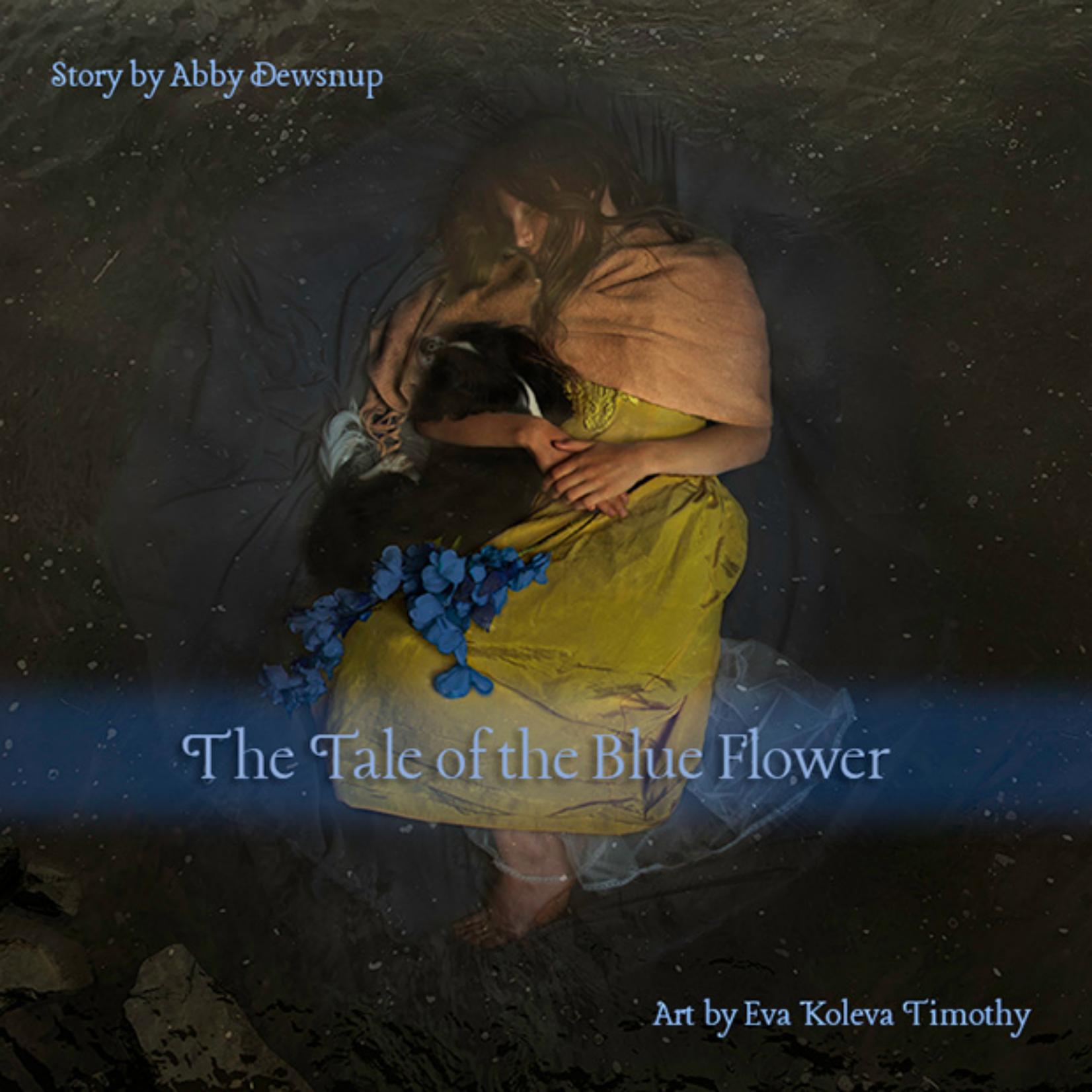


Story by Abby Dewsnap

A top-down photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow dress and a tan shawl, sitting on a dark, textured surface. She is holding a black dog with white markings on its face. A bouquet of blue flowers is placed on the dog's back. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue light flare at the bottom.

