

**Final
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15yrs old**

The Memory of Nature

The boy's hands burned as he gripped the metal, clambering on top of the large pile of scrap. His eyes scoured the pile, searching for an old phone or a tv remote. No luck. Nothing but juttred TV's and pieces of rusted steel. He sighed in frustration and sat down on an old fridge to rest, surveying the dead world around him. Seeing the acid rainstorm in the distance, sweeping across the towering crags of the trash mountains. Seeing the lakes of red-brown water, filled with oil and chemicals. Seeing the crumbled ruins of past structures, jutting out from the sea of scrap that filled the land. And seeing no life. There used to be animals here. His father would tell him these amazing stories of a green landscape, full of beautiful creatures of every size and shape. He would soak those stories up, dreaming of that amazing world that existed at one time. Then he would wake up to the acid rain, and remember that that time was long gone. He sighed, and clambered down the pile. His boots hit the ground with a splash, and a hissing sound filled the air as the acid water bubbled.

The boy gave one last look at the junk pile in front of him, and turned to leave. Then, he turned back. There was something strange about the pile. No, something strange *in* the pile. A door, made of dark brown wood, in perfect condition, at the bottom of the heap. It sat there, and it seemed to beckon to him. He walked up to the pile. He remembered the task, the batteries that he needed to collect before nightfall. But his curiosity kept drawing him closer and closer. There were golden carvings on the doorknob, and as he gazed at it, he recognized something his father had told him about. Flowers! A beautiful rose was carved into the golden door knob. He

reached out, resting his palm on it, feeling the indents of the carving. He then twisted the handle, and the door swung open.

The boy took one step into the dark hallway beyond the door, a cool breeze replacing the hot, swampy air outside. His hand reached for his breathing plugs, and he gently pulled them out. A wonderful scent filled his nose, a fresh, sweet smell that he had never smelled before. He took several deep breaths, and felt around for a sense of where he was. His hand brushed a railing, and he felt around for a step. He found it, and descended down the stairs in the darkness. He reached the last step, and hopped down onto a soft, springy material. He could hear water, not the drip-dropping of rain, no, a much louder noise, like a million drops of rain falling at once. Then, a light flickered on. He closed his eyes, temporarily blinded. When he opened his eyes again, he blinked. He could not believe what he was seeing.

He was in a cave, an enormous cave, and in this cave were the likes of things he had never seen before. An enormous waterfall crashed down from overhead, falling into a verdant oasis filled with bright green plants and blooming flowers. A small beach bordered the pool created by the falls, made up of purple and gray rounded rocks, where a large bear was sitting. The bear swiped at the pink fish that were jumping out of the water. The spongy ground that he felt under his boots was a verdant field, filled with wildflowers of every color imaginable. A shimmering river ran from the oasis through the field, and other animals drank from its cold depths. It was just like the stories his father told him. The boy took a step towards the river, hesitated, then took another. The animals did not seem to notice him as he walked towards them, minding their own business as he looked around in wonder. He reached the riverbank, and plunged his hand into the water. It was icy cold. He scooped some up with his hands, and splashed it on his face, confirming his sense of reality. He laughed with delight and continued walking.

The lovely, sweet smell seemed to be emanating from a grove of flowers and trees on the edge of the oasis. He pinched one pink flower and smelled it, inhaling the scent and smiling ear to ear. He then walked over to one of the trees. Bright green-orange fruit hung from its branches, and he shook the trunk until one of the colorful orbs fell off. He bit in, and the sweet, tangy taste of a mango filled his mouth. Still munching the fruit, he walked over to the beach and sat next to the bear. He watched the bear expertly grab the fish out of the water, and marveled at the intelligence of the animal. After watching for a few minutes, the boy shed his scrapping jacket, took off his boots and jumped in the pond. The ice cold water shocked his body into stillness for a few seconds, and then he was jumping and playing, while the waterfall roared and splashed in the background. The fish began to jump around him, and he was suddenly one with the fish, caught up in one of nature's dances. After what seemed like hours playing in the oasis, the boy climbed out of the water and sat by the bank, wrapped in his jacket. He realized it was time to go. His parents would be waiting for him, concerned for him. Mad at him, most likely. But he didn't want to leave this paradise. He stared around the cave, and noticed a sign above the entrance he had come through. "*Himmler's Nature Emporium*" it read. He squinted to make out the other text on the sign. "*Established 2045.*" He swallowed. 2045. That was 100 years ago. And suddenly his joy was gone, replaced by choking sadness. This place. The green, springy grass that smelled so fresh. The clear, flowing river that was safe to drink from and play in. The beautiful flowers and plants that brought their splashes of color to the landscape. All of the animals that called this place home. This place was a relic of a forgotten time, a time when trash didn't pile in huge craggy mountains, and a time when people didn't hide in tin shacks to escape the scathing rain. A time when lakes, rivers and seas were filled with blue water and colorful life, not chemicals, trash and oil. This place was a memory, and it was time for him to leave it. He stood up and wiped his eyes, and began his trudge back through the oasis, through the field, and to the entrance. He looked back, savoring the green grass, the crashing waterfall,

savoring the memory of it all. He then turned back and walked up the stairs, through the hall, and out the door into his polluted, dry world.

After putting his breathing plugs and safety goggles back on, the boy walked away from the door, tramping through the scrap as the blazing sun set. Before the door closed fully, a flash of color flew out of it. A butterfly landed on the ground outside the door and sat there, watching the boy walk away. Then, its wings began to turn a sickly brown hue, and it collapsed, another memory erased by the new earth.