

The Green

Where I see who I am is in the green. Moss and clovers are sprouting up from the dirt, you can run your hands along it, and the texture is soft but sturdy. You can experience a different sensation on every spot the green brushes your fingers.

Lying in the ocean of green is a stone path. Flat, smooth, cool stones plucked from the running river to lie in the dirt. You can twirl on them after spring rains, or when the dew has left its mark on every surface. Twirling until you're dizzy and fall soft in the moss and clovers. There you stay laid, closing your eyes. Listening. You can hear the wind move through the trees. A symphony of different noises. The whistling as it zips over and under branches, their creaks as they sway. Leaves rustling, stretching their tendrils away from each other and towards the indigo sky, then shivering back against each other. The river bubbles nearby, a steady stream of fresh, life-bringing water, gurgling over rocks and branches, otters and beavers splashing as they rustle about their homes. Even further you can hear the faint roar of the waterfall. Powerful and magnificent, yet gentle enough to shower you after a long day of running and playing, sweat pouring from your brow. Sitting beneath it is my favorite sound. There is no greater silence than the silence nature brings to your mind by showing you how loud She can be.

I see this location and the aura is bright. Colors shift from orange, yellow, and deep purple, to white, but always vibrant, welcoming, warm, and alive. The vignette around the scene creates a bubble, keeping the sacred nature of this place as Hers. This is where everyone was born. Everyone starts here in this moss-covered paradise. But the bubble burst somehow. Slowly, over time, once joyous colors swallowed the beauty whole. The gray that cooled my feet and acted as a platform for my dancing was now dark and ominous, seeming to seep into this Paradise with tendrils, creeping above the trees, turning their leaves dark, shrouding this once-bright grove in black shadow. The waterfall roars louder, its torrent now much too strong and loud for a gentle rain or shower. I still sit beneath it, but rather than soothing silence, the roars seem to be screaming, battling with the noise that also excreted its pollution through the bubble burst.

At first, I was sad. Sad that my world, my beloved nature was being tormented, tarnished. And where was She? Why would she let this happen? She put me here, She must have known this was a possibility. Why didn't She prepare me? My grief gave way to anger at Her. Angry because now I know fear and I was never meant to. Angry because now I know ambition and it's swayed me from taking

sustenance in enjoyment. I can no longer dance without care on the slippery, shining stones, I see them as stepping stones. They are just a way to get to the next destination. I can no longer celebrate the bubbling of the river, the poppies and mushrooms spotted along the groves, listen to the songs of birds and the hum of the Earth at Her most vibrant. No, that river is now sustenance, a symbol of work. No longer can I leisurely drink from it, rolling over on wet sand to dip the cup in that I crafted from the riverbank's clay. No longer does that cool, clear liquid hit my lips and I feel gratitude for the life it brings. Rather now, I notice the flecks of the riverbed in my cup, once minerals I paid no attention to, just knew they were there for a reason my body needed. I notice how little I can fill in my cup and wish for larger vessels to store it in. I must prepare for when the bubble bursts. My green world has been tarnished and I will not leave it. I will stand and defend, no matter how dark it gets. I will cut down the wildflowers and trees to grow food that will sustain me. I will work and work and work some more until this poison infesting this land is gone. I must restore Her.

It's been 30 years. I sit in the grove. The river still runs, though now it's a life-sucking burden, quenching the thirst I have from hard labor., nothing more than a tool for my work. The waterfall still falls, though now it hits my ears as a shriek.

Like She's screaming and I can't save Her, can't even find Her to save Her, so I stay away. I hear birds I never get to glimpse. I see tracks from animals that once clamored upon my shoulder. I sit in the clearing, with no weapon, nothing to defend myself, but I am on high alert. I've memorized the shadows and darkness, I can see when just a tiny bit more seeps through. I have learned how to survive quickly. Gathering water and food and returning to this spot so that I can watch and wait and try to defend this place. I stopped being angry at Her a long time ago. This wasn't Her fault. She created this lush, dense land that was perfect for anyone. She didn't open the gates for the pollution. And to Her credit, She must still be here in some way. I'd been so focused on my toils, on achieving the greatest output in the quickest way that it wasn't until that past year or so I'd taken notice. This land, though no rain has fallen, though no Sun has shone, is still lush. The trees still have their branches and leaves, not a single one lost. The moss and clovers still grew and created a blanket between the body and Earth. There was evidence that all the same creatures still roamed and played and lived their fullest lives here, but I haven't seen them. Since I'd discovered all was still the same, just shrouded, it seemed to have gotten darker. Everything is still here, everything I once loved. Everything I came from, everything She ever taught me to enjoy. But I can't see it. Because this gray and black came without warning. Without

permission to enter, without knowing I was even here it seems. And I, just being me, unable to find Her, can't make the dark dissipate.

One day, I was going through all the stages of...whatever I was going through, for the thousandth time. The cycle is always the same: despair and grief for what I'd lost, excitement for what will one day surely come, anger at having ever been shown this beauty in the first place, fear that I would never truly experience beauty again, gratitude that my tribulations hadn't yet outweighed my resilience. But nothing compared to the loneliness. It was strange, when all was green, I never felt lonely. I knew there were others, beyond the bubble. But I never felt lonely because I was away from them. I felt a buzz, knowing one day they'd share splendors and wisdom I hadn't partaken in yet, and I would do the same for them. But when the gray came, so did the lonely. I would watch the otters and the heron in pairs, and long for someone. Not to rescue me, not to take over my toils so I could once again lie in the grass. But someone to share me with. To put words to all I see in my mind without fear of judgment, without the void being all that hears. I longed for someone who wanted to roll in the clovers despite the fog. I wished that I had someone to share what the stars told me with and hear what they see in them. I craved an audience to hear Her tales. I called out to gods and goddesses for

someone, anyone who could see me or could hear me. My answer was echoes in the gray.

As I spun in this spiral once more, I had a moment of clarity: I've toiled this land, but She designed it to once be rife with life: fruit trees and low tubers that would always bear sustenance when properly sown. I was grateful for this and She taught me to use every part of what She bore: Banana peels boiled and combined with golden honey created a new flavor, tomato greens tossed into a bowl with other scraps and cabbage will add a bit of added nutrients. She even showed me how to reuse the most wasteful scraps, ritually giving them back to the Earth. In this practice, I learned that I could plant a peach pit and care for it every day: fresh water from the river and rain, sunshine, and balancing the heat with its thirst.

There was never any rhyme or reason to when a new tree in the grove sprouted, or why it didn't. Yes, even with Her lessons, there were still pits that just wouldn't sprout. Sometimes the conditions may have been off just one day, but to that tiny pit, that day was crucial. Sometimes they would sprout in a few weeks, sometimes I'd think they failed and they get their true leaves just a few days later. As far as when that pit will bear its fruit, that could take years, just for one brand new, plump, beautifully pinkish-gold peach to bend its branch, indicating its life has

completed its cycle and it's ready to be returned to the Earth. I'd partake with gratitude, tasting the brightness of the Sun, the rich sweetness of the Earth, the water of the Moon, Her labor, my labor. Everything worked euphoniously over such vast expanses of time, even when it looked like this tree wasn't even moving, not a sway in the wind.

I am a peach pit.