

### **A Case Study of Carbonized Moths**

*Q: If a moth that had burned to ashes in the flicker of a candle could live once more, what would it do when faced with THE SUN?*

FIRST RESPONSE: The Moth Remembers. The Moth Flies Past the Sun.

SECOND RESPONSE: The Moth Forgets. The Moth Flies into the Sun.

THIRD RESPONSE: The Moth Pretends to Forget. The Moth Flies into the Sun.

FOURTH RESPONSE: The Moth Does Not Know the Sun. The Moth Stays Still.

## **Abstract**

When the sun scorched Icarus  
his skin flaked into a thousand pieces  
which took flight as he fell and took life  
as what was still his sunk into the sea.  
The pieces that longed for the sky  
were afraid of angering their father's killer  
and floated on the wax and feathers  
to safety until the moon was high.  
Only when the stars shone bright  
would they fly again, the fragile,  
beautiful children of Icarus and his pride.  
Some of them briefly recalled the pain of life,  
but most had already forgotten the  
sensation, instead longing for  
heat, not the warmth of a body  
but something far greater than that.  
something grand, something dazzling.  
a mother.  
They would never meet her, of course,  
for she was what they hid from in dreams  
and gentle cocoons of silk and thread,  
but they would be tempted by imposters  
claiming to share a flicker of her heat.  
The children would burn, like their father,  
and their ashes would rise up in smoke  
longing to someday join her high above.  
  
Of course, we don't know them as ash.

We know them as moths.

## Hypothesis

The moth must not burn  
despite how badly it longs to touch  
the sun and all its light it must not  
go any closer. The plight of  
the creature  
must remain moral  
in dilemma  
moral in  
passing  
moral  
in  
all ways  
that keep  
it from  
ruin  
The moth  
though it wishes  
for understanding  
it cannot receive it  
lest the process  
the experiment  
the moth  
go to waste.

## Methods

### a.) you tell the moth

it has paper for wings. if they were silver or gold  
perhaps the scorch marks and the love bites left  
by the fire would be tolerable, but the moth  
could never fly with those wings. it would fall.  
tell the moth that it will burn.

### b.) you tell the moth

it has a thorax of stuffed-cotton and goose feathers.  
a vivisection of which would reveal the plush heart  
and the cross-stitching left by a god who loved it so.  
you love it so. not enough to give it life but enough  
to know it inside out, abdomen to thorax, thorax to  
heart, heart to lung to throat to mouth to moth to you.  
a fire won't know the difference from piece to piece,  
it won't pay special attention to any of it, won't admire  
the things that make the moth a moth and not a fly.  
a fire doesn't care, won't care, not like you do.  
if it tries to leave you again,  
tell the moth that it will burn.

### c. you tell the moth

you won't know how to sleep without it buzzing just  
above your head. you won't know how to breathe  
without it on your shoulder, gnawing into your clothes  
and stopping just before your skin, this, the only kindness  
you have ever known. please, you say. please  
you don't want it to leave you too. you are not as bright  
as the flame, the blaze, the sun, the stars, the heavens  
but you melt like a candle with the moth by your side.  
doesn't that mean something? isn't that light enough?  
fine. then you will become more, you say.  
tell the moth you will be an inferno.  
tell the moth you will burn.

## Application

Some people say it's love.  
With such bountiful desire for the flame,  
the moth ruins itself and gives way to ash  
all for a single moment with what it loves.  
It's a thirty second pleasure, maybe more  
if the moth is trading in a body well-lived.

Perhaps to the moth, this is a simple choice.  
They can try their fate, see if they can hit that  
oh-so-lucky ten-month lifespan, the kind only seen  
in white-walled laboratories and cookie-cutter tanks.  
They can fly through the holes of the spider's webs,  
and pry themselves off the swatter's grisly sheet.  
They can live. For an hour, a day, a week, forever,  
they can live for however long Nature's cycle calls for.

Or they can join the pyre.  
They can choose which light they fly into,  
the buzzing lamp post on tomorrow's quiet street  
the peony candle sitting forgotten on the windowsill  
the broken headlights causing the build up on I-5  
and they can press themselves up against it  
forcing the diameter of their wingspan to fit into place.  
They can watch the whorls of smoke and carbon flee  
from the crevices between leg and bulb, body and hell.  
For those thirty seconds, or that maybe-more-than-so,  
they can feel the heat creep up over them,  
illuminating everything that they could be  
and everything that they once were.

So they could live, for their hours, their days, their weeks,  
their for-forevers-or-so-long-as-nature-would-have-them,

or they could burn.

Perhaps to moths,  
love isn't even a factor then.  
Perhaps leaving is just leaving,  
and the carbon is wisest  
for not bearing witness.

## Variables

One of us learned to move on,  
though which it was is hard to say.

One of us went to work the next day  
having slept well the night before. That  
one noted slight back pain in the morning,  
a sore throat and the signs of winter's end.

The other looked through the bathroom  
mirror at three a.m. and saw a moth  
staring back. That one vomited into the  
sink, washing an amalgamation of  
rotting fruit and silk scarves  
down the drain. That one  
did not sleep at all.

One of us went to family brunch on Sunday  
and used the phrase no-longer-on-speaking-terms.  
That one smiled at their mother and asked  
politely for the orange juice and the bread  
and thought nothing of the lingering holes  
gaping and wide in their shirt sleeve.

The other pressed their antennae up against the  
bedpost in solemn prayer and begged for  
forgiveness, forgiveness for the larva they  
swallowed whole because they confused it  
for someone also looking for company.

One of us remembers control and coherency,  
a partnership that was supposed to be secure  
if not for the winged impostor that crept in  
through the window and feasted on our  
bedsheets every night.

One of us remembers dependency in death,  
matrimony of the material kind that wasted  
away to nothing when the metamorphosis  
truly began.

## Conclusion

The moth burns.

[And THE SUN is no factor at all.

It sticks a wooden skewer into the  
peony candle it got it for Christmas

and lets the light catch

and the skewer

burns its fingers as it all

comes to a close.

It hurts

And with fingertips

charred to ash the moth

picks up the pieces

and must now start again.]

## **Conclusion (Continued)**

I was an infestation, I think.

I tried to give myself the benefit of the doubt, theorize  
a noble pursuit to be otherwise but I was

the problem. I was the anthill you hid from  
your mother and the wasp nest you kept from  
your father and the larva you thought you  
kept tight in a jar but crept out of the cracks  
and hatched in the dark of your bed and  
you were so scared of the buzzing and  
the stinging and the humming

and I don't blame you  
because I was scared too.

I found the anti-parasitics sitting  
on your desk the night I came to  
your room and cried on your shoulder.  
Your shirt reeked of mothballs and  
vinegar and honey and I felt sick when  
you pulled me closer and rubbed my back  
with an open hand and a thin smile.

I was an infestation, but I did not know it  
and I did not want to die.

I do not want to die.

I'm sorry.

I won't expect you to understand. You  
could only keep a moth in your closet  
for so long, after all. I just wish you had  
the decency to open the window for me  
on my way out.