

Essays about Azolla

William Barnes
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barnes, William () "Essays about Azolla," *Exile*: Vol. 69: No. 1, Article 13.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol69/iss1/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

Essays about Azolla
William Barnes

Was she not born to eat?

With an overflowing bag of asparagus veering my bike to the left, it poured as I pedaled up my driveway. Grandma picked them from her garden that day, and the second I greeted her for dinner she insisted I take the lot home. Like always, she refused to eat the last corner of her sandwich. I scarfed everything down without a second thought.

I reared my head to the swollen sky. Shrouding the harvest moon, inky clouds swirled and electricity danced about them as though nature's wicked fingers sought to melt hands to handlebars, flesh to mud. Flickering lightning permitted me to read beyond the bordering woods' treeline. Through dripping curls and cupped leaves, I could make out the ghastly silhouette of a feeding doe no more than ten feet in. I stopped pedaling to stare. Taking the place of wet rock raking through gravel beneath my treads, molars meeting forb.

They were born to eat.

An atmosphere laden with carbon dioxide-powered intercellular assembly lines, and an endless plume of fresh water brimming with nutrients authorized the construction of quadrillions of cells. Fifty million years ago, *Azolla filiculoides*' heedless roots sucked up any and all nourishment they could grasp, and the species nearly imploded on itself. The remnants of this are seen today in ten meters of fossilized mud embedded deep within the Arctic crust, but Azolla was always mud. As I see Azolla I see a deer as I see myself, for our most primordial ancestor sprung from mud itself.

I held my gaze on the doe and lightning flashed. Akin to blooming English ivy about a fallen barn, the white of her tail weaved through frayed vines and wood. Darkness took hold. Moments later the woods lit up again, and her stalk-muddied maw now faced me. As though two needles had plunged beyond my orbits, the doe's stare probed the wrinkles of my soul.

Was I not born to eat?

Agriculture was a staple innovation at the dawn of my species' worldwide sprawl, and with the passing of every harvest moon, our farming is further refined. When our ability to extract any and all nourishment our grabby hands can reach peaks, it will have already been too late. As we siphon every morsel of water from aquifer to gut, we will gush, and then we will burst. Nature looms over us the

way a buzzard eyes a bloated deer, and the deer reminds me that I've always been one with the mud. The doe continued feeding, so I pedaled up the rest of my driveway. The sky lit, rumbled, and ripples of raindrops in a puddle preceded cascading monsoons of murky water up my legs. Slid away, did my back wheel. Tumbling slack-jawed into the mud, one with the mud, and a doe feasted upon asparagus trailed behind.