The Tale of the Blue Flower

Art by Eva Koleva Timothy

In dreams, I return to the fair isles of Ðunn. I see the rolling white cliffs, with their stones cracked and sprouting, and the waves of the neighboring ocean wash over the sand. Creased between the surf and the hillsides lay a town content in its slow ebb of life. It was in these dreams that I learned the legends of the town, and was given the story of the blue flower to pass on.

¶The isles of Ðunn were once rich with tales from overseas. Stories of monsters and beasts, heroes and adventures were written on parchment, bound in leather, and well-loved. Books passed between hands and homes with the same urgency as the shifting tides of the ocean.

As the legend goes, a prideful man once convicted the townsmen as fools. You love your stories more than you love your isles, he crooned. It is a fool-hardy pursuit, reading.

¶His words passed through the town and entered the hearts of people. No longer were they proud of their leather-clad books, their legends, and ancient tales of ancestors crossing the sea.

With the next full moon, the people cast their stories into the sea. Floating alone, the books were swallowed whole beneath the waves. Peace returned to Dunn that night, alongside a newfound hollow feeling, as if the people had cast aside their own souls.

And so it went that years passed, and the tales of legend, enchantment, and lore faded as the stories had. After their grandparents had come and passed on, the children of the town learned nothing of the world beyond the horizon line. Still, they yearned for something more.

In my dreams, a traveling witch passed through the town, babbling about words and magic. A rickety cart pulled behind her, and she displayed her wares of glass and magic and awaited the gathering townsmen.

With a glint in her eye, the witch said, “I offer you a book on legend, in exchange for a quest.”

The adults who knew of a time before that fateful night were hesitant, their eyes gleaned over with thoughts of comfort and safety in their beds.

“We don’t need grand tales of adventure and legend,” they said. “We have our town, and that is that.”

The children of Dunn however, still carried a fire in them, for they had seen the sea, and hoped for lands far distant from their own. A girl, her head raised to the witch without fear, pushed her way to the front.

“I heard you’re selling stories,” she said. “And handing out quests.”

The witch mustered a half-smile. “Only the young can believe in my foolishness,” she said, mocking the town.

A murmur passed through the crowd. “I’ll give it a go.” the girl’s voice rang out.

True to her word, the witch gave her book of legends to the girl. “Child,” the witch crooned. “This is no fable. The book in your possession carries the greatest tale of all; The Story of the Blue Flower.”

“The blue flower?” the girl questioned.

The witch raised a gnarled finger to her lips. “You must heed my advice,” she said. “Here lies a story, and in it is truth. You are to seek out the blue flower for your quest, the same in your storybook, for only the blue flower can return the tales, once lost, back to you.”

“Now remember, child,” the witch continued. “Here is my warning. Send word to the castle, should it appear, that you need entry, and I have sent you. They will hear your plea.”

“Secondly, keep away from giants and beasts. They know of your journey and wish you harm. If you’re lucky they’ll stay far from wandering girls and parchment storybooks.”

“Lastly remember, horses of white make for great companions, and lend them an ear. Their words may cast illumination where all was thought to be dark. This is your quest, and a quest that will be of utmost importance if you wish to restore what was lost.”

The girl from Dunn set out early the following morning as the sun rose over her thatched town. She felt the immensity of a thousand paths set before her and a multitude of possibilities within her.



With her mind set on visions of adventure, and the witch's book of legend clasped firmly in her hands, she creaked open her old front door.

Her quick tongue and eagerness in the town square did little to help her courage as she stood before her front steps. For a single moment, the town beckoned her to stay, promising the peace and security of the familiar within its stone walls.

She closed the gate carefully, so as not to disturb those sleeping inside. The town that had long forgotten to look up would miss her departure, but she knew she would return.

Heart pounding, the girl set out for the sea.



Drawn by the dawn she made her way along the Dunn shoreline awaiting the arrival of the witch's promise. The ocean was stormy, the color of charcoal and raging against the sand. Not knowing what her next step should be, she decided to read the book of legends the witch had given her to pass the time. Her hands traced the worn parchment pages. The words were new, foreign, and bursting with possibility before her eyes.

Hours passed as she delved into tales of the blue flower, her eyes roving page after page in a kind of trance. In her mind, the threads of the witch's advice returned to her. "Many have sought the blue flower, myself included," the witch had told her. "Read their stories well, for in them is wisdom. Perhaps, in time, you will come to understand the tales."

