

Pretty Owl Poetry

Issue 22 Summer 2019



Established in 2013, Pretty Owl Poetry is a shoestring operation based out of Pittsburgh, PA, where its small staff occasionally hosts the reading series POPpresents.



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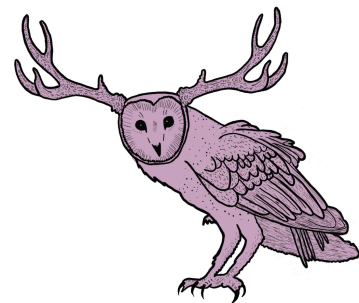
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Self-portrait as Vulture

Tyler Gillespie

I've never seen a man as beautiful
as a deer. I know *such* a poet
thing to say, but this morning

off road shoulder a deer hit
by late night driver or sunrise cruiser
who was texting or smoking

or drinking which I was doing
none of but wanted to so badly.
Felt woozy to see the deer:

Pile of fur & delicate bones.
Near my neighborhood
speckled cows graze in marsh.

Egrets & saw palmetto.
Hawks overhead.
Barbed wire keeps me out.

Some days three Sandhill cranes,
tall grey birds with teenage legs
& bright red foreheads.

Some days those cranes make me
wait longer at the stop sign
than usual as they cross the street.

My friend told me those birds
mate for life & only ever have
one baby. That's why we

always see them in triads.
My friend then said the cranes
had almost disappeared from Florida –

only like eight or so left in the state.
So some scientists quarantined
those eight or so cranes & waited

for them to mate: a courtship as old
as dinosaurs because birds
of course were once dinosaurs.

The cranes mating dance a jump
some spins & thrown sticks.
It's said their mating call can be heard

over two miles away. "Their population
stabilized," my friend continued, "but,
come to think of it I don't know

if that story is actually true."
These cranes used to scare me
because of their height

& their don't-mess-with-me faces.
Lately I've been thinking *what happens*
when one of those birds dies

gets hit by a car a driver
texting or smoking or drinking.
The driver stops puts down

the drink & ashes stops
the car drags crane into ditch
then keeps it moving

as the crane's widowed soulmate
or its offspring feels shock & must later
deal with the grief of such great loss.

Lately I've been thinking of you.
& I probably shouldn't tell you this:
I hit one of those cranes.

I'm just kidding! You *know* I'm not
a goddamn monster though I did get
out of my car to look into the deer's eyes.

They were bluer than yours
which I hadn't thought possible.
I stood on the other side

of the road. Couldn't get any closer
because vultures surrounded the deer.
Vultures that hang around dumps

& circle the houses of old people.
I've never seen a man as beautiful
as a deer & I've never seen a bird

as happy as a vulture. I mean
really those birds flapped
their fucking wings & cawed

their fucking caws like it was
the bird party to end all bird parties.
& suddenly I was jealous of them.

Those ugly happy birds knew
exactly what they had been put
on this earth to do. Knew

exactly what they were
supposed to do & they didn't
care at all who saw them.

Pain Is Pain Expressing Itself as Pain

Emily Kendal Frey

My default assumption

Is that people are mad at me

For taking up space

I don't think this is incorrect

What's changing

Is what I do about it

I walk down the same blocks

Back and forth to my office

Streaking moods

Like a goldfish

With shit hanging off

What can I do

If you do or don't love me

I sense the summer

Will be devastating

I got my birth certificate

In the mail from the state of Virginia

Was surprised

By the purity of happiness

At knowing my birth time

Maybe I am lovable

Now

A Virgo moon

A pattern extending

To a visible edge

Remission

K Dulai

Stage IV

All the mothers are dying. We gather for shivas, bhogs, larkspur-filled wakes. Our mothers' stolid beauty drifts about us even when the last one is gone.

Stage III

The hardest to write. Though now the grandchildren start to arrive and our mothers are the happiest they have ever been, the pulsing of the babies' cries, their hunger for love and for our milk, blind us to our mothers' new fatigue, their forgetfulness, their fumbling. We sing brokenly of their neglect and failure.

The diagnoses wait for later, the later of too late. The symptoms are patient and we are cruel.

