

## Aspyn the Tiger Moth

### Once upon a time...

Aspyn the Tiger Moth laments as it flutters above a bed of delectable flowers glistening with nectar. "Where does the time go?" A verdant carpet of natural splendor extends as far as can be seen and its beauty calms Aspyn. It watches as a light breeze kisses the petals of plants and grass into surging waves. While a lovely view, Aspyn finds that it is tiring more each day from flying. "I need to rest soon," it reflects. A nagging thought returns, "Am I nearing my time?"

Resting on a delicate fern that sweeps back and forth rhythmically, Aspyn takes a thoughtful breath. "When did it all begin?" A lifetime of memories flood its thoughts, and with them, nagging questions that cannot be refused, "Was I a good Tiger Moth? Did I betray myself or did I fully use and share the gifts bestowed me at birth, with no confessions that I'd get to them later, but didn't?"

A small whirlwind gamboling close to the forest's edge fetches the earliest memory with a jolt. A sudden nightmare returns of a deafening roar from a helicopter overhead blasting pesticide down over everything. Aspyn remembers itself as a fully-grown Woolly Bear caterpillar being blown off the juicy leaf delicacy and thrown far away from the other Woolly Bears. Aspyn slams into a curled leaf holding a large water droplet from the recent rain. Spared direct drenching of the vicious poison, Aspyn watches as all the other Woolly Bears writhe in agony and convulse in final uncontrollable spasms, dying.

Aspyn's relief is premature as a deep, burning sensation grows. It realizes that some of the poison is ravenously eating at its skin. The rain droplet dilutes the noxious liquid as Aspyn swipes it from its skin.

Too late. A veil of darkness intensifies. Strange images gather as Aspyn curls into a tight ball. A distant tunneled light grows intense. Through hooded eyes, Aspyn perceives a council of Ancient, translucent Tiger Moths descending and chanting as they envelope Aspyn. Their concerned faces are discernable through Aspyn's pallid eyes. Even so, with the poison leeching throughout its body, Aspyn's breathing slows and becomes erratic. Sinking into numbness, the trees above Aspyn became delicate, edgy silhouettes that dissolve into the pastel blue wash of sky.

In an instant, Aspyn is above its body watching its still form. Aspyn is fascinated by the Ancient Ones placing their hands on its body and chanting a healing prayer. Aspyn studies the effect on its body growing more vital and straightening as their healing energy is absorbed. An Ancient One speaks to Aspyn telepathically, "You must return, your work is not complete."

Aspyn is repelled by the thought, "No! I'm tired of living in fear. Animals try to eat me and humans poison me. You know what I just went through! I'm a destructive pest and do nothing but destroy beautiful things...just ask them!" The Ancient One smiles knowingly, "You are trapped in a story that others wrote. You cannot allow yourself to judge yourself by what people say. Stupidity and ignorance are always trumpeted. You must discover your own true essence, then you will find joy in your life and know of your own beauty. What you focus on is what you get. Always remember, inner peace comes when you face your fear." Smiling wryly the Ancient One adds, "Besides, there is no choice here."

Aspyn is suddenly back in its body. Surprised at the feeling of its life renewed, Aspyn looks at the world around it, as if for the first time. The beauty takes its breath. Dropping to the ground from the leaf, Aspyn moves through the tangle of high grass, dead branches and exposed tree roots. Nothing is too great that cannot be overcome. A giddy sense of vitality is seductive as Aspyn increases its stride.

Nighttime approaches and it is time to rest. Looking over a cliff's edge of shocking severity, Aspyn sees a small cabin far below. "Yes!" Aspyn smiles to itself. The way down is treacherous with loose rocks and dirt. Even Aspyn's numerous feet slip out from under it many times. By the time Aspyn reaches the bottom to the cabin the last of daylight has faded. Aspyn walks up to the cabin hesitantly. It has bad energy and a sense of foreboding but the wisps of homey smoke from the chimney invite Aspyn to press on. Moving stealthily now, Aspyn peeks through a large crack in the wall. It sees forms dancing gaily, encouraging Aspyn to crawl through the opening to join them. Just as it is about to do this, a large Cockroach scurries out of the same crack from inside. "Don't go in there," Cockroach warns. Aspyn is taken aback, "Why?" "Well...look at them," Cockroach snaps back. Aspyn peers at the faint figures. Diaphanous images of mice and birds twirl, and as they do, Aspyn sees that they have hollow backs. Cockroach says knowingly, "Yeah, no backs means that those are ghosts, and this is their feasting ceremony just before they go looking to take the living spirit out of whatever they find. And we're some of their favorites! We've got to get out of here before they quit dancing."

Aspyn and Cockroach rush to the darkest part of the garden but close enough to see the cabin. Ghost figures sweep out from the chimney and fly off in different directions. "That was close. Good thing I warned you," Cockroach says proudly, "and now you owe me." Aspyn splutters, "What do you mean?" Puffing up and fluttering its wings in a display, "I saved your life." Aspyn is befuddled, this is all too weird, "You did, yes...and...by the way, when did you get wings?" "All Cockroaches have wings; we just move faster and are harder to catch on the ground...kinda clunky in flight." Cockroach looks around nervously, "*Danger is about.*" They hurriedly search away from the cabin until they find a perfect place to rest for the night.

