

Uprooted

I am cooking. Well, sort of. I am thinking about cooking, Fritz is coming over today, just like every Tuesday evening. I leaf through the splattered pages of this old cookbook. Tony gave me this book, years ago when we lived together in Seattle. He was dangerously handsome, and maybe as equally unintelligent. I come across a few of my favorites, but I've cooked them recently, so I go out on the edge, and choose an Indian curry chicken stir fry. Does Fritz like spicy food? I wonder to myself while I skim over the ingredients list. I laugh out loud. How could I forget? That one time in Costa Rica, we were completely soused; eating at a restaurant near the beach he ordered some spicy burrito something or other. He puked it up right there at the table. We ran, we ran for the hills, or the dunes.

Fritz brought more gifts today than usual. I never get tired of turning the knob of my sturdy wood door, and seeing his shining bright blue eyes. They are entangled in mine when he gracefully verbalizes "Good evening, Claire." I reply, and then help his other tangled limbs carry the sorts he traveled here with. "Gosh Fritz, you're a damn every day Santa Claus! You need a velvet sack.."

We always leave the gifts on the couch, and their explanations and origins would be introduced after dinner, a lovely banter of words, histories, and sips. Oh and wine, was always one of the gifts. I think that's why Fritz and I have always gotten along, we both appreciate the twisted, unexpected turns that any journey can offer, the history behind things. You may pick up a thing, and never be aware of the energy this matter once ensued, or witnessed. Like this ladle that I am using for the curry, it used to belong to my grandmother. I remember an evening when I was a young girl, I ran across the street over to my grandmother's house to borrow this for some soup my mother was making. As I was returning, I met a lonely fellow who melted my soul. It became our new family member, I introduced him to everyone else. Jets was our pet for 17 years. It's just the manner of such arbitrary events and how they become twisted and weaved into the thick fabric of one's life. I never returned the ladle.

"Whoa, those spices never fail to put me into a trance, mmmm." Fritz watches as I gently stir, peeking into the pot of simmering Indian jewels, sniffing the vegetables and yellowy meats. "Yes, the herbs too, they are the freshest," I loved having the herbs alive and readily available right here on my windowsill.

“Claire! I can hardly wait to tell you.” He’s methodically collapsing the napkin over his crouch. “I was at the garden this past weekend. You know they needed some help re-potting a few things. They’re making this whole new section of the garden. You would love it, only arid plants. Cacti of all sorts.” Fritz likes the curry, I can tell. “Claire you remind me of a cactus. Defying all the odds, being the sole comfort and savior, and beauty of such a barren place. A god damn oasis.” I blush; Fritz always had the best compliments. “Anyways, Jack, you know Jack, he’s got his own garden at home, all sorts of crazy stuff.” Jack was the trick of all plants, he would joke about how staghorns made him horny. “I remember,” I say, “he once showed me that big stinky flower. I don’t know who would ever want such a flower..” He chuckles, “It reeked! Well he’s moving out soon, got some other garden to tend in another county. So, I was looking over his collection, and I don’t know, I mean it’s strange, this one just caught my eye, so simple though. A vine.” “I love vines” they climb, they stretch, they leave their trail behind them. “I know,” Fritz says softly. “So I will bring it next time I come.” That was all, that’s how it was with Fritz, just enough information, how I liked it, plenty of room left for my hungry imagination. Fritz is the only man I could tolerate over all these years. He’s so giving, and appreciates giving, like me. But he never expects anything in return, he never takes like any of the others did, I don’t know, I can never put a fork on it.

The sun is slowly crawling across the walls of my bedroom. Sneaking through the separations of my curtains, then waking the wall bringing its color back to life. I’m finally up and in the kitchen now, there’s a breeze coming through my galleasses, this morning whispers sweet hellos that linger and twirl behind my ear long after they pass. I am in a curiously wondering mind set today. As I water the lavender and sage, images of Fritz walking among cacti play in my head, his hands moving about as he talks with Jack. And most of all I imagine this mystery plant. A vine. One that had to be oh so interesting to call Fritz’s attention. It was a nice day.

