

## IN THE GRASS

There is a field mouse in the grass.

It skitters and jitters, a dusty brown comet of fur with a leathery pink trail streaking behind as it scampers through the green. The field mouse settles on a smooth gray stone, sitting upright on its hind legs. Its nose twitches and its stub clawed toes comb nervously through long needled whiskers as its hematite eyes, shining black and wet, quickly shift back and forth across the shrubbery.

There is a serpent in the grass.

Pale jade eyes trained forward ceaselessly, unblinkingly, forked tongue snaking out to taste the air in front of it, the serpent slides carefully through the field. Its scales shift and shine emerald and topaz amongst the blades, melting into the green as its muscled form coils and curves and winds its way ever closer to the stone, closer to the field mouse.

The field is silent, save for the gentle hiss in the wind dancing through the grass, blade on scale on scale on blade. The field mouse holds, frozen even as its nose still twitches.

The hissing wind presses in on all sides, and the field mouse's nose stops twitching. Its eyes scan the shifting blades dancing and swaying in the breeze, slowly tightening around it. All it sees is green, but the wind and the hissing stabs into its ears. It stays as still as the stone beneath it, holding, waiting.

For just a second, hematite is lit with a flash of brilliant

emerald and topaz.

In that second, there is nothing in the grass—no movement, no wind or sun hissing through the blades. The serpent is coiled into its fatal spiral, an emerald jaw hung open to reveal ivory needles in a garnet-studded maw, and the field mouse statuesque as if carved from the stone beneath it. The field is silent. Then the field mouse's nose twitches.

A hiss, a squeak. The shift of scale on blade on blade on scale, and the wet ripping of roughly torn flesh.

Silence, save for the gentle hiss of wind and sunlight. There is nothing in the grass—save for the coiled form of a dead serpent, its emerald and topaz throat torn through by stub clawed toes, and a trail of bloody paw prints leading away from it across a smooth gray stone.