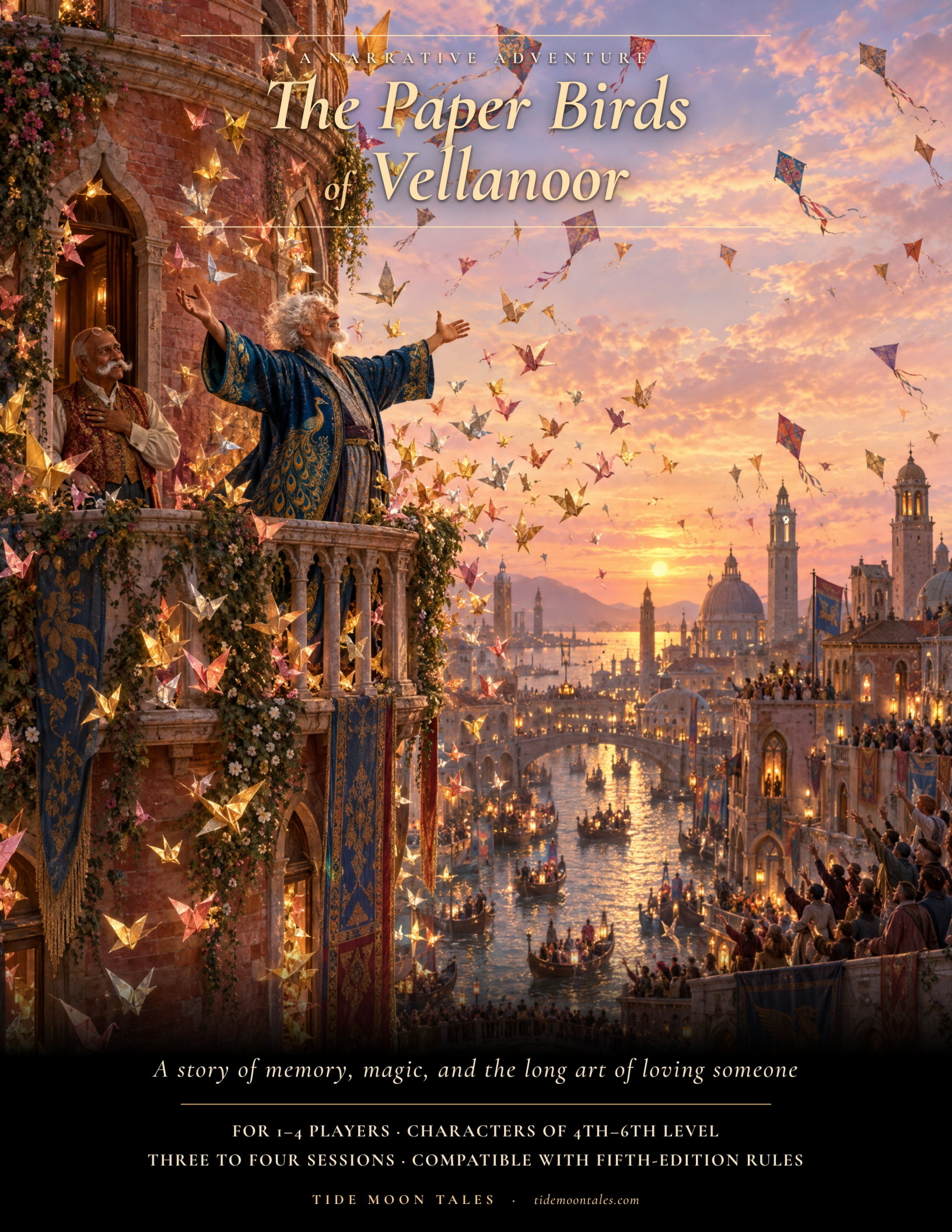




A NARRATIVE ADVENTURE

The Paper Birds of Vellanoor

A story of memory, magic, and the long art of loving someone

FOR 1-4 PLAYERS · CHARACTERS OF 4TH-6TH LEVEL
THREE TO FOUR SESSIONS · COMPATIBLE WITH FIFTH-EDITION RULES

TIDE MOON TALES · tidemoontales.com



A NARRATIVE ADVENTURE FOR 1-4 PLAYERS

*Paper birds are falling out of the summer sky.
Whoever catches one sees a moment of a stranger's life.
Three days before the Festival of Kites,
the city wants to know whose.*

The Paper Birds of Vellanoor is a complete narrative adventure set in a sunlit city of canals and bell towers, and it is a mystery about memory. Streets are waking up fifty years in the past. Blank white holes are opening in the world. People wake having lost one precious thing: a husband's face, how to whistle, the way home. The trail leads to a crooked tower where the greatest enchanter the city has ever known is losing his mind. His husband of fifty years is hiding it from everyone. And their daughter, who hasn't been home in fifteen years, has just been sent to find out what's wrong.

It is warm, quick, and often very funny: a manticore that shrinks when you tell it the truth, a crook who sells bottled afternoons, a dinner party nobody wants to leave. Underneath, it asks what happens to love when one person can no longer remember it, and it ends on two words your players will carry home.

66

pages

16

scenes in three acts

4

structured
conversations

5

set pieces

7

characters

4

endings

What Makes It Different

Memory Is Not Truth

The monsters here are made of an old man's memories, exactly as he remembers them. Find out how things really were, say it to their faces, and they change. Clever truth beats brute force.

Conversation as play

Four structured scenes, each a small game: a dinner where everyone tells how they met, a game played in a gondola until dawn, an old teacher's last lesson, and a city telling a man his own life.

Nothing is wasted

A joke at dinner in the first session becomes the last line of the book. A one-page map traces every planted detail to the moment it pays off.

Characters protecting each other with lies

Every major character has a surface, a subtext, and a breaking point, with the exact words they say when the truth finally comes out. Most of them are hiding something out of love.

Story first, dice second

A token economy rewards vivid, honest, and funny play, including a *Recall* power that lets characters remember what the story needs. Rolls land in four tiers, and players narrate their own triumphs.

Any table, handled with care

Companions scale the story from one player to four. Six open backstory Threads let players write themselves in. This is a story about dementia, and it treats every character with dignity, with guidance for tables close to it.

