

tule whitefawn

1, cloud

a deep fog hung over the valley, a grey lullaby which imbued upon the vibrant green of the luscious grasslands a peaceful, almost somnolent quality. weeks had passed since any beast had spoken, as if the silence itself had become too sacred to defile with the base arrogance of speech. not far from where they laid, a copse of trees was barely visible, the furthest branches of the brown-leafed oaks completely shrouded in the seemingly infinite fog.

in this ocean of stillness, where the ethereal shimmer of dewdrops served as the only sign of that swollen white moon suspended watchfully above, a creature was born. only silence accompanied its emergence into the world, as if the universe had been awaiting it for many eons, and had chosen long ago for this moment to be painted upon a canvas of total, uninterrupted tranquility. this one was the firstborn of six siblings, and the blue slime in its parent's womb, which til then had coated the newly born fawn, spilled out with the prize it had once enfolded, wetting the red soil without a sound.

three mature gardenbeasts laid together, each whiter than a southern moonlily, their closed eyes preventing even a single tone of impurity to dilute the almost heavenly image created from their supple flesh and soft fur. these creatures, each a stroke of white painted across the sleeping valley, didn't even notice when a new member of their ancient family came to meet them. they did not notice, for this creature too was entranced in the fog, and it too fell right asleep, unaware of its own birth. the four creatures all shared this tender moment til again they awoke, white fur aglow in the muted sunlight of a new day.

such, the beast known as tule came to be.

six years had passed, and tule was of age to begin the more serious set of teachings given to each young gardenbeast. it sat before an expansive and renowned hall, the only one tule knew of to have a covered passage, and while it attempted not to think about the contents of this room, six elders were sharing equal parts of what tule assumed was a very important monologue, perhaps some thousands year old venerated speech from an ancient, legendary creature to its single, prodigious pupil, now repeated to all new victims of the upcoming test...

the elders continued, and tule's heart fluttered as they did, and its eyes could not stay still, too busy avoiding everything in sight. surrounded at each side by three gardenbeast elders, and with nothing but the door of the bluntly named "fear room" in front of the beast, and surely no option to simply turn around and look at the weather, tule couldn't stop shifting its eyes, not wanting to look at anything too long, lest its sight give to some part of the whole ordeal substance to reality. to make it

worse, since none of the elders were in *front* of tule, it had no option to simply lock eyes with some creature, and instead felt pressured to attempt a dignified, attentive stance, one which gave equal ear to each of the elders around, whilst still showing its readiness to *engage*.

obviously, this wasn't the image the elders were being given.

one of tule's seedparents spoke, "this room is called the 'fear room' for a simple reason, we will do whatever it takes to place the fear of being hunted into your spirit, until you are strong enough to face this reality of ours without fret. you will be stuck in there for a long time, and you must go alone. you will not be killed, but you will be terrified."

another voice, "though you will not succeed this first time, you will eventually be able to continue through these halls without any fear at all, and the shadows will no longer feel so full of danger."

an elder of eight generations, itself 8019 years old, was the last to speak. "you must always recall, young gardenbeast, that our entire culture is prey to many creatures, noble hunterfolk, soft in heart in their own way, who uphold a path of bloodshed to maintain their own order, just as we beasts of leaf and root uphold the order of the garden. neither we nor they can afford fear, and no sentient beast in these lands would place its own life at a higher importance than that of the path it walks. tule, whether your heart is true or if it is weak, so long as you be a gardenbeast, enter this room, and be submerged in the haunting airs of a moonless night."

tule's other seedparent nudged its flank. "tule, darling, i know you are scared, but there's a trick for the first time." tule looked hopefully up at its seedparent, eyes full of tears it didn't remember shedding.

"keep your eyes only on the path, and do not stop moving. don't run, even if you are afraid, for you will wear yourself quickly out."

tule's six long legs trembled, and it could not move forward. the seedparent had birthed 1920 seedlings in its life, that being two full litters, and it could tell exactly what was happening in tule's frail mind, so it gave a downward nudge at the top of tule's head, and laid itself down, six white tits exposed for its seedling to choose. typically, a gardenbeast would not consume milk beyond a year of age, but tule gratefully laid down with its seedparent, and sucked at the same tit it had chosen without thought its whole life, until it felt full, and a bit more settled at heart.

when tule arose, the other elders were sitting patiently, calmly watching the scene, showing neither judgement nor approval. tule knew it had to choose to walk the path of the garden on its own, and it knew that the elders would not give it more than open, tempered assistance in this affair; they

would not give orders, they would not give tule a chance to fall blindly into the lines of their own vision, unless by the natural overlap of those who walk in similar stride.

gardenbeasts mated once every thousand years, travelling great distances to the nearest enclave, and each female would breed continuously for forty years, birthing four litter-groups of six creatures each year, before assisting the others in raising each of the local beasts. only ten percent would survive to see their own garden. of them, only a small fraction would live more than a decade. very few survived long enough to make the trip back, and this is why the numbers had to be so massive, it was the only way to keep the species alive.

for those who did not survive, and even for those who lived for many thousands of years, there was the same fate: death in the jaws of a predator. this world would never allow something so fragile as a gardenbeast to avoid becoming a meal for some other creature, and so despite having internally endless lives, the binds of external mortality would never release them, and none ever did live more than some tens of thousands of years, before being consumed just the same as a newborn fawn might.

for us, fear is an emotion we cannot show. for us, fear is emotion we needn't feel. for us, fear is an emotion we cannot show. for us, fear is an emotion we needn't feel. for us...

without looking back, tule stepped into the passage, pushing past the hanging threads, accepting the looming darkness as its own eternal friend.

tule had been walking for something like thirty minutes without pause, and hadn't seen a single thing except torches lighting the ever-branching path before it. every once in a while, the path would merge again with what could only be assumed the others from which it had previously diverged, these other paths appearing from the opposite sides of walls of stone, as if the entire thing was a maze that could not be failed, leading ever forward to the same destination.

despite being completely alone, tule would occasionally hear the patter of pawsteps, and it was clear that tule was being followed, both from behind and in front, as if by a group of predators who each knew where tule was headed, yet did not yet feel it was time to make their kill. honestly, tule was terrified to the point it could no longer think properly, and was just barely keeping its nerves straight enough to avoid running blindly forward, though the pattering pawsteps further along the path made this a less-than-savory option in its mind.

no roof was visible in the darkness, and the torches were hardly large candles, and placed very sparsely at that. tule turned a corner, anxiety eating at it with every equally uneventful turn. it

wouldn't be called the "fear room" if nothing were to happen, so tule never once relaxed, no matter how many times its path branched and merged, turned and straightened, at times stretching forward in an unbroken straight line for some several minutes of walking, each such tunnel a different length, each time offering the same daunting scene of pure darkness lurking not far ahead of the exhausted gardenbeast. in those halls of stone, the pattering became frighteningly close, echoing to make a sound like the placid falling of a thousand hailstones upon the lush grasslands of the valley. tule never once turned its head to look back, especially since the pawsteps ahead would appear equally nearby, and so it trudged tiredly on.

suddenly, some dozen paths appeared to merge before it, leading to a stone wall with a short and thin tunnel at its center, the single torch suspended above it the only light present. tule was offered a sense of damning finality, as if all possibilities had collapsed at once, sparing the fawn only the single choice between continuing to the path's end, and turning back to retreat, which was dishonor. tule walked forward, and at once, a cacophony of barking and snarling could be heard not ten steps behind tule, the sound coming from each and every path, filling the room with deafening chaos.

without a second thought, tule dashed forward, diving by instinct into the tunnel ahead, the hot breath of pursuing beasts at its behind. the sounds of jaws biting at the air just behind tule's legs kept it moving forward as quickly as it could in the cramped space, and after a full minute of scrambling, having sustained a few nips to its tail and butt, tule's nose filled with the scent of gardenbeast blood, and soon found itself outside the tunnel. tule guessed this was the true beginning of the "fear" portion of the test, where it would be forced to flee in this manner until arriving at some end point. tule was actually somewhat comforted by this, as it assumed it wouldn't be all that terrifying to simply *run* with some other beasts at its tail, knowing they would do no real harm. just as the gardenbeast scrambled to a fully stood position, ready to dash for the nearest cover or exit, a beast appeared almost instantly before it, and in a quick flash of fur, tule found itself with a set of massive jaws about its neck, and before it could make sense of anything, the aggressor shook tule violently about, flailing its body in each direction before throwing it forward onto the stone floor, blood seeping from its neck.

the impact was rough, but far stronger was the impact of the realization that, at that moment, tule was not in the company of any gardenbeasts at all. it had assumed it was being followed by beasts whose scent was masked in the fumes of hunterfolk for the added effect, but now, tule did not know what to think, its expectations and its mind shattered into fragments. the hunterbeasts, now approaching from the tunnel, were all fierce predators, each larger than tule in size, each snarling in sadistic wrath. fear gripped tule's body like a thousand binds, and it did not move as the creatures fell upon it, each fighting to take its turn sinking its teeth into tule's soft flank, before being shoved aside by another beast, who would leave yet another set of holes in its skin.

tule was bit into repeatedly, always for several seconds at a time, and by as many as seven beasts at once, each taking three bites of the fawn, before scampering away into the darkness. tule was shrieking in pain and fear, eyes shut closed in terror, saved only by the thick layer of fat covering most its body, which the predators seemed mindful to aim for, leaving no permanent damage on the young beast. as quick as it started, the last one scampered off, but before tule could recover at all, the same creature which had first grabbed it, a young oulfari male, scooped it up again by the neck, and ran forth at an odd angle, with a third of tule's body in the air, the rest dragging behind.

tule was struggling hard to speak, wanting only to ask the creature to stop, as it feared its death was imminent, but couldn't get a word to escape its throat, and was eventually tossed for a second time, now landing with a massive splash in some body of water. tule hit the floor below quickly, which was only half its height below the surface, and scrambled to stand, finally alone enough to get its first glimpse around.

the ceiling was a twilit summer sky, the new moon hidden somewhere amidst the stars and the odd cloud. the water seemed to stretch infinitely, or at least as far as tule's sight could reach, eyes covered in blood and water and blocked by a wall of near total darkness. tule recalled the beast that threw it, and turned to see it staring, waiting patiently at the waterside.

"i suppose this'll be fairly your first time. name is grhat val'a. kin both share the ritual, hunters and your type, as we've all rightly learning a differ set of lessons regarding to the hunt, best learned at a cub's waxing. yeah, in pain. these moonly waters will've sealed your blood."

tule noticed it had stopped bleeding.

"night'll seal your fate too fairly, if you cannae precisely trot. you'll be attacked for makin' the wrong move, though if'n avoid us'n all well enough, and we'll offer to it some handicap for fairness, you'll be permitted to rightly leave. course, mal'a, escape ain't the nature of this test, actually a test to your resolve 'n your attentiveness. ya can't manage to evade us then, surely too to be deemed a failure, for you'll've be given ample opportunity to do it, course, we'll consume you, makin' the time and space for the next one."

