

The Pineapple Family

Juncus is certain the grass crawls towards the house at night. Up like an army, up on grass-legs towards the house at night.

Can you see this picture, Poales? Night forms around the farmhouse with its usual black filling out, day stepping into funeral suit with hat of peacock moonlight and cane of feathery owl. For a minute there it seemed like the big strawberry would never go down, stuck in chocolate hotel of sky, but then it did go down, it did leave us, retreating back over the yellow prairie land as if having blinked on only by mistake. Now the land is a dark total, but a haze of yellow is leftover and caught like lightbulb in my eye. This new darkness is so complete I feel the sun is as dead as you.

The porch I stand on, you know, is the same one we used to stand on together, you smoking your skullcap cigarettes, so happy to be human for the hour. You liked it best. I lean against the wood rail, pushed by the black night to remember you and our other dead machines. So many things can happen at once on planet Earth. Your light has gone out and minute by minute I'm damaged. By a hot and slow moving wind. Where does it come from? I'd like to know more about wind, and thoughts. Thinking of you, the wind sends my hair around my face and over my dull eyes, so scratchy black tendrils of hair push into my mouth and split apart and taste of horse. Of course we were always aliens, I don't think that story was ever going to change. But my form, your form; it felt good to be convinced. The moon hangs over the farm large and banana green. Moths swim in dusty circles, puttering against my newly female ears. *I am human now, though I have eaten from moon.*

Aside from that, the land is deathly still. As I watch it, the dark takes on a tone that is almost burgundy. In the distance, silos and water tanks and tractors dark against a lighter darkness of sky. Hard to believe anything lives and waits out there in the grass family, but they do. I've seen it now and even if I hadn't, the proof is in your death, Poales, your body ever-sleeping in their chrysalis.

It's my turn to keep watch. I enjoy this more than any other task the Council can give me. I do my rounds somewhat mechanically, maybe badly, and am taken to standing out on the porch for long minutes at a time, just looking. I don't need a flashlight. Unlike Eriocaulon's, my night vision has adjusted incredibly well to this form. Some rats and raccoons dart around in shape of shadows. When I keep watch, it's like the size of the farmhouse multiplies; as do the acres of flat land enroaching it. I become aware of just how tall a house is. Just how big a pick-up truck is, parked and sleeping like an animal in the firewood lot. Stars bigger, moon bigger, air bigger, crew bigger. Me bigger? No.

Crew goes fast asleep. Mostly everybody under webs of sleep but me, who is free to walk, cool walker outside of dreams.

The crew gone to check the hotel should be back soon. Of course a dread has slowly crept up, a nervousness about it all. Thinking that maybe they're gone, like you, and we'll never see them again. The process of being stranded on earth has involved me with constant prayer.

I'll only stay out here another minute. On the porch, under stars, wind combing like a crawler over landscape. Behind me, the screen door rattles like tin cans; the wheat rushes sideways into song below this wind. Air is stuffed with smell of grass and dirt. If I were actually human, and not an imitation, maybe I would sweat. It is the weather of sweat. Poales, you liked to cover yourself in river and pretend that it was sweat.

Let me go inside now. Let me power down the lights, and close the doors, and close the colorful windows on every floor. The night grass will blink awake now any minute—

Hotel crew, you good?

Back inside, once the shuttering of the home is complete, I pause in the shadows of the kitchen to boil a mug of tea. Tillandsia made a woodrush mixture out in the morning grass. When there's not much to eat, tea and tinned mandarin-cakes will fix you right up, hey?

I drink my tea under spree of moon light. It pokes in through the boarded windows, unstoppable. The tea releases a woody green flavour on my tongue.

Wait.

Hear anything?

Poales, do you, in the chrysalis?

I edge towards the window over the sink, where damp sponges sit like dim coral creatures, and pull the edge of cardboard up to peek through. But outside the prairie is flat and dark. You can't always see them, but usually you can make out their silhouettes on horizon, tall as electricity towers. The truth of them is in your death, Poales. Though more so in your warnings.

I slide the cardboard back into place. A strange rigidity has slid over my skeleton.

