

Internet Hole (an excerpt from Psychopomp)

by Amanda Sledz

The Internet is an excellent invention for people with nothing better to do, and people with something better to do who nonetheless don't want to do it. Today's restless research dig: the Appalachian foothills left behind on my quest for Portland's left coast comforts. Cicadas, in particular, since I don't get to hear them any more than I get to see the green glow of summertime fireflies.

Those hills were my first post-Cleveland experiment, from urban metropolis to hidden town tolerating the presence of a college for the sake of employment, amusements, and insight into the lost other side. Appalachia was where I learned voices that sing from womb to grave escape ugly mouths that never knew dental work; where skies could be sketched in purple lightning lines; where something called a wind surge could uproot every tree with a single passing inhale.

Seventeen-year cicadas are the sometimes-singers that surprise spring with the ugliest mouths of all. Their early-dawn sexual thunder used to piper me whenever I wandered away from myself, connecting my dots no matter the page. I've called upon them and their song for weeks, summoning my own wing-stung voice, and though my red-eyed plea splits the bark of interfering trees, they still don't answer.

The decision to leave was fueled by the understanding that one can only live somewhere so long before it's no longer a discovery. Visitor evolves to invader, surrounded by natives wondering which intruder will be the one to demand a retail outlet with everyday great low prices, or will become the latest slumlord renting collapsing houses to college students relieved to have the freedom to further trash the place. Maybe my own ugly mouth would have

been one to join the drones of those humming agreement that out-of-state miners should remove the tops from mountains that have carried the cries of children and coyotes. Hills brick-and-washboarded with songs culled across the Atlantic and cursed by cried-out canaries feel their outsides slip and slide down legacy, through cemeteries without gates.

Instead, those hills push me over.

Changelings are better suited to Portland, anyway. Like Merlin I'm a prisoner of ancient trees, passed from root to fruit until the final red giant falls.

I didn't move here. I was summoned.

Internet trolling finds some sounds but it's not the same; it doesn't arrive like the first sunburn of summer stripping away the pasty layers and replacing them with red. It doesn't pierce my ears or transform whispered conversations to shouting and then laughter and resignation that the insects win. They always win. It doesn't subtract the apparitions from my living room, or make them assume more fleshy forms.

It's lost to me, the foothills.

Appalachia.

The only real option left is rating kittens.

