

### **All the Little Places**

I always loved to watch the people as they moved. As I sat so close, yet never close enough, and observed the way they spoke or the way their body language gave away more than their words ever would. Those days were always treasured and yet with them there was always a tinge of sadness. I would never be a part of that life or that world. It all seemed so simple and carefree. Humans had things so easy, everything was laid out in order before them. All they had to do was walk the path they chose.

Please do not mistake my words for my feelings. I am grateful for the lot I was given. I was placed in a most revered position and I would never openly complain about what was so graciously handed to me. That would be wrong, a betrayal to my maker and my master. My master deserved someone much better than me, I would never be good enough for the life that was given to me. I am one who covets that which they do not have, I am one who pines and sighs over a world that cannot possibly compare to the one I experience everyday. No I have never been worthy of what I have.

I digress. My own self hatred, though well deserved in my eyes, was never looked upon as a welcome thing in the eyes of my Master. Though try as I may the thoughts always creep back in. Yet for today I must hide such thoughts. Today, of all days, my duties must be fulfilled without error or the delicate balance my precious humans so dearly depend on would be tilted too far and their world would fall into chaos. If anything caught and held my attention it would be the safety of the world I can never join.

I lifted slightly from my perch over Millennium Park, stretching my legs and pushed off from the puff of white below me. I let gravity take over for a moment as the wind rushed against my face and whistled in my ears before I let my wings spread and catch me mid free fall. I had yet to find a feeling that could compare to the sensation of your stomach dropping out and the world

zooming up to meet you. It created such an adrenaline rush that some, of my race, would call me addicted. I tended to disagree, calling it sport.

Most of them were too old to understand the way a mind like mine worked. Although most my age tended to avoid me as well. I had always been the bad egg or the ugly duckling. I am the odd one out for my people. The only one who has accepted me is my Father and there were times I felt he would give up on me as well, though it hasn't happened yet.

I shook my head to clear it again. I needed to focus on my current assignment before I got too lost in my own world. The humans were having one of their perfect days today. The weather was a perfect mixture of sun and wind to drive them all to the outdoors like cattle to the fields. Blankets dotted the park as many sunbathed and ate their lunch in t-shirts, shorts and flip flops. They never paid much attention to the energies around them and that was where we came in. My people have been the protective barrier between the humans and chaos for as long as the human race has existed, for as long as the records were kept.

We were sent to protect them from their own ignorance and from the evils that plagued this world. Things had not always run so smoothly though, meteors rocketing towards earth, the ice age, or the black plague were times when our people had failed in their livelihood. We had always regained our rightful place as protectors though. We were never defeated for long, we always regrouped to take on the enemy again and each time we won back our world.

I had been present for two of those three events, I was young for my people though. The old ones always had the best stories, they knew of life before this Earth. They were around for the Great Wars and the start of a new order that brought about this fragile race and their equally fragile planet. If there was anything the old ones were good for it was their tales of the old order and the way things had worked before the Great Wars.

History always had a way of repeating itself though and today was no exception. It

seemed there was a war brewing, the energies had been moving, multiplying and causing more problems for the human race than was normal. These subtle changes had become so much so that human news and scientists began blaming global warming, criminal behavior, and religion for their problems.

Those were problems the humans could face and even try to change because they would never accept that what came at them now they were helpless to challenge. Their hope now lay in the hands of my people and our defense of this planet.

It seems that after all these years the human race was pulling itself away from what it once knew so long ago. When the human race had first began they had known of us, had taken our guidance seriously and understood that some things were beyond their small world. Over time that connection had been lost, whether through their own evolution or through our inability to work within the realms of their religions and self-righteous ideals, not even the old ones remembered what had divided us so long ago.

The human race was now securely locked within its religions, wars, governments, and materialistic goals. There are very few in this age that can see us and even fewer that understand what we are when we are seen. Most of us, if seen, are relayed in tales of having seen an angel, spirit, demon or god. This most usually brings about a renewed faith in some non-existent deity most of them worshipped in some form or another. Of course that deity, in half of the world religions resembled the human race perfectly. It was such a ridiculous notion, most of our people find it to be disgusting, I thought it fascinating and rather comical.

The human race truly has me captivated on all levels. Which explains why I felt their protection was so important. I would not allow the destruction of something I had not yet had ample time to observe and study, especially when that something held so much of my attention.

