

Afterwards, we lay beneath the maple tree, its broad green leaves shading us from the mid-day sun. She fell asleep quickly but I lay awake for a long time, unable to close my eyes. A diaphanous beam of light pierced through the dense canopy above us and imprinted a small yellow crescent on a dimple just below the small of her back. I stared at it for a while, watching it rise and fall with her every breath until the sun moved further west across the sky and the arc disappeared. Her naked body quivered for a moment as a light breeze rustled through the leaves before tickling the spines of the tall, thin blades of grass enveloping us. I brushed a lock of raven hair back from her face and followed the rapid movement of a pupil underneath her eyelid. I quietly shifted closer to feel her warm breath gently expire against my neck and I realized that I too was breathing slowly. I closed my eyes and felt the comfortable weight of her head on my chest, rising and falling; perfectly in tune with the organs inside my body. Keeping my eyes closed, I felt for her hair, gently bringing a few strands close to my face. It reminded me of a lilac bush that used to grow outside my father's garage when we were kids. I inhaled the sweet smell again and again until I felt my body yield and my heart slow down. I decided to keep my eyes closed a little while longer.

I awoke to find our bodies pressed together into a single flesh spoon. One arm was wrapped around her waist and the other was pressed against my face. The perpetual storm of cicada chirps commenced once more and I retreated to my back, clasping both hands behind my head. With my eyes still closed, I took in the asperous symphony. She was still in deep sleep as I rose to my feet. The late spring air was ripe with the aroma of honeysuckle and magnolia blossoms. I blindly reached for my pants but a warm gust of air quickly changed my mind and I emerged from under the maple tree, my body now a sponge, soaking up the crepuscular humidity. Young blades of grass felt like goose down as they brushed against my legs and the moist earth absorbed my footsteps through the thick moss on the floor. I walked over to a stream at the end of the meadow, just near the edge of the forest. The sun had bloated into a bright orange pumpkin as it descended behind a hill far away in the distance. I found a rock shaped like a chair and sat down in its smooth seat to bathe in the receding fulgor.

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I hear music all around. I am first aware of a string quartet fluttering above me. It bows a sugary rhythm-less swell as molasses and pear nectar drip from a sky that heaves under its syrupy weight. A harp made of bone, strung with silken strings plays a vague melody of rising fourths and ninths as the current cascades over the polished rocks and stones. The breeze stirs up wispy stalks of grain as an oboe and a bassoon begin their courtship. It is timid at first, but it eventually reaches a passionate swirling embrace that brings all of the meadow grass to its knees. I let my feet sink into the creek, my bare toes plowing into the soft murky depths. There is nothing below to stop me from penetrating deeper and deeper and so I stand up. I begin sinking into the soft and warm earth. The water is up to my ankles and soon it reaches my knees. I raise my arms towards the sky and grab on to a weeping limb from a nearby willow tree. The mud is now up to my waist and the leaves are quickly stripping off the branch as I slip further down. The water is up to my ears now; my body is confined in the mire. I close my eyes as the water finally rises above me and the river swallows me whole. The only trace that remains is one hand, still clutching the naked willow growth. I know that it cannot hold me, so I let go. The tree yanks its arm out of my hands, snapping like a whip in the air and somewhere nearby a foraging deer cocks an ear and quickly bounds into the woods.

There is no bottom and as I am engulfed further into the abyss, I hear a slow, aching sonority from the corpse of a viola. A soft brume enters my eyes, ears and mouth. My long hair falls out of my head like slow-cooked ribs off the bone and I feel a great pressure on my skull, as if someone is tightening a vice around it. But just when I am about to dissolve into this watery grave, I feel something clench my wrist. My downward inertia is reversed and I am propelled upward to the surface. I open my eyes once more and see centipedes and snakes lunging at my head but I am moving too fast for them now. A moment later I feel my body lurching out of the water and I come to rest on a dark patch of grass.

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I lay on my back for a long time before I opened my eyes again. The nascent moon shone like an aluminum sickle as it sliced through the cadaverous blue cover of the glade. By my right ear I heard a locust humming a strange tune. As I turned my head to watch it stroke its leg against its wing, a shadow appeared over me. She did not look at me, only upward, toward some remote cloud. She was dressed in a silver satin gown that hung low on her shoulders and around her neck she wore a small diamond that absorbed the lunar emanation like a nocturnal prism. Her hair was down and undulated like an ocean wave with every movement she made. As I closed my hand around hers and pulled her towards me, I felt her touch the worsted wool fabric of my jacket. She ran her hands through my hair, behind my ears and around the nape of my neck, finally resting them on my shoulders. I brought her even closer to me and our eyes locked together. Our gaze became a single exchange of light. Slowly, we began to move through the verdure that seemed to part at our bare feet. A slow, diffuse rhythm rose up through the ground and penetrated our bodies through the soles of our feet. It entered the bloodstream and coursed upward through the veins to the heart. As we wove around the maple tree we felt the pulse enter our lungs and vaporize instantly. I inhaled as she exhaled and her breath was dry and cool. Her hold loosened on my hand and I felt my feet lose contact with the ground. As if drawn toward some powerful magnet, I was pulled higher. The moon cast a spotlight on the place where we had stood a moment ago, but now there was only a sea of grass, swirling and writhing.

I rose above the maple tree and saw its bough extend for many miles across the horizon. A flock of night birds burst forth out of the canopy, cackling in unison as they flew in the opposite direction. Still, I rose higher. I could now see the flickering yellow lights of a city far off in the distance. I knew that I would not visit that place again and I did not try to fight the force dragging me upwards. I passed into a thick vapor of clouds that obscured everything in sight and wet my skin with fine droplets of mist. I began to feel a peaceful state come over me all at once and I felt as if I was shedding my skin. I became more weightless with every passing moment. I shivered when I realized that skin no longer covered me. Soon I heard my bones bang against each other like a deep atmospheric marimba. All of the organs and tissues in my body dissolved into the seemingly interminable fog until there was no physical remnant left of me. Then I passed through the cloud. I looked around but there was no need. I could already see everything all at once. The air was both sunny and moonlit at the same time. The blue of the sky was both dark and colorful. I was alone yet I felt a million different hands caressing my body. I heard nothing and everything at the same time.