She read the tales of travelers seeking out the blue flower. For many, it was to find a lost love or the remedy to an illness. The book promised that all who discovered the blue flower would find their treasure. Each seemed a beacon and the girl could only hope this flower would help restore the stories and wonder of Dunn.



Night came and then passed and her discouragement grew. The promised quest and castle had yet to appear, and the girl began to doubt if the witch had been truthful at all.

Yawning, she cast her eyes on the horizon. In the early morning light, the white cliffs of Dunn were awash with golden light in a kind of luminescent halo. She was so transfixed by the sight that she nearly missed the petals drifting past.

Flowers of pink and scarlet floated in the early breeze, their petals illuminated like fire. Gently, they fell at her feet and washed away with the surf.

Her eyes followed the vanishing flowers, tracing a line across the sea, up the horizon, and onto the gathering clouds above. Silhouetted by the rising light floated a stone castle.



The girl rubbed her eyes. She'd never seen a world of such size, with rippling flags and laughter drifting over the courtyard. The castle was enveloped in swirling fog, and it seemed to float with the drifting clouds. She wondered how long such a castle had sat over her head, and why she had never cast her eyes upward to witness it.

Excited, the girl took a step towards the castle, only to find herself up to her knees in the surf. She would have to swim half-way across the ocean to reach the underbelly of the floating castle. Discouragement settled back over her like a familiar blanket.

Returning to land, the gnarled witch's words returned to her mind. She recalled her prompting to send word to the castle. Taking a deep breath, the girl held out a single hand. "I'm from the town of Dunn, and I have eyes to see you," she said. "I'm searching for the blue flower. I wish for entry into your kingdom."



In response a small cloud floated down from the sky beckoning to her. No sooner had she reached her hand out to touch it, than she found herself whisked off her feet into the sky above.

High in the air, the golden light of the arid morning encased her. Her feet left the white cliff sides, and she found herself drifting towards the rising castle. For the first time, she felt freedom inside her, and the promise of open sea. She could go far beyond the isles of Dunn, explore the vast deserts and meadows of a distant world.

As her mind wandered, she realized she'd strayed from her course. The town of Dunn below her seemed to tug at her heart. She knew where home was, and she remembered her quest. Afraid to fall from her path, she kept her eyes cast upon the castle.

When I awoke from my dream the following morning, the girl and her quest hung like a drifting curtain in my mind. I couldn't see an end to her plight of the missing stories. It seemed, in my ordinary world, that the blue flower was an impossible find. How would the girl locate one flower in all the world? With my curiosity rising, I went in search of more.



As dusk fell that evening, my mind wandered, tracing shapes through the clouds until I located the strange, drifting castle of the witch's storybook. It was there that I found the girl, lost within the meadows of the sky.

It seemed she'd entered the realm of magic found in her stories. Though her excitement was a flame within her, she could not forget the blue flower she had come for. Her eyes searched the vast fields of the floating kingdom, but each flower was as ordinary as the last. None were able to return her stories to her.

It was on the eve of her third day that the second warning of the witch came to pass. The girl had been told of the giant who slept beneath their castle. He held the people of the kingdom hostage to his fiery temper. He often grumbled about quests and magic and wished for the castle in the clouds to remain alone, isolated, and without legend.

At sunset, with the sky painted over in orange and scarlet, the giant finally rose from his slumber. Grumpy and disheveled, he cast his gaze over the kingdom.



His single, massive eye landed on the bright blue of the girl's cloak. His anger piqued at the presence of the newcomer. The giant had seen many travelers pass by in search of the blue flower. His castle was not to be disturbed by ancient legends and the promises of traveling witches.

“Flee from my land, child,” the giant bellowed. “You do not belong here. The flower you seek is not ahead of you, but behind.”

Heart racing, the girl fled from the meadow and onto the castle wall. Her feet hardly touched the stones as she ran. She flew by towers and turrets, the crowds of castle-dwellers parting as she passed. The giant roared, his voice rattling the castle windows, as he pursued her earnestly, and his great footsteps nearly shook her from the crumbling stone wall.



