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There She Was

The last fingers of sunset stretch out in orange and violet across a plain of waist-high green grass. A breeze stirs the blades of grass to wave goodnight to the setting sun. The grass defines a valley bordered by a mountain range to the north with blue-grey peaks that breach the heavens in their enormity. The west edge of the valley is bordered by a steep cliff face of white marble. To the east of the valley lies a peach grove, once famous for its apples. East of the peach grove the trees grow taller: redwoods straining to pierce the sky above them. Through the center of the valley runs a stream sourced from the northern mountains that snakes its way from the western white cliffs to the eastern peach grove countless times until it meets the southern horizon. Several creeks drain off the stream and into the peach grove as though the earth is tilted that way. Along one of these smaller creeks towards the center of the valley stands a log cabin built from the redwood forest.

“There she was, squatting in the long green blades of grass. Actually, at this point I didn’t know what she was, all I knew was that she looked more like me than anything I had seen.”

“So what did you think she was?”

“I don’t know, she looked something like me, I guess I just figured she was another one of me, but with long hair.”

“That’s it?”

“Yeah, well she was squatting, like I said in the grass, and she was facing away from me so I couldn’t see, you know, our differences.”

“And what did these differences look like?”

“Hold on, that’s not the important part.”

“Well then what is?”

“I don’t know, I mean I guess what happened in the few days she was there.”

The clouds are sparse, providing just the right shadows to make the ground sway. The sun is high, but not too hot, and not that bright either. I’m walking through a grove of apple trees. The sunlight bounces off the millions of vitreous red orbs that highlight my periphery. The grove puts on this same light show everyday, tempting walkers to sample its fruit.

The grass bends with each step I take and rebounds as my heels lift off the ground to tickle the backs of my knees. I reach the edge of the grove and I stop. I stop because she's there, in the grass, squatting. Her hair covers the middle of her back with honey brown waves. Her brown skin looks like nothing I've ever seen as the sunlight cuts through the branches above her. It looks like her back is dancing. A breeze ripples through the grass and the blades caress her body as she rises. First they touch her lower back and move, as quietly as she stands, down the apple curve of her buttocks.

The blood at the bottom of my feet convects to my waist. The blood in my head drains to the same place. She turns, as though she feels my eyes on her and knows what's happening inside me. She turns not with her body, but with her head, and I get my first glimpse of those red lips, those hooked eyebrows, that wide flat nose before she runs down a row of apple trees.

"Did you follow her?"

"Hmmm?"

"DID YOU FOLLOW HER?"

“Oh. No, I just stood there, wondering why she ran.”

“Why didn’t you go looking for her?”

“I don’t know, I had never felt that feeling before and I was a little afraid of it... of what she made me feel.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s hard to explain.”

“It must be very complicated.”

A tall figure walks down from the mountain along the meandering stream that cuts through the center of the valley. The figure is wearing a long-sleeved grey robe that slips on over his head. Long weathered fingers grasp a speckled pink granite staff in his left hand. His knuckles are white around the ages from overuse; his fingernails are long but straight and white; he has a long grey beard to match his waist length hair that he shows no signs of losing. His destination is the cabin. The man that lives there has asked him for some conversation. Between the two of them, he is the only one that can climb the mountain so he has to come to the valley every time the man in the cabin wants to talk. His feet would appreciate the grass cushion of the valley if they were not leathered through years of

travel up and down the hard rock of the mountain face.

The sun is high and hot in a cloudless blue sky, shining a warmth onto the world that excites my muscles. My pink skin glistens as I walk along the creek bed next to my cabin. Crab tracks criss-cross the fine grain tan sand that presses between my toes with each step. Up ahead the waterway meanders to the left, I stop. She's been here. Three footsteps dart through the sand to the edge of the creek. It's not so wide that you couldn't jump it with a good run up and that looks like what she did. There are two deep footprints on the other side of the water. From there her trail leads into an endless meadow. If I follow the creek I will end up at the apple grove, if I jump it I will be following her steps south.

"So what'd you do?"

"I followed the creek."

"Why'd you follow the creek?"

"I saw her in the apple grove the day before, I figured she'd be there again."

"I though you were afraid of her?"

