

LITTLE BIRD

By Jesikah Sundin

Gnarled vines hung above me and passed in and out of focus. My waking eyelids fluttered as I craned my neck to better see my foreign surroundings. Walls constructed of woven vines and thatched leaves framed the room, creating dappled light. Above me, purple trumpet flowers dotted the cavernous ceiling and quietly hummed a soft melody in the breeze.

I dug my elbows into the soft animal hide on which I lay and sat up. Muscles shaking, I pushed up only to cry out as hot pain seared down the length of my back.

“Gentle, little bird,” a voice soothed from the shadows. “You will tear your mended muscle and wing. And then how will you fly away?”

The house made of trees seemed to sway in response to the crackling voice. I turned my head toward the voice and stifled a gasp. An elderly woman crouched upon a stool wearing little more than leaves and tattered weaves made from fibrous roots. Wrinkles carved time into her bark-hued body in concentric circles as though she were formed from the trees that housed her. Unlike the violet glow of augmented eyes possessed by the giant man on the beach, the old woman’s eyes were as green as an old-growth forest and equally ancient.

“My name is Helenea, and I am not a bird,” I rasped in reply. “Nor can I fly.”

“The Pétomai rarely do.”

The tree-woman stretched out long limbs and crept closer with waddle-like footsteps. Her back curved with the knots of age. Long dark hair, tangled with vines, reached to her waist. “They lost their song to the moon and sun long before my roots settled in Avalon. Do you want to sing, little bird?”

“Why should I sing?” I clenched my teeth to hold back the forming tears. “My clansmen are no more. They were slaughtered by the River Tribes soon after the magnetic shields dropped. Their feathers plucked for trade and ceremonial robes!” Pain tangled through my back with each angry heave for breath. “The Maiden Wind told me to run and so I did. But I escaped only to be tortured by Dezialean Herders.”

The tree-woman did not speak right away. Rather, she stretched over where I lay until her body shaded me from the golden light pouring in from the crude window across the room. My pulse quieted almost immediately. Even more so when the purple trumpet flowers resumed their gentle lullaby from above while a cool breeze blanketed my flushed skin.

With a summer smile on her lips, the tree-woman traced a stick-like finger along the curve of my cheek.
“Only when you can sing a mourning song during moonrise will you be able to fly away, little bird.”

I found that I could not reply. The crackling flutter of leaves and flowersong carried me back to sleep.



www.jesikahsundin.com

“Little Bird”

Copyright 2017- Forest Tales Publishing