

The Gift Garden (Extract)

by Kenny Mooney

Now I hear a woman's voice. It sounds familiar, like I know her, but in my daze it is slightly distorted, like I am underwater and she is calling to me beneath the waves. She tells me not to be afraid. Her words are calming; they soothe away the panic and confusion. I feel a warmth swelling inside me, a kind of elation, joy. I am suddenly smiling because my ghost is talking to me. Finally she is answering.

Soft and sweet, she presses something to my lips. Eat, she says, and I do as she tells me, chewing and swallowing the succulent fruit. I feel it deep within me, pushing the hollowness aside. My vision sharpens a little; some details become defined, but she remains a grainy image, a shape of fog and neon.

Sleep now, she tells me, and I close my eyes, feeling warm, with a fullness inside me that feels good. I hear her humming quietly close to me, yet somehow still very far away. Her tune drifts further as I fall into sleep, into arms, branches covered in vibrant green leaves that catch and hold me.

Now the apartment is a field; now a tree; now a chamber of soft, swirling blue. I sleep and I grow here, I wake and eat the sweet fruit she collects from the tree, that blooms on its sprawling branches. Those berries embrace me as arms, long and tender, snaking through my body, spreading warmth. She takes them each day, from high limbs and low, she climbs through that maze of leaf, returning to me. Returning to me.

Her voice continues to remind me of someone, but I can never remember who. Deep within me the itch of recognition claws and aches. She hushes my questions and brings me more fruits.

She leaves me at night, alone and weary, drained somehow, too

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faded to move. My strength is yet to return, is what she tells me, so I must rest. I must recover. From what, I don't know. Everything is fuzzy, my memory a sluggish river, thick with fat. There are things I know I must recall, faces and places, things I have done.

But it is all muddy, those waters polluted with dirt, grit, an effluent my mind is leaking, like a bleeding wound. I try to plot points in my mind, of things I know, the solid moments. Then my focus is lost, it begins to blur and degrade, then is gone.

When she is with me during the day, she sings songs to me as she brings me fruit. Her mouth moves in slow motion and her words seem to slur into one another, becoming a single sound, shifting in frequency and tone. She is monochrome made, phasing shades of grey, she ghosts through. Sometimes she seems to flicker before my eyes, like bad lighting, a candle. A nervous twitch. Her eyes never blink when she looks at me, and under her gaze I feel like a child.

Now the apartment is a hospital, and she moves through walls as the angel nurse, the saviour of patients. She takes away sickness and eats up the cancers. Her song follows her through halls long and dark. Lights flash in a Morse code as she passes. When she is out of sight, her hymn still lingers, reverberating from walls.

I sleep then. Out of sight, I sleep.