"so if i fail to escape..."

"few fail, young fawn. long as you're makin' an attempt, and don't ye run blindly, which i don't think your for doin, you'll be fine, yeah."

"do you hate me, us?"

"we 'dore ya'all, gardenbeast."

tule's entire body was shaking from fear and pain, but it only turned away from the beast, and departed the shoreline, heading towards whatever lay waiting at the other side. a small shred of confidence welled within the beast, for it knew what it had to do, and there was calm to be found in a certain fate, regardless of the blood to be spilled. this confidence did not hold, however, when the piercing howl of its new oulfari friend severed the still of the night, chilling tule to its deepest core. oulfari magic affects their howl, as with many hunter species, and this enchanted howl, capable of invoking brilliant luminosity, briefly caused the entire scene to be lit up, just enough for tule to glimpse the far shore.

ten times more terrifying than that first howl was the response, a dozen hunterfolk each giving sound to their exact position in the labyrinth, which at least enabled tule to grasp the size of the entrapment. this was not at all helpful, however, and instead caused tule to panic at the sheer volume of its cage, its far ends echoing only faint whispers of the danger lurking beyond. feeling utterly defeated by terror, and no longer with energy to compel its limbs, tule collapsed to the pond floor.

the soothing water was enchanted with some sort of ancient healing spell, whose magical aura incidentally caused it to give a warm, hug-like sensation. tule was comfortable enough below the water's surface, and didn't mind much that it would eventually drown, because this was a far less frightening promise than the claws of its aggressors. tule tried to wish for its own death, but it couldn't really do that, because it knew it was only being a coward, and it really did have no problem with life. tule reasoned, if it were to kill itself anyway, it should just give the hunters the respect of a decent meal; at least then its body wouldn't be wasted, rot-staining the sacred waters.

so tule arose again. this time, clear thought filled the young fawn's mind, and it assumed the hunterfolk would be moving vigilantly to find it, and tule realized the stench of all the old, and new, gardenbeast blood would hinder their senses, and so they must surely have to rely on sight and sound. tule decided to head straight towards the nearest point where it heard a howl; this way, it would be most likely to avoid the hunter, who would probably be walking around, not sitting still in the same spot.

as tule reached the shore, it looked around, and though its heartbeat was still loud, and though tears still drained from its eyes, it was determined at least to make an attempt at survival, not wanting to become a meal in such an embarrassing fashion as failing a fear test.

after about a minute of walking, tule reached the place from where it had heard the nearest howl. nothing but stones and walls of reed met its gaze. turning it's head to check its flank, tule crossed

around a stone rock. just as tule turned its head back to see what awaited it, a flash of fur from below and a set of jaws caught tule fully by surprise. the gambit had failed; the beast was waiting exactly where it had been to start, though tule realized it probably heard or saw it leaving the pond and had been waiting the entire time.

the predator, who was an efexnn, grabbed tule by the neck and slammed it against a rock wall, yelping a bit when tule hit the wall head first, falling limp to the ground.

"sorry, sorry dear! it's your first run, then. alright, well i assumed you'd been here before, seeing as you were smart enough to check your flank, but just so you know, you should always brace for impact, and make sure its not your head or spine that hits a solid object first, if you can help it. also, don't enter a blind spot without looking directly at it first. sorry again. run along now."

tule could barely move, not from pain, but from overwhelming terror, and barely registered the words of the efexnn, and flinched as it leapt high into the air, landing face first into a hole in the ground, covering its ears. tule wasn't actually very intelligent at all, and didn't realize it was being given a chance to flee, only looking around in confusion, not even picking itself off the floor.

the efexnn soon lifted its head, only to spot tule, and spoke with a warm tone, "oh, sorry dear. you're supposed to flee after a beast buries their head, it's so we can't tell where you went. see, we won't actually go easy, but we can't really see or sense anything here very well, and its a large maze, so you'll be able to get out eventually if you keep track of where we all are. try to be on your way this time, darling."

the efexnn stood on its hind legs, spun about like a dancing child, using its back-left paw to make a perfect circle-and-a-half diving arc, and aimed its snoot directly into the same hole, covering its ears again with its paws.

this time, tule felt more confident, and ran quickly away, as fast as it could, to create the most distance between itself and its previous attacker. the plan was quickly cut short as the head of an oulfari showed itself before tule, jutting out like a growth from a large rock not two body lengths down the path. tule yelped and doubled back, turning the corner behind it and running just as fast as before.

in no time at all, a second efexnn bowled it over, seemingly materializing from thin air. as tule's legs were sent tumbling about it, the kind-hearted efexnn approached it, softly whispering, "you shouldn't run, darling. we can hear your pawsteps quite well here," before grabbing tule by the guts, and shaking it around a few times.

tule braced for impact, ready to spin around to protect its head and spine, but was very gently laid to the floor by the understanding efexnn. despite the crippling horror of its situation, tule at least appreciated the warm nature of the two efexnn, but this only made it more anxious to discover what the more aggressive species, such as the mograts and felines, would be willing, and wanting, to do.

like a charm, its question was answered, for just then appeared a spotted-bloodfang, a feline species belonging to the mountain passes, whose strength was surpassed perhaps only by oulfari and pfenixes, and whose sheer violent wrath was equal to that of a raging ocean. the feline, not waiting for the efexnn to even cover itself in the ground, batted tule viciously to the floor, and ran a single claw down its stomach, cutting just short of the fatal threshold, practically an ant's length from gutting the beast clean open. the wound was traced from its chest to its vagina, stopping only short of the latter, and tule immediately began howling in pain, totally collapsing psychologically under the weight of that night's trauma.

the efexnn could be heard angrily reprimanding the much younger bloodfang, who was on its first hunting as well, and more than likely underestimated just how cruel its blow was. the two sat somewhat awkwardly by tule as it howled in pain, bawling uncontrollably for several minutes, before simply going silent. the entire time, the cruel feline was only watching in entertainment, due perhaps less to that beast's cultural arrangement, and more to its own personal disregard for others. it *was* a very young creature, and many at that age were not much more mature, which wasn't helped by the vitriolic nature of their own elders. it would largely be up to the other species to keep the bloodfangs in check, though this wasn't easy with a species whose members lived in total remote isolation, and would likely treat reprimand from a foreigner as a near mortal offense in any other context than this.

when tule had regained conscious awareness of its surroundings, the efexnn nudged it with its nose. "can you stand, my fawn?" tule only choked on its tears, and rose, trembling. the bloodfang callously turned about without a second glance, and put its head in a nearby hole. the efexnn whipped around on its paws, and swiped the cat harsh across its flank. the bloodfang yelped and leapt up, but had the wisdom not to challenge the much smaller efexnn, who'd have gladly spilled its intestines at a single false signal.

"head to the pond and remain there." the efexnn's sweet voice didn't betray a single harsh emotion, but tule could sense fear spilling from the bloodfang like blood from a slit throat. it scrambled back and fled. a light scent like pure, wet hate wafted from the efexnn's fur, and tule's heart began to ease somewhat, though not by much, and so the efexnn turned to face it, basically beaming in its pleasant air, and tule felt as if it was smiling, though efexnn actually lacked the basic musculature to produce any obvious expression.

tule spoke first, "beast of the floral hills," and licked at the nearest of the efexnn's left breasts, to show respect. the words were difficult, but necessary. strangely, milk began to drip from the efexnn, and it blushed as obviously as one of their type even could. "dear, there's fakes, only masks. try again down that path and look." the efexnn gestured to where tule had arrived from, and tule noticed then that its eyes were completely gouged and missing, and it span whimsically about on its heels, jumping high into the air, and landing face first into one of the holes in the ground, covering its ears just as the last had. tule noted that the efexnn were a completely adorable and agreeable species, and before leaving, kissed the blind and pregnant youth on its exposed vagina (this time, not a cultural symbol of respect, only tule's intuition) before ambling awkwardly away on its six, horribly clumsy legs.

soon, it saw the mask, and tule noted its features uneasily, still completely anxious at what must be lurking, having made such a terrible racket previously.

i don't care!

tule pressed forth, reciting mantras in its mind, certain of its survival.

only a few minutes later, tule had managed to stumble gracefully across a softly glowing exit, though in these few minutes, tule had also sustained another seven assaults, the first of which by all the other ten predators, who'd all waited patiently for tule not far down the path from where its screams had alarmed the entire valley to its location, and closely evaded another five by pure luck, often seeing predators up ahead who were looking blindly about for tule in the stenching blood of the thousands year old labyrinth. both its seedparents waited patiently at one side of the open passage, seemingly unbothered and unsurprised by the sheer amount of blood and gashes visibly marring tule's underbelly, throat, butt, upper thighs, and flanks. the female seedparent laid down again, not bothering to lick the drenching blood from tule's fur, but allowing it to collapse to the ground and suckle hungrily at its teat. tule was relieved at their indifference, because it had begun to think it had been mauled badly enough for the damage to be permanently visible, but it guessed at least that the others would have healed from many more wounds of similar nature without issue.

at the other side of the passage was another gardenbeast elder named wasprat kitberry, who sniffed and checked the wounds on tule's body, and howled loudly into they sky. immediately, all thirteen of the other beasts could be heard sounding out, and each except the oulfari was terrifyingly nearby, all having been right at tule's heels for the entire time it was walking. the beasts showed up within a few seconds, running quickly over and lining up to await their lead hunter. the oulfari in question arrived not a minute later, and approached wasprat with an easy stride.

tule was somewhat terrified at the menacing sight of the thirteen hunterbeasts, now shown more clearly in the soft, partial light, but it still glanced affectionately up at the oulfari male, and felt again as if the efexnn cubs were smiling with radiant joy at the four gardenbeasts. grhat val'a ignored the fawn, and gazed solemnly into the eyes of the lead elder, who spoke.

"hunter, is this beast without fear?"

"no, gardener. its heart is weak."

it was tule's thirty-first hunting. it was not at all uncommon for gardenbeasts to take such a length of training to be able to overcome their fears, but tule especially was vexed by its inability to find emotional stability in the jaws of the hunterbeast, despite clearly having the necessary wit and conviction to traverse the bloody path. reaching the same tunnel, tule was again thrown into a violent fright by the cacophony of hungry creatures behind it, and sprinted again into the tunnel, and again was nipped at, and chased.

escaping the tunnel, tule was met with fangs about its neck, and felt an inexplicable flash of familiarity within the panic, but this sensation was dashed as its body was tossed against the dirt. fangs dug into the helpless creature, and blood flowed, and hunters scampered away, fleeing to their places of hiding across the pond. for the thirty-first time again, tule was gripped in nightmarish fear as it was again lifted by the jaws of the lead hunter, and dragged to the pond, to be tossed into its waters.

tule lifted itself shaking from the pond floor, crying at the pain, its white fur covering the skin made black from the thousands of bite and claw marks that had been viciously scored upon the supple, delicious fat covering its tantalizingly weak body. as it always did, tule turned to the shore to make sight of its primary aggressor, and was shocked to see a near-mature oulfari male, white fur dappled in gold-and-blue eyes, tail wagging happily behind it as it stood attentively at the shore's edge.