If I ever found myself satiated on my studies of them, maybe then I would not care so

much whether they lived or died. Until then they had a firm place in my thoughts at all times of the day.

“Amae! How long have you been here with your head in the clouds? We have a job to do sister, let us move with haste, there is not much time!” A voice shocked me out of my reverie. I grimaced at my failure again to keep focused. I would once again be poked fun at for being the daydreamer.

I could feel him before he leapt for me and with a swift duck he flew, hands outstretched, right through the place where my head had been a moment earlier. He chuckled as he caught himself and flipped around to face me.

“Always you know before I hit you! One of these days Amae, you will not be so lucky! Come now, Father sends me to perform your duties and it is a good thing I have come or you would still be with your head in the clouds!” With a quick twist my brother was now gliding serenely towards downtown Chicago as I trailed just a few feet behind. Experience had taught me that he would take any and all opportunities to knock me around, my guard never faltered around him these days.

He had one thing correct though, haste was of essence now. I had lingered too long, giving us very little time to complete what I was sent to do. According to the Elnas seer there was a particularly nasty energy making its presence known by the Union Station. Our involvement meant that this particular energy would soon become powerful enough to start more than fights or bad weather. Death would be certain if it was not stopped, it would start slow and grow as human bloodshed fed its powers.

We landed quickly, amongst a crowd of humans all pushing to get either to or from work. They took no notice of my brother and I, though they moved around us subconsciously, as wings were folded and bows were drawn. Our work rarely required stealth or secrecy since we were not

normally seen and it had been ages since any of our opponents had caused enough of a scene to be noticed by the humans. Yet though they could not see us they always managed to move around us, as though somewhere deep within them they knew we were standing there.

Of course this is another part of my study of the human race but that is for a later time and a different discussion.

We advanced with silent signals, my brother had grown quiet and serious, no trace of the playful jokester remained when he slipped into his duties. Sometimes I wondered why such a drastic change occurred within him at these times. Does he not realize that all things in life are just as serious as the fight we were about to enter? My brother, Adan, was much too naïve for my tastes.

Energies, for the Enlas people, could be noticed in several different ways. Some of them had a specific odor or an aura that stuck to the places they had touched. This particular energy was simple to find with our eyes for it left a navy colored trace on all things it touched.

As the trace became more frequent we knew that we had found the trail to where it would undoubtedly be hiding from us now. Of course if we were able to encounter energies by those two markers, then they had their own methods of discerning us through our smell. I liked to call both markers survival instincts. Though there have been many a time I wished some spirits did not have them. It only made it that much more difficult when they knew we were coming for them.

Adan beckoned me forward into a dimly lit storage room in the back hallways of the station. As we prepared ourselves for the quick fight ahead a loud crash echoed through the small space. Both my brother and I looked toward where the sound originated. We watched in silence as one of the janitors, with a broom and bucket of broken glass in his hands, turned the corner and stumbled down the hallway at an agonizingly slow pace before finally passing out of our

sight.

Now was our time to destroy this thing, before it grew to something we couldn't handle on our own. As we stepped into the darkened space I widened my eyes and let my vision adjust to the subtle changes in color. The only way to know this particular energies exact location was to find the highest concentration of trace.

I whipped out one of my arrows and pulled my bow taut before letting loose the deadly weapon into the darkest corner of the room. A low hiss filled the air around us and the spirit shimmered into our vision as the poison I had placed on the tip spread around it's essence. Adan stepped forward then and shot of one of his own arrows into the shimmering mass. A screech replaced the hiss while the essence squirmed and fought against it's own demise.

“It is done little sister, let us return to our father and declare the good news.” Adan moved out of the room but I lingered behind for a moment and watched as the spirit squealed out it's death. The room grew silent after a moment and the creature slumped to the floor.

“Why do you do it?” I whispered into the darkness. Always at the end of a fight I found it necessary to ask of them why they chose such a path of chaos and evil. What drove them to commit to such a dirty life? My ears picked up the rasping breaths as the spirit tried to push out the words before death took him.

