

# COXLILIA

A HOLLY TAIL FAIRY TALE

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ENCHANTED CIPHER

COXLILIA  
A Holly Tail Fairy Tale  
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# *The Story*



You stand at your village's border at nightfall, looking into the forest because your time has come: at the moment that the today and tomorrow meet, the emerald coxlilia will appear and you must capture it to save the life of your sister which will disappearate before the sun's next set.

You feel the weight of the fruit and cheese in your pocket. It's going to slow you down. You also feel the weight of the necklace she gave you. "For luck," she said. Your mother just won't let you grow up.

You walk into the forest—the wettened leaves, the sticky bark, the hollowed logs—and you know it's impossible to do what you set out to do because so many have told you it was so: the emerald coxlilia will appear for one minute under any wettened leaf, on any sticky bark, or in any hollowed log.

You continue to walk. You will camp for the six hours and then, at the moment the two days meet, your search will begin. You will search frantically: stomping leaves hoping to hear the juices of the coxlilia spill then collect the bug and the juicy leaves; throwing yourself against the trees hoping to shake the coxlilia from the branches where it will lose its grip on the sticky bark and fall and fall and fall until you will hear it splatter against the wettened leaves; and rolling log after rolling log after rolling log until the coxlilia spins out onto the wettened leaves, too dizzy to take flight. This is how it will be.

Time is passing, and you do not know how much because thinking has a way of speeding up the minutes and slowing down the hours. Your knees wobble and you sit. Your body aches. You figure hours must have passed. You hear the crickets. The leaves are drying and now have more of a crunch.

Your eyes begin to close. Your legs tingle with rest. Your head bows. You realize sleep is intoxicating. And you tremble. You tremble as you realize—

A spark.

You know your eyes are closed, but you know you saw it: a spark through a hollowed log.

You try to open your eyes, but you realize they're already open. They've always been open.

The spark.

You crawl to the log and look through.

Spark.

Spark spark.

Spark.

You crawl into the log, and

Crawl, and

Crawl.

But the spark gets farther and farther

Away.

You realize how pointless.

So much time wasted.  
The emerald coxlilia  
Does not spark  
By any story  
You've heard.

You place one hand over the other to turn  
But find the log hugging your sides.

You place one hand behind the other to recede,  
But you bump bark.

You look back,  
But darkness.

You sigh. Looking ahead:

Spark spark.

Spark.

Spark spark.

You crawl. You need to find  
The coxlilia. So much time  
Wasted. You crawl faster.  
Your sister is ailing. Your stupid  
Curiosity will be her death and,  
If it is, you will make sure it is  
Yours also. You swear.

You crawl

And crawl.

The spark sparks:

Spark

Spark spark.

It moves farther away.

You collapse. You stupid moron.  
You won't live and you don't deserve  
To because you now know this  
Is why no one has ever found  
The emerald coxlilia.

You cry.

You scream.

You bang against the log:  
You'll break through and find  
Yourself back in the forest then  
Burn this log for its trouble.

You stop banging—the side  
Of your hand is bleeding.

You crawl

And crawl.

Spark.

Spark.

Spark.

Your eyes close.  
If you're going to crawl  
For eternity, if you're never  
Going to find the emerald coxlilia,  
Then you might as well sleep.

You lay yourself down.

Inhale.

Exhale.

You reach down the log  
And feel the stretch.  
Your hand touches something.  
Like silk.

You scramble to your knees, feeling,

Feeling,

You find it. A gagamush weed.  
You laugh, pulling the flattened  
Silky tapers, then biting off just  
The amount you need—some other  
Curious fool may need some—and  
Wrap it around your hand.

You feel a coolness, a tingling, as if  
you have just been  
Teleported to a mountain's peak.

You crawl,

And crawl,

And crawl.

A squeak.

You stop.

Another squeak,  
A flash of darkness,  
Down the log,  
Towards the spark.

You take crawling chase.  
There is an end.  
And you know like you know  
This is it.  
At long last, you know—

“Oomph.”  
    You fall  
And fall  
    And fall  
And fall  
    And fall  
And hit stone.

You see tiny sparks.  
You want to hurl  
But mostly because the  
Last thing you want to see

Is another spark.