Moments Your Table Will Carry Home

- 🐦 *A paper bird falling into your hand out of a clear blue sky, with a stranger's happiest night inside it.*
- 🐦 *A manticore that gets smaller every time someone tells it the truth.*
- 🐦 *A host telling how he met his husband for the third time in one evening, as if for the first.*

- 🐦 *A grown woman kneeling on a kitchen floor so her father can see the six-year-old he's looking for.*
- 🐦 *A cabinet of a hundred small drawers, each one glowing faintly.*
- 🐦 *Every kite in a city lifting into the dusk at once.*

In This Preview

The opening chapter, the rules for story-first play, the backstory Threads, the city of Vellanoor with its table of twenty memories to catch, and all of Act One, ending on a doorstep. Every page carries its page number from the full edition, so you can see where you are in the book. At the end are three short glimpses of later scenes, chosen to show the heart of the story without giving away its secrets.

PREVIEW EDITION

The Paper Birds of Vellanoor

A story of memory, magic, and the long art of loving someone



For 1–4 players · Characters of 4th–6th level
Three to four sessions · Compatible with fifth-edition rules

“Do I know you?”

“Not yet.”

— overheard at the Festival of Kites, fifty-two years ago

TIDE MOON TALES

tidemoontales.com

Contents

● in this preview ○ a short excerpt in this preview greyed full edition only

● Before You Begin	1	8 · Firsts and Lasts	33
The Story in Brief	2	<i>conversation on the canals at night</i>	
<i>the secret history of the Bellwether, and a timeline</i>		○ 9 · Good Morning, Little Bird	34
● How This Adventure Plays	5	10 · The Cabinet	36
<i>including the rule called Memory Is Not Truth</i>		11 · Do I Know You?	37
● Threads: Backstory for Your Players	9	<i>set piece: The Riders in the Kitchen</i>	
The Cast	11	Act Three: The Palace of Memory	40
<i>seven characters, each with surface, subtext, and breaking point</i>		12 · The Warrant	40
● Vellanoor	15	13 · What Was Taken	42
<i>the city, its festival, and twenty memories to catch</i>		○ 14 · The Palace of Memory	42
Act One: The City of Kites	19	<i>five rooms of a life, a garden, and the Unwritten</i>	
● 1 · A Rain of Birds	19	15 · The Keeper in the Garden	47
● 2 · The Provost's Commission	20	<i>conversation: The Last Lesson</i>	
● 3 · Yesterday on Saint-Vey Street	21	○ 16 · The Release	50
<i>set piece: The Manticore of Saint-Vey</i>		<i>set piece: The Balcony of the Bellwether</i>	
● 4 · Dinner at the Bellwether	23	Epilogue: Not Yet	54
<i>conversation: Tell Me How We Met</i>		The Kites Come Down	54
Act Two: The Hollowing	28	<i>conversation: The Telling</i>	
5 · The Hollowed	28	If the Story Goes Another Way	56
<i>the investigation</i>		<i>three other endings</i>	
6 · The Night Market	30	Appendix A: Creatures & Companions	59
7 · The Brass Bird	31	Appendix B: Handouts	62
<i>set piece: Across the Rooftops of Vellanoor</i>		<i>five handouts, including an unsent letter</i>	
		Appendix C: Quick Reference	66
		<i>including the Kindling: every planted detail and where it pays off</i>	

66 pages · 16 scenes · 4 structured conversations · 5 set pieces · 5 handouts

Published by Tide Moon Tales · tidemoontales.com

Before You Begin

The Paper Birds of Vellanoor is a mystery in a city of canals and bell towers, three days before its most beloved festival. Glowing paper birds are falling out of the summer sky, and whoever catches one sees a moment from someone else's life. A street wakes up fifty years in the past. A dead woman is selling oranges in the market. People are waking up having forgotten one precious thing: a husband's face, how to whistle, the way home. The city's wizards want someone to blame by the time the kites fly.

At the center of it all is a crooked tower, and in the tower lives the greatest enchanter Vellanoor has ever known, a funny, brilliant, gentle old man named Orrin Thale, who is losing his mind. His husband of fifty years has been hiding it from everyone. Their daughter, who hasn't spoken to them in fifteen years, has just been assigned to find out what's wrong with the city.

Where *What the Sea Keeps* was grey and salt-bitten, this story is sunlit. It is warm, quick, and often funny. There are rooftop chases, a manticore that shrinks when you correct it, a crook who sells bottled afternoons, and a dinner party where the host tells the story of how he met his husband three different ways. It is also, underneath, about what happens to love when one person can no longer remember it, and about the people who do the remembering for them. The humor is not decoration. It is what makes the ending hurt.

What You Need

The usual dice, the fifth-edition rules, and a small pile of tokens to use as **Birds**, the adventure's narrative currency. If you're willing, fold a few actual paper birds before the first session (instructions are in Appendix B). Handing a player a paper bird when they earn one is a small thing that the table will remember.

Content and Care

A Note on Difficult Themes

This story is about **dementia**. It depicts an old man losing his memory, failing to recognize his husband and his daughter, and becoming frightened and lost. It also includes **memories of war**, a **child orphaned by a raid**, and **people who have had memories stolen from them**.

It treats Orrin with dignity throughout. He is never a joke, never a monster, and never less than a person. But for anyone who has watched someone they love go through this, these scenes may land very close to home. Talk to your players before you begin. Ask, simply, whether anyone at the table has a personal connection to memory loss, and whether they would like the camera kept at a distance in the hardest scenes. The heaviest moments are marked with ♦.

NOT IN THIS PREVIEW

Pages 2–4

The Story in Brief

Fifty-two years of the Bellwether, told in full for the Game Master: a singing purse on the Bridge of Coins, a little girl in a burned village, an argument in a doorway, and what has really been happening in the crooked tower these last three years. With a timeline.



How This Adventure Plays

Like its companion adventures, this is a story first and a game second. The dice exist to create drama, not to replace it. If you have run *What the Sea Keeps*, the core tools will be familiar; this adventure adds one new rule, **Memory Is Not Truth**, which is at the heart of how its fights and mysteries work.

The Three Promises

Before the first session, make these promises to your players, out loud:

1. **Talking is playing.** A dinner party is not a break from the adventure. It *is* the adventure.
2. **The camera follows you.** Describe what you do so the table can see it. The story will bend toward a good description.
3. **Failing is not losing.** A bad roll makes the story more complicated, more expensive, or more interesting. It never just stops.