Dawn slides up over the horizon, awakening the two. Neither stirs. They look around cautiously. Cockroach says, "I don't move about much during the day." Aspyn replies, "I do, now's the time when leaves open to their juiciest". Cockroach stretches, becoming fully awake, "I'll leave you then...time for me to find a tasty garbage heap to burrow into." Aspyn forces an appreciative smile, "Good luck with that."

Cockroach scurries away, calling over its shoulder, "Remember, you owe me." Aspyn watches Cockroach dig into dank areas and move on if not suitable. Aspyn looks up at the canopy over it being alert for birds and the occasional bat that has yet to find a suitable place to roost until nightfall.

After a trek up and over numerous plants, Aspyn comes upon a clearing. A garden spreads out before it. Salivating with excitement, a stunning geranium is closest. It is quite expansive at four feet tall and three feet wide with myriad, tender little leaves. Aspyn hurries up the stalk, it has been too long since it last ate. Predators to caterpillars, two diminutive Deer Mice emerge below and chase each other frolicking. Aspyn freezes in a clump of large leaves. The Deer Mice scurry away when a tabby cat takes an interest in their game. Aspyn dares not move for hours. Stealthily, Aspyn leaves the garden as quickly as its feet can move without tripping over each other. Aspyn hurries to an old, gnarled Oak tree with a large gash high in the

trunk from where a big branch broke off in a storm. Aspyn climbs and impulsively enters the hole but finds a hollow core and the reason the branch broke away from the majestic tree. The walls of the interior are still damp from the recent rain and Aspyn loses footing and falls into the deep crevice.

Aspyn lands heavily on a figure at prayer, causing quite a reaction. Showing no ill intent, Aspyn holds up its hands to indicate no hostility, "Sorry." Flipping back the hood of its robe, Praying Mantis rubs out the pain in one of its legs as it glares at Aspyn, "You could hurt somebody doing that!" Praying Mantis deliberately calms its anger by controlling its breath. "The walls are wet," Aspyn apologizes. Nodding in agreement, Praying Mantis says, "Well...that's how I come to be here too."

They look up at the hole high above them. Each attempts to climb the walls but they slip and this time Praying Mantis falls on Aspyn. "Ooof," Aspyn exclaims. "My bad," Praying Mantis replies, smiling. "We're all even now," Aspyn submits. "Not the right thinking my little friend, there is no need to make even," Praying Mantis stands fully upright. The height difference is not that great except for the pointed hood now back covering Praying Mantis' head.

Aspyn gives Praying Mantis a long look, "What's...that thing you wear?" "It's the robe of a shaman magician," Praying Mantis replies. "A what?" Aspyn asks. "Shamans see into people, into their 'spirit body' and we find their true personalities and the issues that disturb their health, their joy of life, their energy field," Praying Mantis says candidly. Aspyn snaps back questioningly, "Oh yeah? Well then, what do you know about me?" Praying Mantis studies Aspyn closely, so closely that Aspyn wants to crawl into a hole somewhere. Presently, Praying Mantis says quietly, "I know you have just been revived from death by heavenly spirits." Aspyn's eyes open wide, as Praying Mantis continues, "and I see that you hold yourself in contempt...you don't love yourself, you think you don't have any value, that you don't have any gifts to share." Aspyn's eyes tear, no one has ever before touched its heart so fully. "How do you know all this?" Aspyn whispers. Praying Mantis smiles empathetically, "Shamans fill their senses with nature, every rustle of grass, every bird song, every whisp of a breeze. Each of these teaches us something. We believe what we see, not what others profess. We especially want to be aware of bad energy...that will save you." Aspyn's mouth drops open, "I felt that when I got close to the cabin, but..." "You went closer anyway?" Praying Mantis says frankly, "and that's your problem, you don't honor the deep knowing that you have. And if you continue to doubt your essence, deny your gifts, refuse your warnings...you will likely only end up as a meal, as you would have at the cabin."

Aspyn's head swims. Praying Mantis offers, "You must learn the ways of nature if you are to fulfill your destiny." Aspyn extends his palms upwards in a gesture for Praying Mantis to begin. Praying Mantis sits down and draws a circle around it as far as its index finger can reach, then it looks at Aspyn. "I don't have my shamanic drum so we must invite Woodpecker...it is much favored by the divinities. Its pecking will be as a drum's heartbeat. You will journey on its sound, but first, we must find something here that we can use for our ritual." Praying Mantis is satisfied as it picks up a leaf, "Now here's something that you know a lot about," as it hands it to Aspyn. "Hold it to your heart." Aspyn does so. Praying Mantis continues, "Now step into the circle." Woodpecker begins pecking on the tree trunk outside.