In her wild escape, she found herself in a part of the kingdom she had never been before, one made of red brickwork and iron gates. The giant, growing weary (for he had not chased anyone in some time), collapsed in his pursuit and roared in frustration. The girl dared a glance over her shoulder and with delight, she saw the giant fall farther and farther behind her. She leaped from the castle wall and onto the safety of the cobblestone path.

Before her lay an iron archway situated before a flowering courtyard. Hopelessly lost, the girl listened for the sound of the giant before casting her eyes back into the mysterious courtyard. Within the gates stood a golden, glowing lantern. Its light promised refuge.

Wildflowers curled around the red columns. A whispering seemed to emit from the entrance. Still catching her breath, the girl pulled the witch's book of legends free from her traveling bag. She flipped through the parchment pages and came to stop at the final story. In the book, a grove of autumn trees silhouetted against an iron lantern. The scene depicted before her mirrored the picture drawn in the book. Even the lantern, bright and glowing, was the same as the brief sketch outlined in the story.



She knew her blue flower could not be far.

Inside the lantern-lit courtyard, a reverence blanketed the cobblestones. With bated breath, the girl approached the lantern, waiting for an epiphany, perhaps a sudden burst of blue light to appear and return her stories from the sea.

“Child,” a voice said.

Afraid it might be the giant returning, the girl started and recoiled from the voice.

“You seek the blue flower,” he continued. “Come, let me speak with you.”

Slowly she turned to the direction the voice had come from. There behind the window of a forgotten stable, a white horse watched her with wise eyes. He was awash with the golden glow of the lantern, which cast a rainbow hue over his silken, white mane.

Warmth emanated from the horse. Remembering the witch’s third piece of advice, she approached his stable door.



“You are troubled,” the horse said.

“Where is my blue flower?” The girl cast her eyes on the sky, where a dark, ravenous storm was gnashing its teeth. With desperation, she said, “how am I to know where Dunn’s stories lie, and why they had to go?”

“Perhaps you could start from the beginning,” the horse encouraged. “And retrace your path. Tell me of your journey, I’m sure all hope of the blue flower is not yet lost.”

The girl wiped her eyes. “My home lies in the isles of Dunn. We’ve forgotten our stories, you see, but no one was willing to go in search of them. No one but me.”

“I see you carry with you a storybook,” the horse said pointedly.

“It was a gift from the traveling witch,” the girl replied. She turned to gaze at the flickering lamplight. “She encouraged me to seek out this kingdom. It was here that I met with the lumbering giant. I had hoped to find the blue flower with him, but he only demanded I leave.”

The memory of the giant's words drifted through the courtyard. "You do not belong here." He had said. "The flower you seek is not ahead of you, but behind."

"He chased me from the castle walls," she said slowly. Something was brewing her mind. The answer to her questions teetered just out of reach. "And it was in this courtyard that I found you, the white horse the witch spoke of. I am to listen to what you have to say." A blush crept up her cheeks. "Though I fear I have spent the evening only talking of myself."

The white horse's kind eyes rested on her. "You have come from afar, child, but giants do not lie." He bowed his strong head.

"He was right?" her shoulders fell in disappointment. "I've missed the blue flower?"

"It appears that the flower that you seek lies not with me or in this land," the horse said. "but in you."

The girl couldn't quite understand why a warmth blossomed inside her at the horse's words. "The blue flower --" she pressed a cold hand to her heart. "-- is with me?"



The horse offered her a knowing gaze and said nothing in reply. In place of awaiting an answer, the girl looked down at her hands, a realization washing over her like a sunrise cresting the hill-tops. In her palm lay a single, radiant seed.

As she watched, the seed sprouted and grew in length, a shaft of green breaking through the shell and into the warm glow of the lantern. The sprout blossomed into a vibrant flower of deep, midnight blue. The flower cast a reverence into the lit courtyard, and the girl could scarcely breathe for fear of disturbing the stillness.

A luminous blue light emanated from the blossom and cast a glow across her face. Slowly, the flower began to recede once more. The green of the shaft dissolved into her palm, followed by the single blossom. Eventually, all that remained of the blue flower was a receding glow, until only the memory of its warmth remained.

She met the horse's gaze. "This is why the witch sent me across the sea," she said. "To return home with the first story -- the story of the blue flower."