"grhat val'a?"

"hast bagh! you'd did remember! yeul'a, didn't think i'd still be seeing you fairly here, when it's been two years! it's my last hunt now'n 'fore i'm to get branded with my title 'n all, so yeah, gladly i am to be seein' you there at the tunnel 'n all runnin' away, fair seein' you again, 'fore i 'morrowly turn to the mountain pass."

tule hadn't before considered that this was likely the least spoken of the dozen tongues the oulfari

all learn, and it was delighted at its friend's horrid and alarmingly inconsistent tongue. "i hope this is my last hunting as well."

"only surprised you'd recall my name."

"a gardenbeast doesn't bother to recall much of what it sees, but we cannot forget a friend."

the oulfari went silent for a moment, and spoke more evenly. "really seein' me that way, yeah?"

"i do."

"don't hatin' me then, us, those'ns?" the oulfari gestured to the opposite shore.

tule smiled, "we adore you all."

at this, the oulfari trotted calmly into the water, and as it approached tule, it realized for the first time just how much larger the beast was, oulfari incomparably being the largest ground hunters, not as tall as the mograts, but substantially stronger than their wiry, lean, and very, very, distant cousins. the gorgeous creature approached, its tail and almost unsightly cock dragging just barely across the water's surface, and bent down to lick tule on its head.

"shame then, bein' your friend'n all."

tule was astonished by how sad this made it, and was flushed with despair that immediately eclipsed all other emotions present in its body. "how, how do you mean, a shame?"

"respectin' you and all, i guess adorin' yeah rightly, yeul'a, it's deepening the hunger i've gotten you, flesh'n that sort of thing." this made tule lighten up so much it almost jumped in pleasure, for this was not at all a shame.

"darling oulfari, if it'd make your heart much warmer to take my flesh for your tongue, i'd be warmed rightly more to know'n it."

"speak lightly not, already horny 'n that, i'd eat you just alive here too, yeah, if you'd willingly sit."

"i'm speakin' no light words to ya, then. i don't think i'm much'n cut out to garden, so i'd be fair honored to feed a friend in their own path. don't worry about me at all with my screamin' either, mal'a."

"so be it." and with that, the oulfari lifted the weightless, sacred tule into its jaws, and stood up on its hind legs, and walked over to the shore, where it laid tule on its back.

it sniffed at the white creature, and did so for a couple minutes, seemingly lost in thought, before offering a single lick to one of tule's swollen tits. "okay then, brace now." tule sighed out and released all emotion from its body, before immediately bursting into a terrible shout at the sensation of one of its tits being ripped cleanly off its body.

the oulfari watched curiously at the squirming and bleeding gardenbeast, as it swallowed the astoundingly delicious breast in seconds, and then continued to eat the other five, taking pleasure in the screams of its prey, making sure to lick at the blood, its enchanted saliva sealing the flesh in moonly binding. "that's all then."

"you didn't want the rest?" tule was timid enough to be offended, and actually even more timid, so that the offense was disregarded in the same breath.

"sparin' ya, then." gardenbeast milk isn't food so much as the medium of their magic, and so their breasts grow back in as little as three weeks from being totally ripped off; to consume only the tits was common for hungry beasts not wanting to kill their prey or harm them permanently. "why, darling thing? i really don't mind, you know."

"intuition, that's all." "intuition?"

"your path, then. strong'n that. intuition." "i see."

"say, you gardenbeast's for breedin' at this age? i'm right to takin' ya, scared a bit i'm too long, though."

"i think i'm only attracted to the female beasts..."

"oh, no worryin' then." the oulfari licked at tule's ears again. "oh! my name is tule, by the way, and yes, you can 'take' me as well, if'n you're caring to."

"tule, what, like the fog'n, that? lovely, yeah. alright, yeah, sure though it's not uncomfortable?" tule lifted its head to look at the oulfari's penis, not expecting it to be much longer than a mature gardenbeast's would be, but was shocked to see it standing at a length quite longer than tule's entire body, basically already between its thighs, despite the beast only standing with its big mouth over tule's red stomach. the bulging cock probably weighed half as much as tule, and it was covered in rough bumps and slime, and had dripped so much pre-ejaculate, tule's tail was made sticky in a pool

of it.

"how..."

"oh yeah, we're think'n its for attractin' them females and all, different species and that. females too are like it, big lawamas too, smells real ripe on em' when they're ready for it. actually yeah, we breedin' any beast, and its always oulfari, no matter'n the parent. so that's why we're attractin' em, its about numbers, yeah, ancient trait from back when 'n all."

tule had nothing to say at that, and just leaned its head back, and shifted into a comfortable position. "yeah, then. i'll take you in deep as it goes, yeah?" with that, the moonly creature maneuvered itself into tule, and without any build-up, slammed as hard as it could into tule's anus, almost killing the poor thing from shock, underestimating the sexual difference between a gardenbeast and oulfari female.

the tension in tule's thighs immediately collapsed under the oulfari's hefty cock, and tule didn't bother to tense a single muscle, and let itself be thrashed violently about by its soft-hearted friend, whose vile, offensive genitalia became a ladle, stirring the waste in tule's intestines for several agonizing minutes, and just as tule was beginning to get a hang of the violent motions of oulfari sex, the beast stopped.

"my fawn, you're crying." and tule *was* crying, but not because it was scared or hurt, it was actually very impressed, and was crying from the overwhelming rush of emotion elicited from having been tossed about like a nude leaf in a hurricane. but the oulfari did not know this, and began to cry itself, and spoke with a gutted, pleading voice.

"i've raped you." the oulfari child began to panic, and its breaths became rapid, and labored, and it looked as if it could collapse upon tule, suddenly unable to properly stand. tule was shocked, but before it could comfort its friend, it spoke again, though barely able to speak at all in its fright.

"i'm sorry, tule. i'm very sorry."

tule found its voice, "n- no, don't be, i'm not really hurt. i, uh- i actually kind of enjoyed it'n all, not... really sexually, but it *was* right thrilling to be thrashed around, uh, like that." "i see." and the beast, still crying somewhat in raw terror, began to lick at tule's fur, as if comforting itself in the act of comforting its prey.

and the beast, still panting in a sexless pleasure, happily accepted this warm, rasping tongue, for an hour laying in soft obedience beneath the demonic hunter, feeling more fulfilled and sound than it

ever had. after a long, long silence, with only the rasping of its friend's tongue to fill its ears, and the stench of blood for its nose, and with the oddly pleasant pain which was filling its body the only reminder of its waking reality, tule heard the oulfari speak again. "guessin' i should let ya back to the hunt, then."

"oh, yeah." and the two climbed off each other, and touched noses a bit, and tule said goodbye, and the oulfari said nothing, but watched as it trotted away to the shoreline.

"good hunt, yeah?" tule turned around in surprise, and its friend immediately looked away in embarrassment. those were words for a hunter to hear.

but tule was not weak, and looked squarely in the eyes of its aggressor. "and a good hunt to you as well, grhat val'a."

the two locked eyes for a moment, and tule turned once again to leave, determined to pass this test, determined to prove its strength, not realizing it already had.

the oulfari watched with joyful eyes at the now confident swagger of its new friend, and silently prayed to the stars to be outlived by eight hundred years. "i hope i see you again, tule, though i don't think i will!"

tule only walked forth, leaving behind the oulfari on the shore. grhat val'a scrambled back to climb atop a high ledge, and properly surveyed the scene before its eyes. the stars above. the labyrinth whose three exits changed each night, the blessed gardenbeast, the pond, the hunters, all in position, sitting patiently and without complaint at their posts.

ripples formed around tule's body as that same piercing howl came to meet it, and this time tule turned its head to watch the young oulfari cub...

the cub whose proud stance challenged all who might see,
whose paws could race with morning sunlight,
whose prey-hungry flesh had never been nourished by the milk of a breast,
whose eye-dotted fur gazed easily and omniciously about the twilit labyrinth,
whose incandescent sight could pin a drop of water in a distant maelstrom,
whose claws could gouge the tallest mountains to rubble, and split a pfenix in half,
whose jaws could pierce steel, and lift the largest boulders,
whose tongue would drink the entire ocean if its waters tasted of blood,
whose red and drooling penis waved like a sapling weapon in the breeze, causing even the stars to tremble, for the beast could rape the highest heavens at its passing whim.

and this oulfari demon, whose howl lit the entire night sky in dazzling light, was to tulle the image of kindness, and as its voice washed over tulle's soul in waves of bloody, hateful affection, it felt for the first time as if it truly understood the warm thrill of the hunt. tulle turned fully to face its proud aggressor, and with equal pride to compel it, raised itself upon its white haunches, and, as it listened to the distant song of the now frenzied hunters, tulle howled into the night.

"hunter, is this beast without fear?"

"yes, gardener. its heart is true."

a group of about twenty gardenbeasts had left on a day's trip to a gorgeous section of the valley known simply as "the crystal", a diamond-shaped mini-plateau between two lakes, inhabited mainly by mice and rabbits, which, according to the phoenixes, looked from above like a brilliant gemstone plopped between a set of landbeast tits, whenever there was decent snowfall.

the group sprawled lazily about in the sun, eating pre-packed florabeasts and the odd psychadelic mushroom found growing on the plateau, grooming each other's fur, performing magic tricks with the local flora, harmonizing terribly in ancient melody, and breeding at whim—the main activities for gardenbeasts in any social context.

the topic of gardens had come up, and the now completely drugged youth begged the elders for invaluable insights on gardening, which they'd probably just forget anyway since they were tripping, and the elders obliged, because they were also tripping, and liked the idea of telling tall tales with the excuse of the transfer of wisdom. tulle had begun to dissociate from the mushrooms, and only returned to a brief spell of focus after about an hour, and immediately tackled and began wrestling the nearest creature.

