

Gone to Seed

by Katrina Dessavre

The careful paths of larger versions gave me enough time to think, to sense their fears from pauses between footsteps, and prepare those minutes, hours, weeks before they decomposed into my whole. The quiet, slow ones, the ones who stepped as if they knew I felt their presence, were the most susceptible to a slow strangling, to misdirection and dwindling hope. I could obscure paths, distract with sounds from behind, evaporate dewdrops to fog up their view. They slowed like insects in the cold, until their limbs folded and they curled up in the crook of a tree stump. Others took a more jagged, desperate approach. They tore through branches, screamed and heard their screams echo, spun around until they became dizzy and sat down in the wet moss in frustration. Those required entrapment, a web of vines I modeled after spiders catching their prey. The strongest managed to hack their way out so I had to loosen the earth under their feet, anticipating their movements so they fell unsuspecting into a puddle of liquid mud that stilled them forever.

But this one squeezed out of the gaps between the vines. It seemed to even enjoy the challenge, laughing and stumbling forward. The faintness of its footsteps made it hard for me to sense where it was at any given moment and my mud puddles appeared just shy of its erratic movements.

I had never felt an intruder so small before. I didn't even notice it at first, and mistook those light footsteps for a breeze tickling my moss. I hadn't heard laughter in so long that I assumed those sharp tones reverberating between my limbs came from a bird testing its mating call. The steady beat of crunching leaves knocked me out of my slumber and I had to scramble to think of a plan of attack.

It was nearing the clearing, the only part of myself I left bare as a reminder of the place where that cigarette had flared and spread

until there was little of me left. I could still taste the bitter remnants of their bones, burnt to ash, so many decades later.

When I couldn't feel the creature anymore I knew it had reached the clearing. The ground there was numb. It was only later, after I managed to wrap a thick vine around its minuscule, fleshy ankle, that I felt a tingling sensation. And it was only after the last trace was a boot the size of a bluebell that I felt those giddy first moments of photosynthesis on that previously forsaken, parched earth. It had never occurred to me that the creatures could plant seeds.

