A Wilderness of Life
Lodivine

Dedicated to Axel, an International Wolf Center ambassador wolf who passed recently.
May your wild spirit live on.

When cold winds push against the mountains and stormfronts blizzard, I sometimes hear the cry of a wolf and wonder why they howl. Sometimes their howl warns of danger. So when I hear it, I close my eyes and listen. Through the gales I make out a different song, both old and new, from a land of pure nature, a wilderness of life. This is no fairytale woods with dragons and knights to slay them. The glories of this forest are very real. They are wilds of Earth that shrink day by day.

In this forest a fox waits. Very shy, it lies in the ferns and dewy clearings, hoping for its prey to wander along. It hunts with respect for prey, and kills only what it needs. It brings this food back to a hollow where kits wait. They bounce, delightful little younglings, knowing only the sun. But the elder fox knows there is also shadow.

In this meadow, filled with golden grasses a rabbit hops, snacking on some greens. It is always watching the edge of the woods, knowing a silent hunter could be there. It watches the skies for birds of prey, turns at any snap of a branch. The rabbit gains much from always watching. It sees beautiful things that others don’t. It sees the world’s true colors, and knows they are changing.

In this gorge, whittled by the shallow river at its bottom, a cougar drinks. It sips from the river, always thinking, always questioning, as it must to survive. It suns itself on a warm boulder, carried by glaciers ages ago to this bank. It drifts into sleep, and dreams of stories passed down from elder to kit, from when the forests and skies went on forever. It wakes every day to find its well-guarded territory has shrunk, and smells something thick in the border meadows. It can hear it in the big metal birds that fly overhead, and can feel it cutting its bones.

In this sky, deep blue, an eagle watches the animals below with respect. When it sees prey, it swoops to give a quick death. It knows the animals have lived a good life, no matter how short or long, because of the gifts of this beautiful land. But now the land is dying. All the animals know. The same questions circle through their heads. How will they live? How will they protect their young? What are they fighting? Can they stop it?

In these mountains, great giants of rock, a wolf howls. It does not know its foe, but looks down at its pack- the ones it lives for - and knows they must stop it. It barks at its packmates, rallying them. It stands tall, its silvery-gray fur blowing in the wind. There is a storm coming to these forests and meadows, to the rocky river and its gorge, to the skies above, and even here, to the mountains. Home. A place of wilds that holds the animals here. The foxes. Rabbits. Cougars. Eagles. And wolves. Lightning flashes. The wolf gets a feeling in its chest that it hasn’t felt for a long time. It climbs to the top of its ledge and stands with pride and honor. It howls. It is not the howl, heard so many times, of pain, wondering, hopelessness. It is a howl that says ‘Here we are, still here, after everything that you’ve thrown at us. We are the wilds of this land. This wilderness is our life, and we will not let you destroy it!’

The barks of foxes, squeals of rabbits, screams of cougars, calls of eagles, and howls of wolves are joining together. Anyone can hear their message. I close my eyes and listen.