

When You Listen | Casey Matthess

My feet, bare and calloused, dig into the sand while the breeze lifts smaller particles to dance off the cliff's edge and fall into the salty water. The skin that separates my bones from the earth, hardened and torn from listening to the stories of the soil that a year's worth of land may cover. The whispers of the wind fight against my straining muscles, aching, to prevent me from plunging into the frantic waves of the water beneath me.

I stand and *breathe*. Breathe in what the world sings to those who listen. I breathe in those long, grueling stories. And she tells me everything I need to hear.

The wind is more than a current that pushes and pulls, or a force destined to make leaves dance and water ripple. It is more than a breath that we draw into our lungs only to expel soon after. Likewise, the water is more than a force eager to wrestle and drown. It is more than a deep, unknown, and dark body. The water is more than a reflection. Fire is greater than destruction, heat, and burns. Fire feeds, it does not only devour. The soil is home to thousands of plants and animals alike. The soil is fuel and creation, never unwanted, never unused.

The world is a spirit and she has been calling my name for years. I can finally understand her. I can finally answer.

As my eyes rest and flutter shut, the melodies of the wind grow louder, transforming into a song so beautiful no instrument nor human could replicate, "I have waited for you, my darling."

An unforgiving tear rolls down my cheek. Sorrow does not weigh down my chest. Anxiety does not burrow in my stomach. Anger does not burn my ears. Yet, an unknown

relief rumbles through my spine, escaping through my fingers and my toes. The roughened skin on my feet feels no resistance from the sand anymore. My body— my soul— feels free.