The moment Aspyn steps into the circle, Aspyn drops through space and wings through a magical world. Crystal dewdrops sparkle and wink, tall grasses smile, flowers bow in respect, ants wave from below, and crickets, standing in quartets, sing to Aspyn passing over them. The sky is alive with hundreds of frolicking Tiger Moths that fly in wondrous synchronicity. Aspyn watches them visiting every flower and becoming yellow with pollen and joins them in that; and, the flowers that Aspyn caress beam with dreamy, freshly pollinated grins. The sky is a profusion of colors that rainbows can only envy. Such joy, such freedom! Aspyn deliriously merges with the merriment of ecstatic abandonment. Woodpecker begins pecking a 'shamanic recall', a beat that is faster and more erratic, that summons the spiritual traveler back from a journey. Aspyn opens its eyes to see Praying Mantis smiling at it.

Praying Mantis offers, "You've been busy. Your energy body is luminous and quite attractive." Aspyn is giddy, "How long was I gone?" "A day, maybe a little longer," Praying Mantis replies, "journeying time is not clock time. I was starting to wonder if you'd be back soon enough for us to leave because I sense that moment is at hand." Aspyn remains jubilant, "What I saw!" Praying Mantis chuckles as it looks up at the gashed opening above them, "Nature is taking a hand and we must leave quickly." The hollowed tree groans with an ominous cracking sound as thunder roils the sky outside and a violent wind torments the weary tree. They both hurry through the new oval-shaped, woodpecker hole to reenter life outside as if for the first time. They breathe in the exhilarating scent of newly wet earth, again and again. Inside, hollow sloshing sounds let them know their resting place is now full of water. The storm passes and nature settles back into its bustle of activity.

Praying Mantis turns to Aspyn, "How do you intend to use your life?" Aspyn is startled-reflective, then hesitantly replies, "I saw a suspended nest that I make. Then...I was in it, swimming through a gooey, rich mixture of tissues, memory limbs and bodily fluids. And the jelly-like-stuff voice says that a more profound image of me...awaits me." Aspyn is embarrassed at admitting something so strange and it avoids Praying Mantis' eyes. "Wonderful work!" Praying Mantis exclaims, startling Aspyn, "and that allows me to go on with my life and leave you, my friend, with your *Becoming*. With no opportunity for Aspyn to say, "Thank you," Praying Mantis flies away. Aspyn leaps from the tree trunk to enjoy its aerial journey vision but it only plunges to the ground below in a cushioned bounce on matted grass.

Aspyn finds a stately, tall plant whose broad leaves provide it safety. Attaching a chord to the underside of a leaf, near the stalk, Aspyn follows a primordial urgency in spitting up a saliva-like mixture of hormones and mixing it with its own Woolly Bear hair. The encasement quickly forms one strand at a time, surrounding Aspyn into a protective shelter. Resting now from the rushed physical exertion, Aspyn's thoughts are as bewildering as those from its hallucinogenic trip from accidentally nibbling magic mushrooms. Aspyn struggles to make sense of its body assimilating a seething cauldron of molecules and membranes.

Aspyn abruptly finds itself outside its body again but hovering close enough to see into its etheric body-cocoon and to perceive the life-legacy process evolving. Aspyn watches Ancient Ones mingling in the swirling transmutation and harmonizing their vibrations to solidify the formless amalgam. Unassembled, in pieces, Aspyn's insides follow some invisible architectural plan with a heart forming here, lungs there, and wings expanding and evolving, all driven by a primordial destiny.

Days pass. Aspyn awakens to find itself back in its body and as though out of surgery. Aspyn is claustrophobic in its confining prison cocoon. The casing's protective rigidity resists change of any sort but Aspyn pushes and stretches; its movements split the suffocating structure, and with a final effort, forces it wide open. Aspyn thrusts its body out of the empty casing and opens its wings for the first time. Aspyn pumps internal fluids into the wing's veins, expanding them to be dried by the sun. They are a colorful tapestry of gossamer firmness. Perched on the lightly swaying cocoon shell, Aspyn flaps its wings for the first time and celebrates life with delicate fluttering. Freed from its Woolly Bear caterpillar life history and guided by a life energy that resonates throughout all of nature, Aspyn leaps into flight. The shamanic vision comes alive as Aspyn cavorts in ecstatic aerial inspiration. Swirling past one tree then another, hovering over one open flower and others, Aspyn is giddy. Suddenly Aspyn senses danger and swiftly descends closer to the ground while scanning the sky above it. It sees a bat harassing something in the distance. Aspyn stares and sees its old companion, Cockroach, scurrying for its life. The bat is unrelenting. Aspyn remembers the Ancient Ones whispering about its new power and at once, Aspyn vibrates the tymbals on its abdomen. The bat becomes confused by the conflicting, pulsing vibration and flies away. Aspyn flutters over to Cockroach and alights next to it. "Remember me?" Aspyn chuckles knowing it looks nothing like the Woolly Bear caterpillar that Cockroach knew. Befuddled, Cockroach shakes its head 'No'. "We were at the cabin together and you told me that 'I owed you', well my friend, you've been repaid." Cockroach is amazed, "You've changed!" Aspyn smiles and laughs, "Good of you to notice," then adds, "it's not wise to stay here. *Danger is about.*" Cockroach roars in laughter, those were its very words to Aspyn.

Together, they fly away into a sundrenched world of mystery, majesty and most of all, Joy!