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English 218

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## Short Story: Nature's Voice

Deep in the West Kaena Woods, where the light did not shine, where the ravens rarely crowed, where quartolf briefly howled, something stirred. Standing within the dark, rich soil near the center, moss clung onto the bark of trees, barely surviving on the limited sunlight—and the vibrations of the wooded home.

An almighty tree, with arms thicker than a man and height several stories high, stirred. Its canopy rustled, its roots jostled, and branches quavered. Near the top of the tree, a rough-featured face—made with a blocky nose, jawline, and eyebrows—twisted and contorted.

The eyes opened, revealing pale yellow sclera and green irises. A groan emanated from the tree, and its roots tore up from the ground and stepped forward, scattering the birds resting above. It did the same with its other foot, and the sprat nesting underneath squeaked in terror and dove into the undergrowth.

The tree groaned once more and lowered its arms with a crack, then twisted its head, cracking more. It turned back around, facing the distant light it knew to be at the edge of the forest. It narrowed its eyes, then stomped forward. Ajax emerged from the shadows and joined him, walking slowly with him. He stomped again, and the ajax's predators, the quartolf, joined him, uncaring of their meals standing with them.

The tree continued forward, and with every step, more species of the West Kaena Woods, ranging from the insignificant sprat and ceroachs to the great visawks that watched from above. The

woods shifted from night to twilight, then twilight to daytime. The fringe of the forest came into view, granting a glimpse of the plains beyond.

The tree did not look back at his entourage of nature, but he knew they were there, for he called them. In a deep, guttural voice, he said, **“Our domain...has been violated...and now...we will help man...understand...that even nature...has a voice...once more...”** The animals with him continued in silence, knowing well the truth in his words.

Knowing the truth of the rynth.

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At the edge of the woods, in the bright afternoon, a group of men worked around a fallen tree with blue wood on its inside. Two focused on uprooting the stump at the edge, another two peeled off the bark with scrapers, and another two prepared a metal sled and tied ropes onto its hooks.

A heavyset man wearing a pale yellow jacket read through a tattered paper nailed to a board. He sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “The mayor ought to know that we’ve already cut down an azurewood this month.” He eyed the signature on the board. “This won’t look good with election coming up.”

The ground shook beneath them, and all the men stop their work, looking around them. The ground shook again, and they dropped their tools. The crown of the rynth rose above the young trees around it, and animals flooded out into the plains, running around the men and their work. They shouted and screamed, scrambling out of their way.

The yellow-coated foreman stepped back, oblivious to the rushing wildlife. All he saw was the enormous tree marching forward, keeping pace with the wildlife in his grand sweeping strides. He swung his arms forward, building up momentum and quickening his pace toward a walled-in village

deeper in the plains. Moss fell from him in great droves as he and his army marched toward the unaware town.

The foreman's men approached him, all with their helmets and gloves in disarray. One pointed at the rynth and said, "Th-That's the guardian of the woods?" The foreman slowly nodded, open-mouthed.

Minutes later, as the marketplace of the town is bustling with buyers and merchants from a distant place, the activity stalls as the rumbling begins. Screams erupt from the populace as ajax and quartolf burst through the open gate and destroy the spices, pottery, jewelry, and food, barely allowing the people a chance of running to the safety of their homes. All eyes aimed at the rynth, however, as he stormed through the roadways, toward the hall in the center.

As the rynth stomped, he eyed the river running alongside and through the town and watched as the pure blue water became murky and brown upon exiting. The rynth growled and upped his pace.

The rynth progressed toward the hall and toward the men wearing mail armor stood in formation around the entrance of the hall, wielding rifles poised to fire magical blasts. But the animals swept over them, with Quartolf tearing the rifles out of their hands with their jaws and ajax pushing away the men from the path of the Rynth with their antlers.

Within the hall, men wearing black cloaks sat around a round table, and sitting at their head was a man with a grizzled beard wearing an ornate golden medallion. All hunched over the table to stabilize themselves from the constant rumbling outside.

Dust fell from the ceiling, and a man with an orange beard said, "I *told* you we shouldn't have approved those bills!"

The ceiling peeled away from the walls, and the black-cloaked men collectively gasped. The gnarled fingers pried the ceiling's wooden frame upward, and the Rynth peered inside, glaring at the grizzled man.

The Rynth reached toward the old man with its free hand. He screamed and attempted to run for the door, but the wildlife blocked his path, all coldly staring at him. He froze, stunned, then pinched by his shirt collar and lifted into the air, up to the rynth's eye level.

The man forced a smile and drew his arms close to his medallion. "G-G-Guardian Rynth....w-what brings you here?" The smile quickly dissipated as the rynth brought his face closer to the man's.

**"Mayor Brigg...you have defiled our treaty for the third time,"** the rynth bellowed. **"You have cut down the rare azurewood trees more frequently than we agreed...you have polluted the river with your foul technology...and you have excessively hunted the denizens of the woods, leaving fewer and fewer for me to protect..."** The animals collectively growled, cawed and hissed at the man.

Brigg whimpered and clapped his hands over his head. "I-I-I just approved the permits! It's not my fault! *Ahh!*" The rynth shook him, jangling his medallion.

A low rumble emanated from the rynth's chest. **"You are their leader...you are to tell your people what is or isn't right...do that, or I will end our treaty, and allow the fierce denizens of the woods you begged me to restrain to roam free."** He lowered the Brigg back to the floor, and set the ceiling back on the walls, leaving the men to stare harshly at their mayor.

The rynth and his entourage of wildlife exited the town and returned to his wood. Hours after the rynth's departure, life returned to normal in the marketplace, albeit more subdued with the might of the rynth in their mind.

As the crown of the rynth's boughs returned to the deep heart of the West Kaena woods, two wolf-like men stood on a hill overlooking both the trees and the town. One black and one white, they both studied the wildlife returning to their normal lives in the forest.

The white wolf adjusted the pack on his back and turned to face his elder companion. "Why was the rynth so angry at the humans? Aren't we the ones responsible for warning them when their actions would lead to the rynth's intervention?"

The black wolf slowly shook his head. "Here, the people of Respit have made a special agreement with the Rynth. In exchange for his protection, they promise to do little to harm the forest, such as only cutting down fast-growing trees or being sparing with their hunting. But Mayor Brigg has done little to curb the humans' activity, despite being warned twice before by me." He turns away and marches down the hill, and the white wolf follows. "We Lykai are the balancers of nature; we ensure that no one side has power over the other. The rynth is the voice of nature, and humans are the voice of progress. They are always at odds with each other, and it is up to us to ensure that they do not come into conflict with each other."

As the forest came out of view, the white Lykai blew out his breath. "I'm glad to have the rynth on our side."

The black Lykai smiled. "They are no one's side but their own."