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THIS LAND

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THIS LAND

Sierra Archer

There's this feeling that's taken up residence inside my soul. It's a desperate, passionate tugging of the heartstrings, full of yearning and excitement; tinged with melancholy and pensiveness. It runs its roots so deep that it feels as if I was born with it and only now it has awoken.

I look at our gently rolling foothills, complete with the strong oak, the sweet maple, the ever-shaking aspen, the assortment of larch and pine and laurel and sumac and hemlock. I watch the deep emerald transform to quaking bits of gold and flaming red and foreboding brown. Then bare, frosted with white, only to be brought back to life by the thawing and the melting and the warmth. The way the hills hide us away, creating a world in which we are safe from the world. We are as much a part of these hills as the roots of the biggest oak are woven into the earth.

I look at our persistent river, which flows from the smallest of trickles and grows into a force that is so strong that it can travel northbound before returning on its natural southern path. I've known its creatures, caught the clawed crayfish between my fingers and felt the tug of a carp dragging my line to the bottom. I've known only a portion of it, fishing and swimming and kayaking and it feels like a place one is drawn to. After all, without the river, there is no need for a port.

I look at the creatures and their emblazoned God-given glory. The stag, with its crown of bones in the beam of a spotlight, the bear with its elusive nature caught only on the rarest of summer evenings, the robin who brings the sign of new life with his wings, and the peepers that sing their ditties on the riverbed while lightning bugs dance on the breeze. Not to count out the quick-footed rabbits, the resourceful squirrels and mice, or the other skilled critters of the wood. It is

when I receive the rare chance of glimpsing an elk through a car window that I'm reminded of the oldness of this land, in the steady steps and bugling cry and the knowing way the antlers curve on the head of the wild ruler.

There is a feeling that runs so deep that I wonder if it'll ever run dry when I look at these things. A longing to satisfy it by looking for more. I want to see more, to see the gently rolling hills rise steadily into snow-touched mountains that kiss the sky. I want to see the calm roll of the river turn into white rapids running over the land in a hurry to spill into a vast lake. I want to see the animals in their last frontiers, with a solidarity that time has not erased. Oh, I want to see.

I am desperate to see what makes this land. I am longing for the Smoky Mountains, in their longevity and heritage. I am yearning for the Mississippi, in its power and undaunted stride. I want the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada,

the Grand Canyon and the plateaus and the mesas, and the buttes and the Badlands,
the lizards and cactuses and hawks and snakes,
the heartland, and the plains, and the tornados and the wild horses and the bison, and the trails,
the mountains, and the gullies, and the ravines, and the waterfalls, and the caves and the
mountain lions, and the wolves, and the sequoia, and the stars,
the tundra, and the midnight sun, and the snow, and the frozen lakes and the grizzlies and the
moose and the spruce and the mountain goats.

I want to see the Northern Lights dance in the sky.

I love my home, but I cannot help but long for a time that has passed, a time when I could've
looked upon this land, unhindered by the weight of concrete and metal and heat and smoke we
made. I wish I could have lived with the land, live beside snowy mountains and on stormy
prairies and under massive redwoods.

I wish I could've seen this land in its greatest form,

Untethered.

Untamed.

Untouched.

Unending.