This past week in between our visits was a bit more painstaking than usual, but it’s finally Tuesday again and I am so excited to see Fritz this evening. But he was at the door with out the plant he promised. “I’m going over to Jack’s tomorrow,” he explains, “last day he’ll be in town. I’ll be around after with the plant.. If you still want it.” Fritz looked up from his plate and now lasered me right in the eyes, which I thought was sort of odd, why wouldn’t I *still* want it? I’ve been waiting *for* it. “Yes, yes of course I do. Should I prep a pot or..” He interrupts “It’s all ready for you, I’ll just put it down wherever you please.” I take a tour around my house in my third eye,

my room nor bathroom didn't seem as right as the kitchen did. "Right there, on the windowsill, perfect sun." "Perfect," Fritz replies, "now your herbs will have some interesting company." "I'm excited."

I don't believe Fritz has ever visited on a Wednesday before, I find myself a bit anxious, almost like I'm preparing myself for a first date. Did he plan it this way, maybe he's curious to see if my house and my mind are any different from a Tuesday's? I laugh at my thoughts. Fritz, he's so interesting, why *do* we follow such a rigid schedule, him and I? I really can't remember how our weekly dates have come to be. I remember when we broke up long ago, it wasn't like any of the others when we said our goodbyes. Our lives weren't similar enough at the time, our wants and needs were not the same nor could they be satisfied if t'was possible. I flashback to our last goodbye and see those strings that were dangling there in his eyes, still holding onto me, and I was there on the other side holding back, something unspoken, but incredibly loud.

There's no breeze today. I am lying in bed with a slight headache. I can't quite remember falling asleep. Fritz and I drank more wine last night than usual. I wonder what time he left. We sat out on the couch in the den for hours it seemed, sipping away and reminiscing on some of our wild adventures. Something we rarely did on Tuesday nights, because there weren't any gifts lying around to be talked about, just the vine in the kitchen, which he put down on the windowsill. I've decided the first plan of the day, is to drink a lot of water, and share some with the vine too.

"How's the vine livin'?" Fritz points toward the poised slender limbs lightly draped over the sill. "Nicely, very nicely." "Great, I'm glad, maybe when it gets older you can plant it in the back up against a tree or something, so it can climb. I don't know how its possible but Jack says it's in the same genera as the Venus Fly-Trap" Oh a goddess plant! "Well Claire, I sort of have some sad news this evening." That sentence thumped my heart out of sync; Fritz was never a carrier of bad news, or anything sour for that matter. "Jack's finally got all settled in at his new place, working at that new botanical garden, getting everything going. He says they're a bit shorthanded though and they could really use some help. They're offering great pay and I've got a place to stay.." I wish I had something to say, like "Oh, well I heard that there are viral worms in the water supply in that county, wolves too, I don't think that's a good idea." But I had nothing of the sorts, nor could I lie. I felt myself feeling selfish, I by no means wanted Fritz to be far from me. "Wow, what an offer," I finally gas off, "You know Jack's a great guy, you'll have a great time over

there.” “Yes, I should, so I’ll be off before the next week starts. Don’t think I stood you up next Tuesday.” I smirk at his remark, I didn’t really have anything to counter balance, I was just looking him right in the eyes, calmly. I think everything that we wanted to say about this situation was released in the slimy beams that we shot at each other, detached yet direct conversing.

I’m building a castle, of blue sand. My feet are submerged in this grainy blue substance, and the waves are lapping the sand a few feet away from me. With every calm wave the sand turns bright pink momentarily where it breaks. The sandcastle is sprinkled with bits of conch shells. There’s no one out here laying on the sand, it’s not much of sun bathing weather. Off in the distance strange sounds of machinery distract me. I gaze up to see smoke stacks billowing big puffy clouds that litter the sky. I am sculpting a tower when I hear a cough, I look up, right into the eyes of a man, a firefighter, fully suited. “What are you doing missy?” He asks me. “Oh I’m just making a palace, a place where I can see all from.” “I wouldn’t call that structure sea worthy,” he says.

Life without Fritz has become a bit dull. There aren’t too many things around the house; a cure for boredom was much easier in the younger days. Sometimes I wonder if sporting high heels and a get up to get it up would be appropriate for the grocery store. I guess I am old. Fritz is old too, I wish we could be old together. I’ve been finding myself in culdesacs lately, where the street sign reads ‘Fritz Way,’ because nothing has really been the same since he’s left.

The leaves wilt quickly, so I water the vine three times as much as the herbs. As the weeks pass, the vine continues to grow with vigor. The leaves have become broad and sturdy, its limbs now stretch out on both sides of the sink. I can now see the little white roots poking out of the bottom of his pot. There are some premature ones as well on the underside of his limbs. They kind of remind me of un-symmetrical centipede legs.

