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By the end of the day, Twitch and Babel had once again gotten themselves good and lost in the hills of Tennessee. Twitch hadn't once looked at a map and they found themselves in a strange part of the forest where the trees were gnarled and twisted. They decided they'd follow a brook through the woods, walking in the short grass beside it.

For the first time, Babel began to feel he was moving away from his destination. "Hey!" He pestered Twitch about it, "Hey! Goin' wrong way!"

"Oh, don't worry--We'll wind around to it, I think."

"Check the map?"

"It's almost dark, birdie, we'll check it tomorrow." This barely placated the noisy bird.

Eventually, they stopped and made camp. After staying in a nice warm

house they'd forgotten how cold it was getting out. Oh, how chilly it could be at night! They could see their breath! That is, until Twitch started a small fire.

They boiled water and ate dinner; Babel sat in his master's lap and they wrapped up in a blanket. Most of the leaves had blown off the trees leaving starlight to shine through the twisting shadows. Twitch stared up at the twinkling lights above; Babel stared ahead into angry the fire below.

By and by, Babel got bored of climbing about his master and staring off into space. "Tell me a story!"

"You want to hear a story?" Babel nodded. "Does it matter what kind?"

"Kind?"

"Well **Halloween** is coming up. Remember that?"

Babel **hated** Halloween! "Dun tell spooky story!"

Twitch smiled deviously down at the bird. His pointy canines glinted in the firelight.

Babel yelled at him again, "Dun you **dare**!"

Twitch turned his head away from Babel and started his story, "There once was a little bird," Babel didn't like Twitch's tone at all, "This little bird liked to fly in the dark!" Babel didn't like the dark either; he puffed up aggressively. "One night, a night **very much** like this one, he flew off into the darkness to watch the stars," Twitch motioned to the sky as he said this, "And he heard a rustle in the bushes...Like this!"

Twitch rustled the bushes behind Babel. **Shk Shk Shk Shk**

Babel wasn't dumb; he knew how these stories ended! "I hate this story!"

Twitch laughed and wiggled his fingers in front of his mouth like some kind of slobbering monster, "And something with **big sharp teeth** stalked him!" Babel eeked and backed into Twitch's blanket, nipping at the finger-teeth as they closed in on him.

"Oh no! It's got you!!!" Twitch wrapped his fingers around Babel and picked him up, tickling his belly, "Om nom nom nom!" Babel laughed, or 'squeaked,' and was helpless against such a overpowering monster.

"Oh no-o-o!"

"Oh Ye-e-es!" Twitch laughed and continued his assault of the innocent little bird. They hadn't laughed together like this in quite a while. There was nothing to do now but laugh!

That is, until bedtime rolled around.

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That night they were snoozing peacefully under their warm blanket right next what used to be their fire. The charred sticks were still warm and the tinder burned like cheap incense. The night was inky black, but they didn't mind as they were off in dreamland; no doubt adventuring through that world as well. There couldn't have been a more peaceful scene in all the forest that night!

Then out of nowhere came a low rustle in the bushes--An ominous rustle!--Right next to their campsite!

**Shk Shk Shk Shk**

Babel heard it first, but Twitch woke up too. The bird peeked out from his nest in Twitch's backpack. "What was that?"

Twitch grabbed the bag and pulled his knife out, yelling into the darkness, "Hello!? Who's out there?!"

There was no answer. There was no noise at all. Babel was frightened; he hated the dark more than anything! "Twitch!"

"Quiet!" Twitch tried to make heads or tails of the inky darkness. The moon's pale glow only barely made it between the trees, peeking through as dusty rays. "Hello!? Hello?!" No answer. Twitch was uncertain of what he'd heard or where it had come from. The knife in his hands felt tiny in the darkness. Babel could just about cry.

After about a second or two of staring off into the wilds, Twitch decided to start up the fire again. The matches were tucked into his backpack and he fumbled around for a few seconds trying to find them. There was a creepy crawly feeling setting in and it made him work more feverishly.

