

A Door for Heartbreak

By Nayune Kim

In the empty silence, the walls of the old house creaked softly against the wind outside. Its paneled wooden floor was littered with books, dried leaves, and burnt-out candles. Gusts of air that slipped under the door blew through the room and swept over the oak table in the center, brushing against chipped windowsills and whispering through the pages of open books before fading into silence.

Suddenly, I burst through the door with an explosion of wind.

Letting out an ear-piercing shriek, Luna dodged in the air as the wind tore through my tangled hair, her owl wings flapping madly against the current. She crash-landed onto her wooden perch beside the table as I clutched the doorframe for balance, the old door swinging on its hinge with its stained glass rattling.

An old satchel was slung over my shoulder and I held in one hand a worn leather journal scrawled with *Spells for Heartbreak*. A basket of mushrooms hung around my wrist.

With my other hand on the weathered doorknob, my hair and cloak billowing around me, I turned and looked back at Eryndrath one last time.

"It's beautiful, isn't it, Lune?" I whispered.

Luna chirped in agreement.

Even at night, you could see the massive silhouettes of dragons gliding silently against the backdrop of stars, and the stone castle looming in the distance in all its glory. The full moon painted the grassy fields in a pale glow.

I was going to miss this world, just like all the others, and I probably wasn't going to see it again. I never stayed in one place for long, but that was the way it was meant to be. My door, which always opened to the place that needed me the most, had opened to their world, and so I had healed their broken hearts; my job here was done. With a faint smile, I took one final breath of fresh air before stepping back inside to force the door shut.

I absentmindedly hung my cloak and satchel beside the door and set down my spellbook and mushrooms on the table. I walked over to the window nook on the left side of the house as Luna cleaned her feathers, waving a dismissive hand at the mess on the ground. Before long, the scattered herbs gathered themselves into bottles of whisperfern leaves and silvermoss blossoms, nyrel mushrooms and vernbriar root.

My physical craft wasn't much, but I didn't bother improving it; my own magic lay elsewhere. I was renowned for my gift across worlds and realities, often a mythical legend of sorts. I was whatever creative name people came up with; the heart apothecary, the heartbreak nurse, the feelings bartender. (Some weren't very fluent in modern English.)

I slumped down onto the mismatched cushions beside the windows and looked outside. In a sunlit forest meadow, a nearby pair of stags grazed peacefully. I leaned closer and saw that their antlers were made of white birch and grew little sprouts of leaves.

I blinked, and the scenery changed to an advanced cityscape made of gleaming steel. The streets below were filled with crowds wearing plastic masks in the neon fog.

I blinked once more and this time saw nothing but a landscape of jagged red rocks, no life to be seen anywhere.

I rested my head against the window and sighed. All these worlds, and I still couldn't remember where I came from. The only memory I had was being sent away as a child to be a witch's apprentice, a witch who had long since passed. So, even after all those adventures, all the wonderful people I had met and the amazing places I had been, nothing had ever felt right. I suppose that, once you've been everywhere, you never feel like you truly belong anywhere. It was ironic. I knew cures for grief, betrayal, broken love, and broken dreams – the four types of heartbreak – but nothing for homesickness. Especially if you didn't know where "home" was. I stared out the window like this for the next few hours, absorbed in my thoughts, gazing out longingly at one world after another.

Suddenly, Luna began screeching and flapping her wings in distress, shattering the peaceful silence.

"Luna?" I said, scrambling to my feet. "What is it?"

She ignored me and continued to panic. I followed her line of sight and stumbled backward, stunned by the sight before me. An odd yellow light was radiating from the door, gleaming through the stained glass and scattering fragments of light.

All of a sudden, the windows began rattling and the whole house seemed to shake, drowning out Luna's cries.

"Luna!" I shrieked.

This had never happened before.

The light grew increasingly brighter until the world around me turned white. Shielding my eyes, I continued to stumble backwards, trying not to trip over the scattered books.

And then, just like that, it stopped.

I peeked from behind my fingers and saw that the light had completely disappeared, and the shaking with it. The house had gone dead silent, except for my short, panicked breaths. I was still unsure of what had just happened.

That was when I felt it.

I heard the sound of musical laughter first, then smelled pinecones and fresh grass. I inhaled the scent of a lush forest and a home-cooked meal on the stove. I instinctively took a step forward, and Luna called out to me.

“It’s alright, Lune,” I breathed, “I think I know this place.”

I slowly stepped forward and reached out a shaking hand to the doorknob. Unsure of what to expect, I tentatively opened the door. Luna looked on anxiously, tilting her heart-shaped face.

But the moment I felt the cool air on my skin and warmth on my face, my eyes went wide and tears began burning in my eyes. I did know this place after all.

“Luna,” I whispered.

For the first time, the door had opened for me.

“I’m home.”