Stage II

Our mothers know that they have outwitted the distant parenting of their own childhoods. They shower us with hugs and kisses before we leave for college. One of us for across the country, one of us to France, one of us just timid enough to stay in-state, but upstate. From our dorm room hallways we spend good money to call each other and ask, Should I take the pre-med classes now or should I wait? What color should I wear to the party? Did I let him go too far? I think I am losing it, I am bleeding, what should I do? Can you please ask your mom?

Stage I

The weekend after Halloween and the neighborhood is calm. The Columbia kids have gone back to their books and we teenaged girls meet at Boomers to look at CDs and cool T-shirts we cannot afford, even with babysitting money. We split a slice of Koronet pizza on the sidewalk. Some jerk calls out to us about the blonde one's ass, the brown one's tits, the tall one's—oh, our mothers taught us to be appalled by the words even then, in 1990.

With our braces and wool sweaters, jeans frayed at the cuffs, we loaf our way to Tom's Diner on Broadway for bits of hot chocolate powder, floating under whip, hiding like the grit waiting for us on the sidewalk. But inside there are no dirty men, no witches on brooms. Our magic spell is the innocence of cream, that tips our noses.

at the periphery of catastrophe

Susan Carlson

i think there's a circle around everything,
not a big circle around us all,
but that every moment
or place is the center of something
if you were to draw around it
an invisible line encompassing
both what's fine and everything
that's about to go wrong

i was toying with the idea
of forming a stanza
for each thing gone
but you've got plenty of those

what if i lined right instead, like

earlobes and how little pain comes from a pinch

light, whatever its source – sun, moon, stars – what it does

to clouds

so many kinds of food

but the problem with that is how long i could go on without
getting to the heart of it all

a stanza is sort of like a jagged box
and i want this one to hold
the worst thing
at its center, surrounded by
how, usually, life goes on while

i pray i'll spend today at the periphery
of catastrophe, like yesterday's answered
prayer, another calendar page of plenty
counting down

Coming to Terms

Susan Carlson

My mother-in-law would rather talk to me
about what comes next because
I am not the one she failed
to heed when there was still time to change,
not the one trying to tell her what Jesus meant –
or was it Paul – when he said that thing
about the wages of sin – if sin is what happens
when we fail to plan or try to do more
than get by or at least not have another
piece of cake with our diabetes.

I read an article about how poor people are judged
for buying cigarettes when they can't pay the rent.
It explained that, for christ's sake, what's a body to do
when there's nothing to provide respite if not joy.

Some people have all the luck, like dead parents
with life insurance. Others work so hard
only to stop at the store on the way home.
And there are those who *fuck it all*. Who am I
to judge? My mother-in-law
has only one breast left – and the Red Wings.
Whose fault is that?

I'm starting to believe in god again,
or want to. I might just make him up
because I'm beginning to see the light
or at least the way things are – like faith,
like how we're left with what we do.



Living Without a Prescription as Post-Structuralism

Stephen Lin

Don't stop me if you've heard this before –
because you've heard this before.

This story's
belly is full of deep-fried culture and MSG.

This story is smeared with grease,
traces
a history of saturated fat
through immigration lines
with its brothers and mothers
and uncles and fathers
and sisters and grandmothers
all sharing the same kitchen.

I was born after this story's conclusion
and will bear its retelling,
translating it for the next generation,
cleaning and straightening its teeth,
widening its eyes for another country's
smog.

There used to be a Chinatown in Pittsburgh,
there used to be mountains where now
blasted plateaus along the highway
sprout strip malls,
Pan-Asian buffets,
and dialysis centers.

Yes, these are heritable traits,
yes these are tropes
and mutate with every child
that survives them.
I have outlived my father
at last. I have taken the failure of his organs
as memetic.

We inherit the shape of this country
 beaten into our parents,
bruises where they don't show,
 hand prints where they are unmistakable
so you remember where you came from.

So when the results of my blood work
 came in, I kept myself from
reading them,
 as a way of allowing my father
and his father
 to propagate,
 continued to eat myself
 to death,
as if diabetes could be a fable
for naturalization
of foreign cuisine,
 foreign manners,
 foreignness.