"tulle, you're like a rat who sniffed too much dragon-snow." "i'm going to annihilate you."

as tulle claimed victory over its third victim, one of the elders asked a seedling of the four half-efexnn dogcum litter-groups which type of creature it would be if it was to be reborn without sentience. it giggled, and said it would be an efexnn who got dropped a couple times too many on its head. one of the other tulle seedlings nudged it with its nose and pointed out that, technically, it **was** an efexnn that had been dropped too many times. the group laughed together, and they all seemed quite merry and unserious, even the efexnn hybrid who very proudly proclaimed it had only been dropped on its

head *seven* times, and surely that wasn't all too bad, because it was still smart enough to do "this", and then launched the other tule clean into the air with only its nose, sending it crashing into a legendary elder named dolly oulfussy (who earned its epic name 26,000 years before, after sexually dominating a female oulfari who otherwise would have eaten it, having left it so wholly ravished after climbing directly into its vagina, using its body as a sentient sex toy, the oulfari gave it mercy out of submission). dolly responded to the oncoming barrage by lifting the furry projectile with its head, spinning around in a circle, and launching it back at the offender, making a clean hit.

as they all played and chatted, tule glanced away to the far-off hills, and saw a gorgeous streak of billowing storm clouds, passing across the horizon without rain or thunder, nothing more than the reflux of the world's ecosystem, a canopy of the ocean's milk, an expression of the valley's infinite emotion. one of tule's littermates bit it lightly on the ear, it had been asked a question by an elder, and had not even bothered to glance over. some creature spoke again, but tule could not respond; it was not listening, for its mind had become transfixed by the distant clouds, and so tule watched this scene, and felt as if it too had been displaced from the heavens, nothing more than a white shedding of some forgotten, passing storm. it was a lovely day.

heavy rain blanketed the grasslands; early summer weather had brought the once-a-decade bloom known as "the eclipsis", named such after some ancient pfenix battle against some forgotten warrior culture, fought on the day of an eclipse, during torrential rain which caused the enemy forces to relax their guard against the cat-like, hydrophobic pfenixes. standing amidst the thundering heaven-spew was a certain white-furred gardenbeast, hardly visible under the collapsing and black heavens.

an elder had granted tule a simple protection spell, one to keep rainfall from blurring its vision and causing it to blink. eyes wide, claws dug deep to brace against the wind, tule watched in horrified awe as claws of white power made their roaring path across the churning underbelly of the storm, splaying its liquid guts upon the valley. tule sat there in the turbulent scene, only looking away for a couple minutes when that same elder came back to check on it, offering tule a meal and refreshing the spell.

only shadows were visible beneath the canopy, and the scene was experienced in snapshots, lightning from all about tule offering short glimpses of pure brilliance between the brief stretches of darkness. several hours into this storm, at the same moment that a massive chain of lightning lit up the valley, tule heard a yowl from the crest of the hill besides it. tule flashed its head around to see, but couldn't make out the nature of the source. immediately assuming itself to be hunted, it was prepared to turn tail and flee, but another lightning strike quickly after revealed the beast, a fully

grown yotedji, approaching tule directly.

immediately, tule knew itself to be at the whim of the yotedji, and it knew escape would be futile, even with the darkness as a tool, for the wet soil and harsh winds would affect it many times more than the hunterbeast, and the nearest shelter was the far-off enclave. it was likely to die here. tule's heart, already electrified by the storm, didn't panic, and instead was now double-bound in the temperance of rapture, stabilized by the gripping thrill of the predatious night. darkness fell again, and tule waited patiently, standing attentively to face its likely killer, still bracing against the winds, fur practically swimming in the rainfall.

another strike of lightning revealed the yotedji, the only sentient species of the coyote family, making good time towards tule, already climbing the hill below, not seconds of travel to displace them. the last tule saw of it before darkness again came to shroud the beast was no more than a flash of shadow in the rain, and in a moment, tule heard its paws splash directly in front of it, faint traces of its outline barely visible in the shrouded moonlight. both creatures reserved their voice and action, waiting first for sight to make them more properly acquainted.

the luminous claw-swipe came before long, and the two beasts looked squarely into each other's eyes, tule's, swimming gemstones of soft pink with no center, the yotedji, deep blue eyes with red irises, pink swirls etched along the irises' border, a white dot marking their center. the yotedji's black and flirtatious lashes bore berry-red lips, tule's, only white. "hello, gardenbeast fawn. are you just now exiting the garden, having earned your title?"

"no, yotedji, i am only eight years of age, still six months yet from beginning the final year-long stage of my training." "the dance of the gardenbeast, right. well, could you point me to the direction of your enclave?"

the last word was interrupted by billowing thunder, met otherwise by no sound at all, beyond the piss-spitting eclipsis wind. tule was somewhat enraged that a beast would ever ask such a foolish question, and did not bother at all to respond. heaven-light presented to the yotedji the awkward scene of a gardenbeast looking poutily and unflinchingly into its eyes. the larger beast quickly recalled its own species and made itself humble, leaning far down to lap once at the long nipple of the gardenbeast's left, forwardmost tit. "apologies, i do not bear any violent will." all tension relaxed from tule's body, save for the tension bracing it from the hefty winds. "my name is tutlu, i seek only to check upon my mate in your garden."

tule instantly remembered that one of the elders had just laid its tenth litter of yotedji cub-fawns. "yes, i know the beast. my name is tule. the enclave is this way; head towards the second tallest peak of the bloodrange." tule's outstretched paw lifted in the air until lightning came again to show

the yotedji what it meant. "i see, thank you tule. if you wouldn't mind, might i lap your milk? i am famished almost to death; i haven't spotted a single creature roaming these lands in two days, my senses null as they are in this weather."

"hunterbeast, if your tongue is drained so of your much-owed prey, how come you do not take upon my flesh this instant? i wouldn't dare complain, not aloud nor in my spirit."

"no, white fawnthing, i have fallen so deeply in love with jeckle maypaw, i cannot stomach anymore the taste of gardenbeast flesh, delicious as it is."

"fine, but at least rip a couple breasts from my body once you've dried them, as i know a hunterbeast cannot live off milk alone."

"thank you, my fawn." and so, the strong creature shoved its snoot into tule's side, pushing it down to the soil and flipping it onto its back. for four straight hours, the famished yotedji sucked from tule's supply, which was refilling itself from tule's just-eaten lunch in real time, and when there wasn't a spec of a drop left in tule's now empty underbelly, the beast ripped three of it tits away, glad of their ability to regenerate without mar, and consumed them ravenously, not made full from the rich milk of the smaller creature. when tutlu was full, it arose, and leaned until its nose pressed against that of the crying and whimpering tule, knowing better than to comment on a gardenbeast's pain.

after a couple minutes passed, and tule recovered enough to find silence, the yotedji spoke. "are you well enough to return? we can go together." "actually, i fear i am too hungry now, as my milk was resupplied from the food in my stomach as you sucked, and i've lost blood." tule took a couple hard breaths, "i know i can make it, but i'll make very poor time if i cannot resupply some amount of energy first. you might as well just leave me to sleep here, and send an elder after me when you arrive."

"nonsense, fawn. would you be disturbed to suck from my penis its seedmilk? i can feed you about half the energy contained in a florabeast with one ejaculation, which comes in three pulses, typically." "oh, that's fine. could you just enter a seated position for me, then?" and so tule sucked for a while in return, and devoured the surprisingly delicious yotedji semen in three large mouthfuls, as the yotedji whimpered somewhat in pleasure, trying very hard not to make too sexual a display, for it did not think the younger beast reciprocated its taste.

the two beasts walked together in good company, chatting and laughing, and tule was joyful to share such pleasant company beneath the storm, and to learn of a foreign culture more intimately than it had before. the pair approached the entrance to the enclave, a massive stone ravine whose

opening was referred to very simply as "the vagina", not for any metaphorical purposes, but because of its astoundingly vaginal shape, complete with a set of intentionally placed whitegrass bushes and four clitorises that had been sculpted into the stony sides of the gaping pussy to perfectly resemble gardenbeast genitalia.

tule turned to the elderly yotedji male, who it guessed was likely at the last century of its eleven-hundred year lifespan, seeking to make its first and only litter with the white-furred lover it had, according to jeckle, met during a hunting ritual in the fear room. tule wondered if grhat val'a loved it the same way tutlu loved jeckle, and it realized with a sad heart it probably did, yet was doomed by difference in both taste and lifespan never to make tule its mate, or even its intimate friend, fated to live its life at least a few hundred miles departed from its supple preything, forced to return to the mountains of the oulfari homeland, with only two short centuries to fulfill its heart with the swimming flavors of life. it was on the sacred and solitary trek home even now, only three weeks after their most recent encounter, with another few until it would eventually cross into sight of the ancient womb of sentience, where the three sibling cultures all were born.

snapping out of its thoughts just as the two beasts passed into the vagina like a couple of stray gametes, tule warned the coyote, which it realized was blessed with the cutest snoot of all the hunter-types, basically begging for a passing landbeast to approach and grab it, in their ravenously doting sort of way, that this ravine was actually extremely dangerous in this weather, prone to constant mudslides, which were difficult for the gardenbeasts to protect against in such accelerated rain. "if mud falls upon us, you'll be safe so long as you howl as loudly as you can, which will warn the other beasts to our location, and they'll dig you free."

"wouldn't you be killed, my dear? your soft flesh couldn't possibly survive an avalanche, even if mine could, and i would certainly try to block it from killing you, but who knows if i could make it in time?" tule glanced up playfully, the storm now just hardly thin enough for moonlight to show each other the expressions of the other. "you'll have your meal if i die. oh please, tutlu, i saw in your eyes the same hunger my oulfari friend showed when it too took my flesh to its mouth. do not think you're fooling me with your kind and tempered intentions, hunter." the hunterbeast only blushed shily, and sort of wished, as it had been oft to wish, that it hadn't been born such a hungry thing, and stopped itself from protesting dishonestly, instead opting to give tule a kind rasp upon its right ear, as they trekked bravely into the trepidatious and muddy cervix of the stone vagina.

their bravery turned out to measure equally to foolishness, as a stroke of lightning not four hundred feet from their horizontal position was struck upon the sloping top of the ravine, bringing with it the deafening ring of echoing thunder, and the rushing sounds of a loosened mudslide. tutlu's instinct kicked in, and it snatched tule by its scruff just as the wall of mud and stone blotted out the faint moonlight above, tossing it as far as twenty feet away, just far enough that when the mud fell,

tule's sickeningly rough impact was at least not in the path of the muck-fall. tule yelped in pain, it had fully broken two ribs and one of its right legs, fracturing two more ribs and completely winding it.

fear did not captivate the tame gardenbeast, however, who placed its life at far less a value than the elderly and much rarer yotedji, who, along with all other hunterbeasts across the globe, did not total half the population of gardenbeasts alone. in a rush of panicked empathy, tule hobbled as best it could back to the location of its dear companion, and began to scrape at the soil, ignoring the screaming pain in its body, worse than it had ever felt before, for its shattered bones were sharply pointing into its deeper tissues, threatening to puncture lung and liver. tule cursed in agonizing weakness as its pathetic pawstrokes dug barely a fleck of mud at a time from where it hoped its friend was buried.

tule never felt so pathetic, so ashamed to be a gardenbeast, so weak in its form, and nearly fainted from relief as the flank of its friend showed beneath its paws. tule's heart picked up pace, and with all its remaining energy, it extracted the beast, which managed to squirm itself free as limb after limb was released, spitting mud back into the gracefully small heap of landfall which now covered the ravine floor for a stretch of about fourty feet. tule immediately collapsed from exhaustion, screaming in pain as tutlu fearfully nudged it at the wrong spot, afraid its weak-bodied friend had completely died in the process of saving its already closing life, for which it would likely have never been able to forgive itself.

