

THE ARCHER AND THE DARK

from the documentary *Lost in the Glow*

ACT ONE · THE FIRE

A long time ago, there was an archer. One of the best that ever lived. He was so good that he could hunt in the dark, under the stars.

He had a dog called Sirius who followed him everywhere. Sirius always knew the way home, and he told the other animals when the seasons were about to change.

The stars told the archer where everything was. He knew them like the back of his hand.

People started to hear about him. They came from his village, and then the next village, and then the village after that. But it was far too dark. They could only hear him. They could not see him shoot.

So the villagers built a fire.

And the fire was wonderful. It was warm. It kept the wolves away. And now everybody could see, even at night.

So more people came, from further and further away, and the fire got bigger, and brighter, and higher. Nobody ever thought to stop. Everybody kept throwing on more logs.

Why would they? Every single log was a good idea.

Then one night the archer raised his bow, and he could not see his target.

He shot anyway. He missed. He had never missed before in his life.

Nobody noticed. They were all looking at the fire.

He looked up. There were no stars to guide him. Not one. Just an orange, flickering glow.

And when he looked down, Sirius was gone.

ACT TWO · THE WALK

That night, the archer went out into the dark to look for his dog.

He walked past the fire, and past the last of the light, until the ground was cold and there was nothing to see by at all. He had never had to feel his way before.

A moth landed on the back of his hand.

“Have you seen my dog?” asked the archer.

“I have not seen anything for weeks,” said the moth. “I was going somewhere. I have been going there my whole life. But somebody has moved the moon.”

A badger came the other way along the path, and did not stop.

“Have you seen my dog?”

“No,” said the badger. “Good night, friend.” And he was gone into the hedge.

The archer stood still. He had been out here for hours, and he had not been alone for a single one of them. The dark was full of animals, all going about their business, all of them getting along perfectly well without him.

Then, low down in the wet grass, he saw hundreds of tiny green lights.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Looking for each other,” they said. “This is how we do it. We shine.”

“And do you find each other?”

“We used to,” said the glow-worms.

And the archer sat down in the wet grass, because now he understood.

Sirius was not lost. Sirius was out there somewhere, in the dark, looking up, waiting for the stars to tell him the way home.

And there were no stars.

ACT THREE · THE WAITING

In the morning, the archer walked back to the village and asked them to let the fire go out.

Nobody wanted to. It was warm. It kept the wolves away. It was the best thing that had ever happened to them.

“Then keep a small one,” said the archer.

So they did. One fire, low down, in a ring of stones, pointing at the path where the feet were. Enough to see by. Not enough to reach the sky.

Some people were cross about it. Some said it was too dark now, and they were right. Some went home, and they did not come back.

Then the archer waited. Nothing happened for a long time. He was not good at waiting. He waited anyway.

And then there was a star. Just one.

The next night, three. The night after that, more than he could count. It happened slowly, the way the best things do.

And one night, something came out of the dark and pushed a cold nose into his hand.

The archer raised his bow, and he could see.

There was hardly anybody left to watch him. He found that he did not mind at all.

He had spent years saying, look at me.

Now he said, look at that.

And when the archer was very old, they put him up in the sky, so that everybody would always be able to find him.

Go outside tonight. Turn off the lights behind you. Let your eyes get used to the dark — it takes longer than you think.

Look for three stars in a row. That is his belt.

And just behind him, the brightest star in the whole sky, is his dog. Still following. Still the first to know the way home.

They gave the archer a name, a long, long time ago.

Perhaps you know it.

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