

Skyscrapers

by Rachel Swirsky

Summers, I sleep on rooftops. Under smokestacks, beside stairs, in the sudden green of precarious gardens.

I love to lie when discovered. "I'm your new neighbor." "The landlord sent me." "I'm the ghost of the girl who died on the 11th floor." "I fell from the sky." I wear billowing white dresses and a wide-brimmed straw hat that throws my face into shadow. People are eager to believe me.

Sometimes I say a true thing. "I adore heights." "I'm very old." "I once lived someplace green."

A young man guessed once. "You're a nympho!" Only he thought it meant I'd come to make love among his potted ferns. He yelled for my secret lover to come out. "Ollie ollie otsen free!"

A hard change, inhabiting these glass-eyed steel towers. All angles. I am curves, like roots and leaves and tributaries. I long for beauty.

At summer's zenith, I stand on the edge and stare down at hard, distant avenues. There are no longer any gods to chase us from our trees. But there is always this way out, this dive into asphalt. Wingless flight would be beautiful.

Instead, I find a wide rooftop in the middle of green and hide in a sculpture garden. Tourists are everywhere, hectic with stares and wry remarks. A little girl with tangled orange hair practices walking pigeon-toed. She takes a cartwheel. Adults gasp. Imprudent! There is beauty here.

The leaves change. I don a sweater and descend from the roof. I roam narrow corridors with a mop or tea tray and sleep in offices on beds of paperwork. With the snow, I retreat to boiler rooms, completing my circuit from rooftop to roots.

They are trees, almost. Steel trees with leaves of glass and stairs for branches. New trees. And trees are always beautiful.