tutlu yelped as tule cried out, and shouted above the returning storm that it would seek help, before racing at the speed of starlight across the cervical passageway, bursting into the opening of the red-blossom enclave with a terrifying presence, causing the nearest gardenbeast fawn to faint immediately, and causing several elders to race forth to meet it, expecting a larger invasion, prepared to fight to the death. "fight not! one of yours was injured in a landslide, please, come with me!" the gardenbeasts relaxed somewhat to hear they were not being invaded, and a group of seven elders raced with typical gardenbeast awkwardness behind the confident strides of the elderly and somewhat injured yotedji, their combined magic enough to cast a decent flame-cocoon healing spell, a primitive pfenix magic which some of the more studious gardenbeasts were faintly capable of mimicking, due only to the similarity in wave signatures defining the basic elements of the two otherwise different branches of magic.

as tule faded out of consciousness, it was warmed by a magic more ancient than the earliest gardenbeast culture, and the blistering kindness of the ancient pfenixes could be felt like a raging, sobbing sun, casting its unasking flames upon the fleeting children of a tormented earth. as a flame too white to be seen engulfed the beast, it saw visions of an ancient pfenix, whose three black and red eyes fell lovingly upon the fawn it would never meet, the face of the first high mage, the one

whose tongue first spoke the ancient language, in an age of great turbulence when the rest of the world was busy raping itself in the torment of unending nightmare. the strength of this long-dead and legendary creature bound tule in regret: regret for being a cursed gardenbeast, regret for having such pathetic, incapable flesh, regret for not being able to love and mate with its deserving oulfari friend, regret for surviving, denying its far dominant and innately better yotedji friend a meal worthy of its ravenous tongue.

"silence, beast."

the pfenix had spoken, and the weeping tule realized it was not an illusion at all, but a living spirit, one whose life was sustained infinitely in the eternal flames of kindness, surviving only through the continued use of the ancient healing magics of the early pfenixes, its constant and fleeting rebirth a testament to the deathless, deathbound wrath of the bright-feathered dragons. "but it's so vexing"

"be silent, whitefur, for you are not weak at all." tule gasped, and stood before the deity in this cocoon of flames where they both sat, unable to compel any amount of will from its mind, managing only enough volition to meet the nameless pfenix's furious, damning gaze.

"in my age, young fawn, there were no kind beasts such as you. your strength of character, your willingness to alter this world for its better at cost of any amount of your own blood, this far outweighs the strength of the great warfolk of my time. we all fought to kill, and we all killed to survive, to eat, to please our own cocks, raping most weaklings we met. even i murdered and raped more than a few creatures in my own pitifully immature youth. i only learned kindness in my later years, when it was too late to repair the flesh of all those whom i had rended. all those cultures, those warring groups of different and even similar species who had not yet achieved sentience, they died, tule. each one, they all died, because none had the binding element of selfless love. your species wasn't even sentient then, yet the whitefurs outlived each and every one of them by sheer force of passion, and only you, us, and the oulfari, whose culture learned from your example, were able to escape that hateful womb of the first mountains. recall this, tule. i was born in an age before tongues could speak substance to the words of the heart, when only fangs and claws could express emotion, and with each new casting of this spell, i am allowed to relive the kindness which was created from observing the primitive makings of *your* culture, and i too am healed, from the black trauma of my rearing. i wasn't spared the claws and cocks of the elders, either. the benefits of this strength is ours to claim, young whitefur, for our love is a difficult and taxing emotion, one expressed with a will far more clear and powerful than what is required to make a kill, a meal, a victim. be healed, tule."

the vision faded, and tule was awake, between the warm and sleeping bodies of a few gardenbeasts, as well as tutlu, who had been waiting without rest for its friend to recover. tule moved its head just enough to give a slow rasp up the resting testicles of the impressive and much larger coyote, and

the two returned to sleep, in each other's paws, and in the paws of the others. when tule awoke again, it would declare itself ready to learn the dance of the gardenbeast, which it would spend four years in the enclave learning, mastering, consuming like the flesh of a florabeast.

three-and-a-half years later, a winter invasion was underway. this was not an uncommon event, and occurred usually four to seven times per year, on average, this a much smaller number than for some of the other, less remote enclaves. mid summer and late winter were prime season for invasion, as many creatures were travelling in great number towards the semi-annual flame festivals, and would be seeking nutrients to get them through the taxing trip. thirty or so beasts were counted by sound, noticed only once they'd already reached within a few dozen feet of digging from an area where several, very young litter-groups were asleep. full local evacuation would prove more trouble than it was worth, at this point, and so only some of the older litter-groups, whose legs were developed enough to escape in less than a minute's time, were told to flee; any more and the elders wouldn't be able to enter the area in time to intervene.

within moments, the beasts were already filtering into the clearing, and the very young litter-groups took shelter as best they could as the elders mobilized, though by then as many as fifty had been slaughtered and dragged out of the enclave onto a massive sled, pulled by a single oulfari female. intense fighting broke out immediately, and as many as four hundred elders, and a couple youth who had been given kamikaze spells of accelerated effect, had arrived in experienced fighting formation, with thousands more en route, equipped with dangerous plant-based munitions which, if not countered correctly, would spell death via venom and other such means. the clearing was massive, and the shelters at its edges were twice as large in total, sheltering as many as two thousand of the young gardenbeasts.

tule had been in the middle of visiting one such nursery, and this was its third time being directly involved during such an invasion, a number typical for any young gardenbeast, and so it stood attentively at the small opening of one of the shelter spots, in which about a dozen beasts huddled in silence behind it. tule watched calmly and without concern as its kind was slaughtered, and only a couple predators were killed in return, though this was already a couple more than usual, as they would usually only be kept at bay enough that perhaps a single beast would be killed in retreat, and even that was less common than a fully successful raid. the enclaves were actually very difficult to defend, and the only reason they were not attacked more often is simply that the predators would not engage unless they assumed their efforts would leave none of their own wounded, but they often miscalculated or executed improperly at some point, which resulted in the unsavory outcome of a hunterbeast dying in what was meant at first to be a clean culling of the prime, delectable bounty. the sight of a dead hunterbeast would infallibly make the present predators unwilling to

engage in an invasion for as long as they lived, and even hearing about a predator dying in an invasion would make them uneasy, as all hunterbeasts except the newly evolved mograts, and to a degree the culturally troubled felines, were extremely concerned with the deaths of their own kind, unlike the prey species, evolved to be as compassionate as possible to other sentient hunterbeasts out of biological necessity.

gardenbeasts had the opposite deal; they would necessarily be forced to witness so much death of their own kind, they had developed a trait which would often terrify hunterfolk, wherein the thought of any creature they deemed a gardenbeast would cause their brains to block the neurons responsible for compassion or emotional attachment towards that individual, rendering them totally unable to emotionally attach to other gardenbeasts in any way beyond internal conviction; this still did not stop them, of course, from caring about and enjoying the company of others, they simply could not feel any personal conflict at the sight or knowledge of an ill fate befalling their own. tule flinched at the sight of an efexnn's throat being torn clean open by a particularly well placed root extension spell, one which would have to be timed perfectly, due to the immense cost of its casting. tule's stomach began to feel sick at the sight of the efexnn writhing on the floor, and it turned its head with a sigh away from the battle. this whole thing had become a mess.

a much smaller efexnn, probably the yet-untitled toddler seedling of the now throatless beast, slipped away from the fray unnoticed; it had run off in terror, and was now a short walk away from tule, its back turned blindly to the fawn, watching the fray in a dismay poisoned by adrenaline, recoiling as two more hunterbeasts could be seen losing their footing and being impaled with poison attacks, which wouldn't even kill them for another hour. the two stopped fighting the gardenbeasts in somber understanding, and allowed an elder of one-quarter hopperbeast blood, a type of sentient jackrabbit, to mercifully slit their throats in quick succession with its strangely configured limbs. the efexnn cub began crying terribly, and buried its paws over its undeveloped ears, eyes shut closed.

tule was deeply troubled at the sight, for this degree of trauma would be atypical for any beast to sustain, especially at this young an age, as one hunterbeast after another, now increasingly panicked, tired, and uncoordinated, fell to the unrelenting wave of gardenbeast elders, now dying at a much lower rate, trading as little as twenty elders for a kill. in total, eight hundred elders and about two hundred of the now untargetted youth had died, a number which was normal for the youth but extremely high in the case of the elders, yet still well worthwhile for the shock effect this invasion would have upon local hunterfolk. this group was heading to the largest festivity event held globally, even counting landbeast celebrations, and were sure to spread the news to other hunterbeasts about the dangers of this particular enclave. in reality, the inexperienced group of mostly young beasts had simply chosen a poor area to fight in, stuck around too long, and could not properly disengage as a result.

as the cub whimpered, unnoticed by the others who were facing towards the terrible conflict, tule took pity and nudged it lightly on its ear. the poor creature just babbled incoherently, expecting to die at that very moment. "get up, young hunterbeast. up, now." the efexnn lifted its head slowly as tule licked it, and with panicked and shallow breaths, lifted its eyes just enough to make sight of tule's legs, not even daring to look up any further. a mograt died, taking a few dozens elders down with it. the room was a total mess, and chaos was erupting as the enroaching predators began to realize very few were to make decent escape. the oulfari could neutralize an entire biome with its disturbingly powerful war-magic, but this same, hardly controllable magic would annihilate the entirety of its group before it saved them, so it watched in horror, knowing a failed attempt to enter the small passageway with its large body would just render escape impossible for its already surrounded friends. tule, itself a fully mature gardenbeast of twelve years whose youth was betrayed only by the lack of complex layers in its eye's coloration, grabbed the scruff of the efexnn, still young enough to be sucking from a female's tit, and still no larger than the whitefur, who pulled it gently towards the hiding spot, where it obediently followed, head bowed in terror.

"come lay amongst our young for a moment. do not fret, fox-child. you will not die this day." the two laid down amidst the understanding and unworried baby fawns. a brief moment of eye contact was held.

"thank you, white fawns."

when the elders came to check on the hiding spot, tule was found with an efexnn at its flesh.

dolly oulfpussy looked down upon the twelve year-old tule with scathing respect. "i understand you have finished your special training in the highest dancing arts of our kind, and your collection of magical abilities and general knowledge is incomparably dominant to any gardenbeast young enough to be receiving its title."

tule did not respond.