As if to be a model minority
 means to die the way
everyone else in America dies:
 with a mouthful of General Tso's,
 leftovers congealing in my heart,
fried rice clumping in my veins,
my eyes trying to ignore typos
 in the postcard picture of a desert out west
 I have never been to.
I hear golden vials of insulin
 twinkle after the rain,
 in the starry clear night
that taunts the east.

They write home in needle pricks
 and brushstrokes,
 carving out pages
like lanterns,

making a show of shadows
obscure what is held back
to make the picture clear.

They ask me in the voice of my father,
What does this word mean?
Have you eaten yet?

(But Baba,
nothing tastes the same
without you.)

How do I put these all together
so that you can read this
and open me
like a book?

On the occasion of the first year I forget your birthday

Josh Daniel

There remains little visual evidence / of my late father's existence / exist as he did primarily pre-digitally / forever fixed in my mind in the 90's / like bowling alleys / and The Dude / but we do have one video / recorded years ago / passed around routinely / like an heirloom / or a secret and / it's not much / maybe fifty seconds of footage / he was not known / my father / as a man for whom silence / must always be filled / still there's a three second clip I replay / on dark nights / I have a recurring dream in which I forget / the heft of your voice / when I go to retrieve the tape / to retrieve the sound / it falls to ashes in my hands / how precious are the physical reminders / of loss / those phantom limbs no longer seen / but felt nonetheless / you say "Josh come here" / "come here" / I hear your call / I'm running

Under the Umbrella

Melissa Martini

Under the umbrella, the scent of stale cigarettes on her skin overpowered the rain and dew around us. I didn't mind her smoking, because cigarettes looked good on her. When she told me she was trying to quit, I was disappointed – not because I found smoking attractive or particularly liked it or anything, but because it was a part of the picture I saw in my mind whenever I thought about her.

I told her I thought I was pregnant. It was only the second or third conversation we'd had, but someone needed to hear it, and something about the dome covering our heads like a helmet left me feeling an unfamiliar safety. She stopped walking and we stood facing each other. She looked me up and down, her gaze pausing ever so slightly on my stomach. I probably shouldn't have noticed. Congratulations, she said, I think.

I didn't know it then, but later that day, blood would spill from my body for the first time in two months. I felt like I'd lied to her – the timing was impeccable – a slap in the face. What would I say to her the next time I saw her?

As I sat on the toilet, I went through nearly half a roll of toilet paper before realizing the flow wasn't slowing down. When I examined the crumpled up wad in my palm, I saw thick, black clots, like expired cherry pie filling. Afraid I'd clog the toilet, I resorted to shoving in a tampon instead of finishing off the roll.

Back under the umbrella, I noticed the raw skin on her fingers as she gripped its stem between us. I ran my thumb across my own frayed cuticles, wincing as I passed over a particularly tender bit. How many years did it take for us to finally speak? One of us asked the question, but we both knew the answer: four years. Four years of making eye contact and laughing at each other's jokes. Four years of nodding as we walked past each other.

I'd sat near her once while she was listening to music. I could hear it through her headphones and decided to eavesdrop as if I was in high school again – a very shallow but not necessarily inaccurate way of getting to know someone. A song I knew followed by a song I wanted to know. It would be hypocritical of me to interrupt her, since I so passionately preached about leaving women alone while wearing headphones, so I sat next to her not saying a word, enjoying the muffled song as much as I could.

Unlike headphones, the umbrella seemed to simultaneously amplify and soften the sound of the rain. Desperate to move along the conversation, I asked her for advice regarding a family gathering I'd been invited to by My Boyfriend and his family, at which I would know absolutely no one.

She replied by telling me all about Her Boyfriend, whose family was tiny and contained. This disappointed me for some reason. As she spoke, I wondered how Her Boyfriend felt about her smoking – would he miss her familiar scent after she quit, the same way I was already missing it despite it still lurking in the air between us? Did he still smell it on her, or was he so used to it that it wasn't even there anymore?

