

The Goddess of Spring

I first saw Cordelia the summer after someone tore out my heart on New Year's Eve. Too much fog for specifics, but her glow cut through it all. Ivory skin and a wreath of gold leaf for hair. She'd not seen me before but said she'd have to try harder to. Her cyan eye left me feeling like I was leaning back too far looking into open sky, only she was even better at getting me on my back. The first time we were entwined and exhausted she said words, since branded into me, like the weight and warmth of her body.

*"This sacrosanct act,
let it be remembered back.
And our beating hearts,
be the drums to dredge up,
that primordial pilgrim.
From seabed to ours."*

I'd not understood, it took time for Cordelia's tales of the Goddess of Spring to coalesce. Of a mother, entirely unlike her own, whispering encouragement at every step in a language with only four letters.

"Okay, occasionally five."

She told me about a shrine, rundown out of town. Where she'd go if she could muster the courage and strength to get out unnoticed. There, almost alone, she'd pray and ask why she's stuck in a body so uncooperative

"But of course, I had it wrong all along. The flesh isn't a test, it's a gift, as is getting to give it again."

I remember breakfast on the beach. Wind and sand shredded our skin, and ruined our eggs. Because Cordelia told me she was nostalgic for the sea.

"They're the same waves, darling. As always. Don't look so incredulous about conservation of energy. Quiet, and you can

hear the Cambrian explosion echo.

There's something I should ask. How would you feel sharing my body with another? At least for a few months."

Cordelia had to be the happiest I'd ever seen someone who was constantly throwing up. I insisted she see a specialist to settle my nerves. Big mistake.

Being told this was totally normal for someone with her history, and that this early on in a pregnancy, was comforting the first time. Less the second. By the third, fuck!

Doctor said that it was still all fixable, that Cordelia would be okay but she'd need every ounce of strength just to get better. I asked about our child, fine apparently, which I thought was more important than the doctor did. Cordelia was doing everything not to cry.

"I can get better and we can give it another go. Now we know I'll have to work a little harder, we can prepare properly, not just rush in. Can you keep yourself entertained for now, darling?"

The doctor finally cut her off before she could say anything else at a hundred miles an hour.

"Okay, okay, okay I get it! We don't do that then! But I can get better?"

Cordelia had stopped trying not to cry.

The temple wasn't hard to find on my own.

"Just remember which way you came when my hometown hides behind the trees. You know, no one expected life inside the caves? Then they opened it up and found thriving species who hadn't seen daylight in longer than hominids have even existed. Most of it tiny, until they found her. Not sure whose shrine it was built to be, but it's hers now."

At night, confident I couldn't be followed or found, I trod

soft ground and came across a visage, storeys high, carved into cliffs. Its mouth and eyes ever open while other features were worn away. My pack felt heavier as I approached. I entered through an eye, instinctually avoiding the mouth.

Out of the moonlight it grew darker. That's what fire was for, to send the shadows reeling back to reveal just how much less claustrophobic the caverns were than our apartment. I hoped it was my torch colouring the walls. The soft song of the outside become more distorted and scratchy, the same way gramophone music rots.

A casual glance back caught me when I couldn't recognise the caverns I'd come from. There was wind, the warm kind. As I continued I heard the sounds of countless mouths, each breath out of sync with the rest.

I entered the main chamber with my fading flame for company. All I saw at first was the amorphous mass of uncountably many moving parts. Soon I'd have run out of space to step through to get any closer. I swung at the lump with my torch to get its attention. It reared up and thrust itself into my light and I recoiled without getting a good look.

*"Behold the Goddess of Spring.
Apex atop apex.
The warden keeping us in food chains.
That every predator preys too.
The basis set of flesh and bone."*

In my brief glimpse I saw tentacles tipped with paw and claw, maw with antlers for mandibles and every kind of eye.

"I heard a joke, no one knows if the scariest thing about her is all her cloacas having teeth or all her teeth having cloacas."

One neck, not sure if serpentine or plesiosaur, was poised to wrap around me before another skull burst out from under the surface of its skin and snapped it severed. The creature didn't so much move as rot and regrow pieces in new positions. The corner of my eye caught the writing of endless genitals

making up for their incompatibility with enthusiasm.

I managed to scramble back, my torch held out to create space. I reached into my pack and found the damp cloth wrapped package. I held it out for countless snouts to sniff at and be excited by the scent of fresh blood. I said the words I'd been revising since setting out.

"It's a heart, one that failed you. She chose to live as the last of her line instead of doing her duty. Don't doubt my devotion, I'm ready to hear what it's all for."

"Persistence Perpetuates."