

Karl-Erik

Short Story

The rain came down in torrents, cascading icy rivers over my sweltering flesh. The saturated air smothered my blazing lungs, and the zephyrs of air pressed the blackened smoke from my stifling surroundings. I am alone.

Molten shards of the vessel I arrived in have been sprayed in all directions. The heated radiance, the spray of water, and the lush of the wild all created an enigmatic fusion of colors. My mind is free! Free from the confines of agonizing rules and excruciating tasks. Now *I* am free!

When, where, how, it does not matter, for I am free. This is true happiness; independence from any other who may wish to impose themselves upon me.

From the dissipating smoke I can smell the sodden earth, mineral rich water, and the sweet aromatic pollen of the tropical blooms. What's this? There is another smell, behind the curtain of the others... metal, but not of with what I arrived, more natural, blood. That smell, that invigorating smell of blood, it churns my bowels every time my nostrils are stimulated by it. I must find it.

The drooping foliage part for me without effort, and cover my trail with just as little resistance. I soon find myself before the source of the stimulating scent, a streak of blood untouched by rain, pointing to a hole in the forest underbrush. I pause over the streak to savor the scent before moving to the hole.

A ragged breathing is all I hear from where I stand, but below the leaves, lies a figure, slumped and still. It's a female bird of prey, I conclude this from her enlarged talons, hooked, powerful-looking beak, and even in such a dilapidated state, her dominant form.

The blood was apparently coming from her wing, a gash the length of my finger ran down the right wing. I have an idea, and it is to aid this creature, though against my instinctual desires, I will have this bird as my... familiar. I believe it is beneficial for my mental well being to have a companion, as I do not wish to endure these wilds alone, but To be my familiar, she will need a name," Leftwing" seems appropriate.

Leftwing's weight was bogged down by the rain, and she seemed uneasy about me, but she was too weakened to resist my assistance. I picked her up and moved her to the nearest dry area formed by the canvas of leaves above. Here I put makeshift wrapping around her right wing, aligned what felt like a broken bone, and tied a short tether to prevent her attempts to fly and further her injuries.

The rain has still not given up, after three days, but I have acclimatized both to it and the plantlife here. I have found several edible berries, fruits, and plants, based on the diet's of the smaller animals here, which have also proven edible. Leftwing prefers the long eared rodents; after I had given her the first carcass of one, she immediately became much more reasonable.

Today I had lengthened her tether, but she did not attempt to fly, so I assume she is still in pain. I had also discovered a game to play with her to pass the time between sunrise and sunset, I hide some food in one hand and some unedible content from the

same source in the other, I then hold out my clenched fists and get her to figure out which contains the food, she has yet to bje wrong.

Now day six, and the rain has only lightened to a drizzle, I find myself standing amid the stretched shadow of a ruined stone structure, reaching high above the treetops. Through the pale grey mist of rain, I can make out a set of steep steps leading to the top, at the top of which is a doorway into a darkened room. Making short work of the stairs, I enter the sheltered room. With no markings on the walls to depict any significance, and the architecture being a pyramid shape, I would have to assume that it had little, if any, importance and thereby will not be protected by the unlikely traps of legends.

The inside of the structure is dark but surprisingly dry, and at the rear of the room a set of stairs lead up to another floor. Undisturbed by weather, the stairs are solid enough for me to step on, and I soon find myself at their top. This new room is about twenty paces in diameter, has a stone ceiling, grey, and dry, completely sturdy, and the walls have openings every couple of paces. I am quite surprised by the lack of wind that comes through the small windows, only a slight draft, there is another draft as well, above me in the one corner of the room, I can see an opening, but not to the sky, the tunnel turns out from the building, always slanting away, a smoke hole? It must be, now that I look closer I can see that the ceiling slants towards the hole as well.

I believe this would make a better abode for Leftwing and I than the forest floor, which I can see from one of the windows; a small pillar of smoke is rising from the horizon of green treetops. I should return soon, the sun is setting.

The rain has finally ceased, but the air remains humid, the sky remains grey, and I am still surviving on my twelfth day in freedom.

The move from the camp was swift, and Leftwing is quite anxious to move again. Now I have set a bed for myself, a perch for Leftwing, a fireplace, a door to keep out predators, and a shelf for storing foods.

The next day, I used the hide of several animals and some plantlife to form a perch for Leftwing which I can wear on my shoulder, because I believe she deserves a place to sit that matches her noble heir, and what place could be better than my sholder?

Yesterday, I located a stream not too far from our new shelter, and it was inhabited by an abundant amount of fish. I caught about a dozen with my clawed hands digging deep into their flesh, killing them as I picked them up. I hung the fish from a beam I set up outside the windows, the beam angles downward from an upstairs window to an opposite downstairs window, I put the fish on at the top, they slide down on their own weight. I plan on drying the fish for an emergency, if one should arise, which brings me to today.

Today while I was seated upon the roof of the shelter, I spotted a glaring seam of crimson emerging from a point in the sky, the point seemed to be a descending ball of flame. The brilliant flare hurtled at an astronomical speed, to my dreaded surprise, it seemed to be heading directly at me. Could I outrun it? I, the one who no living thing can outrun? It would not be enough, for the impact crater alone would reach further than my sprint could take me. However, It soon thundered past overhead and collided with the horizon, launching a massive

amount of heated debris into the sky. It seems they have finally come for me, but at least, I am not alone.