Our conversation ended with little to no useful advice passing from her mouth to my ears. I barely knew her any more than I knew My Boyfriend's family, but I still would have rather stayed under that umbrella with her forever than go anywhere else.

At the family gathering, My Boyfriend left me alone with the Sisters and Sister-in-Laws – and even the Mom – to go smoke a celebratory cigar with the Brothers and Brother-in-Laws – and even the Dad. I didn't even know what they were celebrating.

The women discussed pregnancy, birth, and babies – the conversation sounded recycled, as if they'd rehearsed it beforehand. Around us, children ran, their feet pitter patter like raindrops, a pattern of noise I could focus on just long enough to remove myself. The children disappeared to them and I longed to do the same.

My Boyfriend eventually found me again, small and silent. A joke was cracked about our future together – pregnancy, birth, and babies – as I gripped the stem of my wine glass so tightly I almost thought I felt it bend between my fingers. The sangria I was handed what seemed like hours ago was the same color as the blood still coming from my body, dark and bright at the same time, yet artificial, as if too much food coloring had been added. A stained strawberry floated alongside an ice cube.

I think I laughed at the joke, but then I smelled the cigar on My Boyfriend's skin and cringed. His smoking wasn't a regular thing – just a once in a while, special occasion type of thing. I wasn't used to him smelling like that: he was supposed to smell like the cologne I bought him for Christmas. I have to go change my tampon, I said out loud, handing My Boyfriend my glass and walking away.

In the bathroom, my hands shook as I pulled on the string and let it drop into the toilet. A tear dropped between my thighs, splashing against the water seconds before a drip of blood did the same. My Boyfriend knocked over and over.

What's wrong? He asked. It was muffled by the door between us, but I knew what he said. Nothing, I'm fine, I replied, as I slid in a new tampon and pulled up my pants. I flushed, washed my hands, fixed my makeup, and opened the door. The hug he gave me was empty, expected, routine – it was simply what he was supposed to do, but I knew he didn't know why he was doing it. Still, I melted into it, allowing our bodies to become one.

Us, in *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, February 23

Brooke Schifano

In the restaurant, we're next to the long-cheeked fish, waiting for food as he waits for a deep pot of boiling water or a hot-oiled pan to swallow him whole: his red oval mouth, rows of needle-teeth, and his one torn fin flicking. Here, above the lobster's rubber-band claw, is another kind of deep blue—scuffed plastic tank, painted-on ocean, the wrong salt, and the hook has never stopped yanking upwards, cracking his jaw in its new direction. In his one, blank eye, it's easy to see your attachment to the ground and mine to the water—your fear of this swollen-mouthed float. Today, because of my fins, I ask you again if you like it here, if you've burnt your mouth, if my cheeks are red from the hook, if my swim is enough to steady our sink, if you've become afraid of the kind of ocean we've made.

In Which the Computer Programmer Contemplates Love

Hadiyyah Kuma

Tomorrow the programmer will delete the smile off of her face and close her floral curtains. Her second-floor apartment will only attract one person's eyes. A boy walking home will look up and be reminded of his dead grandmother's housedress and he will swallow the lump into his stomach and he will never look there again.

Around midday, the programmer will eat breakfast. She will create the perfect algorithm of sobs so that she can search her days for the same kind of pain and code accordingly. Soft pain, hard pain, concrete pain, abstract pain. Ranges from Easy to Very Hard to deal with. Some have direct causes, and some are less direct. The abstract receives a Very Hard classification. Aches of the stomach and forehead, sharp pains in the temple, those are concrete. These are Easy. She will look for themes and patterns in her breakage. This will take all day. Algorithms are like recipes, a procedural method to the management of the abstract. It's hard work, but she needs them all. So she is not too loud and shocking to her neighbour in the apartment next to her. So she can plan when best to eat so that her digestion runs smoothly. There will be knives on the counter that she will put up for sale online, \$5 each to rid herself of sharp things quickly. She prefers local pickup and payment in cash. No pleasantries will be exchanged, although she omits that from the item description.

