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THE OWLMAGE LISTENS TO YOU

THE OWL MAGE LISTENS TO YOU

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This story was written originally for Mulmur Hills Camp as part of campfire programming, and revised for Camp Heartwood Mystery as part of a story-based mythological curriculum.

This story is suitable for both children and adults.

The Heart Mage's drums are beating and so, to the Council of All Beings we come. The Heart Mage's drums are calling and so, to the Island at the centre we come.

We come down. Down from the stars, down from the skies on sleek wings, down from the mountains where the Alpaca chew, down from the Realms of Light. We come up. Up from the caverns and rocky spaces, up from the shining crystal halls at the core of Earth, up from the fire-baths where the Flame Salamanders soak and smile, up from the Realms of Darkness.

From the jungle forest with its wide waxy leaves.

From the snowy northland desert. From sweeping grassland hill. From sea to sea, from sand dune, the West Wind swept and brought us all. Today we have heard the Heart drums calling us, and so, to the Council of All Beings we come. From all directions the West Wind sweeps across the Universe and brings us to the Central Island at the Heart of Things. Here our shining circle gathers at the edge of cliff overlooking sea, where the Great Tree grows.

We are Sovereign Entities with bright eyes. We are Elementals and Beings and Creatures of every form and colour. We are mages and gods and Ælves and keepers, makers and guardians and sages. We are Rainbow-hued, if you put us all together. Too many of us to count, we are wings wide with feathers lifting, cloven hooves thudding on the soil, paws curling into stalks of

coarse grass, palms curling open, chests rising and falling with breath, eyes lit, mouths about to whisper the secret words of love

The Lion steps into the Circle's core and suddenly there is nothing but his pure golden body. Nothing but his light, and all of us within him. All Beings inside the Cosmic Lion, the One Who is All.

When the Lion steps back to the Circle's boundary we become separate again and he says,

<<We have come. We are well. We are One. Welcome, my brothers and sisters.>>

<<We are One,>> we agree. We breathe together for some time, enjoying the Friendship of the Circle, where one of us is the other.

But soon, one of us notices something, and when one of us notices, we all do.

Something is wrong.

The Owl Mage shivers her feathers. She feels it.

Reindeer Queen stamps her foreleg. She scents it.

Rainbow Wolf growls. He hears it.

Unicorn Seer flings up her head. She sees it.

Heart Mage smiles. She knows it.

Something is wrong.

There is a great silence.

Finally, Mouse speaks. <<There is somebody listening,>> she whispers.
Her whiskers tremble. <<There is somebody listening to us.>>

<<Who?>> asks the Owl Mage. <<Who?>>

We all listen, trying to hear who is listening.

We shift nervously. The Swan Goddess folds in her wings. Treeshaper swallows. The Lizard Maker tenses her muscles. Sun Knight fingers his bow.

<<It is the Shadow,>> Mouse whispers. We listen again, for the ringing of the Shadow's sound, for the answer of its echo.

And then the Owl Mage looks directly out of the pages of this Story. She looks directly at you, the One Who Is Listening. <<Who?>> she asks gently. <<Who are You?>>

The Shadow being, the one outside of the Circle, is You.

Yes, You.

You do not quite understand.

You are suddenly in our Story, and you do not know how that happened.

You are the Shadow who is listening to the Council of All Beings.

We, the beings in the Circle, look at you, the Shadow on the outside of our Ring. There is a sudden flurry of our voices, as though everyone is talking at once, as one being.

<<Who are you?>> demands the Owl Mage, opening and closing her feathered wings.

<<What is the heart of your story?>> challenges the Water Bear with a fierce growl.

<<What way will you give?>> asks the One Who Walks.

<<What is your code, your clue, your mystery?>> whispers the Wind Shaman, winking one unfathomable eye.

<<When is your time?>> cries the Snake Angel, flashing his multi-coloured wings.

<<Declare your intentions,>> states the Thundering Ælf, crossing her arms.

There is a great silence.

We listen, but no answer comes, or if one does come, the answer is not deep enough for us to hear.

In the Circle, nobody speaks. Nobody whispers. Nobody moves. The Owl Mage's cry echoes in our mind. Who? Who are you?

But there is no answer.