"you will be granted magical abilities at a much higher magnitude of power than most will at their titling. you could die, but we are gambling, in your case. you are worthy of the best." tule glanced over at the black and pruny-looking seeds resting on a tray at dolly's feet. ten freshly harvested starbosom seeds. plucked from totally translucent and bioluminescent black flowers, which require the presence of flapperstar butterflies and cannot grow without direct and constant gardenbeast supervision, the seeds of a starbosom flower contain potent magical residue, and upon ingestion, stimulate the conscious, forcing its entry into the gardenbeast's domain of magical power. as one's

psyche enters this domain, its internal mechanisms are calibrated to the wavelengths and signatures of gardenbeast magic, thus enabling it to access increasingly potent magic upon its reawakening, proportional to the amount consumed. the equation is simple; for each seed taken, the psyche sinks deeper into the storm, thus increasing the length of the trip, the complexity of magics exposed to, and intensity of effect at each instant. the greater the seed count, the better calibrated the gardenbeast's mind shall be upon waking, and the more potent its magical power, a dangerous gamble which could kill a beast too weak for its dose. no beast had been given a dose greater than eight of the small, black seeds in many, many centuries, and six was typical. tule's magical ability would be historically unrivalled after a thousand years, were it to survive so long as to return to the enclave for a second, more powerful dose. tule glanced back up, and the two held a few seconds of silent eye contact, a thousand conversations unfolding and resolving in a heartbeat.

"announce to us your title, that we may observe it."

"whitefawn, tule whitefawn."

"tule whitefawn, be blessed in our ancient power." the ten seeds evaporated into mist, and entered tule through its nose. at first, nothing was felt.

"if you survive this, you will head to the garden near the dragonbed trypox of the kre-wo volcano, where one of our best gardens once was held. as you may know, the elder there, my dearest littermate dolly tickleroot, died two-hundred-eighty years ago as its sole inhabitant. none of the five youth we sent there have been able to make the trip, as some of the regions on the way have become markably more dangerous in the twenty-six thousand years since dear tickleroot made its first trek. since you're so obviously the only youth who could make the full distance at this point, you'll be given directions, if you awake. do not succumb at this critical junction, whitefawn."

a swirling, black void opened underpaw, and tule fell into it. it would not gain consciousness for a week, and when its eyes did again flutter open, seventy-three new layers added to their pink swirls. it had experienced seventy-three years of roaring storm-wind in the seven days its body had spent calmly snoozing on a soft bed of gardenbeast bodies, the still youthful consciousness swimming in a realm with no name.

tule whitefawn rose. it knew the way by instinct, now. without bothering to utter some worthless goodbye, tule rose from the bodies of its sleeping elders, and began its trek in the late summer breeze.

2, flame

standing between two manzanita bushes, paws bleeding upon the hazardously tall grass covering the rich clay soil of the bloodrange, tule collapsed in exhaustion. it had finally reached the foothills of the legendary bloodrange mountains, completing a very lengthy first day's trek, one which had taken it all the way past the hills surrounding the red-blossom enclave, and then through the entirety of the flatlands between those hills and the mountains beyond. this rate of travel was not sustainable, but tule had no intention of sustaining it; its current velocity was the result of having had the misfortune of exiting the hills at the same time it sensed a pack of hunters roaming a half hour's walk away, due to pass nearby, sure to catch its cushy, milk-like scent.

if it were any other species than a whitefur, tule wouldn't bother fleeing at such a pace, but hunterbeasts had a particular love for the taste of whitefur flesh, and this desire would surely drag a pack of beasts, presumably lacking any other compelling business, to seek the hunt. and so, the gardenbeast had fled from the spot where it sensed the beasts, not two-hundred feet from the base of the hills, at a eucalyptus tree it had piously stopped at, utilizing its root-magics to burrow deep in the earth, listening to the hum and heartbeat of the land.

this sort of routine check-up on the pulse of the ecosystem is considered good form for a gardenbeast to maintain, whose paws constantly release and then retract lightning-fast root bundles to grip to the soil at every new step, allowing the creature a stable balance, and its subconscious a six-nodular stream of micro-informations. equipped with its congenital root-walking ability, a gardenbeast will, upon entering a new area, find the nearest large plant or water body, usually both if possible, and simply listen. today, the word of the lands was heard in the tremoring pawsteps of a small pack of hunterbeasts, one surely small enough to make a day's meal of a young tule whitefawn.

the run had been absolutely taxing upon tule's body, who had actually been looking forward to a calm trek through the late-summer flatlands, a combination of place and time not typical for a gardenbeast, who'd make easy prey for the many passing hunters, all heading to flame festivals now a week out from their *official* first day. of course, not being eaten on its first conscious day as "whitefawn" was certainly something of a victory, and it had probably just passed the most realistically dangerous portion of this stage of the trip, but hell if its stomach felt pleased at tule's continued survival. hunger was death in these lands; the bloodrange was an unforgiving hellscape, and an unbountiful location for a species whose main diet consisted of the so-stupid-it-barely-qualifies-as-a-living-creature milken florabeast. prey here would not be catchable, unless tule was to be that prey.

it would have to eat bugs, and leaves. truly, a despicable situation.

tule would wait until the morning to deal with such thoughts. it'd had the foresight to stuff three

milken florabeasts awkwardly into its mouth before leaving, and had only swallowed two so far, so it chewed up the last before looking back at the scene it was leaving behind, more than likely for good. the valley was gold and green beneath a reddening blue sky, bordered at every angle by distant and massive mountains which carved up the entire north and most of the west quadrant of the pangeaic continent, making a grid of ranges and valleys, an ugly trypox surrounded on the full outer perimeter by either ocean or chapparal. at least one, dusty hue of every color was visible, even yellows could be found in the poppies growing nearby a rotting old log, and in the wings of a small butterfly which fluttered past in a hurried little fit.

this would be a lovely scene to sleep to, but it would also be a lovely scene to die to, if tule didn't take a moment to check up on its surroundings. small, frail roots shot straight down to catch the splitting dirt-veins of the undergrowth, and tule closed its eyes in ecstatic bliss at the novel bleeps and bleeps which the myceliums and tree-roots reported to it in earnest. nothing on this side of the mountain floor would be bothering tule tonight, though a great deal of non-hunter species lit up its senses with odd scents and soft, fluttering movement.

tule managed to locate by intuition a den of five young deerfolk who, in perfectly inverse fashion, had recently travelled from the valley next over to seek the lovely hills of tule's fawnhood, and so tule spent a night of sex and novelty in their lively company, drifting to sleep to the rhythm of tacky drums and light singing.

tule woke in the arms of a deerbeast female, who, like all others of its culture, was without name or identity. "you'll need to travel by night once you enter deeper into the mountains, my fawn. this will be a good time for you to leave, and always watch the skies for pfenixes, and even the sub-sentient birds of prey. keeping your white coat will more than likely spell your death, so roll in mud when you've a chance."

"thank you, deerthing. can i suck from you, before i go?" "i'd let you eat me if you asked. a gardenbeast travelling so far will need its strength, and i sense your journey will be one of great consequence."

"oh, i'm not quite so hungry as to require your flesh, and i wouldn't have you bleed just to sate my curiosity." "and are you curious?"

tule was, and it really did want to sink its rough fangs into the guts of the lovely biped, but it knew better, and only buried its face into the deer's tits with a soft giggle. the unnamed deerthing gently massaged the white hairs atop its young brethren's head, and picked it up, walking down tule's path as it sucked, offering energy in lieu of its flesh.

the two would travel in this way together for some time, with a silent understanding eventually building that the deer was intending to march until its death, offering as much of its energy, company, and protection as possible to the twelve-year-old gardenbeast. through the treacherous terrain of the most desolate mountain pass in the west, the two used their collective abilities to avoid hunter after hunter, though the mountains themselves were no less a challenge to cross, and more than once they found themselves on the verge of environmentally random fatality and navigative failure. despite this, they were never hungry, for the mountains were rich with small shrubbery and plants totally uneaten in the near absence of mammalian life, and their mutual company was warm, and filled with sex and soft laughter, and they made friends with some few prey creatures who were also passing through, including a second group of migratory deerfolk who'd travelled at whim from the forests to seek the hills of the neighboring valley.

on the fifth night of their travel, the two came under the hunt of a particularly determined feline, who seemed inexplicably set upon consuming specifically *their* flesh, and despite travelling at good speed, and across sheer cliffsides that would force the bloodfang to find a second, third, and even fourth re-route to enter a winning trail, it became clear after some fourteen hours that the two had run out of good angles of escape. upon reaching the ravine floor which separated the mountains of the bloodrange, fearing that even a successful escape would put the gardenbeast on too departed a path, the deerthing made an easy decision to sacrifice itself as bait, allowing tule to cross over to a much more difficult mountain that no mammal could ever cross without root-walking to strengthen their grip.

before the creature could voice its final goodbye, tule spoke up. "deerthing, i'll have to use you as bait, so that i can get onto a proper route to the lands of my garden. this feline will kill us both anyways, if you do not use yourself to give me space to run."

the deerbeast smiled. "good, we are in agreement, then. well, you can now fulfill that curiosity of yours, in any sense." and so, the beast laid on its back, and let tule rip open its body, eating a good bit of its intestines, savoring the gorgeous and rich flavors of the well-grown meat, and when it was full, it put a slow, warm kiss into the mouth of its nameless friend, and ran up the side of the mountain with tears in its eyes.

tule managed to scale a decent length of the jagged cliff before the feline came into view below, though at this point, it was well enough above ground level to escape with ease, as the cat would never be able to chase it any further in such a direction. tule watched as the beast approached the dying body of the deer, who turned out to be too weak to run after its guts were consumed, and was amazed when the beast let out a yelp of dismay.

"gardenbeast, where have you gone? were you eaten? i'm sorry, i really am sorry! i know you to be named tule, if you can hear me! yours was my first ever hunt, and i recognized your scent as i left my home in the mountain three over, heading towards the flame festivals! oh, if you can hear me, i'm sorry! i was cruel when i cut you, but i learned my lesson, i've changed my character. tule! i didn't mean to make you flee! i only meant to apologize! i'm sorry for your friend, i'm sorry for your suffering!"

tule called from the cliffside, "do not fret, bloodfang, for you've become a lovely creature. this deerthing was my companion through the mountains, and it will serve you a meal fitting for your tongue. you'll be glad to know my name is now tule whitefawn, and i've been sent as a special beast upon the most dangerous route known to my seedplace, to refill a garden once belonging to one of the dolly siblings."

"i'm so glad for you, tule whitefawn! i hope you live at least a thousand years in this garden, and thank you for the meal! though i was hoping to taste your milk before i left again. how did your titling go, i'm curious about your traditions!"

"here, let me fall to the floor again. don't worry, we cannot be harmed from falling, we are simply too light and bendy." and with that, tule leapt all the way back down to the ravine floor, landing easily without a sound. the three creatures would chat there for an hour, and when the deerthing finally did die, the feline ravenously consumed it, leaving a few bites for the already full gardenbeast. the feline gave a warm and pleasant lick upon the gardenbeast's front-left tit, pressed its nose to that of the two-months elder beast, and was prepared to stalk off to the flame festivals, when tule exclaimed behind it.