And now,  
You have dozens.

You lie against the stone.  
Eyes closed.  
The sparks dwindle from dozens,  
To dozen, from dozen,  
To nine, from nine,  
To seven,  
To three  
To two  
To one:  
Spark.  
Spark spark.  
Spark.

You open your eyes:  
A mouse, on hind legs,  
Squeaking at you.

You look around:  
Stone floor stretches out then  
rises to stone walls that stop rising  
then stretches out to stone ceiling.

You preferred the log.

You preferred the illusion of having  
Some place to go.

But you are calm.

You take out the cheese wedge  
And break off a piece.

You eat it.

The mouse squeaks.

You break off another piece  
And hold it out in your hand.

The mouse sniffs about,  
Then sniffs as it trails its way  
To your hand, sniffs your fingertips,  
Climbs in your hand to sniff  
The cheese, then takes the cheese up  
And starts nibbling.

You laugh.  
But then stop as you become light-headed—  
Wozy. You pray  
The mouse

Isn't

Diseased.

Shimmer.

You eat the piece of cheese  
You hold in your paws.  
You drop the cheese and look  
At your body passed out

Against the stone wall.

You hate your life.  
But on the bright side,  
Mice have relatively short  
Life spans. The woods  
Are stalked by owls.  
This will be over  
Soon enough.

You sigh a squeak.  
You eat your cheese.  
But then you know—

You know like you know  
That in the stone are  
Holes big enough for  
You to fit through  
And you know all of them end  
In dead ends except for one.

You wonder why you've  
Rarely gone through that  
One hole, but you remember  
You weren't always a mouse.  
The mouse had everything it needed  
Down the holes lined with berries  
Growing from ivy leading to  
Dry hovels.

But now you need differently  
And berries growing from ivy  
Leading to dry hovels will  
Not suffice; so you will dare  
The hole rarely travelled.  
You think dare because you know you

Had your reasons—your instincts—  
For never daring to go.

But now you have other instincts—  
Other reasons.

You scurry up the wall,  
To the hole where the stone  
Wall turns into the stone ceiling  
And climb in.

Darkness.  
You remember the log.  
You back out of the hole.

But you must—

Climb back in.  
But the log.  
You were trapped.  
Back out.  
The stone.

But you must.  
And you did get out of the log, eventually.  
And you were able to back out the hole.  
So the hole is different from the log.  
Maybe the stone works differently than the bark.  
Of course it does.

You climb in and scurry, scurry, scurry.  
It's dark. You aren't taking risks.

You scurry.  
A berry.  
Your stomach growls.

But what if the stone turns into the log?

You squeak.  
Preposterous.  
You stop and eat the berry.  
You laugh.  
You know before you  
Never worried so stupidly.  
You never worried at all:  
You followed your  
Animal instincts about  
The holes,  
The berries,  
The stone,  
The log.

The berry is good.  
No regrets.  
You feel energized. Alive.  
You scurry faster than you have  
Ever scurried before.

And you see it.  
A hole at the end.  
Getting closer.

The stone truly was not the log.

You reach the hole's  
Edge and look out:  
Hundreds of men, on their knees,  
Heads bowed.

You place your paw against the wall  
To scurry down but slip

And fall

Fall

Fall

Fall

And hit dirt.

You scramble to your hind paws

To see the wall.

It is marble.

Turning:

Rows and aisles

Of men,

On their knees,

Heads bowed.

You go among them

And sniff, you smell—

Grapes!

You run between them,

Darting around,

And see the one

With the grapes: an old man,

With twig-like legs.

You shouldn't take his grapes.

He needs them.

You turn—

Oomph;

You bump—

Shimmer.

You look down at your

Ashen knees.

You hope she comes quickly.

You need to know when  
The rain will fall. When  
The famine will end.  
You need to know before  
You slaughter your last  
Pig—so you know whether  
To mourn. Or to feast.

You pray it isn't to mourn because  
You know you will not starve,  
And you know you have the  
Reasons to justify to yourself  
And others what you will do  
If your last plump pig is to be  
Your last real meal.

