

Jasika by the Mountain

by Brian Michael Barbeito

There was the small wooden structure near the base of the mountain. It had weathered many storms and its walls talked about the scars of this. In the hills to the west various cries came out from feral animals that seemed to go linger that autumn. But it had been a number of seasons that Jasika had lived there. She was a rugged woman, and after a broken path in middle age had found its way to her, she took a real dirt path one destined morning, and kept going. She took refuge in an abandoned hunters' dwelling, a place that was to become her first home in the mountains. After a few difficult winters it had become too damaged for her to stay. There had been general wear, and more specifically, a tree knocked off half of the roof during a December storm. In this second and much smaller dwelling she had resided since, growing accustomed to the sights and sounds of the wild, only setting off on the long journey infrequently to get the supplies needed. For the most part she was self-sufficient, and had become better in time at hunting, fishing, and surviving amidst her environs.

From the nearest town, many miles away, she stole books from the small library, hiding them away in a nondescript rucksack. Instead of any guilt at this, Jasika had felt a thrill, and then a sense of contentment. In her digs she read, and in time re-read the books that she had taken. She became, in her isolation, very good at remembering her dreams, and though at times her dreams were frightening, they were for the most part benign flights into interesting worlds. In her slumber she went to even more distant places than where she had chosen to live, and there were often warm rivers of salt water, while the skies in those lands seemed to be made from colors that she had not seen before, but were most similar to orange. Many years passed, and her sparse existence continued with a sort of uneventful bliss. One late afternoon, fatigued from a long journey in the mountain, she sat down and that

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is when it happened. A bird came near to, or right over the roof, and began singing. The suddenness of the bird song against the previous quietude brought Jasika to enlightenment.

