

I remember when I first saw the Sun.

It was only a dot in the dark, but I craved more. It grew until it consumed everything. The bright, golden world was nothing like my damp cradle. Around me stood the tall ones, ancient oaks with green leaves trembling in the wind.

Do not ask which was my mother. I never knew.

Days passed, and I was pleased with this warm, green world. But one night, before the Sun returned, men came. They worked in a rhythm I still remember. Axes rose and fell. So did my companions. Eventually, they all cracked and collapsed. I was too small to do anything.

The men left and took their bones with them. I was alone. Only then did I learn how vast the sky was. My home became a grave, stumps remained where giants once stood.

In the gloom, a bird came. He had beautiful eyes and an ominous call. I liked him, and he liked me. He visited night after night, resting on my arms.

One day I grew strong enough to hold my first finch. A boy came too. He found me among the stumps and returned again and again, sitting beneath me, listening as I sang in the wind.

We both grew. Soon he stopped coming.

When he returned, a woman stood at his side. My leaves were falling, but I still sang. They laughed beneath me as my gold drifted down. When night fell, he carved into my trunk. I didn't understand the marks, only the pain. They smiled anyway.

I never saw them again.

Time carried me upward. I grew tall like those before me.

One night, I felt the earth tremble. I had never felt this before, and my old bones shook as though I were a sapling again.

Over time, orange light replaced the dark. I learned to enjoy it.

The night bird never came back.

One storm tore my oldest branch away, leaving a wound in my side that the men gawked at. The men took the fallen limb, and I never saw it again.

One night, the earth trembled. Smoke filled the air though it wasn't dawn. Men crept through the streets. Others hid. Then new men arrived with roaring beasts that choked the sky. They dragged more men and lined them up.

Silence followed. A different night bird came, crying softly among the ruins.

Long after, a man came. He was weak. He leaned against me, tracing the old scar the boy had carved. The scar I had forgotten.

He let out a terrible sound. I listened.

After he left, I was alone again.

Eventually, the men returned and rebuilt. One day, they gathered around me. I understood their intentions.

I was wrong.

Instead, they placed stones around me, as if I might leave. They laid a path at my roots.

Machines came, loud and restless. Not as loud as the axes, but loud enough that the night bird has not returned since.

Word Count: 500