

**The Harpy's Familiar:**  
**The Search**  
**By Vivian R. Tynes**

Coatl woke up in the morning with a feeling of great excitement. Today was the day when she, a harpy of eight years of age, would finally get her familiar!

*Yes oh yes oh yes oh yes WAHOOOOOOO!!!* Coatl thought. She got out of bed and went to the living room in her family's small nest-cave in the trees. Then, she happily ran to her older sister Teyacapan's room to wake her up.

She roused her sister by yelling in her ear, "Oh, come on, Teya, wake up! It's my Bonding Day!"

Teya wearily opened her eyes and groaned, "I know, you told me seven hundred times yesterday." Coatl pulled the covers off the bed, stuck out her tongue at her sister, and, to the sound of Teya yelling, "YOU LITTLE...GAH!! I CAN'T THINK OF A GOOD ENOUGH INSULT!!!" she ran to her mother Citlali's room to wake her up too. When she got there, she bounced on the bed until her mother sat up.

She said, "Coatl, next time wait until later to wake me up."

"Mooooooooooooom, it's my Bonding Day. We need to get ready!" Coatl replied. Her mother sighed and got out of bed. She told Coatl to get her Animal Amulet and prepare for the journey to the Elder's nest-cave.

A few hours of fierce preparation later, four wall-sticks broken by Teya's bat, two messed-up vine-pots (courtesy of Citlali's quetzal), and finally they were ready to go. Coatl went to her room and placed the Animal Amulet, a teardrop-shaped amethyst, around her neck.

"I hope this gives me a normal familiar or I'll never hear the end of it from that thug of a harpy, Chimalma," she said to herself. Coatl walked out of her room and met her mother and Teya at the entrance of their nest-cave.

Then, as was tradition in harpy culture, her mother made a speech to Coatl to wish her luck on the path ahead. And the speech was this: "We are different from the other forest harpies. As you know, the quetzal is a symbol of change. It is fitting that Teya has a bat when everyone else has birds, and I wouldn't be surprised if you end up with something unusual as well. I just want you to know that we won't think any less of you, no matter what you get."

And with that, the three harpies jumped off the edge of the nest-cave, opened their green-black wings, and flew.

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After about ten minutes of flying, the family arrived at the Elder's nest-cave. Coatl descended to the entrance first, followed by Teya and then their mother. They landed and walked through the oak archway and into the Hall of Flight.

At the end of the Hall was the Table of Wisdom. Behind the Table was the Throne of the Elder. And on the Throne of the Elder sat the Elder herself, staring deeply into the depths of the eyes of The Statue of Eiri, a small, carved idol of the first forest harpy's familiar, Eir. It was said that when the Elder gazed into the little dove's eyes, she could learn what was of importance at that moment.

The Elder looked up from her reverie and saw Coatl, Teya, and their mother standing at the arch. She stood up and smiled at Coatl. Then she said, "I believe your name is Chicomecoatl Amaxal?" Coatl nodded. "Welcome to the Hall of Flight, young one. Now let us go to the Place of Departure at the edge of the Deep Forest. Come!"

And with surprising swiftness for someone of her age, she walked to the oak arch and jumped. The three harpies raced to the edge of the nest-cave and looked down. For a moment it seemed as though the Elder had forgotten how to fly, for she was plummeting down with her wings folded. But at the last second, her wings shot from her sides and pumped, propelling her upwards.

When she was at the same height as the arch, she turned to face Coatl, said, "Follow me!" and swooped away on slightly tattered wings towards the Deep Forest where harpies never went but to gain their familiars. And Coatl followed.

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The family followed the Elder to a clearing with a stone structure in it: The Place of Departure. It was a spiral wall about three feet high and was covered in bright green moss. The Elder landed in the center of the spiral and waited for the family to catch up.

When they arrived, the Elder looked at Teya and their mother and said, “Now it is time for us to leave. The path Coatl takes is hers and hers alone.” She turned to Coatl. “When we are gone, close your eyes and leave the Place of Departure’s spiral wall. The Animal Amulet will guide you. When you sense trees ahead, open your eyes and enter the Deep Forest. There, you will find your familiar. I must warn you, don’t go too far to the east.”

Coatl said, “That’s mountain harpy territory. I remember, my mom told me how the mountain harpies hate us because of that war fifty-two years ago.”

“Excellent, young one,” the Elder replied.

She opened her wings and prepared to take off. Coatl called as they left, “Wait! How will I know which animal is my familiar?”

The Elder smiled and answered, “You will know it when you see it.” And they were gone.

Coatl watched until she couldn’t see them anymore, and then she looked at her amulet. She let it fall against her chest, closed her eyes, and said, “All right. Let’s do this.”

The amulet became warm. It started to pull her to the left. She began to walk, following her instinct and the amulet. The little teardrop-shaped amethyst pulled her in a continuous circle leftwards. Finally, it turned her to the right, and then straight. Coatl walked forwards a few more feet until she felt the amulet go cold and thud against her chest. She opened her eyes.