Tonight, she swallows bitter shots with her best friend the writer. She pouts her glimmering mouth at strange people, fixes her purple metallic eyeshadow every hour. In the bathroom she lays her hands on her stomach and breathes in and out seven times, trying to visualize herself softening. It is the milky weight of unspecific emotions that pull at her intestines. Her reflection in the mirror is an aged movie star with winged eyeliner and diamonds in her hair. Except the diamonds are flakes of dandruff and the wings of eyeliner are smile lines. She goes back out and she dances until she catches another stomach cramp, and her friend says, 'I didn't know you had that in you.'

Tonight, there is a full moon. At home, she opens her curtains wide and stares into the deep black sky. A kid rides by on a bike, probably a food courier. The programmer is hungry and makes herself a juicy beef sandwich and sits on her balcony in just a black jumper and eats. Her legs are up on the railing, and her faint scars glisten prettily under the blue.

She watches her scars, thinking that they are aggregate data. A beginner's lesson on programming explained to her that the lifetime of a part is not managed by the whole. That is, without the whole, the part still exists and vice versa. The scars are but an entity that can exist without her body. The scars do not manage the lifetime of the person. With some oils she could erase them. She could be clean. But programming taught her little about love, and the love for the glinting whites of her cuts was strong and confusing. They were the only part of her that she cared for. Better than shots, better than dancing. Love is not supposed to look like this.

She takes her legs off the railing and goes inside. The beef sandwich lies sprawled open on the table, food for the birds when they wake in the morning.

Light Eater

Guy Biederman

Meg sat at a small table overlooking the garden with morning light streaming in through the window. I poured two cups and watched the cat crouching in bushes below the birdfeeder where random seeds had fallen. Sunlight illuminated the side of her face, and strands of silver glowed electric in her hair. With lips slightly parted, Meg sat radiant and still in the light. I placed a cup next to her five tangerine slices and buttered toast. She hadn't touched a bite.

Möbius

Marc Pietrzykowski

My neighbor plays thumb-piano on his porch while it snows
fat flakes, falling more or less straight down.

In the Spring, if we are all still alive, I'll watch him
plant peppers and tomatoes in his front yard
and curse at the squirrels who have learned to love both.

He drinks too much, and says ugly things to his wife,
but not often, and less than before, and their love
is a stained glass window the sun shines through
as they walk along, to the library, or ice cream shop.
He works somewhere, comes home looking tired.

When the snow slackens, he goes upstairs and sits,
his back to the window, a computer glowing on his lap,
and he types. I get the binoculars and peek at the screen:
*My neighbor plays thumb-piano on his porch while it snows
fat flakes, falling more or less straight down.*



Excerpt from **_Insert Coin_**

Joshua Zelesnick

~

bubbling above the waves, god's voice
through a microphone, *come on down*
and in this time lapse our contestant
is born to us, casino bells

and chimes, the clapping crowd, the ears
of our great nation tingling
as we watch the contestant run
down the aisle to produce meaning

our lives, we can't believe it her
name was called, and now she's slapping
hands with the other contestants
this *who* from the crowd, will be next

~

saturn possesses a moon that may contain
water, and if this is so saturn's moon may or may
not have exhibited life is what the contestant
thinks to herself, life is round and salty and large and crumbs

and rule of law and warm and curious and debt cycles, life
is stubbed toes and self-help and winter and fudge
and free trade and sour and kissing and which bill to pay
and ponzi schemes, life is extracting fossil fuels

and arbitrage, racist killer cops, and dancing, *does*
the moon of saturn present these intricacies, the contestant
still dressed like a spark white day dream asks, maybe not
she thinks to herself, maybe not this moon

~

the contestant was abducted
from herself, from her self's self
from her self's self in awe, from her
emptiness, she's got loans, she needs

more time, she needs entertainment
a job that pays, the contestant
is far away from herself, her imagined
self, she's only a contestant in a manner

of speaking, in that any one of us
can be called contestants, in fact she
has from the beginning been a problem
her abducted self the solution, to find

~

the contestant thinks the world
is full of holes, her body
too is full of holes so frequent
that when she plugs one more pressure

releases from another, you
could watch her play the game most nights
as she gathers at the window
eye, a hole, through a telescope,

another hole, looking past the earth
into the deep she thinks maybe
everything is just a hole, look!
everything a hole to be filled

