

## Salvation

They watch their land like a single eagle. Blind and deaf, I thought them idiots as well, meeting them the first time in Spring. They thought it was Winter, for the overhanging mossy walls shaded them from everything, from warmth. His name was John; he introduced me to Paul, Pious, Benedict, and an array of other names that'll make you feel guilty for going to church only on Christmas and Easter. They waved without hands, without sounds, and didn't notice when I ignored them.

The walls were cool and invisible but for a patch here and there of graphite slate left uncovered by green. Vegetation proliferated on all sides, but stayed out of the paths John took so that he couldn't feel it pressing in. He thought the place was empty, that God or some divine fallacy kept their church free of vines and tendrils belonging to the Devil or some false divinity. He was wrong; I couldn't tell him, or didn't want to.

We used sign language to communicate—he would feel my hands and I'd ignore most of what he signed in reply. I told him I was a journalist here to learn about this amazing church that has been kept up by a dozen monks for years and years. So he toured me around and I marveled at everything he didn't believe existed—he felt my hands sign out the shape for "Springtime" and shook his head. Shivered, signed "Winter". I stopped conversing there. He kept going. Regaled me with the church's fascinating history and how the good Lord bequeathed unto them this and that, how they have his everlasting protection from Evil (here he crossed himself and attempted to do the same to me. I dodged.)

He introduced me to Paul, Pious, Benedict, and the other monks again at the end of the tour. Went into a cavernous room filled with greenery invisible to John and certainly invisible to the other monks. Their corpses strung up on vines above us. I could see their ribs, mostly white but with mossy spots, too. Splatters of red on the grass beneath them, in front of John. I strung him up too, wove the vegetation between his bones with care. The screaming of a man who's never heard a scream is eerie. I said a prayer to entertain myself and left his hands signing "Amen".

Years later the plants swallowed them all.