“I was, but it was that fear that made me want to see her.”

“It made you want to see her?”

“Yeah.”

“You wanted to face your fear?”

“No, sort of... I wanted to know why I was afraid of her, that’s why I wanted to see her again.”

“Was she?”

“Was she what?”

“Was she in the apple grove?”

“Yeah.”

“What happened when you saw her?”

“I don’t know, it’s hard to explain, I couldn’t really control it. Or maybe it was just that I didn’t want to stop it.... She was just standing there.”

She is standing at the edge of the grove, petting the grass playing at her fingertips. She is standing on the other side of the creek. She is facing me with her bare round chest and nothing between her legs that I can see. She is not the same as me, but she looks like me, and I can see how she’s

different from me. I feel the blood in my body organize itself between my legs like the first time I saw her. Her stare moves from my face, down my own bare chest and rests on the only part of my body extending towards her. She shuns its gesture and turns. She is going to run again.

What blood is left in my cheeks rushes to the surface in shame and anger. I yell to her to stop. She pauses. I take two steps back and prepare to jump the creek bed. I hear her say something, but there is too much happening in my body to listen to the words. The energy gathering in my body easily carries me over the creek bed. I reach out an arm to feel her chest, to feel how it is different. She pushes my hand away and turns to run. I rush forward and tackle her from behind. She screams a scream that bounces off the apples into nothingness. She tries to crawl out from under me, and her fingers rake the earth.

I grab her around the ribs and turn her over. Her fingers tear at my face, cutting my lips, nose, eyelids, and forehead. I grab her wrists and pin them to the ground above her head. She is yelling again. I ignore her again. The blood pooled at my hips wedges between her thighs. Her eyes widen and she stops yelling to draw in a breath too big to release. A warmth surges through me and I bend down to bite her lip. A salty

taste leaks into my mouth. My backside flexes back and forth, building momentum. Sweat drips from my brow onto her face, cutting across her tears. I feel all the blood in my body rush to the tip of my existence and then explode back through my veins. I stop thrusting, her legs are shaking. Her head is turned so her right cheek presses against the grass. I can't see where her eyes are looking, but it's somewhere far away. The earth gyrates as I stand up and I almost lose my balance. Blood stains my skin from my stomach to my thighs. She lies there, gasping as tremors disrupt her body.

The man that lives on the mountain stands outside the cabin. He looks up at the rising moon, then lifts his right hand and knocks on the door seven times. He lowers his hand as the door swings open to the inside and the sound of wood rubbing against itself fills the air. He greets the man who lives in the cabin with a hug then proceeds inside without waiting for further invitation. The man who lives in the cabin closes the door slowly with his right hand.

Inside the cabin is one room. The door opens in the center of one of the three walls that form a triangle. Just below where the roof meets

the walls that the point of the triangle across from the door the logs have been cut out, creating a window that opens to the mountains. Along the wall to the left of the door is a neat pile of grass contained in a rectangular wooden frame. On the right side of the cabin is an apple wood table for two with a matching set of chairs. The old man is the first to sit down, his back to the mountains. He extends his right arm and points with his whole hand to the chair across from him, inviting the man who owns the cabin to take the seat across from him.

“What happened next?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What happened after you stood up?”

“Oh, I turned around and walked into the creek.”

“Was it cold?”

“Yes, very.”

“Were you?”

“No.”

“How long did you stay in the creek?”

“I walked all the way back here in the creek.”

“You walked back here?”

“Yes, and I laid down on my bed, right there, and went to sleep. Then when I woke up things were different, the apple grove was different. That’s why I called you.”

The sun is low in the sky and the grass stoops, trying to move away from the heat. The wind is dead and the only thing that touches my body is a sweltering stillness that extracts the water below my skin. Deep grey clouds circle the mountains to my left, but offer no shade to the valley. To my right the grass meets the southern horizon and I can see the earth’s vaporous exhale of heat. I am standing in front of the apple grove, looking down two rows of bare, black limbs. The ground is littered with rotten leaves and apple. I bend down to pick one up. Worms wriggle through it at every angle, consuming the brown flesh under its sagging red skin.

Brandon McAdams, 2009