~

*because women are interesting
and important, said
the contestant to the eager
audience awaiting the moment*

*to applaud, they are not an after
thought, not secondary players
in human destiny and we
have always known that, which is why*

the contestant was speaking
without the future tense, without
some sickness to possess, chewing
up language to fuse to the chatter

If What Physicists Now Admit

Anthony DiPietro

is true, what any good poet
or pothead all along knew, that everything that will ever happen
has already happened, then you
were always a pretty, green-eyed, party boy with a too-short
life, and I've always lived with this
carousel, these miles, there must be, of film footage in my mind. in the dream
I'll have tomorrow
and had yesterday, I will be, I was, at your mother's sink
by the breakfast nook, buttering toast,
everyone in your family adoring me, asking what I've written lately,
even your father, judge jim,
hardest man in the county, your sister asking who
will win the next election,
everyone jamming themselves into seats close to mine, craving
eye contact, except you,
upstairs cleaning your hole then scrubbing imperfections from the leather
jacket you like to wear
to raves. here you come with bloodshot eyes down three stairs at a time.
you cheek-kiss your mother
goodbye. I hear the front door close soundlessly behind you.
you were peter pan before
peter pan. I've heard from your mouth the refrain, getting too old
for all-night circuit parties—
berlin, d.c., barcelona—but your dewy eyes never cut to one side
and say, please make me king
of never never, ring my finger, bring me to your dream
house in vermont
with the wide front porch to write on. you will never see
that place, you thought you had
the time and nerve to wait'll your forties to want what I did: my voice reading
before bed, or singing, always spoiling
you with one more story, as anyone will tell you all beautiful
boys deserve.

pantoum at the altar of unclaimed teeth

Rebecca Martin

several months ago a construction crew found one thousand
teeth buried in the wall of a building
in Valdosta, Georgia. blame it on dentistry,
but my jaw still hurts when I think about it.

my baby teeth buried in my mother's jewelry chest
rattle together at night, refuse to stay dead.
her jaw hurts when she thinks about it,
she tells me. she is used to sleeping alone.

at night, a rattle: coins on the eyes of the dead.
you leave a toothbrush at my house but won't
tell me you love me. I am used to sleeping alone
but want you to hold me anyway.

I leave a toothbrush at my mother's house but don't
ever remember which is mine when I return.
she holds a place for me anyway,
one I can never fully occupy.

remember what belongs to you upon return.
tiny deities uncurl: an anti-echo
for the ones who have never occupied
the altars our mothers built.

god makes himself small: anti-echo
for one thousand found teeth
in the altars mothers build for grown children
whose jaws still ache with absence.

pastoral with deer, prophetic

Rebecca Martin

the road to my sister's college graduation
is littered with ordinary carcasses:

I count twenty deer with their legs outstretched.
the first I pass is so whole

I look away and the car swerves beneath me.
pendulum like the swing between life

and death isn't a matter of *swerve* versus *grace*
like my mother, who calls me not long

after from her own car to tell me with disgust
there are so many dead things on the road.

at dinner she and my sister recount
the story of a mouse half-alive

in their basement, whose legs broke
and who they couldn't bear to kill —

I am unable not to think of its terror
as it waited outside to die,

of the deer whose eyes
tongue refused to hide for my comfort,

of my mother's hands reaching
across the plate, admonishing her body

in the same breath. small mourning
for the body I left underwater

two states and five years ago.
I'm not supposed to flinch

at bodies on the highway anymore,
to read the headless deer

as an omen or a breath-stealer,
am not supposed to be making

this drive alone. you and I disagreed
about the expanding deer population

only a week or so before we broke up.
after a life in the suburbs, you knew

better than I what nuisances they bring:
omens of annihilation who destroy

gardens and orchards, whose fur hides
ticks, Lyme disease — certain death

for the family pet. you did not reach
for my hand in the crowded hall

of birds at the museum that night, lifeless
behind glass, beaks curving up

to an inevitable ceiling — *we all die in a box*,
I wanted to say, but I wasn't thinking

of the carnage I'd find on I-90.
when I see the antlers and the ribcage

my body tells me the story it needs:
the sharp intake of breath is unwarranted;

there exists no space for performative grief
at seventy miles per hour for the creatures

who hurtle themselves at us again and again.