He struck the match and it lit up the area close by. Nothing seemed particularly out of the ordinary. A cold wind suddenly rustled through the trees and blew his match out, once again leaving them in the utter darkness.

"Awk!"

"Hold on!" Twitch struck another match and lit the campfire up again. It started up, but did not burn very brightly. There was a quiet moment where their eyes got used to the light and they realized there was nothing there. Nothing anywhere around them anyway.

Twitch checked the bush over. It was an oak bush and there was nothing special about it. No bears, raccoons, or rabid animals. No nothing. Thank goodness! Twitch went back and sat down next to the fire. Babel hopped into his lap immediately. "What was it?"

"I dunno, Bab. Whatever it was it must've gone away."

Babel looked around and slowly started to calm down a bit. "Good. Scared me!"

"Yeah," Twitch kept looking over his shoulder, "Don't like uninvited visitors, right?"

"Right..." Babel sighed and yawned. "Time?"

"It's late," Twitch ruffled the sleepy bird's feathers, "Go back to sleep, Babel."

"Nothing out there?"

"Don't worry; I'll keep my eyes open." Babel was too sleepy to care. He went back to his nest and cast one final wary look out into the forest before slipping away again.

=====

That night, Babel had the most horrible dreams about cats and ghosties and all sorts of weird and freaky things. His mind turned over all the things that could have been hiding in that bush. That morning he awoke with a start in Twitch's pocket. Sunlight touched his beak as he peeked out. "Morning Babel."

"Morning..."

"You sleep okay? You were squirming around a lot."

Babel sounded extra unhappy today, "Nightmare."

"Aww, poor birdie!" Twitch picked the little bird out of his pocket and got him a cap of water. "Here, have a drink."

Babel didn't recognize anything. He was actually feeling kind of dizzy. "Where are we?"

"Somewhere."

"Nice," Babel rolled his eyes and dipped his beak in the water.

"Let me worry about it, birdie." Twitch preened Babel's head feathers and fixed up his shiny red ribbon. "Feeling any better?"

"I worry," Babel huffed at his master, "Got places to be!"

"Well! You're certainly cheery today, aren't you?" Twitch could almost feel Babel's bad mood from where he was sitting. "Cheer up, Babel!"

The bird only grumbled.

"Hah! Listen to you! Are you going to be moody **all month**?"

It seemed like the day was getting even worse as time went on. Now it seemed as though his master wasn't happy with him! He harrumphed and turned away, raising his tail feathers at Twitch unhappily. Twitch wasn't going to have that though. He placed the bird onto his other hand and coaxed him back to face him. "Hey now, don't get all huffy!"

Babel's mood just soured further. The little bird lashed out and bit at his master's hand angrily. "Yow!" Twitch pulled his hand back into a fist and checked the bite. Sure enough he was bleeding just a little bit.

It took Babel a moment to realize what he'd just done. He could taste it on his beak and immediately turned away again. His tail was neatly tucked between his legs this time and he hid his head under his wing. What an unhappy day; he was unhappy with himself and with the morning and he just wished he could go back to bed.

As hard as it was to, Twitch cracked a small smile. It seemed Babel was sorry even before he was able to reprimand him. "Well!" He bit his lip. "Just a ball of sunshine, eh?"

Babel didn't answer, just peeked over his shoulder at his master. Twitch stayed patient and patted the bird gently. "It'll be okay, Babel. Let's get goin' birdie."

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The leash is where bad birds go. That's why Babel was tethered to it today. He didn't fight it as he usually did though, just remained fairly catatonic all day. Twitch was getting worried that Babel might have some kind of sickness or seasonal depression. Winter wasn't exactly Twitch's cup of tea either. The cold weather would sink in at night and he'd wake up with chills. The sniffles came out in cold

weather too, and that was especially bad for Twitch who didn't have a nice warm bed to retreat to when he was sick.

Twitch also noted that they were going far slower than he expected they would. Nothing could be more miserable than getting caught in a snowstorm! Babel wasn't made for cold temperatures, either; Twitch surmised that the little bird would probably freeze before he would.