Birds

Birds are the adventure's narrative currency. Each player begins with **one Bird** and can hold **up to three**. Real folded paper birds make perfect tokens.

Earning Birds

Award a Bird when a player:

- **Paints the shot.** Describes an action so the table can see it.
- **Tells a true thing.** Answers a conversation prompt with something honest and costly.
- **Pulls a Thread.** Brings their backstory Thread into a scene in a way that matters.
- **Hears the subtext.** Names, in character, what an NPC is not saying.
- **Makes the table laugh.** This adventure runs on warmth. A genuinely funny moment is worth as much as a moving one.
- **Lets it hurt.** Chooses a complication or loss because it serves the story.

Spending Birds

A player may spend one Bird to:

- **Lean in.** Gain advantage, declared before rolling.
- **Try again.** Reroll a die and take the new result.
- **Flourish.** On a success, add a cinematic effect: disarm, shove, trip, frighten.
- **Not today.** Turn a hit on an ally or companion into a near miss, and describe the save.
- **Flashback.** Reveal a short scene showing how you prepared for this moment.
- **Recall.** *New in this adventure.* Ask the GM one fact your character could plausibly remember about a place, person, or thing. The GM answers truthfully. In a story about forgetting, remembering is a superpower.

Cinematic Rolls

When a roll matters, the player describes the intent, the GM names the stakes, the player rolls, and the result falls into one of four tiers:

Result	What Happens	Who Narrates
Triumph Beat the DC by 5+, or a natural 20	Better than hoped. Add a bonus effect or gain a Bird.	The player, fully.
Success Meet or beat the DC	You do what you set out to do.	The player; the GM may add a detail.
Success at a Cost Miss by 1–3	It works, but something breaks, slips, or is noticed. The player may refuse the cost and take a failure.	The GM narrates the cost.
Fail Forward Miss by 4+	It doesn't work, but the story moves: a new problem, a revealed secret, a door opening somewhere else.	The GM; the player describes the reaction.

When a player drops an enemy, ask: *“How do you want to do this?”*

Memory Is Not Truth

Many things the party fights or explores in this adventure are **Manifestations**: pieces of Orrin's memory made real by the Bloom. A manifestation is exactly as Orrin *remembers* it, which is not the same as how it was. Memories grow. The manticore he fought at twenty-two was, in his memory, the size of a carriage, golden as a lion, and terrifying. In reality, it was the size of a large dog, mangy, and mostly afraid.

Any character who discovers how a manifestation differs from the truth can try to **Correct** it, as an action:

- The player states the correction aloud, in character, to the manifestation: *“You weren't that big. You were starving. You were the size of a dog.”*
- They roll a **Charisma** check (any skill that fits: Persuasion, Performance, Intimidation) against the manifestation's **Correction DC**. If the correction is backed by real evidence (a caught paper bird showing the truth, Bastian's testimony, an old record), they have advantage.
- On a success, the manifestation changes to match the truth. Usually this means it gets weaker. Sometimes it means it becomes something else entirely.

Truths to correct can be found in the world: in caught paper birds, in conversation with Bastian or Liesl, in records at the Collegium. Encourage players to collect them. Clever correction should almost always beat brute force, and should always earn a Bird.

The Heart of the Rule

Memory Is Not Truth is a combat mechanic, but it is also the theme of the adventure. Every character in this story remembers things wrong in a way that matters. Orrin remembers himself as braver than he was. Liesl remembers him as crueler than he was. Bastian remembers everything exactly, because somebody has to. The climax of the adventure turns on the difference between what happened and what we carry, and on the idea that what we carry may be worth keeping anyway.

Set-Piece Fights and Conversations

Every fight is a **set piece** with a **Stage** (a place with features to use), **Stakes** (what the fight is really about), **Beats** (events at set moments), and a way of **Ending It** that is usually not “kill everything.” Every act also contains at least one **structured conversation**: a small game with prompts and the NPCs’ own layered answers. Go around the table, let players pass, reward honesty and humor alike, and end each conversation on an image rather than a summary.

Running for One to Four Players

Three companions can travel with the party. They hold doors, shout warnings, and take the hits that make players furious; their real spotlight is in the conversations.

- **Liesl Moss**, the Quiet Hand agent, joins in Act One. She is a skilled fighter whose blade cuts through spells.
- **Teodor Brask**, Orrin’s fifteen-year-old apprentice, can join from the end of Act One. He knows a handful of small spells and is extremely brave about the wrong things.
- **Quillon Dask**, the disreputable memory-merchant, can join in Act Two. He fights dirty and flees often.

Players	Companions in Fights	Enemy Numbers	Notes
1	Liesl and one other fight	Use the “1–2 players” numbers	The player starts with 2 Birds. Companions act right after the player.
2	Liesl fights; others support	Use the “1–2 players” numbers	Each player may call a companion once per round.
3	One companion fights	Use the “3–4 players” numbers	Companions take their own turns.
4	Companions mostly narrate	Use the “3–4 players” numbers	Companions handle side threats in narration.

Pacing

Three sessions of three to four hours, one per act, with the Epilogue at the end of the third. The Festival of Kites is three days away when the story begins. Every morning, the city is a little stranger: more birds, more streets gone backward, more holes of Gray. Let the players see the clock in the world rather than on a page.

Threads: Backstory for Your Players

A Thread is a loose end in a character's past that this story can pick up and pull. Offer the list to your players before the first session. Each may choose one, invent one, or choose none. A Thread is a frame; the player fills it in. Each comes with the **question** the story will ask, and the **scenes** where it is most likely to surface. Award a Bird whenever a player brings their Thread into a scene in a way that matters.

The Estranged Thread

There is someone you stopped speaking to, and you no longer remember exactly why.

A parent, a sibling, a mentor, an old friend. There was a fight, or a silence that grew. You tell yourself it was their fault. Decide whether that's true.

The question: If they forgot the fight, would you?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

The Caretaker Thread

You once looked after someone who could not look after themselves.

A sick parent, a wounded comrade, a younger sibling, an old teacher. It was the hardest thing you have ever done and you have never told anyone how angry it made you, or how much you miss it.

