

Peace

The wind, holding its breath, waits; fearful. So too is silence, in its own peace, cleaved as a sword sharp enough to rend a soul in two parts leaves its sheath and shines blinding death in the sun, high above, with a single spot of darkness where a leaf blocks it. The wind moves it hurriedly away.

Cruel point aimed at cruel point, each waiting for the other to destroy the moss between in a flurry of steps, to rouse the fury of the wind and cast it down upon the rocks and the soil, and blow each to their demise.

An ear twitches in the tension. It is almost enough to play a chord, but the wind refuses to move lest it disturb a turbulent soul stronger than its strongest gale. The tune is cold vengeance, though both bear fur warm enough to weather its storm. Orange and orange, fox and fox, fire and fire, but their eyes tell a different story: green and taupe. One full of fury and death a thousand times over, ready to bury the world in its own waste and ashes; but the other is peace, patience, disdain, and a drop of the desire to punish.

Finally the wind draws its breath in slowly, cautiously, as one foot is raised and placed delicately back upon its pad. Its bearer brings the sword up to stop the reaction and does so with perfect time. The wind can almost be heard screaming at the cut, and the twang of steel on steel, instead of shattering the silence, cuts a clean line through that echoes off each tree in the forest, through the mountains around, and then back.

And then the storm comes. A dance of power and grace, of hate, of beauty; the silence can barely stand up to it, and the wind grows ever restless as stroke upon stroke parry one another to lead to the inevitable conclusion:

Failure. The wind, unable to contain itself, lets loose a single gale that puts both foxes off their step. The dance ends in cacophony, with swords clattering on the stones and dirt, beauty marred and edges dulled, falling down the hill.

On their backs, the warriors stare with dumb confusion. Surely one must be better, or luckier, or even stupider. The conclusion they face is not one they ever imagined: there is no conclusion, only failure of either to face the other with more skill or even more ferocity. Tempered hate against cold cruelty, and yet neither could find purchase. Together they stand, still staring after their lost weapons, thoughtless.

The wind, meanwhile, blows again, relieved that it need no longer hold its breath, and the leaves stir joyously in the breeze. Silence, now battered, a patchwork of noise, retires to its own time, or to death.

That leaves, in the old world, the failures of warriors who now stand side-by-side. The wind stirs their fur equally, makes their whiskers itch and their noses twitch at the smells of reality. One looks perplexed, the other confused, and they turn to look at one another for answers.

But no answers come, and they feel nothing more than embarrassment. What was a quest for vengeance has turned to pure folly, the remnants no more than greed. After trading sorrowful looks and shifting from foot to foot, they come to an unspoken repose. One bow, equally shared, brings joy to the wind, and the animals and plants all the same.

They move as one, taking hand in hand, and turn their backs on their steel. Together they go, down the winding path, with only the rest of their lives to come.

Now, I must ask: why can hate and cruelty realise their idiocy when you cannot?