That just made it all the more important to make sure they were still heading south. He checked his compass just to make sure. Yeah they were still heading south. "You okay back there Babel?"

Babel did not answer. Twitch sighed; that figured, one of the few friends Twitch had left on this planet wasn't talking to him. Seemed like a lot of people went that way after he left home. "Squawk if you're alive, birdie."

Babel didn't answer. He was stuck in a funk and it didn't seem like he'd be recovering anytime soon. Sometimes he'd nap off and on but, overall, he was pretty miserable. "Babel?"

Still no answer, Twitch decided it was time for some action; something drastic to turn Babel around before he got any worse. He headed for a nearby tributary and put down his pack.

Babel blinked and peeped up from the backpack, "Why we stoppin'?"

"We've been traveling too much, Bab. We need a vacation!"

"We can't just stop!" Babel looked around. This didn't seem much like a vacation destination to him.

"Can't we?" Twitch took off his shoes and socks and dipped his feet in the cool water.

Babel shook his head. "Gotta keep goin'!"

"Tomorrow."

"Whadaya mean tomorrow?!" Babel hopped forward. "What about winter?"

"We're fine." Twitch took out some string, a hook, and a bobber and leaned back against his bag.

Babel climbed up the bag onto Twitch's hat and looked down at him from the brim. "What about the mountains?"

"Ah, we'll get there."

Babel huffed at this unhurried attitude. He wanted to take his master to the mountains and be done with it already; be useful and fulfill his destiny and make him happy for once! He climbed down the hat onto his master's shoulder to squawk more worry-wart things in his ear. "You worried at all?"

"I'm on vacation." Twitch baited the hook with some jerky and tossed it in the stream. "You are too!"

Babel whined, "Want to get there."

"We've got all the time in the world to get there." Twitch did not have a pole but seemed fairly content simply using his hands. Babel was still nervous; he paced up and down his master's shoulder. "We aren't going anywhere, Babel, so just relax okay?" Twitch let more slack on his line and leaned lazily on an elbow. "You're like an anxious little feather duster right now."

"Dun like it here!"

"Okay, then we'll leave **tomorrow**." Babel rolled his eyes and perched on his master's shoulder. Time started flowing down the river.

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"Why we gotta be vacation anyway?"

"Because we're too stressed ou--"

"I'm fine!"

"Sure you are."

"I am!" There was a long pause in their conversation. Even Babel wasn't really buying it anymore.

They could hear the gentle murmur of the water flowing on the rocks. The wind gently moved through the trees and leaves fell across the river. There was a duck in the reeds nearby making a lot of noise. All around them they could hear the forest napping through the sleepy afternoon. The river flowed. The crickets chirped. Twitch wiggled his toes and stretched out happily.

Babel was not content with this peace and quiet. He was getting bored and he made this very apparent by sighing about every minute.

Twitch gave Babel a tired look. "You've never ever been in such a hurry before!"

"Never anywhere to be!"

There was a pause, Twitch thought he had a bite. "Like you've got anywhere to be now."

"M'serious!"

"Why?"

"Just...'Coz we got to get there!"

"And we will!" Twitch poked the bird gently. "Can't you be patient?"

Babel turned up his beak stubbornly. "No!"

Twitch shook his head and reeled in his line. He tossed it out again and held it taut. "What did you see in that dream about the mountains anyway?"

"Nothing!"

"No really, You've been acting weird ever since." Twitch pulled on the line gently to free it from some weeds.

Babel just changed the subject. "Bad day."

Twitch felt like he should push the bird to answer but decided against it. Now was not the time to corner him. "Why is your day so bad anyway?" Twitch smirked. "You're on vacation."

"Sure..." Babel climbed down Twitch's coat and dug his feet into the grass.

"You can't be unhappy when you're on vacation!"

The logic was charming and Babel shook it off aggressively. "No, is bad day!"

"Aww! Well I guess my present will go to waste then. Can't get anything nice on a bad day can you?"

Babel perked up. "Present? Present?!"

