

## Angel's Trumpet

It began with the journalist, then Jama and finally, Alta.

The journalist wanted a story. A photo paired with a few lines on a page that would bring him fame and fortune. And for that, he would do anything.

Disguising himself as a poacher was surprisingly easy. The, in his words, idiots still had not realised that there was no newcomer joining this season's hunt. But their idiocy worked out in his favour. As long as he stuck with them, he could get the story that he wanted – *Journalist uncovers an organised poacher organisation – Last survivors of a species driven to extinction by poaching – The face behind organised crime in the black market...* The titles were endless.

BANG!

A gunshot fired in the distance. He excitedly ran to see what caused this. 'Are they fighting among themselves? Already? Did someone have a sudden change of heart? They repented? Or was it money? No wait... could it be? They found and killed a rare animal on the spot? And I get to write about this? Amazing!! Joining them was the best decision ever!'

"S-so?... What... was it? The gunshot?" He managed to squeeze out with laboured breaths.

"Did you run here? Now that's a first".

"Of course I did! I was worried that something happened to one of the guys". That was a lie.

"Oh no need to worry, it was nothing. Happy fingers over here thought he saw a dangerous animal.

Can you believe it was actually a chicken?"

"...Huh?"

"Yeah, a chicken. But at least dinner is served?"

'A chicken? A FUCKING CHICKEN? These idiots!'

The gun flavoured chicken was begrudgingly delicious.

The next morning began in flames. Someone forgot to put out the campfire properly, a dry branch caught on fire, then another, then another, then another, and before dawn, the whole forest was no longer green, only red with a thick black smoke. It was the journalist. It was an accident, at first. The smell of the first burning bush woke him up. Immediately, he went to wake up the rest. They were all passed out drunk from last night's festivities, but a few slaps should've woken them up. However, just as he reached the first person, a thought passed through his mind. 'How newsworthy would a forest fire caused by poachers be?'

He retracted his outreached hand, packed his equipment in a safe place, moved his sleeping bag, and simply, went back to sleep. So really, it was an accident, he just, looked away.

They moved to a different region of the forest, higher up hill and about two days drive away from the fire.

"Psst"

The journalist turned to the voice. "What?"

"Me and some of the guys are about to, how should I say, ascend higher, wanna join?"

'Drugs?' Normally he'd say no but today, no this week was a good week. The fire burned harsher than he thought it would. The reporters ruled it as a natural fire caused by global warming. The hashtags #Americaisburning #Savetheearth have been trending ever since. And only he had the inside scoop on what really happened! With pictures and videos too! Truly, he could leave now and he'd get the fame that he wanted, but he decided to see this through.

"What even is this?"

"Datura or Angel's Trumpet. They're made from this flower that hangs upside down like trumpets.

Look” He showed the journalist a picture.

“They’re pretty”

“Right? And the trip they give you is amazing, better than fentanyl. You can’t find them in the wild anymore, so people grow them privately and make these babies”

He took it. The first hour was fine, he questioned if they had given him a placebo as a prank. But, by the second hour, the trees started talking. No, it wasn’t the trees, it was the sky. No, the moon or the sun? Maybe him. Was he talking?

“Do you understand the severity of your crimes?”

“Crimes? What crimes?”

“You burned them all, my creation”

“Your creation? God?”

“Something similar. So? Do you admit your guilt? Will you beg pitifully for mercy?”

“Why would I? It was just a bunch of trees”

“Lives were lost!”

“Nobody died, not even an injury!”

“No human life was lost, but lives were lost”

“The animals? So what?”

“Do you not value life?”

“If that life isn’t human then it isn’t worth anything. Besides, everything underneath the sun belongs to us, the plants, rivers and animals. How we decide to use or destroy our things is up to us”

“How arrogant. I’ll make you regret your words today”

He woke up the next day with a nasty headache. ‘Never again, those trumpets nearly killed me’ Around three days later he saw a pair of Bricknell’s thrush flying overhead. He went to take a picture. But, as he drew closer, he noticed that. The birds. They were talking.

Alta was a proud bird. His most prideful possessions were his beautiful voice, tender like the first rays of the morning sun but more powerful than the tune of a well-built organ, and his bountiful knowledge. Unfortunately, such a beautiful voice was a talent that could not be taught, but knowledge, knowledge could. So, when the time came to teach the young the way of the world, he gladly took on this task.

“Jama, do you know who the greatest creature on earth is? The one that stands above all life on this planet?”

“No, who is it?”

“It’s us, birds. In this world, only we are blessed with wings. Able to fly to all corners of the world without restriction and walk on land if we please. We choose when and where to breed and the insects and trees follow our cycles, giving us the food we need. In this cycle, we control everything.”

“What about humans? I heard they can fly too”

“Nonsense! They’re just sacks of meat forever glued to the land like the rest of them. They can’t fly! They require these metal junks to even reach a tenth of the heights we can. I admit they do seem to have some intelligence, but as long as they don’t have these wings, none of that matters.”

