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Roots

Before I met you and knew you, loved you and hated you, we had already spoken. Every weekday morning we'd claim our place on the red plastic bench, put down our roots for five minutes under the bus shelter.

For most of those months, the sun spilled over the roofs on the opposite side of the street, warming our knees. There'd be the man calling out Big Issue on the pavement behind, the coughing, yawning commuters, the two other buses that came before ours. Stopping, groaning, taking off again. We sat side by side. I hoped when you looked at the ground you were also looking at me. You made me think about whether my shoes matched my socks.

Along my arm, the side of my thigh, I began to feel you seeping in. As if I was sitting up against a radiator. I could tell when you were angry, or distant, or content. Some mornings, we'd stretch our bodies at the same time; four arms reaching out towards the road.

They say plants communicate without speaking. They gasp chemical messages into the air, and whisper through their roots and the secret fungi threads that feel their way through the soil.

I never heard your voice. When our bus came in, I asked for a new ticket each day, but you just showed your pass. You always sat at the front and when I looked ahead I was looking at you.

The Wednesday I decided to do something, it was an ache in my ribcage. I made myself shift on our plastic bench. I turned my body towards you by a fraction and it was like my heart was up on my tongue, pounding.

I offered you the coffee I was holding, said I didn't want it. Your leg shifted. Your face cracked into a smile. You started to talk. And when our bus came whining in, hissing to a stop, neither of us climbed those steps.

Pond

Rain splashes circles over the pond's skin. They widen, like the patterns in a kaleidoscope; I remember pressing my eye to those tubes as a kid, getting lost in their small worlds.

I think about the fish at the bottom, skulking in mud. I wonder if they see the drops from the surface, see each one rush towards them like a wavering tube of light. And I wonder if they stop and rove their slow fish eyes to see it come down, like we would watch a shooting star.

What she is made of

“Oh, and for the love of Christ,” her boss said on Tuesday, “wash your hands.”

Molly thrust her middle finger, its creases blackened with soil, at the closing door. She moved to the sink and pressed soap into her palm. When the water began to run, it felt like a part of her was peeling away.

She ran a thumb nail under the nails of her left hand and watched their ends turn from black to cream. The scabs on her knuckles from sanding down the fence posts, red and black... there was nothing she could do about those.

In fact, she was proud of them. Customers be damned. Molly kept her teeth gritted beside the glass cabinets as they looked at the perfume bottle she held up, then to her hands. Those sour jam scowls on their lip-sticked lips, just like her mother's. They could stick this bottle where the sun don't shine.

This was her job, but it wasn't her life.

Her life was out there, down by the river, in that garden where the soil was alive with worms and ants and those tiny coral beetles that looked like ocean creatures. Where the sun came out to turn her shoulders red. Where the fists of white blossom punched their scent into the air and sent shivers of petals tumbling to the compost heaps.

Melanie with the drawn-on eyebrows was staring at her again from across the aisle. Yeah, yeah, we all know you finish a perfume bottle a day with your panther smile and shrill-voiced charm.

It wasn't as if Molly was asking for a raise or anything. Why would she want to stay here any longer than necessary?

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If she closed her eyes under the fluorescent lighting and concentrated, Molly could hear the white, bright noise of rain from inside the poly-tunnel. When she sprayed her bottle out towards a waiting wrist, she imagined a pod exploding its seeds. An act of ecstatic hope, something so fixed on finding connection that it would turn itself inside out to show the world what it was made of.

Thinking time (a haiku)

Outside; hunched, sawing.
Boots peppered with orange dust.
The rain is white noise.

Weeding

The give under your fingers, and that soft crackle when you've got him held just right and it all rips upward; the scraggly beard of his roots showering soil over your shoe.

Sometimes, his roots run deeper, and you're pulling at his heart strings, following them wherever they twist, into the garden path, under your feet, tugging until you finally reach the end.

Look back at the ground, and you can see the erupted lines in the earth where you've torn up something that had its life down there.

I still don't believe that most things are best left alone.