"Well I dunno...Are you going to cheer up enough to appreciate it?"

"Is it: 'Babel gets off leash'?"

"No-o-o."

"Is it fish? Hate fish!"

"No-o-o."

"What is it?!"

"Are you going to be a happy birdie?"

"Yeah!"

"Okay then, close your eyes." Babel did so and Twitch produced a small pile of fresh blackberries on the grass.

The little bird could smell them immediately and his eyes flew open. "Blackies!" They were one of Babel's very favorite foods. They were going out of season soon too! "Where didya get these?!"

"Magic."

Babel didn't actually care how Twitch had got them. Within a minute or so the pile was gone and Babel was feeling fat and content.

Twitch smiled and pet the content bird. At least he wouldn't have to worry about Babel's mood now. "Having a good vacation Babel?"

"Gettin' better!"

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Twitch and Babel set up camp by the river that night. They wandered around before dark looking for twigs and logs they could use to build a fire. It was brisk and there was no particular path they were following. Babel was really just happy to be off the leash.

The little bird always found it a bit scary how the forest could kind of blend together, especially in the dark. Maybe he was just getting sleepy, but sometimes he could sit on Twitch's shoulder and not be able to tell where they'd been or where they were going. There were no real landmarks to him, and he was always traveling all the time; he wasn't allowed to get a real lay of the land.

There was only one place he knew better than any other. That was Orangetown, an area which encompassed the orange tree they'd camped by last winter in Florida and the area around it within a few miles. Orangetown was their primary winter destination; it was their real vacation hot spot. The memory of it in Babel's mind was always preceded by the taste of citrus and the feel of a warm breeze through his feathers.

Babel sighed, he could remember nights sitting in that tree, and looking up at the stars among the rolling fields of saw palmetto. Those were happy memories. "Twitch, when we gonna see O.T.?" Babel was referring to the tree itself.

"After we go to the mountains to find your grotto."

"Oh," Babel hummed, "Think he's okay?"

"I'm sure he's as okay as he ever was," Twitch stopped and picked up some dead wood, "Why are you so interested in O.T. all of a sudden?"

"Vacation--Just...Remembering."

"Yeah, it doesn't feel much like a vacation without ol' O.T."

"Wish we could stay with O.T. all-year-long."

"Yeah, but we can't stay in one place **all** the time. Had to try and find work up North. You know that."

"Yeah..." Twitch returned to the campsite and started building a small fire. Only enough to boil a canteen of water and warm up their surroundings. Babel continued, "Nice in Florida."

"Well now, do you want to go to Florida or to the mountains?"

There was no question in Babel's mind. "Mountains!"

"Well then...Guess O.T. will have to wait, eh?"

Babel mumbled in agreement.

"Sleepy?"

Babel sounded flat, "Tired."

Babel wanted to say he was tired of traveling and being out in the cold; and being in Tennessee or Kentucky or wherever they were. He wanted a longer vacation more than anything. A warm home and a nice night to go with it where they didn't have to worry about the weather or the rest of the world.

But...He also wanted to make his master happy, lead him to treasure or whatever he was supposed to find in the mountains. Treasure, Florida, winter. It all filled him with worry and conflicted emotions. It was like he had a full list of things he wanted to do, but he wasn't strong enough to do anything. At least not right now; the little bird could barely keep his eyes open...

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There was a noise...

**Shk Shk Shk Shk.**

It came from the bushes nearby! Once again, Babel's beauty sleep was interrupted, leaving him disoriented after a short, restless nap. What was that sound? Where had it come from? Paranoia was the first thing he felt.

Twitch was still awake eating his last morsel venison jerky by the slowly dying fire. He was immediately on his feet, knife in hands, calling out into the darkness. "Hello! Hello!?" Making a lot of noise was a good way to scare off potential predators.

"Hello?!" No answer. Babel whined and got to his feet as his master yelled at the woods. "Hello?!" Still no answer.

"What was it?"

Twitch walked over to check the bush and scratched his head. There was nothing unusual about it at all, just like last night. "Huh...I dunno what it was."

