

## The 12 Permaculture Principles

### Principle 1: Observe and Interact

I used to think the sound of sad women was beautiful,  
loved the smell of wine being poured down the sink.  
How sacred the pouring out, the porcelain stained red.  
I've poured sun into your eyes to make you look  
like a woman burning—like a field set ablaze, scorched and ready  
for next season's planting. I sweep the bugs from your eyes  
laughing because bugs always get caught in them  
and we imagine that your eyes are like open windows  
and bugs love to stick to the glass. Like little leaves  
trapped in a windshield, eyelashes wipe them clean  
and you get lost in the soundlessness of wishing  
away periphery specks. You pluck wings from a blue iris,  
vision fluttering, a world obscured. You keep the wings—  
melt them, pour them into a crystal cup, drink  
visions of flight; you blink and swallow.  
I draw tears onto your face as you  
pick bugs from your teeth.

### Principle 2: Catch & Store Energy

A man in my family once threw a litter of kittens  
into a burning fire. I imagine the kittens  
mewling for milk—  
for something else this man could not give.

The prayer candle in my house only burns  
on the days that mark someone's death. The dry smell sticks  
to the throat like soot to cheap wax.  
It's usually my mother who lights it, she's good  
at reminding us of our mortality.  
A faded icon wraps itself around the candle's face,  
who was once the Virgin Mary  
and sometimes I can make out the smudged blue  
of a woman born from purity and sky.

When I was young enough to still wear white tights  
but old enough to know what hell is,  
I used to blow out the candles  
in our church because it felt good.  
To lean over their small flames and believe

my breath could anger the heavens,  
I felt godly, like I was tasting  
the flame of something stolen.

### Principle 3: Obtain a Yield

When I say that I want to live on a homestead,  
I mean I want land to spread over my skin, to numb  
my body, purple it all to asters and snakeroot.  
Because when I was very little,  
my sister and I would press our ears against the floor vents,  
the metal slots carried their curses  
from the kitchen to our small bedroom. And sometimes we would lick  
the cool metal, cutting our tongues on sharp words  
and staining our lips in bloodied love.

If we lived on a homestead instead of a suburban street,  
it would be about decomposition.  
Miles of meadows would take our numbness into the soil.  
And the thing about decomposing a still-warm, dead corpse  
is that your steel shovel will dance with maggots  
and you will learn to crave the stinging pull  
between flesh and earth, and you will see  
how we break death  
to make a home from its grave.

### Principle 4: Apply Self-regulation & Accept Feedback

The band claims that their music is *lucid-dream-like*,  
so I go to the gig and stand up-close waiting  
for the lead's guitar to bless me with a rhythmic light.  
I imagine those strums to be the hypnotist's  
metronome that I can experience something  
spiritual here. I sway and think *lucid-dream-like* thoughts,  
but the music is too real and I forgot to put on deodorant  
and I think I am too lucid with not enough dream.  
My feet are covered with the floor of the world.  
And I expect the music will lift my body high  
enough to see the crowd, to look down on the dream.  
I'm the guy in the bible who climbed the tree: Zacchaeus.  
The girl in the opening act didn't wear a bra  
and I thought *I could be that free* and I hated her  
because of my itching, unfleshy form.  
The stage lights pulse. So many bodies bouncing  
off starlight and dancing towards a promised dream  
fashioned in musical shadows and rolled-back eyes.

I scream *Jesus, clean my feet!*  
and the disciples sing back: *fuck yeah.*

#### Principle 5: Use & Value Renewable Resources

When a whale falls, its body becomes a home  
at the bottom of the ocean. I bet the fall  
sounds like the dropped stones of disillusionment.  
I wonder whether each carcass is fully furnished  
or if the fish fight over occupancy  
and divvy up the organs like old lamps left  
in a dead person's house. What makes the whale  
a home? I once saw my mother give our dog valium,  
felt our tile floors turn to dust as our house sunk  
a little deeper. We breathed minnows and rested  
on a decayed seabed. Our walls covered  
in bloated smiles and sand-scrawled apologies.  
Before our house became a whale, it was a water tower  
in the middle of suburbia, the tallest point. It was  
more sky than sea with a tank that could hold at least one whale.  
When the tower was torn down to build our house, we watched  
water spill into the streets, we climbed into the skin  
of a whale and fell asleep with its blubber against our chests,  
its salt pressed into our eyes.

#### Principle 6: Produce No Waste

Naked and soaking in the tub, you try  
to find God. You stripped, lit candles,  
closed the toilet seat, tied up your hair. You scratched  
a cross across your chest and covered  
the mirrors with towels. Now, try  
to stay in the bath for at least twenty minutes,  
any shorter is a waste of water. Any longer and it's a game:  
try not to throw up or pass out, sit still, sit silent, stay dizzy.  
Breathe into your belly and drink the bathwater. Make yourself  
cry and call it a craving for false grieving. The bath drain  
used to scare you as a child, its ability to pull inward, the fear of being swallowed  
into something larger than yourself. The enamel basin  
is lined with incense yet you only smell your own evaporation.  
To separate yourself from the water  
is to admit to your sins.  
You should live waterlogged  
and die with lips sealed shut.

