

When the Silence Comes

A bang crumbled upon the mountain's feet and only an echo remained—for a moment the jungle fell silent. The air burned numb and birds flew from their nests. They circled the tree tops, threading needles in flight—diving through the sky to see for certain that the noise had left them. But just as their nerves settled, and their eyes turned for home, two more cracks thundered the canopy of the forest.

Below watch of the stars, all that had ears listened to the winds whistle. The trees, painted by night, surrendered the depths of their green to shade and shadow. Animals plundered the darkness—prey, if not in search of. Lizards leapt from branches and bugs buzzed in air. But the noise was of something unseen to the jungle—something fierce and bright. Light had beckoned the call of thunder though no clouds stood overhead—those who had seen it clenched their sides and tasted blood. Upon the cool-dirt of the tropic floor, two souls collapsed and breathed their last breath together. The night passed; the sound was never heard again.

He sat beside her as they looked upon their fallen friends—still, motionless. He reached a quivering arm out to grasp them, to wake them from their slumber. But they had long drawn silent and cold. The trees whispered a roar of sorrow to the winds chime and, frightened, she clasped his hair. He ignored her and nudged his friends, confused why they played this game. He too was frightened now.

The sun fluttered between shadows of the leaves. He shook his friends, one last time, to no avail. She peeked over his shoulder, a trickle of confusion feeding a river of worry—she had never seen them like this; had never seen him like this. He grunted, demanding a reply, but nothing was said. He raised his hand and lowered his head. His fingertips brushed his brow as he examined the blood from their bodies. He had seen this—once—years before. Though, it was long forgotten of simple times, free from reminders.

His mother had fallen still. A snarling demon had come in the night. He ran, as did the others—thinking his mother had followed them, thinking she was safe. But when the sun shone blood the next morning, he found her—still, motionless. The others watched him from a distance—curious and afraid. He sat beside her, his head hanging

low to her shoulder. And though he was with her, he felt without her—when the silence came.

She tugged his arm, and he returned from memories of old, born anew. The air whispered a warning to them—dancing the tune of a storm to come. She grunted, clasp ing his hand, and leaned opposite him to force his feet. He collapsed to the strain of her weight and rolled until upright once more. She ran to neighboring trees, seeking cover from the sky. But he lingered—the memory holding him from peace; from her.

Where had they gone?

The rain fell heavy, crashing on the leaves. Puddles jumped to its touch and the jungle bathed, breathing a sigh of satisfaction. She hugged herself for warmth below a tangle of trees, free from the flow of the storm. She watched him, alone, his back to her. She had tried to go to him but he pushed her away. Ever since they had found their friends he had been quiet, withdrawn—she didn't know why.

Water descended his brow, matting his hair and soaking his skin. His eyes stared lifelessly into the distance, the storm around him inconsequential to that of his mind. His breaths pushed his stomach out towards his forearms, planted firmly in mud. His thoughts dwelled on his mother and his friends, on love's longing crushed by confusion's grasp. A fear deep inside him clawed through his memories—his mother's blood, his friends' blood—he knew this now as a sign of the silence. But still he pondered, why?

A flash of light exploded from the sky, and above the trees, sounds of battle roared in the heavens. His eyes turned once more towards her, nestling against plates of bark to get comfortable. She was the last of his family—the others lost over years of surviving day-to-day. But the night shadowed her past too. Would she disappear as they had? Would he?

Suddenly his mind broke to the roar of a branch overhead, the wind tearing it from a tree. He watched it fall before he leapt aside—his arm suffering the blow he'd dodged. He breathed hard, clenching his arm as he ran to safety. She awoke abruptly, startled by his return. She moved next to him but he ignored her, looking instead upon his arm—a smear of blood escaping his veins. She reached for the wound, concerned, but he pulled away, panic stricken and disarrayed. She saw in his eyes a tremendous fear but could not understand—the storm grew.

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