You look out the corner of your  
Eye to see Silas to your left.  
Feeble Silas. Even if the rain  
Does come, he won't live  
Long enough to witness  
Its bounty never mind  
To take of it to sustain his own  
Life. This is your justification.  
Your reason for—

You tremble.  
The thought is so—  
So—

You touch the man next to you.

Shimmer.

You look at your bloody knees.  
She will come and you will tell her

You must find the emerald  
Coxlilia which will give you the strength  
To kill that traitorous Mecaes  
For stealing your last cow.  
He can have your heffer of a wife  
But not your cow.  
You will roast and eat her intestines.  
One way or another, your cow will go  
Where it belongs: in you.

You touch the man next to you.

Darkness.

Your eyes are closed.

You open them. Darkness.

You think: "She knows where the emerald coxilia is."

A voice: "How do you know this? Who are you?"

"No one. You?"

"You are me. And you know she knows where the emerald coxilia is?"

You have reason to believe.

"Excellent. We will hold a knife to her throat—"

"Why is that necessary?"

"She told us she didn't know where the coxlilia was."

"Maybe she doesn't."

"You thought we had reason to believe she did."

"But maybe the reason is wrong."

"Oh, she knows. We know like we know. She will listen to us once more because she

    pities us, but I can hear all, and by the way her  
    bracelets rattle and clang I will take her, make her  
    tell me, then slit her throat."

"But if she tells—"

"No matter. She lied. Can't have someone who lies. Now can we?"

"Yes. But perhaps—"

A drum beats.

It is time.

You pat the knife in your pocket.

You touch the man next to you.

You look at your bandaged knees.

You breathe deeply.

You must warn her.

But how?

She comes down, the tip

Of her toe touching each marble step.

Her hips swirl like figure eights.

Her bracelets rattle and clang.

“Oooooo sparkly.”

“Shut up,” you think. You must get to her.

“Oooooo sparkle sparkle.” You look

at the diamonds around her neck,

radiating in concentric circles.

“Oooooo sparkly.”

You squint. No thread or

String or wire connects the

Diamond shaped diamonds.

You touch the man in front of you.

You must warn her.

You touch the man in front of you.

You must know if she knows—

Touch.

Where the emerald coxlilia is.

Touch.

You can exchange—

Touch.

Your warning—  
Touch.  
For the information.  
Touch.  
Touch.  
Touch.

You are in the front row. Centered.  
To the left: spear carrying guards.  
To the right: spear carrying guards.

Head bowed, you raise your eyes and squint.  
Folds of her flesh rise around each diamond.  
You gasp.  
They are encrusted in her.

A squeak.  
A mouse looks at you with juicy grape pulp  
In its whiskers.  
He felt no shame in eating Silas's grapes.

"Grapes? Who has grapes?"  
"No one," you think.  
"Liar. You know. We know. And we will  
Dig deep within 'til we find out what we know."

You touch the mouse.  
You stop licking your paws  
And scurry to the wall.  
You make your way between  
The wall and soldiers' feet  
To the steps.  
You scurry along a step  
Until you reach a column  
Ending in fire, and you climb and climb  
Then—

You leap.

You sail towards her  
And make your way to her  
Hair before—

Shimmer.

You freeze. The drums stop.  
All bowing heads rise.

You know like you know about  
Certain things so you snap your fingers.  
The fire turns ruby.  
Snap.  
Gold.  
Snap.  
Emerald.  
Snap.  
The fire vanishes.

You take the mouse out your hair  
And place it on the  
Column.

You must do something.  
You know like you know about certain things.  
You point to the drummers overhead.  
They drum.

All eyes are on you.  
You remember the time,  
Before your sister was born,  
You and your mother  
Danced to the drums

Of the parade:

You lift your shoulders then drop them.

One more time.

You pop a hip. Whoa. These hips move further.  
You pop it again.

You raise your hands so the backs of them face  
your chest,  
And you pump.

Gasps.

You keep pumping. Pumping 'til you can't pump—

“WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?”

“Oh, ummm sorry, madame,” you think. “The coxlilia—”

“What are you doing?”

“Sorry.” You were looking for her.

“Well. I have returned to my senses.”

You apologize. “Sorry. So Sorry.” You were on the village's  
border—

“Silence.”

“But you—”

“Silence.”

You're still. They are staring.

“I see. I see,” she thinks. “Thank you. You may go.”