The question: How far would you go, and what would you steal, to keep them?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

The First Love Thread

You remember exactly how you met someone.

They may be alive, gone, or simply elsewhere. You remember what they were wearing and what they said. Decide whether you've told the story so many times that you're no longer sure which parts are true.

The question: Does it matter whether a memory is accurate, if it's the one you keep?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

The Stolen Thread

Something was taken from you that you can never get back.

A home, a name, a childhood, a skill, a person. Optionally, you are one of the Hollowed: you woke up one morning this summer having forgotten something, and you don't know what. You only know there's a hole.

The question: If you could have it back, would you take it? Even if it hurts?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

The Soldier's Thread

You were in a war, and you remember more of it than you'd like.

Perhaps the Ashen War itself, twenty-eight years ago, if your character is old enough; perhaps another. There is one day you return to, uninvited, at night.

The question: Is it a mercy to forget?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

The Wonder Thread

You saw something once that made you believe in magic.

You were a child, perhaps. A fire that danced, a kite that flew itself, a stranger who made a coin sing. Optionally, it was Orrin Thale, at a Festival of Kites long ago, and he made a paper bird fly for you, and he will not remember you at all.

The question: What do you owe the people who made you who you are, when they can no longer know it?

Where it surfaces: *withheld in the preview*

NOT IN THIS PREVIEW

Pages 11–14

The Cast

Orrin Thale, the Wonderworker of Vellanoor. Bastian Moss, clockmaker and reformed thief. Liesl Moss, the daughter who left. Provost Severine Ashgrove. Quillon Dask, purveyor of fine recollections. Teodor Brask, an apprentice with a notebook. And the Gray. Each drawn with a surface, a subtext, a voice, and the line where they finally break.



Vellanoor

Vellanoor is a city of a hundred canals and a thousand bells, built on a lagoon in the warm south, all ochre walls and green shutters and washing strung between balconies. Gondolas and barges crowd the waterways; bridges arch over every one, so steep that the porters who climb them have the thighs of mountain goats. The Collegium of the Arcane sits on its hill above the city, white and domed. The air smells of salt, oranges, frying dough, and, in the last week of summer, paper and glue. Everyone in Vellanoor is building a kite.

The Festival of Kites

On the last night of summer, the whole city climbs to its rooftops at dusk and flies kites: a thousand of them, of every size and shape, painted silk and paper, dragons, fish, ships, birds, faces. For the last forty years, at the moment the evening bell rings, every kite in the city has lifted out of its owner's hands and flown by itself, wheeling over the lagoon in great glittering flocks while the people below sing and cry and kiss. Everyone knows who does it. It is the gift of Orrin Thale, the Wonderworker of the Bellwether. It is the most beautiful night of the year.

This year it is three days away. And there are things falling out of the sky.

Places in Vellanoor

The Bridge of Coins

The oldest and steepest bridge in the city, crusted with shops, where lovers throw a coin into the Grand Canal for luck. It is where Bastian picked Orrin's pocket fifty-two years ago, and where they were married. At its crest is a bench with a small brass plaque so worn nobody can read it. It says *Not Yet*.

The Lamplighters' Quarter

An old, crooked district of narrow canals and leaning houses, full of artisans. The Bloom is strongest here.

The Bellwether

Orrin and Bastian's home: a tall, crooked tower of rose-colored brick in the Lamplighters' Quarter, leaning visibly to the left, with a balcony near the top and a great many mismatched windows. At its base is Bastian's clock shop, *Moss & Thale, Timepieces Mended*. Behind the shop, his workshop. Behind the workshop, a small walled garden, overgrown, with a lemon tree.

The Collegium

White domes on the hill, libraries and lecture halls and the Provost's cold office. The grey-coated agents of the Quiet Hand come and go from a side door.

Saint-Vey Street

A market street along a canal in the Lamplighters' Quarter. It is where the first "Yesterday" happened (see Act One).

The Night Market

Under the Bridge of Coins, on the water steps and moored barges, a market that opens at midnight and closes at dawn, lit by lanterns and frequented by smugglers, lovers, and the sleepless. Quillon Dask keeps his stall here.

The Small Things

Whenever the party moves through the city, choose or roll one small thing to describe. The festival is coming, and the Bloom is spreading, and as the days pass, the small things get stranger.

d12	Something Small
1	A grandmother on a balcony teaches a little boy to tie a kite tail. “Not too short, or it’ll spin. Not too long, or it’ll sulk.”
2	A paper bird lands on a gondolier’s oar. He catches it, unfolds it, and stops rowing. His passengers wait. He is crying and smiling at the same time.
3	A clock in a shop window is running backward. The shopkeeper hasn’t noticed.
4	Children chanting a skipping rhyme: “ <i>Old Orr, old Orr, make the kites fly, one for the canal and one for the sky!</i> ”
5	A woman stands in the middle of a bridge, turning slowly, looking for something. When asked, she says she’s lost the way home. She has lived on this street for thirty years. (Hollowed.)
6	Kites drying on every rooftop like laundry: a carp, a sun with a face, a dragon, a ship.
7	A street lamp is lit in broad daylight, and it’s an old oil lamp of a type that hasn’t been used in fifty years. Nobody knows who lit it.
8	A patch of Gray, the size of a door, in the side of a building. A cat walks up to it, sniffs, and backs away with its fur on end.
9	A brass clock repairer’s receipt, folded into a bird with a crooked left wing, left on a café table as a tip.
10	A fat orange cat on a windowsill, sunning itself. When the party looks again, it isn’t there. (Marmalade, a memory.)
11	A young man runs past laughing with a purse in his coat that is singing a very rude sailor’s song, followed by another young man in apprentice’s robes. They vanish around a corner. (A memory, fifty-two years old.)
12	Two old men, arm in arm, on the Bridge of Coins at sunset, not speaking. One of them is in a peacock-colored dressing gown.

Catching Birds

Paper birds fall over Vellanoor all day, more of them each day. They glow faintly, like paper held up to a candle. Each has a crooked left wing. They are easy to catch: they drift down slowly, as if they want to be caught. When a character catches one and unfolds it, they **see and feel a moment of Orrin’s life**, as if they were there, for a few heartbeats. Then the bird crumbles into warm, glittering dust.