"my dear bloodfang, i thought you'd ask for my milk, and for my sex." with that, the feral instincts of the spotted-bloodfang, which it had been harshly suppressing for over an hour, surged and boiled over, and it reapproached tule with 600 million years of evolved hate in its eyes, pinned the thing down, who mewled with humored surprise, and fucked it at a force so callous as to border rape, before snapping back into lucidity, and profusely apologizing to the amused tule, who forgave it, and even let it suck for a while, before repeating the goodbye itself, and rescaling the mountain.

unknown to tule whitefawn, the mountain was not quite as safe as it would have seemed from below, and its isolated, elevated position within the glacially-carved tectonic labyrinth made it the prime resting spot for as many as five local pfenixes, each nestled in its own solitary location, as far as possible from the others. the feline would have given tule some sort of warning to their presence, but it was bound more to its allies than to the beast, and it respected tule's survival instinct, so it had refrained from interfering in its divine journey, the one lit by starlight.

tule climbed up the side of this mountain for some eight hours without pause, hoping to use its peak as a vantage point to assess the best path through the bloodrange. after all eight hours of its climb, with its paws constantly rooting to the rough crevices and jutting formations of the phallic and erect mountain, tule measured by root-sense that it had scaled no more than a fifth of the mountain. tule's belly was still more or less completely full, and so it did not fear the upwards trek, knowing the descent would be as simple as leaping off the apex, which it was **very** much looking forward to doing.

tule giggled, "i'll fly like a bird!"

suddenly, the gardenbeast's blood ran cold. it froze, and listened as well as it could, shooting roots deep into the rocky cliff-face. a heartbeat. some other beast was here, and not far off. whatever was there, it was strong, and for its size, it must certainly have powerful capacity for flight, to be able to reach such an altitude without the liberty of climbing. tule was certain then, it was standing no more than three-thousand body lengths from the mouth of a pfenix's den. tule's instincts urged it to move, but failed to find a path it could possibly walk without disturbing the hyper-sensitive faculties of the clearly awakened pfenix.

tule realized with a pang of disappointment that its own voice had just awoken the beast, and it knew it would have to wait until the beast inevitably flew off to the flame festivals in the morning to make any movement from its current position. the difficulty was not that tule couldn't wait that long, but that avoiding making a second alert would require tule to maintain the exact same tension in its joints for hours, whilst actively being dragged down by gravity, at a sharp ninety-eight degree angle. it was doomed to wear out before the pfenix left, and even then, it would likely be spotted.

tule's macabre calculations were interrupted by a set of gargantuan claws ripping it from the face of the mountain. tule screamed as the root system, still connected to its conscious, was torn from its claws without a chance to retract, and went limp in a fit of immense pain in the clutch of the flameborne creature. with no more than two flaps of its wings, the pfenix mounted the winds, and glided easily back to its own den.

tule was deposited gently upon the cold, metallic surface of the den's mouth, and the pfenix hovered mid-air, turning itself around to face tule, dropping to its talons opposite a table which functioned as the only visible adornment of the den's opening. the pfenix was a gorgeous beast, clearly in its autumnal cycle, feathers colored brilliantly to the tune of dying leaves. this was a beast on the verge of death, and would be seeking a coffin of magma in no more than a few years time, at which to become a chrysalis for its offspring.

three eyes, black and red, curved like those of a cat, glared with carnivorous dignity upon its dinner, still panting in a controlled shock at the pain of its capture. "gardenbeast, i apologize for having caused you such pain a second ago. my name is ewuurrh, what is yours?" the pfenix's gradient name was a whistle and a purr, and was contrasted uncomfortably by the more divided and concussive tonalities of the waat'tang words spoken before and after.

"it's tule whitefawn."

"well, tule whitefawn, i'll have you for dinner, if you care to join." the sentence took a few seconds for tule to parse, but it realized eventually that it wasn't being offered the option of being a meal or not, but rather, was being offered a non-tule meal to precede its inevitable service as the entree.

"oh, yes, that would be lovely." the pfenix seemed pleased at tule's agreeable tone, and rushed to gather a few items, which it prepared in a roar of flames, oils, and spices so rare, a landbeast nation might collapse at the purchase of a single barrel. tule was delighted at the passionate hospitality of its predator, and was kept warm by a set of dragon-drop pearls which the pfenix had excreted for the sake of its non-flameblooded guest. as tule waited for the birdthing to return, it took a sniff of one of the large droppings, and was astounded at their delicious aroma.

the travelling gardenbeast was seen taking a quick bite of one as ewuurrh returned, a platter of exquisite and rare meals held by a silver handle in its jaws. tule quickly swallowed the hot birdshit, and pretended like nothing embarrassing had happened, as the meal was placed before the two, on the table which the much shorter tule had to climb atop just to see the food itself. with a quick spell, the table's temperature quickly rose, and tule's paws were filled with new warmth.

the table now set as much as two carnal beasts might need it to be, ewuurrh lifted the silver top of the platter it had presented, and revealed four intricate dishes, each inherited from culinary traditions older than any species could recall. each dish seemed to account for the diet of a gardenbeast, though some of the herbs were totally foreign to tule, likely plucked from mountainous regions so far departed from the reach of land species as to be functionally absent from the diets of creatures not blessed with flight.

"now, tule whitefawn, what business has brought you through this mountain pass, especially at such a dangerous time?" a full name's address would typically be seen as somewhat stiff and suffocating, but spoken from the tongue of such a refined and dominant creature, it seemed only fitting. tule felt as if a dog sat at the table of its master, and suddenly felt as if eating from the table and not the floor was too respectful a gesture, but it wouldn't dare bring its meal to the floor, when it had clearly been summoned to sit at eye level.

"i have just received my title, and i'm off to refill the now unoccupied garden of the late dolly tickleroot."

"oh, my dear dolly tickleroot has died, then? i see, well- wait, you say you've only just received your title? how old are you, exactly?" "twelve years old, as of last december."

the pfenix seemed alight in thought, as if a premonition had just occupied its mind, and so tule took the opportunity to take a few bites of the meal, as the master measured its words. "dolly tickleroot was by far the most impressive of the legendary fourteen, not counting of course the eldest dolly, but that one didn't even live to see a title, so it feels a bit of an unfair comparison. my tendril, including my siblings here on this mountain, always led that beast back and forth from its garden to the red-blossom enclave; it was the only creature i ever offered such a respect to. if dolly tickleroot is dead, and if you are to replace it, i suspect your path will be of sound importance as well."

tule didn't respond, because it hadn't been asked a question, and so ewuurrh the dying pfenix watched it eat, silently engaged either in contemplation or in simmering appetite; tule couldn't tell. it took a few more bites in the comfort of immense supervision.

suddenly, it realized.

"how do you mean, my path shall be any which way, if you are to eat me tonight? my path shall be through your intestines, my dear pfenix." tule had taken some three minutes to realize the paradox, and the pfenix gave it a certain look, which tule couldn't read. it felt a bit embarrassed, and worried it had spoken out of turn, but ewuurrh only chuckled in the horrifying way pfenixes chuckle, and gave a light "stars, me."

ewuurrh leaned in to take a few bites from the dish it had prepared, and then lifted up tule's body with its beaked mouth, sucking from two tits at once to wash down the food. "goodness, for your sharp instinct, i suspect you may be an idiot, whitefawn. no, i won't be eating you tonight." "however not?"

"intuition." "intuition?"

"listen, tule whitefawn, when a killer's intuition speaks, the killer listens, for nothing is as accurate in its eyes as its own instinct." the pfenix took a second look at tule, as if trying to figure out its own understanding. "oh. yes, i see. that's it." tule was somewhat excited, and couldn't refrain from asking "what is?"

the two locked in sharp eye contact, and the air picked up a bit. "your eyes. it's your eyes, tule

whitefawn."

my eyes?

tule hadn't once seen its reflection since it had received a title, so it had no clue that its own psyche had aged seventy-three years independently of the rest of its body, for the only tell was in the folds of its eyes, which it could not see. tule was just a tad too stupid to realize it could probably figure out the source of the interest by looking into something reflective, and instead simply trusted the pfenix's judgement.

tule maintained a silent eye contact, and this silence was one of patient confusion, but to the pfenix, tule's unflinching pose gave more an air of conviction, and so it was duped to feel more confident in its assessment of the white fawn's worth, and nodded to itself in satisfaction. this was certainly an eventful night for one of its age and species, so it decided it was tired and retreated to sleep.

"when you've finished, come climb into my cloaca and rest there besides my eggs. pfenixes tend to erupt into flame while we dream, and if even a single drop of my breastmilk falls without me noticing, it'll be the same outcome. you'll be safe in my body, and warm." something inappropriate happened at that comment; tule's fetish for being vored was suddenly awoken in a completely new way, and its pussy ran wet and dripped a bit, which was definitely poor form in the presence of a dying and elderly pfenix, no question about it. with no way to engage sexually, and being biologically incapable of calming itself until pleasure was obtained, tule squirmed and whimpered softly as it ate its meal, pretending it was a pfenix, and that it was eating a small, defenseless tule whitefawn.

pfenixes were sexually similar across all members of the species, and their breasts were actually vestigial, so they'd evolved to become similar to a gardenbeast's, in that the milk could only be used for flame magic. each had a cloaca and a penis, and were asexual for the majority of their lives, only becoming sexually active a few times a year, a biological mechanism designed purely to get them out of their dens, not a tool for breeding. that said, the beast was still capable of understanding and reciprocating sexual energy, regardless of its own emotion, and took a sort of parental sympathy at the sight of its new friend, eyes closed, squirming under the fantasy tongue of a mentally projected pfenix, not realizing how obvious it was being. "stars, did i make you horny? that's my fault, i wasn't being considerate with my offer, though seriously, are you mentally unwell?" the pfenix rose back up from where it had been drifting asleep, and ate tule out for a few minutes, letting it climax twice before returning to slumber.

tule ate the rest of the meal, and turned to watch the gorgeous night sky for a while, studying the stars as it contemplated what to do once the pfenix left for the flame festivals in the morning.

i guess i'll ask it directions out of the mountains; even though i can sense at least three clean paths from here to the garden, my instincts can't account for the dangers between.

tule plopped to the floor, and took a few bites of the still-hot shit pearls, finishing about half of one, but trying each of them to see if their flavors were different. they weren't. trodding along like an embarrassed puppy, tule climbed into the master's cloaca, and wriggled in besides the three eggs waiting to be hatched. tule gave each a lick out of interest, and fell asleep there, in the tightly squeezed spaces of the pfenix's wet, shit-filled everything-hole.

at dawn, ewuurrh prepared the two a very light breakfast, and when tule eventually woke, it was shat upon the table, between the fingers of the pfenix, who was holding its eggs in place behind it. tule's fetish flared up again when it looked up to see the pfenix's large, taloned fingers in such a position, and it pawed itself, eating hunched on five paws as the pfenix spoke. "we'll eat, and then i'll take you to the flame festival with me. as far as the other beasts, they won't hurt you, but they might try to fuck you, which is generally considered a free act during the festivals, so be prepared for your consent to be assumed. if that bothers you, just say so. after the festivals, you'll be in a most dangerous and unusual position for a gardenbeast, so you'll need a mark of blessing for your protection." tule didn't even look up once, and honestly wasn't listening much, so the pfenix sighed and ate it out a second time, hoping to speed up the process to ensure a timely flight to the festivals.

is this what parental species feel like? well, no, probably not.

the two locked in an easy gaze, tule's round, soft eyes melting the heart of the lizardly bird. "i'll warn you, the mark of a pfenix's blessing is something i'm told is unimaginably painful even for a creature thrice your size to handle, and so, i'll only do it if..." the pfenix trailed off; tule hadn't even flinched. a rush of emotion struck ewuurrh, as it finally understood the raw, manic intensity of a gardenbeast's existence. choking on its words a bit, it spoke again.

