

What the Earth Hides

The characters want to find what is beyond the barrier of the world that they live in. So they break past it and unearth what remains behind it. Also, in the story the earth is being destroyed which is supposed to be a humorously literal take on it being "unearthed".

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."
-John Muir

Jane; 2 weeks before the fall of the barrier

Sometimes I hear the earth sing to me. Not the spirits singing in the wind or swimming in the rivers, but the whole earth. It isn't a melody and it isn't a rhyme. I hear the earth singing to me in the absolute silence that I find in rare moments when I'm at the tallest point of the trees or when I swim to the bottom of the lake. One day I asked my dad if the earth ever sang to him too. His response was measured and solemn, "The earth stopped singing to me a long time ago, kid."

The pine needles stuck to the bottoms of my wet feet as I climbed up the sturdy branches of the tallest pine tree I could find. I made my way to the top and sat in the complete silence that it offered, nature's song tugging at something deep in my soul. The view my position in the tree offered me presented the entirety of our village and the whole surrounding forest. Here, you could see the thick fog that made up the barrier around it, something we had accepted and learned to live with. I've spent hours and days and weeks sitting and staring at the barrier. Never have I wanted to cross it, but it's always stirred my imagination and made me think in ways that nothing here ever could. Even the wisest of the elders in our village could not say with certainty what the earth was hiding, and that made me satisfied in just the slightest to know that the unknown could still humanize even those we regarded the highest. But besides humans, even the spirits wouldn't tell us what lurked beyond. That was the agreement of our harmonious life with mother nature's spirits; we give back to them all we can, and they prevent us from leaving our little oasis without telling us what we were missing out on. Not that we would ever have a want to leave, at least I never have. If only I knew how wrong I really was.

Jane; 1 week before the fall of the barrier

For as long as I have lived, every person has treated the spirits with nothing but respect and kindness, and received just that in return. So when I hear my mother and father talking in hushed whispers with some others about what would be necessary in order to remove them, I am hit with no honest emotion except for confusion. Not even anger, because I must have misunderstood what I was hearing. I ran out and to the figure laying across the grass behind our house, my older brother Sam. Instead of saying anything, I just lay there for a few moments and enjoy the silence. It's not the same silence of the earth's song, but it is still heavy and calm.

Finally, I break it.

"Sam? What do you know about what dad was talking about removing the spirits?" My voice is so low and most spirits aren't even out this time of night, but I'm still afraid that they can hear me. Sam sighed and sat up straight,

"Jane, they're only trying to think about what's best for everyone. I know they didn't want you to know yet because you wouldn't like it."

"Know *what*?" I begged.

He leaned in so he could speak even lower,

"They think that the spirits are keeping something from us. Something remarkable that lays beyond the barrier. And if we remove the spirits, there will be nothing preventing us from walking right through that barrier and conquering it."

I could only sit still and listen to my breaths as I tried to think about what he was saying. It could not be that people really thought we were being deprived of anything here? The spirits gave us life, and without them we would have nothing.

"No, Sam, you're wrong."

"I'm sorry Jane."

I really wished Sam was lying, but I don't think that's something he has ever done in his life. We both lay back down in the grass as confusion still clouds my head and I try to swim through it.

"Hey Jane," he breaks the silence, "guess what I think?"

"Hm?"

"I think that you've got more freckles on your face than stars in the entire sky."

And even though I haven't yet surfaced from my swim through confusion, I start to laugh. We sit and laugh so hard and I've never felt sad and happy at the same time but the laughter tugs on my soul, and so I know it's ok.

Jane; Two days before the fall of the barrier

Everything that Sam had told me was right, and I expected as such. Not that I understood why even in the slightest way, but that was something he never could have made up. I just never expected him to join them in their efforts to do so. We sat in our central town building, a place where the spirits could not reach us. Plans were explained and enthusiasm was growing. In two days, we were to drive the spirits that held us captive from this land and we would take over all that surrounded us. We would poison the rivers and scorch the forests, that would ensure our victory. The support seemed so unanimous, so when I spoke up for the first time when there was a sliver of silence, everyone looked shocked. I asked if we were doing the right thing. If harming those that protected us our whole lives was really going to gain us anything. Maybe it was because I was young and they saw me as naive, or because everyone grew weary of opposition in fear of the idea that they would be targeted along with the spirits, or maybe it was as simple as the fact that everyone wanted this, but I got nothing except for stern looks and laughs. I was then promptly ignored and the conversation continued. There was nothing I could do to change their minds, and I just had to hope that there was some unseen silver lining in all of this.

I climbed my tree for the last time that night and tried to call the earth's silent song to me. Maybe if I could find a way to sing back, I could warn it and maybe at least some could be saved. Minutes passed before I felt that tug on my soul. Silent and so steady. Shutting all else out, I tried to tug back, pull the earth to me this time. *Please*, I silently begged, *please do not let them take you*.

Jane; The day of the fall of the barrier

Scattered and frantic like ants scattering from their small huddles when the first drops of rain fall, those of us not fighting the spirits ran up the side of the big mountain, the seemingly only remaining sanctuary as it was high enough from the fires and away from all the falling trees. I look out and cry as I watch the boy who I once called my brother scorch the land that gave him his life and food and shelter. But my tears are not enough to put out the flames that burn through not just the trees I climbed in and the grass reeds I ran through, but also burn through that small tug in the bottom of my soul that would pull me across worlds when the earth would sing to me. My tears were not enough for that and there was nothing I could do as I pressed my knees to my forehead and squeezed my eyes as tight as they could, begging for that silent song to return to me.

Gleeful hushes spread across the group and filled the thick air as I opened my eyes and raised my head to match the horizon that spread across. Men had stopped fighting. The

remaining spirits had fled at our hand. The barrier was lifted. The trees were gone. The lake was dry. It is silent now. But not any kind of silence I like. It is far, far from the silence of the earth's song. I didn't think it was possible for silence to be so cold. And so as we turn to find what awaits us in the promise of the tomorrow that followed the greed we had today, we find all the land as far as we could see barren. Nothing but pale dirt and ash and the stripped sky consumed all that could be seen on the land we were so sure contained the secret to prosperity. Our mother earth had not been depriving us. There was no paradise they were trying to keep us from; rather we were living in the last paradise on earth. We had demanded more from earth that was just trying to save us, and it was now revealed what our relentless need for more had finally created for us.

Earth; One day after the fall of the barrier

I have tugged on the string upholding man's giant veil, and I have revealed the ugly truth that they can be greedy and blind and afraid creatures. But still, I can't help but think back to the young girl and how her big, curious eyes were the same green as the trees that she climbed. And how there were threads of her dark hair still caught in the wind and how her freckles matched that of the stars in the sky. Caring, not greedy; eyes wide open, not blind; and never afraid to listen a little harder when the same song that drove so many others away called to her. And so I know I must give man a second chance. But this time they cannot burn me with their heated fires. And they cannot cut down every last tree I have offered. And they cannot sicken the waters I have gifted them. And this time they must not make the mistakes that they know will hurt them. Man cannot search for answers or purpose within themselves. They must turn outwards to listen to the song that I sing to each of them. They must embrace the devotion that I will match with theirs and then will they find all beauty in their lives to be unearthed.