"Ghostie?"

"Don't be silly, Babel, ghosties don't exist!"

"Sure they do--Botherin' us!"

Twitch put on a confident tone and sat back down next to his backpack, "Take it easy, birdie. No ghosties are gonna hurt you while I'm here." He made certain to keep his eyes peeled for things that were decidedly not ghosties.

"Really?" The adrenaline subsided from the bird's blood and he crashed forward sleepily. **"Hateghosties!"**

"Don't worry about a thing. I'm right here."

"Can't sleep."

"You haven't even tried," Twitch pet the bird gently, "Go back to bed, birdie." Babel slipped away as soon as he closed his eyes.

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That night Babel slept even worse than he'd slept the night before! That morning he somehow woke up even more miserable than ever, though, Twitch was quick to point out that it wasn't quite morning but a bit into the afternoon.

"Morning Babel, you sure slept late." Twitch was walking along a dirt path. "Guess what today is."

Babel didn't reply, just looked around trying to get his bearings. He was in Twitch's pocket again. The forest around them was gnarled. The trees here had all lost their leaves, but they cast long shadows in the pale light from the sky.

"Well are you going to guess?"

"No."

"It's Halloween."

That only solidified Babel's resolve to not get out of bed today. "**Hate** Halloween."

"Well, it'll be over by tomorrow--Maybe you'll feel better then?"

Babel didn't sound overly confident with his answer, "Maybe..."

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The day quickly turned into the evening.

Twitch was hunting that day, but for one reason or another there were no animals along the road--Just crows and vultures. Maybe that was just his luck today.

They found a very nice clearing to camp out in just as it was getting dark. It was wide open, but it was covered in ornery brambles which made good tinder for the fire. A cold wind from the northwest blew through the forest. It pushed the clouds in long strings across the sky, letting the moon shine through. It hung low--Full tonight--A big orange ball in the sky.

Twitch had evicted Babel from his pocket earlier that day, but he kept very close to him. They ate and mumbled about the weird weather that night. Twitch pointed it out, "Yeah, it looks like claw marks in the sky."

"Yeah..." Babel nibbled at his meal. He was getting sleepy, but something in the distance caught his eye. "Twitch...That rock has somethin' on it."

"Which one? That one over there?"

"Yeah."

Twitch got up and looked it over. Sure enough there was something etched into it. It was eroded and hard to read, obviously marked by time: "Here lies: Col. William Turner. Confederate Cavalry 1864." Wait...This was a gravestone. Twitch looked around; there weren't any other stones in the area, but this was an officer he would likely be buried with his men...

"What's it mean?"

The slightest tone of concern crept into Twitch's voice, "Uh...It means...Nothing special..." Twitch had lived in the woods for two years now. He'd seen a lot. He'd chased off bears and weathered the windiest most miserable nights; he'd laughed at shadows and howled at the moon!

He'd never spent Halloween in a graveyard though. "Is--Is bad thing?"

"Uh...No--No Don't worry about it, Bab!" Twitch checked to make sure they weren't camping directly on any graves. After thinking about it for a moment, Twitch realized that **this** would be the point in the movie where the zombies would come out and eat him.

...

So far so good. He sat back down next to Babel and tossed another stick on the fire.

Wait maybe **this** was the moment!!!

No?

Babel was starting to dislike it when Twitch told him not to worry. "Should move camp?"

"No. It'll be alright. You should probably just try to get to sleep." He pulled their blanket out of his backpack and wrapped up in it. It had gotten really cold out all of a sudden! "We'll leave in the morning."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'll stay up tonight and keep watch." Twitch couldn't sleep even if he wanted to.

"Okay..." The bird didn't nest in Twitch's backpack like he usually did; he settled down right in his master's lap and could not be shooed away.

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*It was eerily quiet out.  
Babel stared out at the fire;  
He could feel his eyes slowly closing..*

**Shk!**

**Shk!**

**Shk!**

**Shk!**

The clearing was empty.  
It was dark,  
Just Babel and the bush.