Use the table below whenever a character catches a bird. On the first day, choose from 1–8. On the second day, use 1–14; the later memories are more fragmented, and some are missing pieces, with a blank of Gray where a face or a word should be. On the third day, use the whole table. Many of these memories are **truths** the party can later use to **Correct** a manifestation.

d20	The Memory in the Bird
1	A singing purse, a laughing thief on the Bridge of Coins at night, kites overhead. <i>“Do I know you?” “Not yet.”</i> The joy of it is so strong it makes the catcher laugh aloud.
2	A paper bird with a crooked left wing, held in a young man’s ink-stained hands. A breath. It flies.
3	A wedding on a bridge in pouring rain. Everyone soaked. Bastian’s mustache is black.
4	A thin, frightened, mangy creature with a scorpion’s tail backed into a goat pen, no bigger than a sheepdog, hissing. (Truth: the manticore.)
5	A thousand kites lifting at once over the lagoon, seen from the balcony of the Bellwether. A hand in his hand. Forty years of this. It never gets old.
6	A fat orange cat asleep on an open book about the history of spoons.
7	A little girl’s palm, cupped, and a light blooming in it like a tiny sun, and her face lit from below, astonished. Under the table, an old man’s fingers are moving.
8	Bastian at the stove, burning eggs, singing badly.
9	Smoke. A village on fire. A bread oven, its iron door hot. Inside, a small girl with her hands over her ears. (Truth: the Gray Riders were not as he remembers them; see Act Two.)
10	A young woman in a grey coat in a doorway with a silver badge on her chest. Someone is shouting. It is him. He can hear what he’s saying and he cannot stop. <i>“—the people who murdered Master Cass—”</i> The door closes.
11	A cluttered study. Searching for the word for the thing you write with. Ink. Pen. Quill. It won’t come. Laughing it off. Not laughing, after.
12	A garden. A lemon tree. A small grave with a stone that says <i>MARMALADE</i> . A boy with an ink-stained thumb, writing in a notebook.
13	Bastian asleep in a chair by the bed, still dressed, spectacles askew. Watching him sleep. Not remembering, for a terrible moment, who he is. Then remembering. Then pretending to be asleep.
14	The Provost, young, with a broken leg, being carried down a collapsing staircase. Singing to her so she won’t hear the walls.
15	A face that should be familiar. Where the face should be, Gray.
16	A kite on a rooftop last summer that wouldn’t lift. Then it did, and he didn’t know why. Bastian, watching him, very still.
17	A young man’s laugh. A purse that sings. A bridge. Then the memory just stops, as if torn off.

18 A woman's hand, burned, pressing a small girl's hand into his. A voice: *"Promise."* A voice that is his: *"I promise."*

19 White. Silence. Nothing at all. The catcher is left with a cold, empty feeling for an hour.

20 A note, in his own handwriting, pinned to the inside of his wardrobe door: *Your name is Orrin. You are home. Bastian is your husband. He loves you. Be kind to him; he is tired.*

ACT ONE

The City of Kites

In which it rains paper, a street goes backward fifty-two years, a manticore is told the truth about itself, and two old men give a very good dinner.

Act One at a Glance

Purpose: Delight. Establish the city, the wonder of the birds, and the warmth of Orrin and Bastian. Make the players fall in love with the Bellwether. End on a sting.

Scenes: 1. A Rain of Birds · 2. The Provost's Commission · 3. Yesterday on Saint-Vey Street · 4. Dinner at the Bellwether

Key plants: The crooked left wing; "Do I know you?" "Not yet."; two sugars; Marmalade "in the garden"; the manticore's true size; Liesl's reaction to the birds; Teodor's notebook.

SCENE 1

A Rain of Birds

Mood: Sunlit, bustling, astonishing · **Type:** Opening and wonder

Open with the party arriving in Vellanoor, by barge across the lagoon. Why they're here is up to you:

- A summons from the Collegium, which needs outsiders with no ties to the city's mages.
- The Festival itself, famous across the world.
- A character with the **Wonder Thread** has come to see the kites fly one more time.
- A character with the **Stolen Thread** has had something taken here, and wants it back.

The barge slides into the Grand Canal in the late afternoon, and Vellanoor rises around you all at once: ochre and rose and gold, bell towers and domes, laundry strung across the water like bunting, bridges crowded with people. Every rooftop is covered with kites laid out to dry: silk carp, paper suns, dragons with tails thirty feet long. Somewhere a band is practicing, badly. The air smells of oranges and fried dough and salt.

Then the bargeman stops poling and looks up, and so does everyone on the bridge ahead, and so do you.

Something is falling out of the clear blue sky. Dozens of somethings. Small, pale, and glowing faintly, like paper held in front of a candle. They drift down slowly, turning, gliding, the way leaves fall in autumn when there's no wind. One of them comes down right in front of you, close enough to touch, and hangs in the air, waiting.

It's a paper bird. Folded from a page of old handwriting. One of its wings is folded slightly crooked.

Whoever reaches for it catches it. Use entry **1** on the Catching Birds table for this first bird: the singing purse, the bridge, the laughter, “*Do I know you?*” “*Not yet.*” Describe it in the second person, fully, as joy. Then the bird crumbles into warm, golden dust that drifts away on the breeze.

Around the party, all across the canal, people are catching birds. Some laugh. Some cry. A child on a bridge shrieks with delight. An old woman sits down on the steps of a church with a bird in her hand and doesn't get up. The bargeman says, as if this is normal now: “*Three weeks of it. Nobody knows. Lovely, mostly. Mostly.*” Then he poles on.

Let every player catch one bird if they want. Roll on the table (1–8) for each. This is the hook. Let it be beautiful.

SCENE 2

The Provost's Commission

Mood: Cool, formal, quietly urgent · **Type:** Social

The party is summoned to the Collegium, or seeks it out. **Provost Severine Ashgrove** receives them in a white, cold office with a window over the whole city.

“For three weeks,” the Provost says, “Vellanoor has been experiencing what my colleagues are pleased to call anomalous mnemonic phenomena. In plain words: it is raining memories. Someone's memories. Parts of the city are reverting to the past, for minutes or hours at a time. And in places, the city is simply... gone.” She sets a sketch on the desk: a doorway, and beyond it, flat white nothing. “We call those the Gray. Two people have walked into the Gray. They have not walked out.”

