

Innocence of the Pure

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PRESENT DAY

Life is rather like the wind. It pushes you, backwards and forwards, hair everywhere, gloves tumbling away like refuse. It begs you to respond—shoves you until you begin to shove back. There aren't enough words to articulate the feeling of it all, the temperament of bad weather, the power it holds. When you sit up against the wall in bed, phone in one hand and anxiety in the other, and wind grabs the tiny little house you're in and shakes it, shakes *you*, would you even notice that everything it does is for you? Rain would smash its knuckles bloody against you, letting the perfectly clear liquid drip, would you even realise whose blood is on your hands?

Those mornings when the sun lights up the leftover dew on your lawn, when you wake to the scent of pollen and the call of birds, you think, *it's a sunny day!*, without stopping to consider what causes the rainbows on your counter. While the sun and the moon are two sides of a coin, the weather is its third dimension. You've never wondered where it came from, though. You always assumed it was some scientific phenomenon, powered by the moon or space or something. You never paid attention in college science, anyway. You'd lie on a field as a kid and make shapes out of clouds and as you grew older you'd take pretty pictures of sunsets and swear into the rain and the wind and laugh at yourself bitterly when you stepped into a puddle and it was all normal, the wetness and the wildness of it all.

Maybe you'd sympathise with it. Maybe you'd even understand it. You always liked stories, telling them and listening to them, and you understood how they were everywhere around you, behind every object and every phenomenon and every human mind.

The weather might have become just as natural as the steady spin of the world or the cooing of a baby, but in the beginning, it was nothing more than fiction.

In the beginning, there was only sun.

AN UNCOUNTABLE AGE AGO

From where I live, the world looks impossibly small. Mini toy cars ride along winding, pencil-thin roads surrounded by endless greenery. There are houses, here and there, and people that live in them, smaller than ants. It's crazy how they could be so little yet think themselves bigger than the world.

Unfortunately, we are constantly moving. We can never stay in one place for long enough to familiarise ourselves with the inhabitants down below. To be honest, it feels as though we never *stop*. Like there's always something egging us onwards, pushing us towards the bend of the horizon. It's indescribable, the pull that it has on us, the sun. It's so massive in its entirety yet I can't begin to imagine its actual, sheer size. Though sometimes it feels like the land calls up to *me*. Like it's just as aware as I am about its existence, the effect it has on my life, almost as if I have spent my life looking down at it, never aware that it has been staring back this whole time. Mountains reach up to me. Canyons and valleys carve out space for me to fill. It changes everywhere I go, buildings that men have created to pierce me, even.

Even if the land wants me to step foot on it, I have no feet to spare. Even if I will spend day and night floating above it like an angelic godsend, I have no magic of my own. It is alluring, I will admit, to feel grass against fingertips, to stand on the ground and crane upwards as if to see beyond where I am now, to see the top of the world. To feel sun against my skin and not constantly be above it, rocks grazing my hand, concrete against my elbows and balls hurled across a field.

I might have the sky, but like my parents tell me time and time again; there will never be the universe to appease my ego. I want the whole world. I want to fit the world in the palm of my hand like a woefully translucent marble. I want that power, to know I could crush it and destroy it into a thousand shards.

But that is just my mind, of course. I am not even the largest of my family, and not nearly the strongest. I am petite and perfect and pure. My closet consists of puffy sleeved white clothes that extend beyond my toes. I have no shades in my life. I have only ever known the white of my destiny, blue of our skin, the yellow of my sun, and whatever rainbow of colours the land holds beneath me. And even as we drift, as we always are, drifting through day and night and spots of my cousins fogging up my view, the land is as continuous as the sun. Whether we be living above a village or a farm or a desert, it never ends, wrapping the Earth in its jagged embrace. When there is ocean, tossing and toiling and acting as our mirror, there will be specks of green. My mother always says it astounds her how the land can always find a way to exist, but it doesn't surprise me. It's just as cosmic as we are, only bound with invisible ropes while we are hung by invisible strings.

