked at her sideways. “It does?”

She shrugged. “If she believed the wind could remember things, then yeah. Why not moths?”

She paused, then said, almost casually, “After my brother died, my mum stopped playing the piano. Just... stopped. She used to play every Sunday morning. Something jazzy, usually. But after the funeral, she covered it with an old sheet and wouldn’t even look at it.” Aria didn’t say it to earn sympathy—just like she was placing something gently between us. “Sometimes I think grief makes you allergic to the things you love most.” She picked at the corner of the lolly bag, her thumb grazing the plastic. “It took her two years to touch the keys again. One day she just walked past it and played. Like nothing happened. Like everything had.”

We didn’t talk about it again for a while, but I started noticing things after that. Aria would stop sometimes to watch birds. She traced patterns on her jeans with her thumb when the wind changed direction. It made me feel less alone.

In early spring, Dad started clearing out her wardrobe. I came home to find the bed covered in clothes—chunky scarves I hadn’t seen in years, shoes with the soles worn thin, mudboots still caked with mud from the last time we went fishing. He was holding her blue cardigan, the one with the missing button, and for a moment he just stood there, not folding it, not moving, like it weighed more than it should.

“Do you want to keep any of this?” he asked.

I shook my head. “You don’t have to do it all at once.”

“I know,” he said softly.

That night, I played her old guitar for the first time in months. The strings were out of tune, and I wasn’t sure I remembered the chords right, but my fingers moved anyway. Something slow, something half-formed. A melody she used to hum while stirring pasta sauce.

The sound wasn’t pretty. It wavered and slipped, like it was feeling its way back into the room. But the notes trembled with something true, something that didn’t need to be polished. I kept playing, eyes half-closed, letting muscle memory fill in what my mind couldn’t. The melody caught in the air, soft and lopsided, and for a moment I imagined it curling down the hallway, brushing against the baseboards like a familiar hand. It didn’t matter that I couldn’t name the song. It belonged to her. To us. To a time before silence became so heavy.

When I looked up, the moth was perched on the windowsill. Watching.

I didn’t speak. I just kept playing.

Aria came over a few days later. We sat in the backyard under the gum tree with mugs of peppermint tea. She watched a moth settle on the fence.

“I used to think death was like a room you go into and never come back out of,” she said. “But now I think maybe it’s like fabric wearing thin. You can still see shapes through it, if the light hits right.”

“I think she’s thinner now,” I said. “But not gone.”

Aria sipped her tea. “Do you think the moth will stop coming?”

“Maybe. When I stop needing it.”

“Do you want to stop needing it?”

I didn’t answer.

The last time the moth came, I knew it would be the last.

I stayed still for a while after that. Then I walked into the kitchen, barefoot on the tiles, and cracked the window open just a little. My father was already there, sitting at the table in his dressing gown, hands curled around a chipped mug. He looked up, surprised, then softened. “She used to do that too,” he said. I nodded, but didn’t speak. He didn’t ask questions. Just sipped his tea. And I realised then—we were both waiting for something we’d never name, something we could only feel arrive in quiet ways.

It didn’t land on the mirror or the windowsill. It came to rest on the back of my hand while I was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. I didn’t flinch. It felt like a memory touching back. I watched it quietly, and then, almost without thought, I whispered, “It’s okay. You can go now.”

It stayed a moment longer. Then lifted, silent as always, and disappeared into the dark.

After that, I started opening the kitchen window again. Even when it was cold. The wind felt different—not like it was speaking, but like it was listening. I played the guitar more often. I didn’t stop missing her, but the missing softened. It stopped clawing at my throat.

At school, I wrote a poem about a moth. I didn’t read it aloud, but I printed it and tucked it into a library book on grief. I don’t know who found it. I just liked knowing it was out there, floating.

In art class, I built a sculpture out of recycled paper and guitar strings. It didn’t look exactly like a moth. The wings were uneven, and the body leaned slightly to one side. But when the sunlight caught it, it shimmered—just for a second, like memory.

It shimmered—and for a moment, she was there.