Finally, Reindeer Queen bows down with the crown of her antlers and speaks tenderly, <<Perhaps we are not listening deep and far enough to hear the Shadow's reply.>>

<<Perhaps the Shadow has forgotten the Story of their Heart,>> murmurs Sapcosm, the Woodpecker Guardian.

Loon Troubadour trills. <<Perhaps the Shadow needs us to re-member it.>>

<<Perhaps,>> says Heart Mage, <<We need the Shadow to widen the compass of our sphere.>>

Lion roars. <<Then who will go? Who will go out to the Shadowlands to find and listen to the Shadow?>>

Again there is silence.

Finally the Owl Mage calls out, <<Who? Who? Not you but I.>>
Immediately she leaps up into the spiral of the wind. We watch her circle our Circle then fly west, towards the setting sun, towards the Shadowlands.

<<She will need help,>> says the Unicorn Seer.

We all nod. Yes. To face the Shadow is to require the eyes of a sage, the ears of a buddha and the heart of a universe. A task as easy as moving a mountain. She will need help.

<<I will be her Friend,>> says Mouse. He turns and begins to run west, towards the Shadowlands.

And the rest of us keep our Hearts open, right down to the roots and up to the sky, and we wait.

First the Owl Mage flies towards the blinding light of the sun, over the green hills and enchanted forests of the Central Island of the Universe, above the mossy cliffs and rocky gorges where the secret waterfalls flow. Out from the Heart of Things she flies.

And soon, soon she leaves the Island, passes the Sea, soars over the Spiny Mountains, and enters the Shadowlands. The sun she is following falls and then sets, and it begins to rain.

Soon she is weary and wet.

Soon her muscles are cramped and cold, and she is flying through fog so dark that even her nocturnal eyes cannot see the way.

Soon the feeling of being connected to the Council of All Beings fades, and the Owl Mage feels different, as though she is alone.

But she keeps her heart strong with remembering. *I go to find the Shadow, and listen to its Story*, she thinks. *I am the Owl Mage, and our Circle is in my Heart. We are here.* Many days and nights she flies, repeating these words to herself when she grows tired and the feeling of her Friends is fainter.

And each day it is fainter.

One day a feral storm rocks the skies, whistling and wailing with angry eastern winds. Thunderclaps pound through her cells. Hail drives into her body. The ferocious gale knocks the Owl Mage from her course. Into its vortex she spirals down, falling from the sky, down towards the ground, and soon she remembers no more.

The storm passes. A whole day passes. And then, in a cold and grey twilight, the Owl Mage wakes up. She does not know where she is, but it feels damp and somehow distant, as though it is not quite real. She does not

remember where she is going or where she came from. There are heavy clouds above her, and inside her. She has forgotten herself, and her way.

She is lost.

She says, <<I am>> but then stops. She cannot remember.

A low, thunderous grumble begins inside her. An edgy, worried feeling spreads from her stomach to the rest of her body, and suddenly, she knows. While once she answered with love, now she answers the Great Question with fear. Who are you?

<<I am hungry,>> she whispers.

She looks around sharply for something to fill the empty feeling in her belly. The loss inside her wants finding.

Night is setting in. She forces painful wings to lift her up, and she begins to search the wet woods with hunting eyes. Through glades she swoops, over the pond she glides, through the tangle of broken thickets she navigates, intent on any small movement below. All night she hunts, but in the morning her belly is empty of food and full of need. She finds a hollow in a twisted tree and sleeps restlessly, dreaming of hunger, of mice, of blood.

The next night her hunger is greater, her hunt more desperate, her eyes narrower. And the next night too. Soon she forgets everything save for the shape and feel of this particular longing, it encompasses her from all directions until she is focused solely on this absence. Nothing else matters but to make the jagged pain of wanting go away.

One night she spots a Mouse retreating into its burrow. She dives too late. Her grasping talons snap closed around dirt, not Mouse. Her anger is so

great that her violent shriek echoes throughout the forest, echoes eerie, echoes the urgency of her demand.

From that night on, Owl sees Mouse often, but she cannot catch him. Sometimes she thinks she sees him but it is only her own wings casting tricky Mice Shadows in the moonlight, and when she dives at them, they disappear with silent, mocking laughter.

Her anger grows as her strength wanes. Her hunt to consume, consumes her. Soon she is barely sleeping at all, disturbed by nightmares of something gravely wounded, with two broken wings.

Upon awakening one twilight her exhaustion is so great that something happens.

