Escape

By Kaija Winslow

The sky was a darkened blue the day everything changed. Everything was perfect before the humans came. The rivers ran smoothly and the lake was never flooded. The trees stood tall and proud, and the berry bushes were always full. But the humans came. The humans with their big ideas and the sticks that brought instant death.

That's how my brother died. We were fishing, and the humans killed him.
I was in the bushes when it happened. The boom and his shriek of pain before it was all silent. I watched the humans cross the river and laugh in triumph at their disgraceful kill. I watched them take the claws out of his paws, and the teeth out of his skull. I buried him that night. Right in the spot where it happened. I did not eat or drink for days after that night. Bears are noble animals. We do not kill for sport.

Unlike the humans. I had not eaten salmon in weeks. They overfish the rivers, they pilfer the berry bushes, and flood the lake with their floating noise makers. And now, even as I lay sleeping in my hidden cave in the high hill tops, I did not know when I would eat next.

The next morning, I was sitting on the bank of the river, next to my brother's grave, when I heard the thundering of hooves. Many hooves. More than an average migration. Then I saw them. The elk, the cariboo, the deer, the moose. All running. Every one of their eyes were glazed with fear. They were fleeing. That is what I should have done. Right there in that moment. I just watched them. But that night I could not stop seeing in my mind, the terror in their eyes.

I tried foraging. But what I saw the next day, I wish I hadn't. The humans killed a herd of four deer. I could not tear my eyes away from the horror unfolding before me. I had to leave the clearing. I have not gone back ever since.

Change is a funny thing. It can be bad, but it can also be good. I caught a trout and was about to eat it when I heard the humans. I looked up. The death stick was pointed right at my nose. I braced myself for the end. But I heard them shouting. I opened my eyes. Another group of humans were yelling at the first.
One of them, a female, grabbed the death stick and yanked it into her arms. She threw it into the river and yelled again. The mean group of humans left, and so did most of the second. The she-human looked at me. I looked at her. Our eyes locked. She smiled. I stood up on my hind legs. She looked frightened for a moment. But she relaxed. This gave me hope that one day I would escape.