The Deep Forest loomed ahead. Coatl clutched her Animal Amulet and prepared to step into the unknown.

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The silence in the forest was almost suffocating. Coatl’s only comfort was the little amethyst hanging around her neck. She walked into the woods, pushing aside vines and inching between brambles. No birds chirped, no monkeys whooped, and the only sounds she heard were the humming of the insects and the wind in the leaves. She thought the animals might have been scared away by her entering the forest. She hoped they would come back soon.

After a few minutes, she heard the birds again. The distinctive call of the quetzal, her mother’s familiar, was one of the loudest. Coatl listened to the animals for a while, and then realized she could hear something else: a distant thundery crashing sound, mixed with the splash of water. Below

these noises she could hear the trickle of a creek. Coatl followed the sound to an opening in the trees.

Looking up, she saw a huge cliff, from which a waterfall tumbled. A little river ran from the pool that the falls landed in. She stared at the cliff in surprise. Above and behind it she could see a vast mountain range.

*This must be the edge of mountain harpy territory*, Coatl thought. Hopefully they wouldn't notice that she was here. She crouched by the side of the pool to drink.

Coatl was about to slurp some of the crystal-clear water when she heard a flap of wings behind her. She turned around and saw a huge turkey vulture diving at her. The bird reached out its talons and shrieked. Coatl opened her wings and shot to the curtain of water. The vulture called again and swooped at her, baring its talons in preparation to gouge her eyes out. It missed, and hit her left wing instead, bringing her to the ground. The crazed creature dived, claws outstretched. It wouldn't miss this time.

The vulture was a mere two feet above Coatl and was just reaching for her neck to snap her vital blood vessels in two when something jumped out of the bushes on Coatl's left and called, "STOP!!!" A mountain harpy stepped forward and glared down at Coatl. The vulture landed on the harpy's shoulder. Coatl realized that it must be her familiar. As the harpy seemed distracted with the bird, she took a chance to take a look at her adversary.

The mountain harpy was well over six feet high, and was robed in a ripped dark grey dress. Her wings were ragged and brown, sort of like an eagle's. If the harpy had been an eagle, however, she would have had a nest as big as the pool of water Coatl was lying by.

The mountain harpy stopped talking to the vulture and turned to look at Coatl. "Cragiro here seems to think that you have been trespassing on my tribe's territory." Coatl gulped. "You do realize that if this is the case you will be punished most severely?" she said.

The mountain harpy pulled a sharp staff from behind her back and pointed it at Coatl's throat. "Now. Did you pass the border or not?" Coatl was terrified. The harpy said, "I'm going to count to three. One..." The bushes behind the harpy trembled. "Two..." A black shape shot out of the undergrowth and bounded towards the mountain harpy. "Three-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!" The shape pounced on the harpy and threw her into the bushes.

When the *whatever it was* had pounced on the mountain harpy, Coatl had been pushed onto her stomach with her face in the dirt. Moments later, she heard a rustling in the direction that the *whatever it was* had thrown the harpy.

Although she couldn't see her, Coatl could hear the mountain harpy calling to her: "You will pay for that, forest scum!!! And if my tribe doesn't kill you then that creature will!!! One day you will suffer the wraith of CIOLITHI!!!"

*Ciolithi? That was Ciolithi? She's the most famous warrior in her tribe! She's the daughter of Queen Canisa!* Coatl thought. *I gotta get out of here quick before her warriors show up!* Coatl flipped over onto her back and looked at the sky.

It was empty.

*Wait, what did she say again? "And if my tribe doesn't kill you **that creature** will!"* Coatl's heart beat faster. She was about to get up and run for her life, but then she noticed something.

Coatl's amulet was burning hot. She knew it in moments: This was her familiar, she could feel it! She got to her feet and turned to look at her savior.

What she saw was more change-bringing than a quetzal, more bewildering than a bat, and an enemy of birds and harpies alike.

It was a panther.

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Coatl stared at the panther in astonishment. Panthers, and cats in general, had been hated by harpykind for centuries, mainly because of the uneasy relationship between cats and birds. Harpies were part bird, so this hatred of felines applied to them too. And here she was, with a panther for a familiar! Coatl still had hope that maybe it wasn't, and she backed away, her injured wing trailing beside her. She wasn't looking where she was going, tripped over a rock, and fell to the ground, crying out in pain.

The panther padded towards her, purring softly. It nuzzled her gently and licked her cheek. Then it slowly pushed itself underneath her, supporting Coatl's weight until she could stand.

In that moment, she knew what she had known since she had first seen the panther. It was her ally, her friend, and, most importantly, her familiar. "Yaretzi..." Coatl whispered. "Yaretzi" meant "you will always be loved". She didn't care what the village would think, or not think. She had Yaretzi, and that was what mattered.

**THE END**