Owl feels her hunger and instead of trying to make it go away, she accepts it. Instead of hunting so hard to fill her lack, Owl watches herself sit perched in the hollow of the twisted Tree in silence.

She hears Whippoorwills call. Crickets sing. Frogs burble. The forest sighs. Stillness grows.

She hears the hunger inside, growling.

She listens.

Soon, Owl's fear and anger leave her.

Something gentle enters her heart, and though she does not fully remember who she is, she recalls a secret memory of nourishment and friendship in a shining circle, where Mouse is part of her, and where they are both loved.

We are here, she remembers.

And so she prays as though Mouse is her Friend, and not her Enemy:
Dearest Mouse, I have need of you. May we be together.

She lifts up wings to fly and hunt, calling <<Who! Who!>>

Mice Shadows dance below her but they can not trick her, not tonight. And later when she sees Mouse and dives, perhaps she is faster than usual. Perhaps Mouse is slower than usual. Perhaps Mouse is inviting Owl back home. Perhaps there is love in her heart, instead of anger, and this changes things. But this time, her talons close around not earth but the warm body of her Friend, and as she eats in gratitude, she begins to remember.

That night Owl has a luminous dream.

She dreams that she travels back to a central Island where a Great Tree overlooks the sea crashing below. In a Circle near the Tree are a group of Shining Creatures. They are so bright that Owl is blinded by their light. She alights on a tree branch just on the outside of their Circle. She wants to ask them to help her remember something, but she doesn't remember what she wants to remember.

Then she hears a voice of wild music. It is deep like an ocean, lionhearted, gentle like a feather, it is ringing like a divine bell in the heart of her body's temple. It is asking her something, and with the soft thunder of this voice, her heart awakens. The Owl Mage remembers, and soon she can see all of the creatures in the Circle: from Heart Mage to Human to Ælf, from Spirit Ant to Dryad Dancer to Coyote Trickster, she can see us, our entity.

And so we speak, through the voice of Golden Lion. <<Who are you?>> we ask.

The Owl Mage flutters her wings in despair. <<I don't know,>> she cries. <<I could not remember anything save for my hunger. I have eaten Brother Mouse. I did not find the Shadow and listen to its Story—I did not even remember that I was supposed to complete this task. I have failed!>>

We listen carefully. We can see how the Owl Mage is weak and wounded. Her feathers are dull and twisted. Her eyes are sad and dim. Her wings stop fluttering and go still like a desolate lake.

Then Mouse steps forward from the ranks of our Circle, whole, alive, smiling. <<My Friend, you have not failed.>>

The Owl Mage gives a murmur of surprise to see Mouse here. <<My Friend, you are alive! I could not remember anything but wanting to eat you—forgive me, I have wronged you!>>

Mouse twitches his whiskers compassionately. <<My Friend, you have not failed. I forgive you, though for me there is no need—you have not wronged me. This is what you have done: you have listened to the Shadow.>>

The Owl Mage is silent for some time. We all are. Thinking about Mouse's words.

Then a light begins to transform the darkness in her eyes, and she nods. <<Yes. I have known the Shadow. The Shadow is hunger. The Shadow is consumed with wanting, it is cut from need and molded with fear. The

Shadow forgets this Circle of Light and thinks it is alone. I thought I was alone. I was afraid. Yes Mouse, you are right. I have listened to the Shadow, I have been the silhouette of its unique separation, I have felt the hunger of its desire to eat creation. I understand the Shadow. I am the Owl Mage, but I am the Shadow too. Perhaps we all are.>>

In our Circle, Lion roars.

In our Circle, Loon Troubadour trills.

In our Circle, the Universal Entity makes the music of our resonance now.

In our Circle, we listen with the feel of our core.

<<I listened to my Shadow, but only because you helped remind me of our unity, Mouse,>> says the Owl Mage, nodding her head to her Friend.
<<Forever we shall be Allies.>>

Suddenly, Mouse goes still and quiet. We all do. <<Shhh,>> Mouse whispers. <<There is somebody still listening to our Story.>>

We all listen, trying to hear who is listening.

It is You.

Yes, You.

You are the Shadow who is listening to the Council of All Beings.

We, the beings in the Circle, look at you, the Shadow on the outside of our Ring.

Nobody knows what to do.

There is a great silence.