“I long for purpose!” I say out loud, I am writing a grocery list. It’s not as fun when I’m not cooking for special occasions. As I jot down the word onion, I hear a peculiar noise coming from the other side of the house. I stop, listening intently, frozen in time waiting for another sound to repeat the last. An unfamiliar sound, that I cannot relate to anything I can imagine. I curiously venture towards the kitchen. As I am passing the den about to round the corner, I hear it again. “Sh Shhh shshh shhhshsh shhshhhhhshshshshhh.” My heart is a jackhammer in my chest. I’m

stumped, shocked, I don't move a muscle. There's nothing in there but some plants and some appliances, which are off I'm almost sure. I finally muster the courage to turn the corner, I do so with confidence, expecting to be faced with, something I cannot imagine. I am standing in the middle of my kitchen, facing the window now. Here lies nothing, no movement, no noise, no trace of anything. I finally let my shoulders down a little and take a breath. But before I can fill my lungs I'm interrupted by the noise again. I now see where these strange vibrations are leaking from. I watch as the vine barely lifts its limbs off of the countertop and violently shakes its leaves. They vibrate so fast in the air it looks as though they aren't moving at all. I stare in amazement, I've gone mad. Fritz left me and now my plant is coming to life and I can't do anything about it. I didn't know a plant had such powers. My mind becomes a thunderstorm striking up electrifyingly unbelievable questions. I dump some water right down into the center of the pot even though his leaves are not wilted. He vibrates again, this time a tad stronger than the last. That's not the cure I suppose. In a hysteric moment I open the refrigerator, and glance around, I see a tub of rice I made the other week. "I must be dreaming." I conclude as I decide to actually feed the vine. I dump a scoop into the center. It just sits there, rice on top of a plant. I laugh out loud. Almost angered the vine lets out the most violent shake yet. I panic a bit and think of a plant and its biology, the roots the roots, the leaves are important but not as important as what lies beneath. I scatter some rice along its limbs by the furry white root sprouts. I feel like I am witnessing a sci-fi film as the sprouts reach out towards the grains of rice and suck them up. I sprinkle a bit more, I sprinkled it all.

I am now cooking for two again, but my guest is a bit of a nuisance and I can't ever remember inviting him over. He provides nothing in return and just rattles me for more of anything I give him. I started feeding him all sorts of things, my kitchen has become a mad scientist's laboratory where bizarre experiments justify its existence. The vine seems to like soup the best, I pour it right into the dirt of the pot and it seeps into the hearty roots of the plant. He doesn't care for vegetables, but he enjoys meat. I'm molding some meatballs right now, half for me, half for the vine. This vine is a carnivorous beast.

I've woken up a bit later today than usual, about 10:30. I head towards the kitchen to make some elixir of the morning. As I round the corner, I bump into the door of my refrigerator, which is wide open. There is food scattered all over the floor and some empty Tupper wares are thrown randomly around the kitchen. I stand in disbelief. The vine has grown so big he can wrap his

limbs around the refrigerator twice, that must be how he opened it. The point is clear, and quite distinguished, he has crossed the line, I cannot live any longer with this beast in my house. I stare at this demon plant who hasn't flinched yet and I am now enraged, I open the cabinets below the kitchen sink and grab a bottle of bleach. Without hesitating I unscrew the cap menacingly and bring it up to spill it all over the bastardly growth. I am tilting the poison into his dirt when a limb flies up into the air and knocks the bottle out of my hand. This makes me delirious for a moment of disbelief, and then that same limb comes back with vengeance and wraps itself around my throat.

The cold is stinging my face like a thousand needles. I am flying, literally flying down this mountain of powdery snow. I'm slicing up the white with my skies, leaving curvy swirls behind me. I am nearing the bottom of the slope where there is a patch of trees. I zoom into the clear path. The trees on either side are barren of leaves, and their tops are poked into the snow leaving a canopy of heavy tangled roots exposed high in the air. The trees and their roots have created a cave like avenue that I swiftly glide through. The opening between the trees is now becoming slimmer and I start whizzing by road signs; wrong way, one way, stop, yield, stop, stop, stop, dead end.

I gasp for a breath, my eyes shoot open as if they have been closed for years. I am lying on the kitchen floor, staring at the ceiling. I come to and scramble to my feet and run out of the kitchen. I am in disbelief. Did that plant just try to strangle me? That damn thing tried to kill me. I am glad Fritz hasn't been around to see this. I feel like I've turned into some crazy plant-loving lady that's let some rabid vine enthrall her kitchen. Have I let it go too far?