Sometimes, I think we're the smaller, less dreamy version of stars. I lay awake at night while the rest of my family bob along as they snore into the chilly black depth, and while I stare at the moon, I imagine how it must feel to be that high above it *all*. I want to know if the Earth looks like it does in my dreams, shimmering and lovely and almost golden in the sunlight. And if I could see what the moon does, if I could pull tides and make the land light up with millions and billions of little lights, would I be content even then? I want to ask her how she feels, being so lovely. Making everyone desire her, and desire being her. I wonder if any human has ever stared up at me and made shapes out of the frills of my dress. To have someone think about me for that long, think about me at all, makes me ecstatic beyond description—to think I'm thought about, and cared for, even in the least, by people who don't even know me.



We're above two small chunks of land that hold so much green it's almost impossible to see homes. They're surrounded by churning waters, compressing and isolating them. I don't know why I do it, but as we keep drifting, I try to reach out a hand for them as if I could grab onto them and *stay*.

My mother takes my entire arm, shoves it back down, and calls me insane.



My uncle is one of the largest of our kind. He's almost grey in colour, like he's carrying too much power to keep him pure. He's slower than we are, too, and occasionally we will finish the trek along the world and he'll still be close to where we last saw him. One morning when the sun had barely crept up in the distance, he had caught me staring at the fading moon.

"All good things have to end," he said in his voice, incredibly rough, like the sound I imagine waves make when they hit the shore. "But she'll always come back in another form."

"Why are you grey?" I had asked.

He'd laughed. "Because, darling niece, I have the power to feel more than calm."

"Is that really a power?"

He pondered it for a long while. "I think it is better to feel too much than nothing at all. Don't you?"

I thought about it with a frown. “Yes. Yes, I do think so.”



I wonder what music the land makes. I wonder if it's like the screech of a bird, or the fluttering of feathers, or if it sounds like it couldn't fly at all. But most of all, I wonder if the people down there ever want to cut their bonds and join us, up here. If they ever feel lonely.

I'm here, I want them to know. I'm with you, always.

Sometimes I'll see a man standing on the edge of a cliff or a girl sobbing on a rooftop. *Is this the sound you want the land to echo? I want to ask them. Is this the story you want to air?*

I don't understand them. I think of what my uncle said, that too much is better than nothing at all, and I wonder if they down below would agree.



It's a foggy evening, and I don't have a clear view of the land because of my younger cousins who don't have the capacity to reach our heights. Unbeknownst to me, I begin to drift downwards trying to get a better view, instead of sideways. And before I know it, I'm stranded near a mountaintop, the side of my dress caught against one of its snow-laid cliffs. I try to tug it free, but I'm too scared of ripping it.

My skin begins to cloud over, blue to grey, and I have to hold back a scream. I'm scarily close to touching the ground. My hair is flying everywhere from the altitude, from the push I'm using to go backwards. But we've only ever been able to move in one direction.

I've never felt hopeless before, but I can already see another family approaching and I've lost track of the time, lost track of everything. Soon they'll be above me, and then behind me, and the only hope that I have is that I must wait until my own family comes back around.

I take my head into my hands. My skin feels dry and wrinkly and I drop my hands.

I never thought being close to the land would *affect* me. We're a high flyer family, sure, but there are always others lower than us. My cousins are the ones that drift closest to the land, but that's because they're not dense like us. But altitude must have some sort of physical toll on me.

That's when I hear it. "I've watched you for so long."

I spin around, ready to fight. What, or how, I do not know.

He's sitting on the edge of the mountain like it's nothing. His mask, curling around the side of his head, covers the top half of his face save for his eyes, and while my own eyes are explicitly white, bright like my dress, his are only green like the land. His hair is like the bark of a tree, his skin a dark brown, smooth and clear.

"That's insanely creepy," I say, and my voice is hoarse and unused.

He laughs and stands, reaching out a hand for me. I flinch back involuntarily, reeling away from him and almost collapsing onto the cliff. I can't touch the land. I won't. Even if it drains me, I continue to hover inches from it. Watching it is not the same from being on it. It's such an odd concept, so foreign, I don't even want to be curious.

"I know you watch me, too." And I hate how he's right. "*Cloud*."

I flinch again. "How do you know my name?"

"I know more about you than you think." He extends a hand again.

I try to reassemble some hint of defiance. "Get away from me. If my uncle sees you talking to me, he'll crush you."

