

*A particular dream plagues you through the season's nights. It does not come every time you sleep, but like an over-insistent Freeborn trader it sidles up both unwanted and far too often.*

*There are moths. Moths in their hundreds, moths in their thousands. More than the moths, there are the butterflies. Both gleam in iridescent hues, their wings painting a dizzying, ever-shifting cascade of moving images, and a dusting of scintillating scales that pours from amongst their fluttering swarm. They invade whatever hapless dream you might have been experiencing prior, coating it in their ever-increasing numbers, filling your senses, scattering lesser figments aside in confusion and panic as dream-logic desperately tries to cope with this sudden, jarring rearrangement of the scene.*

*The lepidoptera-smothered scene twists and changes. Some of the moths become winged eyes; some of the butterflies bulge and split with human tongues suddenly lolling from their carcasses, pink and wet protrusions too large to have ever been incubated with them. Some of the insects twist and warp together, becoming horrific pinwheels of flailing legs and antennae held aloft by insane arrangements of wings. They crawl on you, in you, come forth from you. Your flesh puckers and oozes with the things. The butterflies pucker and ooze with worming strings of your innards, impossibly. You fall apart and your flesh is amongst them, made of them and made into them.*

*Then comes a killing word, a killing wind. A voice with no throat whispers, its sussurations a strong wind that washes through all this iridescent madness. Where it touches the insects, their colour drains in a moment; they become monochrome, grey, and die. They turn to dust, to sand, and in what might be a second or might be an hour, the great, fluttering host is slaughtered. The air fills with rushing sand, cascading down like a broken hourglass. Shattered fragments of crystal fall with them. The hourglass turns. The sands rush up again, or rather down, for now down is up. But the butterflies do not return. The moths do not revive. They are dust and ash and sand, and so are you.*

*The sand pours through the hourglass, crushed scales, pulverised flesh, iridescence turned to dull lifelessness. It pours and pours and pours. Time is running out. But is it running out for you, or for the butterflies? For you, or for the moths? It is a river, a rushing river, down a channel lined with bone like rearing ribs. On its banks, figures caper and cavort, clad like barbarians but for their golden masks. It streams on, unstoppably, towards a land of grey nothing, where nothing awaits you, and nothing cares.*

*Without fail, the dream ends as the nothing swallows you, and you awaken. It is not the harsh start of a confused mind rearing from a nightmare, though. It is an altogether more pleasant sensation than that - a gentle opening of the senses, a body filled with calm lethargy, and a sense that nothing is here now, and there is nothing to stir action. That calm languidness soon passes, and then sleep returns.*