The Purple Prose of Cario

by Adam Sifre

Cairo, Arizona, present day

The golden sun, much like my memories of sweet youth, begins to fade, coloring the clay bound buttes in beautiful rusts and oranges. The air is hot and still, and I feel it like a second coat of fur. Part of me prays for a pool of water somewhere near, so I might relieve the heat collecting around me. Instead, I am bathed in dust. Dust that may have witnessed dinosaurs and cowboys and eons of desolation before finding a home on me.

But water is scarce here in Cairo, stolen by perpetual blue skies and blazing sun, to the point where morning dew kissing the kudzu and sagebrush is a rare, wet treat.

I will drink later, perhaps sucking on the wet weeds that overtake parts of my desert, and my dreams. Yes, I can always drink in my dreams, although even there, wet relief is scarce and hard to come by.

“This time I will persevere,” I tell the hills. “This time it will all fall into place.”

The anvil is all iron. Once itself forged in mysterious fires of the ancient's, now the tool for forging others. Not anvils, perhaps, but certainly tools destined to take the fight to the hard dirt or reap what little crops God allows to grow here. The anvil symbolizes industry. It is the mark of progress, gifted to men who are no longer satisfied with stone spears and fur leggings.

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But I am no man. I am Coyote. For Coyote, the anvil has always served but one purpose.

I lift my iron friend, and the effort, the sweet, familiar strain, pulls my front paws taut.
I have carried this anvil a hundred times. A thousand. A thousand plus one. It is my metal albatross, it is my only friend. I take a tentative step closer to the cliff's edge. I press my lips to the iron.

“Roadrunner,” I whisper to my inanimate conspirator. “Roadrunner.”

The anvil feels cool against my lips. In another world, another universe, perhaps Coyote is a stranger to the anvil's sweet burden. Sometimes I wish I was him. I try to imagine a life free of this weight, this bleak obsession. I cannot.

Another step toward the ledge — a jagged isosceles triangle, pointing due west. Far below, on the brown ground of my cartoon universe, I know Roadrunner is there, eating the precious bird seed I've set to lure him to the X.

I dream about the X all the time. And the Roadrunner. I dream of the anvil finding its mark and finally ending my pain - The pain born from a thousand failures and the knowledge, the hard-won certainty, that there will be a thousand more.

Hope always defeats knowledge. It has been so since the beginning, and so the knowledge does not stop me from taking another step.

I would give up all the water in the world. I would consign myself to wandering my desert in perpetual thirst if only I can get it right this one time.

On my next step, I hear the familiar crack. The soft ripping sound that tells me the anvil's weight has sealed my doom again. The ledge falls away.

There is that one instant of freedom where I hang suspended above my world, and everything is still. At that moment, I'm certain that the universe will reveal everything to me.

Then. Gravity. The gravity of my hopes, dreams, and words, reasserts itself, and I am falling. Is it dream or is it real? Is Coyote in other worlds also falling, or is he warm and dry and fed?

I do not know. I have no answers. The universe has not revealed itself to Coyote. I am falling. And the anvil falls with me, still and always above my head. Perhaps the universe has answered me after all. It should feel poignant, I know. But it only feels familiar and overdone.

Fini.

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