

Excerpt from The Change Agents: Whispers in the Wind

Eliza followed a path away from the swimming hole and along the stream. She entered a gully that felt like a primeval rainforest, with immense trees and uneven rock ledges overhanging the path and trickling stream. Ferns, ivy, and hostas covered the gully floor, more remnants of the care this place received in its heyday. Filtered sunlight provided the only light this beautiful and peaceful area ever saw, making it smell of dampness. The songs of birds filled the air, many of whom flitted about overhead while others hopped on tree branches. Every once in a while, the high-pitched squeak of a chipmunk interrupted the songs, and Eliza saw the furry striped creatures darting along toppled trunks throughout the gully or stones along the stream.

Eliza passed two mangled bridges, whose wrought ironwork and sturdy stone had succumbed to the ravages of nature and time. She crossed the stream at the top of a waterfall flowing off a huge flat rock. A crack ran across it and the deluges of water from recent storm surge gradually forced each side apart from each other. More fallout from global warming.

She headed back downstream on another path that dead-ended shortly after it started. Eliza continued through muck and overgrowth until she arrived at the door of the mausoleum where the Captain instructed her to meet. Having visited this site a few times before, she wondered who rested inside since there were no markings on the exterior, and it sat apart from other burials. Built into a hill on the side of the gully, the mausoleum reminded her of a hobbit home in the Shire of Middle Earth. Even though the door wasn't round, she half expected Bilbo Baggins to open it and come out to pick up his mail.

Early for the meeting, she waited in front of the door, watching a flurry of iridescent dragonflies flitting in and out of the sunlight. They appeared black at first but changed to green in one view and shimmered to blue in another. Flying about randomly, they helped take Eliza's mind off the upcoming meeting. Nervous, she felt somewhat ludicrous to be here and tried to dismiss her doubts. She told herself she might as well explore the surreal invitation-nothing ventured, nothing gained.