

The Legend of the Daffodil

I will tell you the story of the daffodil. It is a long-known story from my youth I share now in my age. Listen, quietly. There is a soft music to these words only heard in a patient posture. Listen closely to my voice – the tone will resolve into familiarity.

Over the crest of these eastern hills, before the opening of the plains, there was a great forest. The forest was old, far older than any story, a place that arose from mud and continued to rise from soil. It is said that a man with a cloak of dust could feel the breath of wood in constant motion. Alive, the ground embraced the decay of marrow in the rhythm it nourished sprouts of chamomile. It is said that a woman with wet lips could taste spices in the dirt and fragrances in the air, an intoxication of the very atmosphere. The forest had energy and taste – its limbs were strong. Every inch and space was coated in an amber oil that reflected the sun and absorbed the moon. In light the forest shone; in darkness it swallowed the horizon.

Once there was a legendary hunter that entered the forest while on his way. He carried sinew, sapling, and flint. He was not wise, but men are not so easily blinded in such places, and so he entered with sliding steps and careful glances. He listened to the rustle of branches to learn how to walk amongst fallen leaves. The age of the forest led to a density that was flat to untrained eyes but the hunter spent his life training to see; dappled shades of universal undergrowth and pickled spots of the same green were opened to him in differentiation. With knees bent and a forehead unfurrowed he scanned the depth of color in his vision and could see the serrated edges of leaves against stem. He could notice the gaps and behind-spaces in the thickness of vines. The soft noise from the opening of a fern to a partial sun rested gently along the curve of cartilage in his ear. His mouth was not closed – how else could he taste the gentle tricks of the wind between flowers?

He walked along the in-between of shrubbery, placing his hands on the taut skin of oaks and firs to guide his path into expectant spaces. He could feel earthworms curiously stretch themselves between his toes, so still and calm did he move his feet. Finches were more wise; they knew his hair was not a place to perch and so watched him from their distance as they would ripples in water. The hunter felt the gaze of feathered things and the soft pressure of dirty strings – he saw them as clearly as his eyelashes and was as careful in their presence as he was before polished silver. He knew the forest had no tolerance for excess – his path must be as inevitable as his footfalls.

The sun had begun to feel the weight of its descent when he found a pool of collected rain. The hunter saw the veins extending outward from the heart of this place, and knew it was here that he would begin and end his search. He lowered himself to be closer to the ground as he took his tools into his hands. He had spent the weeks previous sharpening his flint until he couldn't see the border of its edge; the tip of an arrow really has no thickness, and there are such large spaces in the tightest of vines. The hunter always had a love for beautiful things; holding his arrow up to

the slowly darkening sky, the horizon really was no different to behold than the edge of sharpened stone.

There came a time when his throat moved through sand and the hunter knew he must drink to ease his thirst. He moved slowly to the water. He knew better than to move in silence, for silence in this forest would be a void too easily seen as missing. He let his fingers trickle through grass and his heels whisper around twigs, flowing through a log that crumbled and groaned under his weight. His human limbs could not be hidden through a shroud of muffled fibers, but the outline of his body could dissolve against the contrast of swaying leaves. It was in this manner, with the slipperiness of water upon the firmness of ice that he allowed himself to tumble onto the bank of the pond, undisguised and naked. He would rest there, until the sun weighed heavier, and he found a result of his arrow. But as his chin dipped gently down with the weighted grace of dew on needles he stopped, arrested, in a sudden violation of momentum: the pool was impeccably still.

The hunter was suddenly visible, a gasp echoing from the forest at the sight of his uncovered face. This hunter had heard of such a pool, a sheet of water spread thinly over reflections, a collected reservoir of ancient rain that tolerated no illusion. Before he entered the forest, a traveler who spoke with many voices told him of such a place. In the voice of a more-than-man the traveler had said, *There are some waters that resist being drank no matter the thirst of the beholder. Their surfaces are unblemished and smoother than any shell; their openness forces understanding of the constant distortion of waves. Beware of such spaces: a glance into such clarity is blinding – your vision will see everything the same thereafter.* The hunter let the words echo at the edges of his first breath facing his fluid destiny.

Is that me? The hunter was staring so deeply he didn't notice an echo had spoken first. He felt his arms tremble and his knees suddenly stagger as he asked himself again, *Is that me?* The beauty was breathtaking, blink stopping and empty. It was so stunning in magnitude the hunter soon became deeply weary, wishing no more to be concerned with concerns. He looked intently between thoughts, opening and settling into an emptiness of considerations. Soon those moments between thoughts began to stretch until the sun seemed weightless in its speed overhead; the hunter thought nothing of the amber oil slowly layering on his limbs. Never before had the hunter ever seen a stillness so complete – never before had he discovered himself to be so still.

It was then a white petal, glistening and waiting fell as a tear down his face into the pool below. Gentle curves inevitably moved across the face of the water and were suddenly collided, a chaotic dance just barely beyond intuition. The hunter saw a reflection hurried, changed, and interrupted. *Is that me?* The hunter could not bear to move away or change his gaze – he had seen truth in the reflection of sunlight and mud. What use had he of eyes any longer? They would see only refractions and illusions of stones and feathered things! What use had he of a body to posture? His own face was so greatly shaped by a petal! The hunter felt himself breathe and collide with marrow and daisy, his mouth as wide as chamomile. Curious worms poked through toes as thin as roots as the hunter lost his ability to distinguish mud from soil. Sinew

stretched into sapling, flint danced into serrated edges, and the hunter laughed with a face glowing yellow, asking *how had I forced such distinctions?* The pond once more felt the kiss of white petals as the hunter allowed himself to flow into spaces of empty pressure, not resisting the gentle pull of his cup and crown. Once the hunter no longer felt his fingers plunged into dirt nor noticed a wetness of his face during rain, he saw his total reflection and knew himself to be beautiful. This is what we call the Transformation of Things.

The daffodil still catches glances of reflections in moments of stillness, concerned with only the elegance of itself. If one is quiet and patient with the wind, an echo will carry the breath of the hunter with the face of a flower; one will hear the whisper of *narcissus*.