## Principle 7: Design From Patterns to Details

My father doesn't write poems,  
but he chews tobacco and holds  
a blackened sadness in his cheeks,  
under his tongue, between his gums,  
spits the dip into an old Coke can  
and dreams about tying his dead  
childhood to the train tracks in Ohio.  
As a child, I was afraid of thunder.  
So, my father would pound on the ground  
with fists, drum on the walls, bang pots and pans,  
scream over thunder to make it more human.  
We filled our house with handmade rumblings  
and crafted echos that rivaled the sky's deep calls.  
Now, when my father asks: *how can you make art?*  
I tell him I am a poet,  
I tell him I am just making noise.

## Principle 8: Integrate Rather Than Segregate

When I was a girl, I broke my hymen  
while riding a horse and came  
on the wildness of it all.  
*Ride me like a horse, baby,*  
the boys will start to say.  
They will ask for leather whips  
and leather boots and leather skin,  
but I will show them a half-dead mouse,  
my rope-burned hands, how I can't  
make a fist without blisters splitting.  
I've braided horsehair into a bra,  
sewn my thighs to the saddle.  
Which is to say  
that I held a nakedness against the animal  
and pulled the sound of running hooves  
into my womb.

## Principle 9: Use Small and Slow Solutions

It's that time of night when everything looks flat,  
like you could break the darkness with your lips, whistling,  
or fold yourself into a paper girl made crisp  
by the cold smell of sawdust and moon,  
made crisper by the pocketknife pressed  
clean against your thigh. You walk through a field

to cut a horse's leg free from the electric fencing,  
and the fields turn lunar and the horses' eyes hold starlight  
and the grass sways verdant and smokey,  
cratered by hoofprints. The air grows thinner  
and the horses stiller as flies orbit your body.  
An exhaled breath forms a nebulous  
glow. You find a fissure in the sky to slip into,  
see the horse entangled in hot wire. Make your presence  
small, you don't want the horse to flee. Approach  
with head low. Gently touch its leg, feel the potential to run  
buried in the lacerated tendon. Lay down.  
Take the horse's place,  
burn yourself into the world.

#### Principle 10: Use and Value Diversity

The body as a pebble in a washboard  
makes the same strangled cry  
as a gold crown  
in a hollowed-out tree.  
How fucked is that? That  
I can pull tangled thorns from your hair  
and cut your smile into stone  
and make you hear a body resting  
in the crevices of echoed sighs.  
How each night we curl  
into a crescent-shaped liar,  
body made into a reluctant  
receiver. When all the pebbles  
run smooth and the crown is strung up,  
it's the sound of treading on gutted words:  
the body battering against itself.

#### Principle 11: Use Edges and Value the Marginal

The door opened and a girl greeted me,  
she said *you look like a dainty fairy*.  
So, the party started: funny  
and I flapped my wings,  
clicked my pom-pom booties  
together and wished I made up  
a better potion to drown in.  
My friends told me: *Grow the fuck up*.  
I ate from the tinkling lights,  
strung up to mask wall stains.  
I coughed out sparkling  
goo that polished the dingy dance

floor. Everyone looked like  
everyone else and I laughed  
when I saw my pointed ears  
and tickling tears run down hollow cheeks.  
I tried to make my face  
look more human,  
but the makeup didn't stick  
to my pearly, baby cheeks.  
I flitted around like a mushroom fairy  
living off these fungal people's  
mistakes. I would remember  
how dead the night looked  
when the decayed dropped spores  
and dropped acid and dropped  
their eyes to the floor so no one  
looked at our sadness.  
The night was a game  
of sprinkling dust  
on non-fairy boys hoping  
they would shrink to my level.  
When my mom and I  
used to build fairy houses  
from backyard twigs,  
I never thought I would feel  
small enough to slip  
through the front door  
of that unreal house.

#### Principle 12: Creatively Use and Respond to Change

The kids are crushing antique teacups,  
snorting powdered ceramic, paving roads  
with tea leaves. They grew up on asphalt  
and will die on a dream of the sun setting against their feet,  
of running westward. They've memorized  
family members by the drugs lining their eyes.  
To cope, they take up gardening, teach  
themselves hügelkultur: make a raised bed  
over rotten wood. Bury a kerosene  
lamp and rocking chair and wait  
twenty years for them to burst.  
The kids rest their heads on pillows  
made from scabbed decay and stale light.  
Their backs slick with slugs, fingers  
tied in vines, they grow food from filth.