

Death, Life and Rebirth.

Denika Mead

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I push at the confines of my world, touching the smooth surface of the egg as I wiggle. I feel the edges of my circular prison expanding. Little cracks zigzag across the shell, fast as lightning.

I'm hatching! The thought shoots through my head in a strange mixture of burning fear and uncontrollable excitement, the egg splinters to pieces like glass, and I begin to glow.

Rain drips from the cave roof like a lonely song. I glow my luminescent light. My long, fishing lines hang from the roof. They are still, hinting that no insects are caught in their deadly trap. A light breeze whistles through the cave, catching my lines, leaving them hopelessly intertwined. I pull up the damaged ones and start making more.

Echoing footsteps fill the cave, they pound through me, shaking my home.

Voices, human voices snake into the cave, bouncing off the walls.

“This is our largest glow-worm cave in New Zealand.” I hear the voice of an adult male leading a group of children into the cave.

I inch into a hole to hide my light from the humans.

“The glow-worm, called Titiwai or Pūrātoke is part of the fly family called the fungus gnats and-”

The kids aren’t listening. They are all on their phones, not paying any attention.

Only one boy isn’t glued to his device, he is looking at me and the other glow-worms intently. His eyes are a bright, chocolate brown. His hair dark and messy.

“Glow-worms have the ability to control the amount of light they produce,” the man goes on, with only that one boy taking in any of it. “Do you have any questions?”

The boy puts up his hand. "What species of glow-worm is this?" he asks.

"These are the *Arachnocampa luminosa*, they are only found in New Zealand. What's your name?" The man asks, glad that someone was listening.

"Gabriel," the boy replies, smiling.

Footsteps sound again as they make their way out, then silence settles over me.

A tug at my fishing line informs me that a large insect is ensnared. I wait patiently for the struggling to stop, then reel it in. It is a fly of some description. It isn't my favorite food, I prefer slugs or snails, but this is fine. I start eating greedily, this will last me for days. I let the calmness of the cave entrance me.

A creeping sound reaches me. Dread shudders through my body. A long-legged harvestman is silhouetted against the light filtering through the cave entrance. It looks at me with evil-ridden eyes, creeping forward on its spindly eight legs, maneuvering through the glow worm's sticky lines. It freezes, inches away, then lunges. But not for me, for the glow-worm beside me. A crunching sound comes from the spider as it devours my unfortunate neighbor. Then, with a malicious and satisfied look at the other glow-worms it scurries out of the cave.

A sense of relief washes over me as the patter of the Harvestman's legs recedes.

Footsteps again, quieter than the group before. The same boy comes in, the shadows lengthen outside, signaling the end of the day. The boy moves to a corner of the small cave and lies down, gazing up at the glow-worms and their fishing lines, shinning like thousands of stars.

"Wow," Gabriel whispers, the word echoing back. "I love glow-worms," he says half to himself. He lies like that for a long time, just looking at the luminescent creatures on the walls and ceiling. Outside darkness descends, Gabriel closes his eyes and is soon asleep.

In the morning Gabriel is gone.

I have been eating as much as possible since I hatched and now I am going into the next stage of my life: the pupa. I have been spending days making the pupa on the end of my thread, I will remain in there for thirteen days. When I emerge, I will be an adult fly. Reeling in my

fishing lines to create free space I start encasing myself in the pupa, the sides wrap around me tightly. Then silent darkness.

I have changed, I am bigger, and I have wings. Pushing my way through the papery skin of the pupa, I stretch, flapping my wings gently to dry them. The light coming from outside is dazzling after the darkness of the pupa.

I expand my wings, they feel unwieldy and strange. I examine the rest of my new body, I am so different. One thought is pounding through my head, what I had been born for, finding a mate and creating new life. I start searching for a female, still encased in her pupa. Finding one I fly over, wobbling in the air as I adjust to my wings.

I wait for her.

My life is fulfilled.

The next generation awaits.