“Separately, or perhaps not separately, for four months people across the city have been waking to find a single memory missing. Not lost. Taken. The Watch calls it the Hollowing.”

She folds her hands on her cane. “The phenomena are accelerating. My best estimate is that on the night of the Festival of Kites, three days from now, they will become catastrophic. The source is almost certainly a mage. I need it found. I have hired you, rather than my own people, because you have no friends here. That will make it easier to do what must be done.”

What the Provost offers and asks:

- **Payment:** generous, half now. And the gratitude of the Collegium, which is worth more.

- **What must be done:** *“If the source is a mage who has lost control of their power, the law is clear. They will be Stilled. Their magic will be burned out of them. It is not a death. It is very close.”* A DC 14 Insight check notices that her hand tightens on her cane when she says it.
- **Suspects:** she has none she will name. If pressed: *“There are perhaps four mages in this city powerful enough. I have ruled out three.”* She will not say who the fourth is.
- **A liaison:** *“You will be accompanied by an agent of the Quiet Hand, to advise you, and to report to me.”* She rings a bell.

Liesl Moss

The woman who comes in is compact, dark-haired, and grey-coated, with a silver hand-shaped badge on her chest and a thin dull-grey sword at her hip. There is an old burn scar along her jaw. She looks at each of you in turn, the way a fencer looks at an opponent’s feet.

“Agent Moss,” she says. “I’ll be keeping you honest.” A pause. “That’s a joke. Partly.”

On the way out of the Collegium, a paper bird falls across their path. If anyone catches it, Liesl glances at it, and sees the crooked left wing, and stops walking. Just for a moment. Her face goes absolutely still. Then she walks on. *“Come on. We’re wasting light.”*

Subtext: She knows that fold. She grew up with it. Every birthday, every bad dream, every bowl of soup when she was sick came with a bird with a crooked left wing. She will not say so until Scene 4. A player who notices her reaction, and says so, earns a Bird. If they ask, she says: *“Nothing. I thought I recognized something.”*

SCENE 3

Yesterday on Saint-Vey Street

Mood: Uncanny, then comic, then thrilling · **Type:** Exploration and set-piece fight

The Provost’s reports say the Bloom is strongest in the Lamplighters’ Quarter. As the party walks there, the light changes.

You turn the corner onto Saint-Vey Street, and it’s fifty years ago.

You don’t realize it at first. It’s still a market street along a canal. But the awnings are different colors. The lamps are oil, not glass. The people are dressed strangely, in long coats and high collars, and they don’t look at you. A boy runs past with a hoop and stick. An old woman sells oranges from a barrow, calling out in a voice like a crow. The air is gold, and thick, and slightly too bright, like light through honey. And it is quiet. Everyone is moving, talking, laughing, haggling, but the sound is muffled, as if through a wall.

And at the end of the street, where Saint-Vey should meet the Grand Canal, there is nothing. Just white.

The people in the Yesterday are **memories**. They are as Orrin remembers them: the orange-seller is Nonna Amalia, who sold Orrin oranges every morning when he was a student and has been dead for thirty years. She will talk to the party, if they speak to her: *“Oranges! Sweetest in the city! You’re a friend of the young Thale boy? Tell him to eat something, he’s thin as a broom.”* She knows only what Orrin knew of her. If asked anything else, she smiles and repeats herself. This should be eerie and also, somehow, lovely.

Any character who touches the Gray at the end of the street feels nothing at all, not cold, not texture, nothing; and must succeed on a **DC 12 Wisdom save** or forget their own name for one minute. Anyone who tries to walk into it is held back by Liesl, who has seen the reports. *“Two people went into one of those. We don’t know where they are. Don’t.”*

The Manticore

Then, from a dozen paper birds drifting along Saint-Vey at once, a memory forms that is much bigger than the others. It is the most vivid adventure of Orrin’s youth, retold at a hundred dinner parties, embellished every time.

The paper birds swirl together in the middle of the street, and grow, and fold into something else. It shakes itself out. It stands. It is the size of a carriage. It has the body of a lion, golden as a coin, with a mane like a sunset; the wings of a great bat; a man’s face, handsome and cruel, with three rows of teeth; and a tail ending in a bristling ball of black spikes, each one as long as a sword.

It roars, and the roar is the only sound in the Yesterday that isn’t muffled. Every memory on the street screams and runs. The orange barrow goes over. Oranges roll everywhere.

“Oh, for gods’ sake,” says Liesl, drawing her sword. “He always did tell that story wrong.”

✦ Set Piece: The Manticore of Saint-Vey

The Stage: A narrow canal-side market street in the golden, muffled Yesterday. **Market awnings** (can be cut down onto the beast, restraining it, DC 13 Dexterity to time it). **Oranges** rolling everywhere (difficult terrain; a creature that dashes must make a DC 11 Dexterity save or fall prone; players can use them, too). **The canal** along one side, with moored gondolas (can be leapt between; the manticore hates water). **Overhanging balconies** to drop from. **Memory-people** running in panic, who pass through anyone they touch like cold mist. At the end of the street, **the Gray**: anything pushed into it is gone.

The Enemy: The **Remembered Manticore** (Appendix A). It is a Manifestation, with a **Correction DC of 15**.

The Stakes: Nothing real dies here, except the party, if they’re careless. But a real child, a little girl named Pia, wandered into the Yesterday chasing a paper bird, and is hiding under the orange barrow. The manticore can smell her.

Memory Is Not Truth: The manticore is as Orrin *remembers* it. The truth (bird #4 on the table) is that it was the size of a sheepdog, starving, mangy, and terrified. A character who caught bird #4 may already know. Otherwise, the truth arrives in the Beats.

