

## LIGHT

Sleek ebony silhouettes darted across the violet streaked sky, the high trills and echoing caws of the birds ringing across the darkening horizon, scattering the silky dappled clouds that adorned the sunset. Far below, a boy sat silently amongst a field of wildflowers, head tilted upwards, mouth ajar in awe as he gazed at the flocks returning home for nightfall. He admired their graceful flights, how they so effortlessly accomplished a feat far beyond the possibilities of mankind. The bright, glossy eyes of the youth never strayed once until the very last bird fluttered back and it was too dark to see anything.

It intrigued me; the boiling curiosity that bubbled within those pale grey eyes and the wonderstruck expression never disappearing despite the many times he stared at the same creatures flitting across the sky. Without fail, he was there to greet and bid goodbye to the sun; just like the feathery beasts he admired so. While the other boys his age wore cruel smirks upon their faces while they aimed their slings and unrighteously fell birds from their flights, he did nothing but simply observe with a desire so ardent I was afraid to near it.

I fell into a pattern of watching him with as much wonder as he gazed at the birds. I studied him while he toiled over intricate sketches of beady eyes and fallen feathers, watching as the drawings gradually became more concise until he began to fashion makeshift wings. His designs were impressive; flexible, strong but light, nearly identical to those of a bird excepting the impracticality of feathers adding weight.

The process was magical. As he grew from a little boy to a solemn adolescent, so did his passion for the pursuit of flight. There was never a day he missed - be he ill or well, rain or shine. Though his eyes never lost their spark when he watched the birds, now they were calculative and eventually, plans upon paper blossomed into mini bamboo versions with cotton wings. Thus began the days where lazy bobbing flowers would be momentarily disrupted by contraptions wheeling towards the ground.

I have been here for centuries, watching young children play amongst the hues of green sprinkled with fuchsia, lilac and scarlet, their pink cheeks matching the noses of the rabbits that ran rampant in the meadow. Children grew up upon this field, fell in love, whispered secrets and hunted wildlife; not once has there ever been a boy who came here to look at birds. The concept of timeless childhood wonder was foreign to me despite my many years upon this earth, and to discover something like this peculiar boy was both beautiful and terrifying at the same time.

For the first time in as long as I can recall, humans were no longer full of simple wiles and idleness and ignorance, but with something *more*. Here was a boy who cradled his heart upon downy beds of feathers, who knew about the world in the simplicity that birds knew the secrets of the skies and that to discover those mysteries would not be a ploy of greed or fame, but self actualisation. Here was a boy who never lost his guileless admiration through the voyage of time, whose eyes that glimmered every dusk and dawn. I was utterly captivated by him.

Yet, no force could conquer nature itself. Just like birds were made to explore the skies, humans were made to toil the earth. I watched as the boy transform from a strong young man to a shrivelled husk of what he used to be. His broad physique

shrank, vivid auburn hair lightening to a magnificent silver; full cheeks hollowed into sharp angles, shoulders tucked from age. The dream of flight never materialised, and while failure took a toll on his physical state, I'd never failed to see him at the crack of dawn, awaiting the first flutters of wings and the clear, ringing melody of the first trill.

The last time that I knew I would see him was when he staggered into the meadow, hair as white as the daisies that danced under the sun; eyes tired. The way he closed his eyes and tilted his head back as the sun made its ascent in the glowing horizon, the rays of golden light casting a gentle blanket of warmth and comfort, was heart-wrenching to see; like all the fleeting lives of humans, his was approaching the end too.

I have heard whispers in the wind that say when a physical shell is at its most vulnerable, it is the soul that overwhelms, and until that day, I never believed it was true. I remember the way ichor burned through my veins, the whole field alive and pulsing to the beat of his heart. The richness of his spirit - the innocence, immeasurable love, curiosity and something so raw that it didn't have a name - flooded throughout the meadow, staining the earth with its boon.

For a transient moment, his emotions became my own, enveloping all my senses and embodying every immortal cell in me. Mortal souls, I realised then, had as much power as perennial lives like mine. The burning desire to discover the last secret of the universe that ripe age could not give him: flight.

For the first time in the many decades that I had known this nameless boy, I touched him, the briefest glance from the tips of my fingertips, barely skimming his withered shoulders. It was my duty and honour, I felt, to grant him his last wish.

“Thank you for opening my eyes,” I whispered gently.

So he flew. For a few minutes of wonder, he soared amongst the feathered beasts who told him the secrets of the sky and felt the kisses of the icy wind against his weathered face. Then, he exhaled his last breath, cracked lips pulled into a gentle smile as the wind carried his body back to the ground.