*It was so hazy, was he--??*

The bush spoke,  
**"BOO!"**

Enough to send him running.  
**"Twitch!!!"**  
He yelled headlong in the mist.

*The bush called after him:*

**He's left you behind;  
You've run out of time!**

**The truth closes in around you!**

**He hasn't a care  
For you derrière!**

**Looks like it's time to say: 'Adieu!'**

**"Adieu!!!"**

**"Twitch~! Twitch~!! Twitch~!!!"**

*Babel came upon a shape in a nest high up in a dark tree.  
A man with a red hat was there.  
It looked like Twitch..  
But as he got close, the figure turned suddenly.  
It had a big yellow beak, like an eagle, and no ears.*

*It had feathers instead of fingers and no hair anywhere.  
It spoke with a caw!*

"Unfit!"

"Unfit, I do say!"

Unfit - you - to fol - low me!  
Let's take - you right - back up - that tree!

Let's head - right back - to the - Midwest!  
Set you - right back - in your - old nest!

See you - with your - mother - dear!!  
Then - your eyes - fill up - with fear!!

They've got - you up - against - the wall!!  
Hoping - you'll - survive - the fall!!

Off - you go! You sail - away!!!  
Today - is not - your luck - y day!!!

*The figure pushed Babel out of the tree with a caw.  
Off Babel fell into the darkness, screaming.*

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"Wake up, Babel." Twitch shook the bird gently.

Babel was talking in his sleep, squawking a whole bunch. He awoke with a start in his master's hands and immediately struggled to get out of them. It felt like he was still spinning and his vision wouldn't stop whirling.

"Hey--Hey! Take it easy, Bab, it was just a dream."

The bird was speechless. He looked right up into Twitch's eyes, catching them in a deadlock. That look reminded Twitch of the first time Babel had fallen into his lap.

"Geez, you look like you just saw a ghost!" Twitch reached over to pet his frightened friend.

"Dun touch me!" He hopped away onto Twitch's knee. **"Duntouchme!"**

Twitch put his palms out in a non-threatening manner and spoke as gently as possible. "Hey... Take it easy--."

**"No! Dun touch me!"** Babel couldn't tell reality from the dream. Even

if he could he'd still feel heartbroken. **"Leave me alone!"** The bird zoomed off into the night.

Twitch sprang to his feet and called after the bird, "It was just a dream! Come back!" He grabbed his bag and ran off after him. "Babel!"

The bird flew drunkenly off into the graveyard. He couldn't see where he was going and was too dizzy to fly properly. That didn't stop him from squawking though; each time his wings beat down he would yell out something incoherent to no one in particular. It was extremely helpful to Twitch who couldn't see very well in the dark.

Eventually, Babel careened into a patch of thorny bushes and landed on a tuft of grass in the moonlight. With each breath he moaned sad nothings to the open air.

"Babel?--Ow--Ow! Babel, where are you birdie?"

**"Go away!"**

"Babel it was just a dream!" Twitch fumbled through the brambles, following the bird's voice. "--Ow! Babel you can't just go running off like this!" The starling could be in any one of these thickets.

Babel was crying, **"Whydoyouhateme?!"**

**"What?"**

**"Youdunwanmearound!"**

"Babel, I've never heard you say anything so silly in all my life!" He peeked into a thicket he thought he heard the voice from, "You're my friend--My companion! Heck... **You're all I've got!** Why would you **ever** think something like that?!"

"You said it to me!"

"Is that what you were dreaming?" Babel didn't answer that. "Are you afraid that I'd abandon you?" The bird whined. "You **are** aren't you?" Twitch sighed and wandered around, trying to talk at his bird. "Oh Babel! You can't let your fears control you like this!"

**"I'marunt!"**

"Not to me you aren't!"

"I'm bad!"

"No you're a good bird!"

"I'm useless! I'm usel--"

**"Babel! Pull yourself together!"** Babel blinked. It was like an audible slap from across the yard. "You know which bird is useless?! The one that spends its whole life crying! You can feel sad, sure! But you can't keep this up!"