Beats

- **Round 1:** The manticore roars and launches a volley of tail spikes the size of swords. It is magnificent and absurd. Let players feel genuinely threatened.
- **Round 2:** It finds Pia under the barrow and goes for her. Someone must get her out, or stand in the way.
- **Round 3:** A gangly boy in a too-large apprentice's robe comes skidding round the corner with a butterfly net full of paper birds, sees the manticore, and shrieks: *"That's not right! It was small! He told me the real one was small! He was just embarrassed it was small!"* This is **Teodor**. He has just given every player the truth to Correct it with. Then he sets his own sleeve on fire with a panicked spell and has to be put out.
- **Each time the manticore is successfully Corrected**, it shrinks: carriage, then horse, then pony, then dog. Its wings shrivel. Its handsome cruel face becomes a tired, frightened animal face. Its spikes become a sad little scorpion's tail. Reduce its hit points by half each time, and its damage dice by one size. After three Corrections, it is the size of a sheepdog, cornered, shaking, hissing at everyone.
- **When it is small:** Let the players decide what to do with it. They can kill it. Or someone can kneel down and hold out a hand, or an orange. If they do, the memory-beast sniffs, and stops hissing, and dissolves into paper birds that fly away. Whoever made that choice should earn a Bird; this is the first time the adventure asks whether a memory deserves kindness.

Ending It

When the manticore is gone, the Yesterday fades. Saint-Vey Street flickers back to the present, noisy and ordinary. The orange barrow is gone, but there are oranges everywhere in the street, real ones, and nobody can explain them. The patch of Gray at the end of the street remains. It is very slightly larger than before.

Teodor

The apprentice tries to slip away in the confusion, clutching his net of paper birds and a battered notebook. If caught, he is terribly polite and terribly bad at lying. He says he's collecting birds "for research." Whose research? "My master's." Who's his master? He looks at Liesl's silver badge and goes white and says nothing.

Liesl answers for him. Quietly. *"Orrin Thale. His master is Orrin Thale."* A beat. *"The birds have a crooked left wing. Bastian Moss has folded birds like that for fifty years. I'd know them anywhere."* Another beat. *"They raised me."*

If the party asks the obvious question, she says only, *"I haven't been home in fifteen years. It doesn't matter. It doesn't change anything. Come on."* It changes everything.

If anyone looks in Teodor's notebook (he won't let them; it takes a DC 15 Sleight of Hand, or a great deal of kindness), they see pages of dated entries in a boy's careful hand: *Tuesday. Forgot the word for spoon. Laughed. — Wednesday. Asked for Marmalade twice. — Thursday. Good day!! Did the light trick for me. — Friday. Called Master Moss "sir." Master Moss went into the workshop for an hour.*

Dinner at the Bellwether

Mood: Warm, hilarious, then quietly wrong · **Type:** Conversation

The trail leads to the Bellwether. Liesl will come as far as the canal bridge opposite the tower and no farther. “I’ll watch the door,” she says. “Go on.” Teodor, if they have him, leads them in through the clock shop, terrified and relieved.

The clock shop is a cave of ticking: a hundred clocks on every wall, all keeping slightly different time, pendulums swinging, cuckoos waiting behind their little doors. Behind the counter, a short, broad, bald old man with a magnificent white mustache looks up from a disassembled pocket watch, pushes his jeweler’s spectacles up onto his forehead, sees the boy with you, and says, “Hm.”

Then a voice from the stairs, grand and musical: “Bastian! Bastian, there are people! Real ones! Are they staying for dinner? Tell me they’re staying for dinner. I have been talking to the same three people for a year and one of them is a cat.”

And down the spiral stair comes a tall, thin, white-haired old man in a magnificent peacock-colored dressing gown, with ink on his fingers and his arms flung wide in welcome, as if he’s been expecting you all his life.

This is **Orrin Thale**. He is delighted by everyone and insists they stay for dinner. Bastian is gruff and wary, but he cannot refuse Orrin anything, and he is, under it all, a man who has been lonely for a long time. Dinner happens.

Play this scene for warmth and laughter. The Bellwether is wonderful: rooms piled on rooms up the crooked tower, every wall lined with books, a table on the fourth floor under a window full of sunset over the canals. Orrin cooks (badly) and Bastian quietly fixes everything Orrin cooks. There is wine. There is a great deal of wine.

Plant these during dinner, naturally, without emphasis:

- Bastian puts one sugar in Orrin’s tea. “Two sugars, love.” “Lovely.”
- Orrin asks, “Where’s Marmalade? She loves company.” Bastian says, without missing a beat, “In the garden, love.” Later, Orrin asks again. Same answer, same tone.
- On the mantel, a framed paper bird, yellowed and fragile, with a crooked left wing. Folded from a broadsheet page fifty-two years old.
- Through a half-open door, a child’s bedroom, perfectly kept, with a small bed and a shelf of picture books and a wooden sword. The dust on everything is thick, except on the windowsill, where someone sits.

Conversation: Tell Me How We Met

The game: “House rule,” Orrin announces, tapping a glass. “Nobody eats pudding at the Bellwether until they’ve told the table how they met someone at this table. Not the true version. The *best* version. Then the person you met gets to tell us what really happened.”

How to run it: Each player tells how they met another member of the party, embellished as wildly as they like. Then the other player says what really happened, or adds their own embellishment. This should be hilarious; let it be. Then Orrin tells how he met Bastian. Three times. Award Birds for great stories, great corrections, and anything that makes Bastian laugh, which is worth two.

Orrin Tells It: The First Time

Early in the evening, with great theatrical relish, Orrin tells the true story, more or less: the Festival, the purse he’d enchanted to sing, the thief in the oversized coat, the chase across half of Vellanoor with the purse belting out *“The Bosun’s Lament”* (he sings a verse; Bastian puts his face in his hands), and the moment on the Bridge of Coins. *“And I took him by the collar and I said, ‘Do I know you?’ And this wretch, this criminal, this ruffian, looked me in the eye and said—”*

And Bastian, dry as dust, without looking up from his plate: *“Not yet.”*

They look at each other. Fifty-two years in it. The table should melt.

Orrin Tells It: The Second Time

Later, perhaps when one of the players finishes their own story, Orrin says, *“That reminds me of how I met Bastian,”* and tells it again. But this time, he fell into the Grand Canal during the Festival, and a young man in an oversized coat dove in and pulled him out, and on the bank, soaking wet, he said, *“Do I know you?”* and Bastian said, *“Not yet.”*

Everyone laughs. Bastian laughs too. *“He embroiders,”* Bastian says. *“Every year, a new version. Next year I’ll have slain a dragon.”* A player who rolls a **DC 13 Insight** notices that Bastian’s hand, under the table, is holding his own knee, very hard.