“It's n-not a ch-choice,” the words came out in a rush and he sucked in another rasping breath, “y-you un-derstand... Chaos... bir-thright...” that was all that he seemed to be able to push out as a sigh escaped and then he was gone. I moved back a step but watched as a vapor replaced the shimmer that had illuminated his form. My shoulders slumped in defeat, this spirit, as many others had pointed out, was right. I understood because my life had never been my choice either.

“Sister! Amae! Come, we must go to Father!” I turned reluctantly to face my, once again,

jokester brother. As I stepped into the better lit hallway I let my wings unfurl and stretch out to rid myself of the dank feeling that plagued me in the moment.

“Coming brother.” I sighed as I rounded the corner and almost ran right into him. His eyes narrowed in playful suspicion as he punch my arm in a way he believed was gentle. I winced internally but was careful to avoid any outside reaction as those only ever caused more teasing than normal.

“Why linger so long in such a dark place? Surely your head cannot hide in the clouds there?” I ignored his question and motioned for him to continue on so we could return home to our Father. My brother was never one to understand the philosophical debates that were hosted in my head. He accepted our people and the life we were born into without any desire to know what we may be missing outside of it. He was steady, like my father, in his belief of the guilt of the spirits and they were certain that punishment to the spirits was just.

I, on the other hand, am not so sure. My own studies on the spirits, my own questioning, has given me insight on why they do what they do. I have come to the conclusion that over 75% of the spirits I came in contact with did not want the life that had been chosen for them. Over half of the armies chaos that gathered were unhappy with their lot, just as I was.

There had been spirits who had begged for forgiveness, some begged to be set free but the most we could do was send them on to another life through death, the risk being they would end up with the same lot in life. This end result always saddened me for these spirits did nothing to deserve such a cruel hand being dealt to them. It was the same in that I was not worthy of the position I was given, yet life never had been fair.

Our trip was a quick one and my brother was overjoyed to give my father the good news. I merely stood to the side as Adan recounted our heroic battle, which in my eyes was not that heroic. He, of course, told our Father of my daydreaming and how I could have cost them the

lives of many humans because I could not get my head out of the clouds.

“Amae.” My Father's voice was condescending and heavy with annoyance, “You do realize your actions now give me no choice.” I hadn't much been paying attention to Adan's discussion with our Father and my head shot up as he said my name. I wanted to interrupt, to ask for him to forgive me, though I saw nothing wrong in my actions.

“I do not wish to make such a harsh decision Amae, but there is nothing to be done to prevent it. I have sheltered you since you were born but now you must take responsibility. I am sending you to the New Order for a time. Maybe they can teach you discipline.” Now I have found my attention caught and held. My Father wished to send me from the humans I so ardently protected and studied. Did he not know the pain and suffering this would cause within me?

“Father please, I can change, I know I think too much. I can stop thinking, I can work hard. Please do not remove me from your side.” His harsh features softened at my words but I could see his determination, I would have to go no matter how I begged and pleaded. I had reached my limit and it was Adan's fault for telling Father of my most recent slip up.

“My mind is made up. Go now.” I turned away, my shoulders slumped in defeat as my brother merely grinned at me, he was a glutton for watching me be punished. I unfurled my wings quickly and leapt from the stone foundation at my feet.

The wind was heavenly against my skin as the earth flew by beneath me. So many humans would beg to be able to fly, just for one day. How easily I take such gifts for granted. Now, even my Father gives up on me and has banished me from his house. My Father was one of the old ones, he knew of the ruthlessness of the Order and yet he sends me there now.

I felt a sharp pang in my heart as I mulled over all the activities and changes I would be missing within the human race I protected so fervently. Yet I could not disobey my Father, I was



bound by the very oaths I had spoken upon my entrance into my birthright. I landed swiftly back in the middle of Millennium Park then, choosing to spend the evening before my departure with the humans I had protected for so long. There were many that still lay out upon their blankets with their children and friends, while others had left to finish their work days or explore the city.

They were all so very new to the world they inhabited. I have seen so many generations of humans come and go with their changes in beliefs and values. After so long watching them I had thought I would have the answer by now but it seemed I was wrong. I never seemed to find the right answer with them. Humans have always been rather selfish creatures, beautiful but selfish, and yet their ability to adapt and survive within the world is almost unheard of in the New Order.