I grab a sword that is neatly displayed on the shelf in my den, I remove the highly intricate scabbard and hold it close to my chest. This sword was hand made in Taiwan, Fritz brought this to me after one of his Asian treks. I think it's a good idea to bring it with me on my future ventures to the kitchen. I'll be ready to slice any unruly fly away that dares to hurt me again. An evil irritation is swelling inside me; a strong awareness that this fervent vine is no good. I am pulled out my maniacal trance by the ringing phone.

I catch my breath slowly before answering.

“Hello?”

“Hello Claire.” No need for introductions, I want to burst out and tell him what the hell just unfolded in my own home.

“Hi Fritz! It’s been too long, tell me, how are you doing?”

“Great, just great. Things over here are very pleasant, I’ve been having a grand time with Jack, were getting plenty of work done on the garden, it’s coming along great you should see it.”

“I bet, I’m sure you two have designed some ground breaking botanical creations.”

“How are you Claire? How’s the house. I miss our Tuesdays dearly.” I am momentarily distracted, by my heart which has swelled with warm fuzz as he confessed he misses us.

“Oh you know, I haven’t got anything interesting to recount.” What has just happened would be strange conversation at the moment I imagine.

“Well Claire you know, these few weeks I’ve been thinking a lot.. I’ve never really realized how much of my life you hold. I miss you Claire, I really do, I miss you dearly. We’ve known each other for so long, and I know we get along so well. We’ve just been close friends though, for so long, but I don’t understand why we aren’t more than that. I love our time spent together. I just..” I must be still dreaming, that damn plant has poisoned me, made me go bonkers beyond my own recognition. “I’ve just thought a lot, and it’s the only thing that makes sense. Claire it just makes sense.”

“Fritz, I, I, I don’t know what to say. I, have been missing you too, so much, I must admit. You mean a lot to me too. It is really so nice to hear your voice, I’ve been lonely.”

“Claire. I’ve decided. I found a quaint little place, near the new garden, and I want” He hesitates, my pulse thickens. “I want you to come live with me Claire.” He pauses, “I’ve decided I cannot live without you.”

I jet up out of bed. I feel like a child waking up on Christmas, when Santa was still real. Last night after talking with Fritz I immediately started organizing most of the things on my desk so I can readily put them into boxes. There was nothing to question about this intermittent situation at hand. I feel almost as though I have telepathically influenced Fritz somehow; to call me and ask

me those questions. He's quite literally, made my dreams come true. I plan I shall pack all day. I wonder, why have I been so stubborn for so long, god knows I love Fritz. There is only one thing laying in my way now. I scheme as I pack all my precious belongings into cushioned boxes.

I am in my bathroom, collecting pills of Tylenol, Benadryl, whatever is lying in my cabinet. I raise the tin can of cotton balls with precision, and diligently slam it down on the marble counter top, making a whitish powder in between the surfaces. I hope if this doesn't put him to sleep, it kills him. I put the white powder in the pocket of my shorts. I've been avoiding the kitchen and feeding the vine lately, once in while I hear him shaking wildly and throwing things about the kitchen. My heart seems to be running in a race, going as fast as it can. I'm scared to enter but this is it, this is all I've got to do, my confidence steams. I run in, grab a pot that is askew on the floor, and point to the fridge. "I am going to cook!" There's no violent movement from the vine, but I don't get too close just in case. So I start, I'm throwing in whatever is left of my kitchen in the pot. I'm stirring and letting it simmer a bit. I glance over at the plant, would he notice? I grab some salt, while sneakily reaching into my pocket. Dash of salt with a dash of medicine. Its finished. I dump the steaming hot mess directly into the vine. I watch. He soaks it up, his limbs swaying a bit. "Soak it in." I watch intently, anxiously. Almost instantly, his leaves keel over, and his limbs become limp. Yes, yes I have won. I quickly grab all his lifeless limbs and bundle them towards his pot. I rip the pot off the windowsill, up rooting all his evil little white sprouts. It must look like I'm carrying some sort of lifeless land octopus. I run to my back yard, all the way to the back towards the fence. I drop the vine. Peel off his now swiss cheesed plastic pot. I dig a quick hole with my hands, I couldn't care less if he survives. I jam him in.

My whole house and all its contents are now distributed among these sand colored boxes. I look over the sea of various shapes and I am proud. I am excited. Tomorrow, I will bring them to Fritz.

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