

Our Travels on Fire

by Tantra Bensko

We never knew where we were going until we noticed the flames twitching in each other's palms. The flames would grow larger, more pointy and brilliant, and we would hold our hands up to the wind, flat out, and see if there was any. If there was no wind, but the flames still twitched in one direction, in both our hands, we would wink at each other, and know it was time to take a direction. We would find the pathways through the sensations of prickly nettles, through the marshy wetness, through the raspy fronds, through whatever landscape we had immersed ourselves in. It was noticeable some days that the directions were more often than not westwardly. We felt our dreams came from the west, land of new inventions and costumes, land of parties where fat ladies might be seen undressed and enjoying rollicking times on the floor with men become invisible under their rolls of sensuality. Our faces would grow warmer and pinker when we smiled at each other, acknowledging the direction we were going in, with delicious anticipation.

We waited. And behind the large leaves, so large they barely seemed real, might appear the head of a woman from one of the parties we had thought of. She might lick the leaves and pull her own hair and shake her head from side to side rambunctiously. Yes, we knew we were going in the right direction. And we would take off with great strides, our thigh muscles feeling empowered with flesh and extension and bulge.

We knew there was no answer but to pity the woman behind the leaves, because she was not at the party right then, but somehow, we knew she really was. Some of the sounds of the party surrounded her like necklaces, light on her neck like a necklace made for a much more delicately put together woman, making her look larger than she really was.

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Sometimes, it would be an acrobat midget, or a monkey on wheels, and one time, it was a grandfather clock that had a door inside that opened inward instead of the traditional outward. Instead of a cuckoo coming outward, there was a dodo going inward, and we felt the lack of the dodo as it was sucked from the field of energy around us, from the past, through us, and it made us chilly. We had to sit down. The dodo lived in the clock after that, we supposed, but we never went back to check. We never kept up with what would appear around the edges of the leaves, the hanging moss, the stumps covered in lichens. We never gave much thought to them once we moved on to our adventures. We had made up our minds already, or the flames in our palms had, and the little guests into our journeys were incidental, though highly useful in guessing what was ahead. Sometimes they were misleading, sometimes abstractly symbolic of what we were to experience, and sometimes, a little too direct for our tastes, frankly.

One time, the flames in our palms led us astray. I think they were feverish. They were feeling constrained by the colors in our palette of desire, too green, too leafy. They wanted more red, and they directed us into a kind of bordello of the imagination. We were offered toes painted with rose petals and sunk into shoes that walked the streets at night on their own, very gold but not as shiny as they could be if they had stayed in the closets while the feet slept, like most shoes. We were offered mannequins that had pubic hair that grew and swirled, and could visit like a pet, and sit in your lap, but sometimes, we would trip over it when we got up, which would then knock over the mannequin they were connected to across the rooms, which would knock over the lamps. That was dangerous, and we understood the danger of fire. We were not entirely sure this all was what we really wanted. Our colors were becoming more runny. We felt lavalike. The greens were leaking into pathways in landscapes that called us to travel through their little green paths

through all the comforting leaves with serrated edges and yellow stripes.

So we left, and followed the green stream of our colors into the jungle, and began laughing with the monkeys. We were lit up we were so happy to frolic in the wholesome land of monkey chins and baboon bottoms and vines that wrapped around our bodies in welcome and gave us kisses like our mothers would give us. Until one vine slipped its little nippy fruit sensuously into my mouth. I spit it out. But I was never the same. Never the same.

I was no longer innocent that day, and I long for that jungle before the vine tempted me just when I thought I was free of desire. Just when I thought I was following more the green, not so much the red. Now, my flames in my palms are redder than ever. My friend's palm fires are not as red as mine, more golden still. We no longer find the same directions to go in as easily. I am embarrassed. But one day, I will slip my nipple into my friend's mouth and we will go on together, always in the same directions, like we used to, just redder ones. And we will just open the windows of time and fan ourselves if we get feverish. We will dip our fingers into the invisible pools of water in the statues and suck them when no one is watching. We will be careful not to put out the fires in them, and not let them burn our eyes when we lick our fingers. We will know just what to do.

