

Photosynthesis

by Larry Strattner

While searching for wildflowers along an old logging path bordering a ravine, I heard voices.

"Damn, Clete. Where are we?"

"I think you didn't make the goddamn turn, Mert, you idiot."

I looked over the edge of the ravine beside my path. It was a long way down, a stream at the bottom. Lots of rocks.

"Where are we? What's happening?" Mert's voice floated up to me.

I don't know how to break this to you ol' buddy, but I think we're dead. Don't you see the truck? How can we not be dead? It's so hard to breathe. God, the air is so crappy I can hardly move I'm so out of breath."

"Howdy fellas. Howya doin?" A third voice floated up. Sounded like an old man.

"What's going on? Look at our truck? Where are we? Where's the way out?" Mert and Clete's voices, taking at once. "This air hurts to breathe. I can hardly move. I gotta get out of here."

"No getting out of here, fellers." The old man's voice. "This here's Hell. You're here for evermore."

"Get a grip, you old fart. Hell's got fire and all that. This is just a stinko ravine."

"Only some of hell has fire, you bumpkin. This here's an air quality hell. The pollutants down here rot your insides out. You struggle to breathe. But don't worry, you're already dead. You'll just suffer forever. This part of hell is just for loggers. You knew how all this stuff happens but you cut down the redwoods anyway."

I rolled away from the edge of the drop. I still couldn't see anyone and I might have been imagining the whole thing, but it felt to me like it was getting awfully difficult to breathe.