The horse dipped its head. “It is time your people learn the strength in beginning anew. You are their blue flower. You can show them the path.”

She agreed with certainty, for she finally understood just how to bring the stories back. She bowed to the horse and thanked him, her eyes swimming with tears. “I hope to see you again,” she said.

The horse bowed its maned head in return. “You have far to travel. I suspect our paths will cross again.”

She left the castle in the sky, and the angry giant, far behind as she raced back to the cloud that would carry her back to the white cliffs of ðunn.

“I’ve returned from my quest,” the girl announced in the market square that coming noon. Breathless, she watched as a crowd gathered as they once had around the traveling witch. Faces watched her with apprehension, but few were excited at the prospect of their old stories returning to them.



“I sought the blue flower, and entered the castle in the clouds,” she said, her cloak sweeping over the dusty road. “I ran from the giant of the sky, and spoke with the fair horse.”

Hiding their hope, the townsmen exclaimed, “have you found our stories? Do you know where the sea has hidden them, and why they had to go?”

The girl nodded and grew somber, “Our tales of old are lost. The sea truly has swallowed them whole.” A quick smile flitted over her face. “But I have learned that mistakes of the past can be undone. I carry inside me the blue flower, and I have returned home with a story.”

A woman in the front of the crowd said quietly, “you have the blue flower?”

The girl raised her eyes back to the sky, as she had done so often before, and searched the clouds for a passing kingdom. “We can create a new path, a new story,” she replied with certainty. “And we can chart our own course. I know this because the blue flower was inside me all along.” She smiled. “And inside each of us, if we only go in search of it.”

A murmur passed through the crowd. After a moment, the townsmen of Dunn began to smile.

“Now,” the girl said, her eyes sweeping over the crowd. “Who would like to hear a story?”

As I pulled my boots over my socks that following morning, the final threads of my fitful dream still lingered in my hands. I knew the story of the blue flower would live inside me from then on. The legends told in the town of Dunn began with the quick-witted girl, the one bold enough to shake the people from their slumber. I couldn't shake her face from memory.

As I creaked open my own door and grazed my eyes over the horizon line, a sense of responsibility settled in my bones. The girl had once carried the beacon of the blue flower in her hands. With that same beacon now illuminating my path, I knew what I was to do.

You must heed my advice, and learn it well. Here lies a story, and in it is truth. You are to seek out the blue flower, the same in your storybook, for only the blue flower can return the tales, once lost, back to you.



## About the Author

Abby Dewsnap is the author of a clean fantasy series entitled "The World Shaker," and a poetry novel "Yellow Paint."

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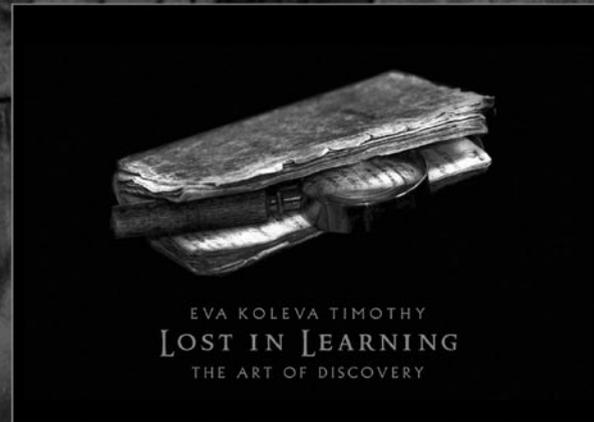
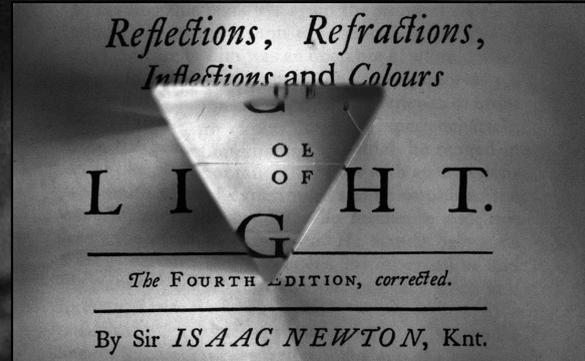
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