"But it's **true!**"

"No it's not! Only when you say, 'I'm useless,' are you useless! If you keep **saying** it you'll keep **being** it!"

Babel didn't have a response to that.

"So are you going to be with me when we leave tomorrow morning or are you going to sit here crying for the rest of your life?"

Babel was afraid of the dark, afraid of being alone, and most certainly afraid of rejection. Now he stood in the midst of all three, but Twitch had done something very important for him. He'd made Babel realize that the power to make that final choice was in **his** hands.

It was all Babel's decision, and when the choices were so clear and concise it hard for Babel to figure why he'd ever choose loneliness over the opportunity to stand at his master's side. In fact... Now he had trouble even remembering why he'd even been sad in the first place. Something about some stupid dream.

"Okay..." Babel got to his feet and looked around. He hadn't even been watching where he was going and he had no idea where he was. Everything was dark and spooky but if he found Twitch he knew he'd feel better. Twitch was always telling him he had to go on, had to always keep going! Well, now was the time.

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Babel strained his eyes in the poor light. "Where are you?"

"Come this way!"

Babel walked right into a thorny bush. **"Ow!"**

"Watch out for thorns!"

Babel retreated, flying over the wall of brush into another clearing. "Twitch?!"

Twitch sounded more distant now than before. "I think you went the wrong way, birdie!"

Babel turned and was going to fly back to his master, but before he did there was a noise from behind him. It came from within a nearby bush; it went: **Shk Shk Shk Shk!**

"Was that you, Bab?"

Babel was silent for a moment. He could feel that familiar creepy crawly feeling sinking in. His breaths were quicker and his heart was pounding. "N-No!"

"Come on, Bab! I don't want you out in the dark!" Babel didn't answer. He was frozen up. "Did you hear me, Babel?!" Twitch was starting to sound afraid himself. "Say something!"

Babel backed up against the thorns, staring out at the lone bush in the center of the thicket. It was right in the moonlight. "I'm scared!"

"Don't just sit there, Babel!"

He had to be strong--Had to be strong and go on! Babel's mind slowly pulled itself together again. The slightest tinge of rage dripped into it, swirling the waters of his thoughts. Now just as everything was finally coming together this bushy interloper just comes out of nowhere and screws it all up? No! Babel hopped forward and yelled at the bush, **"I hate Halloween!"**

The bush rustled at this. **Shk Shk Shk Shk!**

He hopped forward again, yelling louder, **"I hate this birdbrain holiday and this stupid bush!!!"**

A very spooked raccoon jumped out of the far side of the bush. Out of nowhere, an arrow glinted across the forest and pricked the earth with a heavy thud. The little bandit ran off screeching into the forest.

Babel took heavy breaths and watched the beast four times his size run off into the forest. Some small part of him rejoiced at having sent a creature like that packing, but he was just too exhausted to display it.

Twitch's dark outline moved into the glade. "You can be pretty loud when you want to, birdie."

"Twitch!" Babel hopped up and flew right into his master's belly.

"There you are!" Twitch wrapped his hands around him. "There's my birdie!"

"Had a nightmare!"

"It's okay." Twitch walked over and picked up his arrow. It had a dark tuft of fur on its end. "Don't think he'll be bothering us anytime soon."

"Stood up to him!"

"You sure did!" Twitch hiked up his bag and headed back for his fire in the distance. "And you said you were useless! Ha!"

=====

The next morning, Babel woke up just a little after his master.  
"Mornin' Babel."

"Morning."

"You sound better today."

"A little."

Twitch smiled and picked up the bird, placing him on his shoulder while he broke camp. "Guess what today is."

"Not Halloween?"

"That's right! It's not Halloween anymore. It's November now!"

"November!"

Twitch wrapped up his gear and zipped up his pack. "Yep. A new month."

Babel loved the first day of a new month. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes to enjoy it. It was cold and overcast today, but it was bright out and Babel could feel the changes in the wind.

Winter was moving in...

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