“But—”

“I said go.”

“But—”

“I said go.” She touches the mouse.

Shimmer.

No. She can't. She has to tell you—

You run to the edge—

She glares: "You jump, I snap, furry one."  
Gulp.

You scurry down the column.  
You are on your own. You always were.  
But maybe you can make it back in time.  
Maybe the days have just met and you  
Have time to search for the emerald coxlilia.

Darting through rows and aisles of men,  
But, oh no, the marble. The marble wall.

You stop. And turn. To her.  
She dances to the drum.  
Hips moving in figure eights.  
You forgot to warn her.  
You squeak.  
But you know something.  
She already knows.  
And you know more:

You dart and dash and find your way  
Back to Silas. He takes his hand  
And shoos you. You tug  
On his sleeve.

"This is what I get fer givin' yer mah food."  
He reaches inside his pocket and takes  
Another grape out. He holds his hand out.

You don't want it. You squeak at him.

"Take it, yer dumb thing."  
You get in his palm and take it.  
The hand closes around you.  
You squeak and you squeak.

But then relax. You've been through  
This before.

Silas crawls on his hands and knees towards  
The right wall. You wonder  
Why there hasn't been a shimmer.  
Ahead: guards. Oh no, oh no—

A spear spikes the dirt.  
Silas looks up.  
“Sorry...but umm...mah mouse friend here...I just gotta  
umm...”  
You squeak. You'd bite the guard if you could.

“Maybe it would just be easier to kill it?” says the guard.  
“No, no,” says Silas. “Little feller gots what he needs.”  
Silas crams you into a hole in the wall behind  
The soldier's foot. You peek out.  
Will he be okay?  
“Don't worry,” he says.  
He reaches in his shirt and pulls out a golden  
Medallion. He winks.  
“Now get.”  
You get.

The hole is dark.  
There is only one way to go  
So you go that way.  
But then you reach  
A space with three marble holes.  
Oh no. You have to choose.  
You sniff.  
Cheese! Your cheese.

You scurry down the middle hole,  
Go right, and see three stone holes.

You sniff.  
You go down the right hole,  
Scurry up the vertical tunnel,  
Climb over its ledge,  
And scurry until you

Fall

Fall

Fall

Fall  
And land in your lap.

Shimmer.

You awaken.  
You must get back.  
The days will meet if they  
Are not meeting now, if they  
Have not met already.

You get up and the mouse  
Falls to the ground.  
Looking around: stone  
Floor, to stone wall,  
To stone ceiling. You're trapped.

You fall to your knees and bury your  
Face in your hands.  
The mouse squeaks.  
You take out your fruit and cheese and throw  
It in a corner. The mouse runs for it.

You were so stupid.  
So ahead of yourself.

But you laugh.

Because you know like you know.  
She knows.  
And now you know.

You walk to the far wall  
Covered in shadow  
And you press against  
One of the stone bricks.  
The wall moves. There is light.  
You walk through.

You find yourself in the forest.  
It is dark.  
You turn to see the woods  
Stretch behind you.

You do not know what time it is.  
But you are not worried.  
You are calm.  
You walk on the dried leaves.  
    Past hollowed logs.  
    Past sticky barks.

You stop.  
Bend over.  
And pick up a leaf:  
There is the emerald  
Coxlilia, a flickering spot  
Of reflected moonlight  
On its back. Like a spark.

You put the emerald  
Coxlilia in your pocket  
And button it.  
You sit against  
Sticky bark.

You will sleep.  
In the morning  
You will better  
Navigate your way  
Home.

You know you'll find home  
In the morning.  
Your sister will exist  
In the flow of health.  
You know like you know.  
It is so.

You bow your head.  
Close your eyes.  
As you drift off,  
It dawns on you  
That your name is  
Silas, but, as slumber  
Intoxicates, you  
Forget the significance  
Of this remembrance.

## **RESOURCES**

The Works of Michael R.E. Adams  
[www.EnchantedCipher.info/mreadams](http://www.EnchantedCipher.info/mreadams)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL R.E. ADAMS writes stories in the fantasy tradition. He completed his undergraduate studies in English at Georgetown University and his graduate studies in English/Writing at Mills College.