

The Power of Nature

They tell us to never go beyond the fields. Beyond is dead. Filled only with the memories of lives cut short and decisions made by people who would never be satisfied. My friend checked once. He never told me exactly what he saw, but came back with the look of someone who has finally understood the potential of human destruction.

I never needed to check to make sure we were being told the truth, I saw the evidence in the games we played; how we laughed at violence and fought when we disagreed. Even though we are no longer human, we still have the potential to create destruction like the war that wiped out humanity forty years ago. In 2030.

I am the product of two people who were part of the fastest evolution in history. Hundreds of people changed as nuclear power plants worldwide became too unstable following years of dangerous experimentation, wiping out humanity as if it were a glass jar bumped into by a small child tired of being careful. Only the people who were in the right place at the right time were able to survive this carelessness, manifesting an immunity to the radioactivity and becoming creatures with the ability to manipulate the world around them.

From where I coast along air currents I can see Aer Folk like me reinforcing the barriers that protect our growing Montana community from the toxins the war left behind, almost like our own version of the ozone layer, except it blocks out much higher concentrations of radioactivity. I look away from my people as dawn comes to take my watch over the land and sky and I pull my wings into my body, plummeting towards the ground like the meteors which streak across the sky almost too fast to wish upon. Feeling my aunt's displeased gaze, I slow my descent far before I wish to, touching down lightly, gracefully instead of snapping my wings out at the last second and slamming into the Earth with enough momentum to feel powerful, if only for a moment.

I smile up towards where my aunt glides high up in the sky, watching me, before she returns to resuming the last of her reinforcements.

I stride out of the clearing I've landed in, into the trees, listening to the sounds of people conversing as they leap from branch to branch and walk to the river to bathe. I wrap a breeze around myself, letting it carry me up into the high branches of the ponderosa where I live, surrounded by the tall pines that house the other Aer Folk, their branches strengthened by the Laend Folk with their ability to manipulate plants.

As I climb through the person-sized tree hollow serving as the entryway into my residence, I hear the sounds of animals calling to each other, like a great circus has set itself up inside the branches forming the two rooms of my home, though I suppose that's not far off from the truth.

Entering the main area of the tree house, I take a deep breath and proceed to help the animals waiting around the room. The injured animals sent to me come from beyond the fields, where the radiation is so intense that toxic chemicals have to be cleared from their respiratory systems. My job is controlling the poisoned air trapped in their lungs and dragging it out, then sending it on a contained breeze beyond the fields where it belongs. Like humans, the animals evolved quickly to the radiation, but also like us, they can't survive in the radiation for long. Nature, like all things, has its limits. It seems the most she was able to give living organisms was a resistance to the radiation and skills to filter the radiation.

As I purge the last animal's lungs, I feel the sun's fiery wrath on my back, announcing his descent over the horizon. I stand from my crouched position next to the hurt mountain lion, stretching my arms up to the sky as if I could grab the ending day and keep it here, refusing to sleep. Instead, I let the day go. Dropping my arms to my sides, I walk into the back room where a bed made of flexible willow branches and spongy moss waits for me. Sleep finds me quickly tonight, the sunset wrapping around me like a mother giving the illusion of safety. It's a wonderful feeling.

At first, I'm not sure what wakes me, my gaze drifting up towards the stars visible through the woven pine branches above my head. As the world trembles around me, I jolt upright, clambering out of my warm bed and into the deserted front room of my house. Fear quickens my breath and hollows my stomach as I climb through the tree hollow and glide to the ground where children are gathered in a group with the elders, their eyes looking up toward the stars, identical expressions of fear painted across their faces. I follow their gazes to the burning sphere rushing towards us.

In every chaos there is a moment of peace. Of silence. In this moment I feel a sense of awe, of the wish to burn just as bright. Then the meteor hits the Earth, smashing the peace to bits, landing meters away and throwing me into the air. The shock of flying without control leaves me stunned and the impact leaves me just as disoriented as I crash through the branches that once held me up, now talons ripping into my wings and shredding my skin. I can feel my life draining away as I lay on the forest floor. I turn my head to the right and watch as an ant evolves, adapting to the new environment created by the meteorite impact just like humans did decades ago. I smile as Nature decides to favor a new species, and wish them luck.