They are powerful in ways you would not expect and there has been many a time where they have been underestimated by Chaos. Sometimes my race is not the only one to fight against him, sometimes the humans fight too in their own ways. I spread out my wings as I mulled through the grass at the park before finding a larger open area and laying down to soak up what was left of the sun. I turned my head slightly to watch a family I knew all too well that gathered around a blanket to my left only to find one of the young children staring at me in open curiosity.

I lifted one hand to wave at her and she giggled before jumping up onto her small feet and waddling over to me. She was a beautiful little girl, a product of good genes, with blond curls that bounced everywhere as she waddled and big green eyes. I reached out a hand as she got closer and she lifted one child-like arm to touch me.

“Hello Anabelle.” She giggled again, not surprised at all that I knew her. I was Anabelle's imaginary friend as her mother seemed to like to call me. Her mother couldn't see me but Anabelle babbled on about me all the time and so I became the imaginary friend. One day I knew she would no longer be able to see me but I had been hoping if I stuck around that I could

change that. Now my Father was sending me away and Anabelle would forget about me as she grew up and grew out of 'imaginary friends'.

“Ama!” She trilled with a huge grin on her face. She had been picking up on language rather quickly these days but she still had trouble pronouncing everything correctly. Anabelle's mother looked over at her daughter for a moment before turning away to tend to her youngest son.

“Would you like to play tag with me?” I inquired and I had to laugh as her eyes lit up in excitement. Anabelle loved to play tag and she would play it no matter what the time of day. She was practically jumping around in her excitement as I stood and folded my wings in. She looked up at me with a mischievous smile on her features before smacking my hand lightly.

“YOUR IT!” She yelled before bursting into a fit of giggles as she ran towards her mother, around the blanket, and towards another blanket where a couple was laying together. I chuckled as I took off after her, keeping me pace purposefully slow to keep the game interesting for her. She would squeal and giggle every time I got close but she always managed to get away. When I finally let myself catch her she had fallen into another fit of giggles so we lay down flat in the grass as she caught her breath.

“Ama why are you sad?” Her angelic little voice broke me out of my thoughts and I turned to look at her only to find myself staring into her worried expression. Children could be so intuitive sometimes. I sat up and pulled Anabelle into my lap to hug her while I tried to come up with a good answer. Her little arms wrapped around me and squeezed as hard as a four year old could, almost protectively. I smiled before turning her so I could explain face to face that I had to leave.

“Anabelle, Ama has to leave for a little while. My father is sending me away for a time so you wont see me until I come back.” Anabelle watched me seriously as I tried to explain simply

what was about to happen. She didn't seem sad as what I said registered and I was glad that she seemed to accept it.

“Like Mommy says Daddy went away for a'hile and we see him in he'van?” I could feel the hurt weigh down on me as Anabelle brought up her father. It had been hard on her mother when her husband had died but for Anabelle the idea was that her father wasn't gone forever. She would see him somewhere else, some place called heaven. Anabelle didn't really understand what that was but I knew that it meant a lot to her to think that she would see him later.

“Yes, just like that, but I will come back to see you. You don't have to come see me okay?” She nodded and smiled before standing up to return to her mother.

“Don be sad. You'll hav' lots of fun dere. Mommy says he'van is a happy place.” She patted my arm lightly before waving at me and then running back over to her mother to tell her that Ama, her imaginary friend, was going to heaven like Daddy. I sighed as my heart tugged at my conscious, protesting the separation from someone I cared for so much.

Yes, I studied the human race but in this generation I had found a little girl who loved me and thought of me as her best friend. She was the one true reason I found this world so enticing, she was what kept me here, within my birthright. Yet now was the time my father chose to banish me. Anabelle would grow up and forget about me as the years passed. I couldn't be sure how long I would be gone for but I knew this trip had the possibility to bury my friendship with her.

I got up then, walking slowly away from Anabelle's blanket and only allowed myself to look back as I lifted into the air. Anabelle had been watching me and again her smile appeared as she waved to me and then turned back to her mother, who was picking up their blanket to go home. I let the wind once again sooth me as it blew heavily against my skin, the world felt a little bit darker as I made my way back to my father and my banishment.

I landed lightly on the foundation and entrance to our abode before entering my father's

study. I did not announce my presence, nor did I look up to see my father. I merely stood rigid, looking at the floor as I spoke.

“I am ready for my punishment, as you command Father.”