Orrin Tells It: The Third Time

Near the end of the evening, over pudding, in a lull, Orrin turns to the party with the bright, fresh delight of a man starting a story for the first time, and says: *“Has anyone told you how I met Bastian? Oh, you’ll love this. It was the Festival of Kites, and I’d enchanted my purse to—”*

Let him go on for a sentence or two. Let the players realize. Then Bastian puts his hand over Orrin’s, gently, and says, *“You told them, love. You told it beautifully.”* And Orrin stops. And for a second, everyone at the table sees fear go across his face like a cloud across the sun. Then he laughs, grandly. *“Did I! Well. It’s a very good story. It bears repeating.”* And he tops up everyone’s wine, and his hand is not quite steady.

Bastian's Story

If a player asks Bastian to tell it, he refuses at first, then gives in. His version is short. *"I stole his purse. It sang. He caught me. I couldn't afford a kite, so I folded him a bird out of a broadsheet, and he made it fly. I'd never seen anything like it. I've been watching him make things fly ever since."* A pause. *"That's it. That's the whole thing."*

Subtext: It's the only accurate version of the story told all night. Bastian has started keeping the true versions of things very carefully, because someone has to.

The Joke

At the very end of the meal, Bastian brings out a small cake with a single candle in it. It's nobody's birthday; it's just what they do, he says, three days before the Festival. He sets it down in front of Orrin. Orrin looks up at him with enormous, theatrical suspicion, and says, *"Do I know you?"* And Bastian says, *"Not yet,"* and folds a paper bird out of a napkin, without looking, crooked left wing, and sets it on the cake. Orrin breathes on it. It lifts, wobbles, and flies once around the room, and lands on the mantel next to the old one. Everyone at the table should applaud. Bastian watches the bird the whole way, the way you'd watch a child on a high wall.

Subtext: This is the last time Orrin will make anything fly by himself. Bastian doesn't know that. He suspects it every time.

Ending the scene: Late, the party takes its leave. Orrin insists on seeing them to the door himself, candle in hand, dressing gown trailing, talking the whole way down. Go to *The Door*.

The Door ♦

If the party has said nothing to Orrin and Bastian about Liesl, she is standing on the canal bridge opposite the shop, in her grey coat, where she said she'd wait. If they did mention her, she has come closer, to the foot of the shop steps, because she couldn't stop herself.

Orrin opens the shop door, still talking, and the lamplight from the shop falls across the street, and he sees her. He stops talking.

Liesl doesn't move. Her hand is on the hilt of her sword, out of habit, and she takes it off. She's braced. You can see it in her shoulders. Fifteen years of bracing.

And Orrin Thale's face lights up like a lamp. "Liesl!" he cries, and he comes down the steps in his slippers and his peacock gown, arms wide, and takes her face in his inky hands. "Look at you! You're late, you dreadful child, we've eaten all the cake. Where have you been? Bastian, look who it is! Come in, come in, there's still some pudding if you're quick, and Marmalade's been asking for you."

*He doesn't remember the argument. He doesn't remember the fifteen years. He doesn't remember that she left.
He just remembers that he loves her, and that she's late for supper.*

Liesl stands there with her father's hands on her face. She was ready for anything but this.

Behind Orrin, in the doorway of the shop, Bastian has gone grey. He knows exactly what this means, and he knows that Liesl knows. Over Orrin's shoulder, Liesl looks at him. She says, very quietly, so Orrin won't hear:

"How long?"

And Bastian, after a long moment, says: *"Three years."*

End the act there.

Glimpses of What Follows

Here the preview stops: at the end of Act One, on the steps of a clock shop, with a question and an answer. “How long?” “Three years.” In the full edition, the story continues for another 39 pages.

What follows are three short excerpts from later in the book, chosen to show what this adventure becomes without giving away what is really happening in the crooked tower.

From Act Two · Scene 9 · Good Morning, Little Bird · page 34

Orrin turns around with the toast fork in his hand, and sees her, and his whole face changes. Softer. Younger. He puts the fork down. He crouches, slowly, creakily, so his face is level with where a small child’s face would be. He is looking at a point about three feet below Liesl’s eyes.

“Good morning, little bird,” he says. “Did you sleep? Did the bad dream come?”

Liesl is thirty-four years old. She is wearing the grey coat of the Quiet Hand and a sword that cuts through magic. She stands there in the kitchen she grew up in, very still, for a long moment. And then she gets down on her knees on the kitchen floor, so that her face is where he’s looking.

“No, Papa,” she says. “It didn’t come.”

Later that morning, he asks her to show him the little light he taught her to make in her cupped hands when she was small. She never had any magic. The book offers the players a way to help her, and does not tell them to take it.

From Act Three · Scene 14 · The Palace of Memory · page 42

You step through a wedding arch and you’re standing on the Bridge of Coins on the last night of summer, fifty-two years ago, and the sky is full of kites. Not flying by themselves, not yet; held by hands, a thousand strings shining in the lamplight. Music everywhere. Lanterns. The smell of fried dough. And racing up the bridge toward you, laughing helplessly, comes a skinny young man with black hair and a coat three sizes too big, with a purse in his pocket singing The Bosun’s Lament at the top of its little voice, and behind him, robes flapping, ink on his fingers, a tall young apprentice with a shock of dark hair and very blue eyes.

The party can join the memory: chase, dance, buy fried dough, fly a kite. The brighter they make it, the further the white nothing at its edges is pushed back.

From Act Three · Scene 16 · The Release · page 50

Orrin Thale stands at the rail of the Bellwether balcony in his peacock dressing gown, against the rose and gold of the last sky of summer, and he opens his arms.

And behind him, out of every window of the crooked tower, out of the doors and the chimney and the cracks between the bricks, pour the birds.

Thousands of them. Tens of thousands. Paper birds, every one with a crooked left wing, every one glowing from within like a lantern, gold and rose and silver, streaming out of the Bellwether in a great bright river into the dusk. They rise over the canals. They find the kites, every one of the thousand kites over Vellanoor, and ride them. And then, one by one, they drift down, gently, to the rooftops, to the bridges, to the gondolas, to the upturned hands of every person in the city.



"I'm terribly sorry," says Orrin Thale. "Do I know you?"

Find out what Bastian says in the full edition.

The full edition is available from **Tide Moon Tales** at tidemoontales.com