

An Eye For An Eye (Abigail Holubrinkle, 15, Narraguagus Jr/Sr High School)

I

I am a mountain standing on the horizon and punching through the clouds. I see everything; nothing can hide from my penetrating gaze. I see the smallest fleas and the largest whales.

I have no name because there is no need for me to have one. All creatures who call me home are unidentified and will remain so. I exist outside what is quantifiable.

There are two sisters who take refuge in my hospitality: Natua and Humara. They are not humans or gods. They *are* like me. How they came to be and what their ultimate goals are, I cannot say. I watch and hypothesize.

Many centuries ago, they met at my peak.

II

Natua had contacted her sister for the first time in at least a century. She paced near the precipice, no fear of falling. Only pebbles, inconsequential at best, fell down, down, down...and out of her way. Humara finally appeared, dragging herself up the path. Her chest heaved, her legs trembled. Sweaty hair fell around her face and her laces flopped loosely next to her boots.

Natua pounced, eyes flashing stars. "Humara! Make them stop! They *refuse* to listen to each other but they listen to you."

Dressed in a quilt of fur and leather she looked wild. With various scales, horns, and claws she was untamed. Vines and roots snaked through her hair, framing her face.

"I don't have any control over what they do," Humara said stiffly, fighting the wind. "I can influence, but I'm *not* a tyrant."

"Tyranny has its benefits," Natua snarled, encroaching on her sister's space. "For example, perfect obedience! I don't need to *influence* trees into growing. They grow because I tell them to grow! It was all going so well until I decided to go along with your idea."

Thorny plants sprouted at her feet, curling and twisting with her anger.

“How many times have I told you? Humans aren't trees!” Humara said forcefully, stepping forward. “They have free will and free minds. I gave them that gift. It's theirs to do with what they want.”

“What they want has the lovely side effect of destroying the world, my world! Do I need to remind you?”

She clenched her fists. “No! I see everything.”

Natua snorted, rolling her eyes. “Do you, now? You are being extremely responsive.”

“There're those that are speaking out, trying to change what's going on!” Humara pointed out shrilly, standing taller.

Natua bared her teeth. “*Speaking out*. They are shouting into the wind. The smog filled, carbon soaked, wind!”

“Progress is being made!” Humara screamed, using every inch of her diaphragm. “Open your eyes and see for yourself.”

“I see all talk and no action!” Natua replied, more loudly, somehow. “I am sweating on this mountaintop! My forests are being cut down and carbon is mounting! Pests roam the earth unchallenged, my allergies are awful! Where are your wind turbines now? Your electric cars. What are the Paris Accords but pieces of paper? My ecosystems are out of order and my glaciers are puddles of slush!”

“Natua—”

“What can you do? *Influence* it all away? I dare you to try! I will have no choice but to end this myself if they don't cease.”

“We had an agreement! I handle humanity and you take care of the world,” Humara protested. Fear crawled up her spine.

Natua's hackles rose. “And it is a time honored agreement,” she intoned dangerously. “Your precious humans are messing everything up, like they have before. The dodos, do you remember them? The Hawaiian chaff flower? St. Helena olive trees? Your humans are murderers without remorse.”

Then she stalked down the path, poisonous plants blooming under her feet. Humara didn't have time to say anything else. She just stood there, dumbfounded. Natua's plants quickly withered away since this wasn't their home.

III

Humara paced left and right, struggling against the suffocating silence. She stared over the precipice, then down the twisting path she struggled to ascend.

Was it a mistake to give humanity free will? she asked herself. That was always the question. No matter how many decades passed, it never got easier. As Natua said, they mutilated the world with impunity. By sticking to her resolve, they were unchallenged. All the speeches, protests, and activists and the world still warmed. Ice melted, ecosystems faltered, animals and plants were threatened.

And those weren't the only problems plaguing her children! They had the unique talent of making the world harder for themselves.

They're ignorant compared to you and Natua, so ignorant! They practically know nothing, her heart argued. *How many thousands of years have they seen? Did they witness the triumphs and the tragedies that befell this world? Do they know what it's like to celebrate the birth of a star? To grieve for one that's died? Have they buried the remnants of a dead species? They need to learn. The hard way is always more effective than a lecture.*

"But at what cost?" Humara muttered, furrowing her brow. She glared over the cliff edge, watching clouds brew. A flock of birds, crows maybe, were harassing a hawk in the distance. She peered over her shoulder just in time to see a swarm of bats rise into the sunset.

Humara sat on the cliff for many hours. Day gave way to night, revealing a tapestry of glittering stars. She grieved for the humans who couldn't witness such beauty. She ground her teeth at those that darkened the sky.

Humara gave humanity free will. It was her business to deal with the consequences. She swore to do so. "Spare the rod, spoil the child," came to mind.

And, she thought grimly, *if I don't do something now, Natua will certainly do something in the future.* She stood, took a deep breath, then marched down the path.

IV

I could only observe in silence the events that unfolded. They were horrible and so tragic. I am an expert in human literature, but I venture to say more tragic than Shakespere. All I could do was give refuge to the creatures who found their way. To

animals outside my rocky domain, I am a sanctuary. Rarely needed, barely thought of yet always there. I am the last resort.

But not for humanity...

It breaks my heart to say this: they abandoned me. They ventured far and made their own shelters. Shelters that would protect against many threats. I was forgotten along the way, obsolete in the face of their progress. If only they could have known!

Natua's fury burned hotter than magma. She was brutal. Plague after plague, each more threatening than the last. The ground shook, oceans churned, fires devoured everything. Even the plants and animals answered her call for vengeance, eager to bite back.

But every day, I question her methods. Did the fires have to be *that* big, and those storms *so* charged with lightning? Did the ground *need* to tear itself into bits? Natua's rage was a very human thing. She would never admit it, though. She'd say, "An eye for an eye."

I hated being the witness; I wanted to look away, to close my all seeing eye. But it's my duty to watch and my duty to remember. Humanity fought bravely. Sometimes as one, more often not.

I wish it happened differently! Why? Why didn't they listen!?