E.V.E.

A.R. Franz-Blair

There is nothing before the sun and still nothing after.

Solar waves break the mountain's crest, revealing earth, cracked like dry skin. The world stretches on forever like this. Colors form where the sun meets the clouds, rays refracting through atmosphere. No one sees the beauty. Clouds coalesce, darken, churn, evidence chaos is sure to ensue. Still, no one runs. Excitement mounts, lightning strikes, thunder crashes; empty echoes in a desolate canyon. The sky weeps.

Tears fall on hallowed ground, the graves of countless souls that came before, they rise to the surface. Iridescent vines sprout from scorched earth, twisting into a trunk and further into hips, before narrowing back out and branching many arms. A delicate face carves its way out of the fullerene bark, the machine-mother surveying the ravine, seeking out any potentiality.

Her roots ripple through the soil in all directions, weaving a tangled web of life in their wake. They gorge themselves on the first fresh water to fall in centuries, savoring it for the long day. The life-giving liquids infuse with the building blocks of nature before being injected back into the soil. Here bluegrass breaks ground, reaching for the sun until it can reach no further, lingering alive for a brief moment as all things do before they wilt and return to the earth. New generations rise, reaching farther than their fathers, grasping at the heavens till their inevitable demise.

Life cycles ad infinitum; each generation's sacrifice bringing closer long-sought renewal, a dream to revive this once dying world.

Pools of water collect, connecting throughout the valley floor, hints of a future stream. Saplings spring to life nearby, rising above the bluegrass to explore new heights. Emerald leaves longing for life come forth to enjoy a splinter of sun before reddening and making the long fall back to earth. Bare branches shudder in the breeze only a second before an accelerated season sees the trees to fresh coats.

Beyond the leaves, tiny juniper-colored buds flower into tight packs of magenta-pink petals before blossoming out of the sun-bright center, magenta giving way to ivory. Stalks behind swell into brilliant green bulbs as the fragile petals fall away, turning as they grow, fading to marigold before a bit of orange seeps through, spreading top to bottom, and finally settling in a deep scarlet.

Apples fall, decaying atop brittle leaves and bluegrass, withered like the old world. The rotten fruits become incubators in an artificial autumn, seeds sprouting as spring is forced upon the soon-to-be brook. They take root in this land of resurrection, doing their progenitors proud as they break free of earth and spiral for the sun, growing high along the future stream.

Seasons, out of place, stress and break, and as other trees shed red leaves, the machine-mother swallows up the surrounding world, swelling her trunk with the essence of life; now, in the slow death of fall, she comes full-bloom. Her greatest branch grasps a delicate bulb, a minute bud she watches carefully as any mother a child, with the patience of ages. It soon grows beyond compare, an iridescent sphere hundreds of times larger than any fruit of the gully.

Ascension springs upon the ravine. Mother's fruit-bearing branch bows to earth below, time standing still as the great fruit fractures. A hand grips the broken shell, then another, and from the artificial womb emerge a couple, first steps in wild bluegrass. Their hands find each other, shock-waves running course, hearts skipping beats. They float, suspended in sensation; synchronizing pulses, sun on bare flesh, a breeze carrying the scent of sweet fruit.

Temptation takes the form of an apple within reach. Deep scarlet skin offering little resistance as teeth tear through to a hard crunch satisfying as the sweet juices that dance across their tongues before finishing in perfect bitter contrast. Joyous howls fill the canyon, the echoes empty no longer.

Intertwined beneath the primordial tree of this renewing world they gaze upon the sun, a deep scarlet apple sinking beyond the mountains, highlighting the grand spectacle of life. Here, where bluegrass and wildflowers spread like wildfire while berries patch the hillside and grapevines climb gully walls. Here, where dawn saplings are afternoon shade and evening ancients. Here, where life flowers and flourishes hidden in the valley.

Only here, in this garden paradise, a canyon becomes a cradle.

Contributors

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