Relax. The night is a radio. Relax. Earth is an ocean of noise.

"Goodnight, Poa," a voice says. I jump, and it's Tillandsia's eyes that watch me from the kitchen door. She must see something on my face. She frowns, and takes one step closer. Her fingers curl as if wanting to cradle me. "Didn't mean to scare you. Are you alright?"

I step back, and bump into the counter. "Yes. Alright."

She seems hesitant to leave. "Wake me tonight if there's anything you need."

I nod. "Goodnight, Tillandsia. Sleep a good dream."

She smiles at this. "Your speech is becoming nice."

Tillandsia departs. I hear her footsteps travel up the stairs, muffled thuds towards the bedroom that used to belong to the children.

I stand there for a minute, thinking of the circumstance you told me of—snow—before I continue on my watch.

Floor to floor. Room to room. Since Juncus is certain the grass crawls towards the house at night. Up like an army, on grass-legs towards the house at night.

I check the corners of rooms and hallways for holes. Any place a blade could sneak in. Bathroom, my face surges moonish in the oval mirror. Back of pantries, where preserves float in bright brine and empire biscuits lay crumbled for the mice and beetles. Spare rooms I check behind the pine-scented dressers and cherry armoires for holes and also jewels. Humans liked to go dancing. They'd dress up in suits of party. I like to hold this jewellery in the dark and see it flash. This works better in the morning when the sun can glow it.

While I sweep, the occupants of the farm fall to their sleep. Sleep is new for everyone, and some like it more than others. Snoring floats from out behind damask walls and spiders stir in branches of cobweb. The farm's solitary ginger-cat follows me, a pair of floating yellow-eyes pursuing my trail. Dressed in shadow, I go again from floor to floor, avoiding the glossy worms of thought in my head. That Eriocaulon. I haven't seen him all day. Want to know where he is, but if he's hiding from me, I won't go out of my way to seek him.

You've talked to him, though, haven't you, Poales?

You're like a wild antennae attached to both of us. And I have a weird love for both of you right now, since life is good at night. But I'll hide that secret in my leaf-axils.

In the living room, Juncus is alone and fast asleep, limbs statued on a nest of plaid blankets. I stare at him as I move past. Asleep, Juncus looks whittled and blurred and underwater, much less like the wiley cadet he is by morning. He, of course, has banned fires until we can determine what it is the grass families feed off of, and we rocket towards the new year without a single word from the Xyridaceae on when our ships will return to the planet, but as the captain sleeps, he looks like he has let all of that go. When he wakes, he will wonder about the hotel crew and feel bad about you, also.

Down in the basement, there is Eriocaulon, awake too, he's always reminded of an angry owl. He's awake and sitting cross-legged among deserted board games and bar and musky floral couches. He still wears his blindfold. Over his head, pinned into the wood-panelled wall, is a dart board. I think of cosmic apples, of a barbarian's arrow. The shaggy orange carpet smells like walnuts and piano. I want to watch Eriocaulon play the piano. I know he can do it. I saw them put it in his program.

"Enjoying your watch?" He asks. He is not really asking.

I bend towards him, "The dark shouldn't hurt your eyes anymore. Sedge healed you."

"How is it you can trust a Bulrush?"

I stop short at the igloo in his voice, and pull away. "He's done nothing to me but fix you." Eriocaulon says nothing, but his jaw and teeth sit like wood chips, and he seems all of a sudden to be a wood man. Do you see it, Poales? He's a cartoon of fire. "What's got you so worked up? You've been down in your dominion all day."

I want him to say, *other than the death of our man?*

But he doesn't follow me there.

Eriocaulon is given the yellow floral room on the main floor, which is the one next to the kitchen. I thought I would find him asleep after his night watch but he's awake when I find him, standing with his hands folded behind his back as he gazes out the window onto a scene of pure white. A frosted black branch taps against the glass, and he turns his head to the side just so as I enter the room, looking at me silently from the side of his dark vision.

"I'm taking the dogs out," I say. "Why don't you come along?"

Eriocaulon joins me easily enough, but outside in the wild, frost-bitten air I sense his resistance to be near to me.