

Connor Wall

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Media and Narrative

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A Condor's Perspective

The wind is brisk today up high. Cold enough that the heavy snowflakes around me disintegrate into ice dust before landing on the leaves of trees below. It's cold enough that direct sunlight from the sunset ahead —that's normally warm this time of year— barely tickles the face.

Despite the speed and surging high pitch whirl of the air around me, boosting my adrenaline, the chase between wolves and deer below seems to slow in place; and the rabbit on the upcoming slope that's nibbling on grass seems to freeze in place entirely. It's actually following a trail... or is it a hypothermic corpse already?

I see ice shards forming a crust on the lake in the distance, slowly drying out the lake southward. I notice the bright yellow reflection on the shiny water ahead soften as snow begins to dull the shimmering ripples. I can't tell which air currents might pull me down now that anymore the ripples have stopped altogether.

It's cold enough now that the ripples at the usual spot stop exposing salmon underwater or finches along the water's edge. The remaining shards of crystalized water that haven't been covered by powdery snow now only seem to reflect the sun and "bluening" clouds back up at me. It's hard to tell if the brown reflections on those slowing ripples belong to a friendly Condor or to a frostbitten mouse with a chewed-off tail.

Oh, I could really go for a mouse right now. One and done. Nothing beats that delicate crunch of an ice-cold frozen tail and the squish of warm chunky fur before it freezes. I almost give myself away with a caw thinking about the chaos soon that's about to blow through throw this forest. If only the mice came above ground sooner. I'd hate to have to dig around the snow after the fact. If mice only understood how many miles we have to travel for basic sustenance. If they'd just use those wiry, tasteless whiskers sooner and at least pretend to sense an impending doom. A death by storm, death by drop, or death by munching. They always end up waiting out a six-day storm like this under snow thirteen times their size naively hoping to survive. If only the lake weren't so frozen and cracked. I might be able to dive in real quick without alerting the owls. They never miss a snack. Gotta use that 360 neck range for something, I guess.

The mountain peak behind me in the direction of Home is just starting to get swallowed up by the incoming clouds. A stark contrast to sunset on the flat horizon before me. I've never had the privilege of a real sunset until now. The flat, sparse land ahead only reminds me how far I am from the forested homey mountains back east behind me.

The trees' shadows are growing longer. At this rate, I may get caught in the wind. It's time to act. I can feel the air drying. I won't find a meal at this pace. The soft snowflakes in the air are now coarse on my eyes. At this point, I'm alone. I'm the only one who didn't come to their senses and turned back east before the sky prematurely darkened. The wind has weaponized the water droplets in the air, stinging my eyes with ice pebbles.

No point turning back empty-handed at this point.

I notice some movement on the ground. A last-minute attempt by a mountain cat to catch a wren. I see another two-second chase on my left. And again. A glimpse of snow falling off a shaken tree and a flash of an owl wing.

Boom. A thunderclap seems to signal the end of hunting time as natural sporadic movements on the ground cease, and low-lying vegetation start clinging to the ground for dear life. The wind shifts into a rumble. I can now feel it in my inner ear coming from both above and below. The speed of gliding is now the only thing preventing the cold from setting into my mouth, creeping into my bones, and keeping my feathers from freezing.

So much for finding a mouse.

I see a distortion in the snow crystals to my left just before I'm hit with a storm cloud. I never imagined a cloud could feel so solid. I've only ever heard stories from elders about how ice winds could bend Condor wings in directions that would put even the most flexible owls to shame. But now I understand.

Struggling to prevent a wing from snapping and despite several lateral tumbles I notice a bitter pain in the mouth. Furthermore the ground has tilted. The trees bend at an angle. Even two small boulders seem to lean away from the wind and into the ground, all conceding to the storm to survive.

The air is now full of what I can only describe as a feather fight between hatchlings. Tiny beads of ice and shredded-feather-shaped chunks of snow whirlwind through the air at on the ground and high up — clumping just in time to be torn apart in another gust of wind. This white blur continues to mask any natural movement on the ground. A mass regurgitation of dead leaves from the trees below makes the sparse forest resemble an off-white shade of guano.

Greys, purples, and dark greens swirl together and the frozen lake ahead only reflects patchy purple darkness.

I must survive.

I steady my vision on the half-set sun and let the roar of the wind twist me.