

Botanical Garden

by Emily Smith-Miller

It looks like Arizona, like a desert with secrets. The bed unfolded and she was being good today. She would be good, no matter how he moved and laughed she would be a lady. The names of the flowers escaped her, flowers she'd always known. All she saw were waterlilies. Japanese bridge, twisting bonsai tree up the pillar of earth. She took his hand and ran through a bamboo forest, away from the purple plants of alien Arizona terrain. They were lost in the shoots. The tall bending plants of another world that almost blotted the sun. She took his hand, be a good girl she thought. He looked down at her with unwavering pewter eyes. He looked at her like she was koi fish, swimming, wanting to be fed. He was trying to decide if he should feed her, bring the swarm. Waterlilies moving with her whipping tail, growing more eager with every accidental touch. She had to look away. Look into the stalks that created an optical illusion of being inside lines. There was always too much at stake when she found herself under the falling bamboo. Jasmine and vanilla.

Unearthly. We could build a hut, he said. In this forest, we could make a home and live on flower nectar like the other creatures. She didn't know what to reply, except she felt like she'd been dreaming of wolves for so long, that this must be something else, but it couldn't be reality. Pinching a lump of skin on her upper arm, she jumped. But nothing faded. The colors got brighter, the sun beamed through slits in their prison of plants. There was silence. She took his face in her hands. We have to go, she said. This is too long that we're lingering in a moment of perfection. It will be nearly impossible to return. Maybe I don't want to, he said. We don't have a choice, no one was meant to be this happy, she countered. I think perhaps we were, you can be the queen of the valley of perfection and I'll be your king, making you crowns of sweet peas and bogenvia. When the koi gets big enough we'll take him to the river and he can pull our chariot of lily pads over the horizon of an infinity pool. I love you, she said. But you know that I'm an addict and you're

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a fantasy. We probably aren't even real. She rolled over and he wasn't sleeping next to her, it was the man who gave her poison in the morning, poison in the afternoon, poison in the evening. The golden light and pewter eyes were dissolved into table spoons. The floral fragrance was now etched in chemicals, her sheets were dirty, like her hands. And his gaunt face told her that they would never escape their bars of steel instead of organic elegance. What, he asked in a disdainful tone. Nothing, she sighed. Just dreaming again.