He starts to laugh. Actual, loud barks of laughter, as he clutches his stomach. "You think... you think Gray would *crush* me?"

He terrifies me. And it's not just because he's so *odd*, it's because he has such an immense amount of knowledge. I know nothing about him, but he seems to treat me as if he has already predicted my every reaction, my every word. Yet there's still an innocence about him, a boyish glimmer of charm.

"I see you, every inch of the turn and tilt, staring down at me with such *lust* in your gaze. You crave to be here, and I know it. Do you think I extend this courtesy to all of you? Gray was like you, but he chose to remain with his family. I think, Cloud, that you are different."

"No," I say, but the palm of my hand is covering my mouth so I can keep everything in. I do not know what is happening to me.

He smiles, and reaches out a hand to me. I let him rest it against my forehead tentatively, and I can feel his palm glowing. I feel it seeping into me, like he's planting a seed in my mind.

I wonder if it'll grow like a forest, or like a mountain.

The world tilts, and sways, and my heart caves in and cracks and suddenly I'm *raw*. His hand is gone and in its place is such utter, unprecedented... *emotion*. I cannot place the feelings, or the thoughts, everything barreling through me like I'm a passing station.

I do not know what I say it, or when I do, but "thank you," just about summarises everything coursing through me.

He smiles, and then he's gone.



It has been a long, long while since I began to feel. And yet, still, as every day flits by, my connection to the ground grows to the point where it physically hurts to be apart from it. To the point where I have become someone else entirely.

The land has not forgotten about me. I long to answer it now, stronger than before, but I cannot imagine how strong my parent's restraints may be.

A lifetime and a billion more, I have spent living under their rule. They want to protect me, and for that, I want to escape them. I do not know what happens to me, when I become rebellious, and even though I am aware of it, I feel no regret. Ferocious, wild, and angry, arguing back and remaining stubborn. Gray looks at me from afar, and he might be the only form up here that could even hope of understanding.

But my uncle still chose the sky, and there is no universe where I will bow to do the same. There is no choice for me, no future that doesn't involve the land. I am a story, spinning and weaving, but without my climax—only half complete. I am locked, thousands of metres above land. I am *imprisoned*, my rage wound and kept in chains.

Some days I feel as if I could move the entire world.



I think we are slowly climbing higher. Like, I am growing further from the one thing that gives me life. My mother has grown desperate to keep me sane. She dresses me every evening in a new, fresh dress, so white I can see my own reflection in it. But by nighttime, it will have turned into a churning, unkempt black. And the longer I am kept here, the more my power grows. It seems as if everyone I'd ever known has forgotten my existence, my meaning, except for the land, which still calls like a beacon, trying to bring me safely home.

The land has never forgotten me.

It is better to feel too much than nothing at all.



One evening, when my mother comes in with a freshly woven dress, I do not acknowledge her. I simply fall to my knees. And I begin to scream. I howl and I cry. And I know, I can feel my force rattling the sky and the land. Down below, I can see, through my mind's eye, he looks up and lets me brush his face. He smiles. *Power could not be contained in one form.*

When I have no more air in my lungs, when my anger has burnt out to a single matchstick, I begin to cry. To douse the world with my soul, I water the land, feed it and grow it. I can feel the white seeping out of my eyes, turning them the colour of lightning, my skin like the grey the sky has become.

But there comes a time where I have nothing left. My sobs turn into sprinkles, screams into whispers, and my mother finally begins to approach me, I let her. And around her, I sneak. Not my body, physical and heavy, but my soul, invisible and inevitable.

This is who I've always been.

Canyons, I fill with my tears. I sweep through cities, and run my fingers through grass and graze rocks with my strength. I throw balls across fields, grow trees from seeds. And even if there is a part of me that is forever held suspended over the world, I am free to roam the world.

Eventually, I return to the two chunks of land I wanted to hold onto so long ago. Rolling hills and a churning harbour. And even though it is not massive, or populated, or famous, it is mine. That is enough.

The wind, they call me. The wind and the rain and the storm. Once I sweep past to reveal the sky and the sun, I stare up at myself and remember I had never really been Cloud at all, and just because I realised once the land opened my eyes, doesn't mean there hadn't always been a part of me that had craved this wildness.

I am Wind. And this land is my home.