“Then how about them? Are they great too?” Jama pointed to a flock of wild chicken below.

“No, they’re even worse than humans. Born with wings but can’t fly. I don’t even consider them true birds.”

Before long, the sun was angry. Alta wasn’t sure when it started. When did the cool air turn hot? The coniferous trees scarce? And the insects, in hiding? The sun was angry, burning with an unforgiving rage, and Alta didn’t know why. They had to move, further upwards where the winds were cool. But as they moved the sun’s anger caught up with them, hot on their heels running to burn them. Their

fourth move ended up in flames. The sight was unbelievable, a burning hellfire that erupted overnight and a thick choking black smoke. Alta lost his voice, he could still speak but was now a songbird that could not sing, how pitiful. But at least he survived, the same cannot be said for some of the young. It was now their fifth move, far away from the fire but still in the same region. On this day, whilst foraging with Jama, he saw a human, following him. And strangely, it seemed that the human could understand him.

“What do you want?” Alta said this on a whim, not really expecting the human to respond, but it did. “Y-you... you’re speaking! You can speak! How is this possible? Am I still high?”

It was unsure how, but they ended up arguing about who was the superior being.

“You? A bird? I could backhand you right now and you’d die. Not even as big as an elephant nor as strong as a lion and you think you’re the centre of the world?”

“By that metric you are also not the world’s centre”

“Physical strength is not what decides this” the journalist said this with a sage-like tone.

“Exactly! It’s not physical strength, its these wings!”

“...”

“...”

“... PHAHHAHAHAHA OH MY GOD! That was amazing! My ribs hurt and I got it on camera too.”

“DON’T LAUGH!” Alta was red with anger and embarrassment.

“The talking Bracknell’s thrush. Not only do they have some intelligence, but they also mimic human traits and habits”

“Hey–

“The most shocking belief of theirs is that they are top of the food chain”

“I’m talking to you!”

“Their reason being that they have wings!”

There was a deeming feel to the way the journalist treated Alta, and Alta was for the first time, helpless to defend himself. So, he flew away with Jama along with a pride forever wounded.

After Alta and Jama’s sudden escape, the journalist rewatched his clips, over and over and over, each watch brought on a new kind of ecstasy. ‘I’m gonna be famous!’ He quickly sent this to his manager expecting them to share the same sentiments, however...

“You maniac what the hell did you send me?!”

“Didn’t you watch it?”

“I did! And I wish I didn’t! All I saw was you talking to yourself for ten minutes straight! Have you finally lost it?!”

“What?” He re-watched them again and this time, it was just him speaking. ‘Was the camera not strong enough to pick up the sound? But I clearly checked them before sending it? Wait...’ Amidst his ecstasy the journalist had forgotten one crucial thing. ‘Noone’s gonna believe them anyway, they’d think they’re edited’ Instead of fame he would face ridicule. Unless... he had more, concrete proof.

Upon returning to their flock, Alta and Jama were presented with grave news. They had to move again, but this time lower.

“You can’t be serious” there was pain and anger in Jama’s voice. He wasn’t sure who this anger was even directed at.

“It’s the only option, there’s less space and food for us further north. We have to go back down”

“But-

**BANG!**

A gunshot fired towards them. It was the journalist. A relentless chase began. No matter far the birds flew or how many months flew by, the journalist would always find them. It was clear how their lives would-

"-We need to fly higher!"

Oh?

"Jama we can't"

"Not north, higher. Straight up. Enough to reach the stars"

"What?"

An arrogant idea and foolish too.

"Alta it's the only way. If we fly up the human can't reach us, and the sun, we won't feel its anger anymore. We can takeover the skies even the sun and make that our new home."

"...Jama"

"IF WE REALLY WANT THIS TO STOP WE HAVE TO TAKE WHAT OURS!"

"Jama"

"ITS OUR RIGHT ITS WHY WE HAVE THESE WINGS!"

"JAM-

"-ALTA DO YOUR NAME JUSTICE!"

Once again, the journalist found them. This time Alta was alone. Turns out the first gunshot shot a tracker, it was on Alta, and finally, Alta was captured. Just as the journalist forced Alta into his cage, an animal jumped from the bushes and caused him to fall, it was a chicken. When he opened his eyes he couldn't move, surrounded by a field of Angel's trumpets. 'I thought you couldn't find these in the wild. He clearly... He? Who was He? Who told me that? Why can't I remember His face?'

Fear.

That is all he felt. As his blood nourished the plants, he could faintly hear the sound of trumpets.

'One hour. In one hour I will be sa-' A hot slimy rain drop fell on him, but the skies were clear.

In the sky Jama continued to fly higher. Truly he wasn't confident that he could pull this off, but, as the cold winds filled his lungs and the sun's hot rays became a distant past, he thought 'I can do this!' A plane ripped through the bird. It died instantly.

Bunch of fools.