Then the Owl Mage speaks. <<I know the Shadow in part,>> she tells us, <<for I am the Shadow too.>>

We listen.

<<The Shadowlands are a world where we need to eat, and we fear that our hunger and pain will be a forever wound inflicted without passing. There, it is easy to forget, so easy to forget this Shining Council in the Heart, of which we all are part. Perhaps the Shadow needs all our help to answer our questions truly. Perhaps the Shadow needs more than just me. Perhaps the Shadow needs WE.>>

Who will go out, to find and listen to the Shadow?

The Unicorn Seer nods, stamping her cloven hooves. <<Yes. This time I will go to the matter unfurled, to envision our world.>>

Treeshaper nods slowly. <<Yes. This time I will go to Gaia's loam, to create our home.>>

Dog thumps his tail. <<Yes. This time I will go, to befriend our foe.>>

Ælf grins. <<Yes. This time I will go, to say yes and no.>>

Wing Shaper unfolds wings from shoulder-blades as wide as the sky.
<<Yes. We will unite darkness and light; we all shall go, to fall for the flight.>>

Yes. We agree. The Shadow needs all of us to be bright. We will be gifts in each other's hearts. We will be Friends in this Great Story. *We will go, to enlarge our Ring, so the Shadow too is encompassed within.* We will all go. Let us go out, tending the embers of our fierce flame, let us aim together.

And then, one by one, we begin to leave the circled council, leave the Central Island at the Heart of Things.

The first Being to leave is the Owl Mage. She bows to the rest of us and answers the Great Questions with love in her heart.

<<Who are you?>> demands Equus.

<<I AM the Owl Mage,>> she answers.

<<What is the heart of your Story?>> challenges the Water Bear.

<<My Story is the one to give a secret clue. On this page it comes true:
The Owl Mage listens to You.>>

<<What Way will you give?>> asks the One Who Walks.

<<Love my shadow to evolve, and all who question will resolve,>> she answers.

<<What is your code, your clue, your mystery?>> whispers the Wind Shaman.

<<Mouse courage, the spiralling of Enemy into Friend, wing shadows in moonlight.>>

<<When is your time?>> cries the Snake Angel.

<<Now.>>

<<Declare your intentions,>> states the Thundering Ælf.

<<When I don't know what to do, I will ask Who? Who? and remember the answering key is not I but We.>> She leaps into the Wind, flies out of the Circle, through the Gate of Forgiveness that Mouse made for her, and creates the Sky Path of Remembering.

We watch as she disappears to the periphery, going to expand our range of love.

Each of us leaves the Circle in turn, each answering the questions, each creating a unique story, a unique way to listen to the Shadow, a special way to be the Friend and remember the gifts of Heart.

We all go.

To the sound of the drumming of the Heart Mage, we all leave the Council and go out. Out to the Seven directions of Earth's beauty: Enchanted East, Windswept West, Secret South, Numinous North. Up and

Down and Within. To the towns and cities and farms and forests, to the countries and continents where you are living, walking, talking, breathing, being.

Out from this Central Land to become you, and you, and you.

Yes, you.

All of you who listen here, we become you. This is happening right now.

Right now we are becoming you.

Right now we are entering into your Central Hearts, so that you may remember to make wings for your shadowed arts, to live the myth of your High Dream Parts.

You are in our Story. Are we in yours?

You hear something.

You are the One Who is Listening, and you hear.

The Heart Mage's drums are beating, and you realize this silent, resonant sound is actually a knocking on the Door of your Heart, at the boundary to your Central sanctuary.

We are at your Door, and if you open, there will be a Being standing there. Perhaps it is the Lion. Perhaps it is the Owl Mage. Perhaps it is

somebody else, some Sovereign Entity you know so clearly it is as if you brushed the strokes of their skin, lit the hue of their eye, formed the curve of their mouth, cast the shape of their potential structure, made the very stretch of their winged reach.

And when, and if, you open that Door, this Being will ask you the Great Questions so you may enter the Central Island, and remember your membership in our Council.

And when, and if, you open that Door, this Being will ask, <<Who? Who? Who is the Self you choose to Create? Who is the Shadow who stands at this Gate? How wide is the Story you choose to tell? Are we in it, as well? >>

And if you answer with Love for All Beings, your answer will be deep enough for us to hear.

May you answer with Love and let go fear, for
We are here.