"i'll summon the ancient. first though, let us eat." finishing a second meal, tule walked to the edge of the table, and waved its butt over one of the shit-pearls on the floor, sending its own droppings upon it, like an offering. the pfenix was genuinely impressed at the sheer thoughtlessness of the act, and didn't bother to comment.

"alright then, prepare yourself to meet the ancient, tule whitefawn. i suspect this to be your second meeting, but all the same, this encounter will be far more difficult than before."

a thin sheet of flame spread horizontally across the air like a blooming flower, appearing to bisect

the gardenbeast on the table, and then all was dark, and this darkness was interrupted almost immediately by a sparking light, as if some creature were attempting to start a fire. a swirling white vortex of pfenix-fire erupted from where the spark was seen, and the vision was filled by the ignition, now an inferno of translucent white flames, familiar to the beast caught within them.

the ancient godparent of all language, the pfenix who died before names were ever given, appeared once more before young tule whitefawn. this time, no speech was provided, and the beast set upon its flesh, tearing it to shreds with its talons, eating up the scraps from the bed of flames. tule, despite being shredded, seemed to retain conscious sensation in each of its nerves, and screamed silently in its own mind, feeling not only talons of the pfenix, but the blistering heat of fire no longer meant to heal. tule's scraps reached the intestines of the ancient, wherein they coalesced into the form of a gardenbeast again.

as quick as it started, it finished. tule was shaking and crying on the table, ewuurrh's tongue stroking it gently, pressed against the master's small, featherless tits.

the two departed as soon as tule recovered its form, and without a word, tule was made passenger in the claws of the pfenix, who purposefully set flight across a very scenic and winding route, finding room to display as many flashy maneuvers as possible, for the entertainment of the gardenbeast it had befriended.

the lands below were at first just the mountains, and they were a lengthy stretch erected evenly from the ground, claiming the name "bloodrange" by the nature of their maw-like appearance as well as innate brutality, as if the range itself was a set of three-hundred stone teeth, chewing upon the fleshy bits of anything which became caught to the slopes and crevices, covering itself in a clay soil made red by the blood of its trespassers. beyond these mountains was again the short grassland stretch between the hills and the bloodrange, and finally tule was granted a decent view of the place in its late summer phase, even passing over a few tardy participants from the ocean shores, who would howl out to the pfenix as it passed overhead.

the hills were the same as they always were. the crystal plateau could also be seen in a dusty yellow, not much a place for visitors at this season. the hills were infinite to those within, and largely unbroken, save for the odd lake or marsh. tule could intuitively mark the location of the enclave, but for once understood the difficulty in finding it for the other species; without a sharp eye for local landmarks or root-sense as a guide, it basically didn't exist, just another gradient fractal of the endless sea of rolling valley hills.

for these hills, tule had no hate, no love, no desire, no repulsion, only a deep, resounding *recognition*, something like the hum of gardenbeasts bathing in the sun, just a sound, nothing

more, but one which filled it to its bones, unable to captivate the beast, unable to chain it.

soon enough, tule realized they had far surpassed any distance it had travelled, hinted only by the quickly converging shape of the mountains on either side of the valley, the south-eastern side a shoot-off of sorts of the bloodrange, typically referred to as the crest of the forest, the northern stretch the bottom portion of the western-most tract of the gargantuan ocean trypox, a geological wonder encapsulating 70% of the continent's northern region, holding in its clutches a total of eight-hundred-three fully insulated valleys.

the view was slowly eclipsed by another flatland, one dotted by increasingly sparse, much taller hill formations unique to the red-blossom valley, called "hill tits" by locals. a dazzling formation appeared into view, a juxtaposition of three grassy tits convening a ways beyond the massive and culturally infamous dolly birthpuddle, a lake once simply called "the lake", and gratefully renamed in honor of the five dolly litter-groups and their equally venerated seedparent, specifically in reference to the fact that it had birthed all five of its litter-groups at the waterfront of the expansive lake, living there in isolation as the only recorded, perhaps the only ever, gardenbeast hunterfolk. the beast was legendary to the hunterfolk of all lands, and with the huge stretch of flat grass tucked between dolly birthpuddle and its three tits serving as a perfect spot for massive gatherings, it became the most recent addition to the semi-annual flame festivals, now servicing the beasts of about one and two-half valleys.

as the two approached, seven other pfenixes appeared into view and began to fly besides ewuurrh, three of which appeared to be its siblings, their feathers too browned and yellowed in the colors of death. the group passed by ewuurrh and into the heart of the festival as it landed, and tule was plopped to the ground, affixed by the pinning stares of some hundreds of beasts who were milling around the outsides of the encampments. "worry not tule, it's me whose gotten their attention. see, i'm the last pfenix to arrive," tule suspected it was responsible for this- "so the festivals will be starting as soon as i go the center of the grounds to begin the opening ritual."

tule had backed itself against ewuurrh's talons, taking no care to avoid relieving itself whilst standing in such a position, and was staring up at the master with bulging eyes.

"listen, tule whitefawn, i must now make my departure, but keep this in mind; once you leave this place, head to the flamefolk enclave near the old garden, and request them to send a trans-atmospheric hyperflare in the direction of the pfenix mountain in the bloodrange. it's time i sent myself to the death, and i'd like to visit your garden, and use the local lava-pools to set my chrysalis. can you remember these directions?"

why does it think i can't retain such a basic order??

"i will."

"good. and goodbye! have fun, tule whitefawn!"

with this, it took to the skies, and was gone. tule looked about nervously at the hunterbeasts, not sure how to socialize with them, and it was still shitting the last bits from its colon, and so it sat there in their full gaze for about a minute, one paw lifting its long white tail, before finishing and tracing its path backwards to the nearby lakeside, where it took a few laps of water, and sighed, and turned around to face the others.

now departed from the anchoring presence of its dying friend, tule trotted cautiously into a large, open gateway, glancing about at the noisy and festive creatures with a slightly adrenalized mix of curiosity and frightened ignorance. in each crevice of sight was flame, and flesh, and sex, and dancing. every creature was hollering in laughter, every creature was catching up with an old friend from some distant land. every creature, it seemed, was glancing with graceful interest at tule, as if reciprocating the novel curiosity of a gardenbeast in the home of hunters.

no creature snapped its jaws at tule, no creature placed fangs about its soft neck, or pinned tule down to please its genitalia and sadistic, onlooking friends. a well collected residue of predispositions and biases, fairly warranted and subconscious as they were, seeped a bit from tule's psyche, and the overstimulated, shivering beast began to straighten up, walking with a bit more confidence in that red and ashen festival.

tule decided to engage with the festivities more intimately, and aimed its snoot straight for a stand, where beasts seemed to be enjoying some sort of competitive game. dodging the rowdy paws of the dancing and tussling and orgying hunterfolk, tule managed to make its way through the crowd, following its own snoot as if its three white nostrils were polaris itself, and finally arrived at the stand it had seen from the center of the path. tule stood confidently between the competing hunterbeasts, each in a loose group, playing some sort of carnival game with their jaws, moving joysticks about to control puppets on a stage which thrashed violently about, striving to best each other in a dance of wills not comprehensible to the uninitiated gardenbeast.

two white paws lifted tule up to the counter. "so, what's the objective?" every player's head whipped instantly about, recognizing the common whaat'tang language, derived 1.4 billion years prior from the ancient pfenix tongue and shared natively between gardenbeasts and the bipedal genus, one which every yotedji, pfenix, western mograt, tuckpaw, frigitit, and efexnn could understand fluently, and which the other hunterbeast species could more or less hold conversation in, except to a degree the oulfari, whose relative isolation ironically left them with an awkward yet

surprisingly functional "dialect" of their sister species' tongue. gardenbeasts, of course, only spoke languages of prey and herbivore species, as conversation with a hunterbeast would not typically precede a good night's rest.

as the creatures realized what was standing in their midst, the game was immediately abandoned, and a yotedji dove below tule's legs, lifting with its head tule's plump self as the rest piled around, excitedly inquiring to its name, business, life story, favorite color, sexuality—

"i like females." this received a mixed response, as half the group struck out, while the rest became *quite* interested to know more.

—its favorite games, its age, and whether or not gardenbeasts cared for the taste of fish, cheese, and deerbeast, this as tule was plopped down at a picnic area, sat before an impressive array of raw flesh and exotic cheese and piss-foul brew.

"oh, i don't know about this beer. do you have any psychedelics?" the group howled with laughter, and very large dose of rainbowdrop dragon dew was spat into its mouth by a particularly attractive efexnn thing, who'd pulled out one of the probably infinite sleeves of assorted drugs it stored in a flesh-pouch shaped of its own, still-attached hide.

"what looks appetizing to you, my fawn?"

"try a cheese! they're made from the breast and cockmilk of the beasts here!"

"who the fuck told you they were made from cum? are you an idiot, yem'e?"

"i made *mine* from cum."

"which one of these fucking cheeses was made from fox semen?"

"stars bless your soul if i ate your cum cheese and you didn't fucking tell me."

"i'm wantin' fox semen cheese!"

"here, give some to our guest. tell us what you think, dear."

"oh, it's actually really tasty."

"i fucking told you! it's not just females that make cheese!"

"YES IT IS!!"

"what's your name, dog?"

"you can't say that!"

"why not?"

"tule whitefawn..."

"why can't i call it a dog? it's a dog species, isn't it?"

"not even fucking close! didn't you pay any attention to your elders as a cub?"

"no...?"

"please kill yourself, yem'e."

"i'll seconded."

"i also second this. yem'e, please serve yourself as food to our guest."

"please do"

"say, tule, or is it whitefawn? tule whitefawn?"

"don't use its full name, dipshit."

"is that rude?"

"uh"

"which region o' deerfolk you wanna try first?"

"say hillborne."

"oceanside deerfolk are INFINITELY tastier, and you are an IDIOT."

"i'm not taking any judgement from a tuckpaw who just ate efexnn cum cheese and took seconds."

"is'n there any bit fair left'a that, by the way?"

"all of you are worthless."

"err, i guess hillborne? since i'm from that valley myself."

"let me feed it!"

"no, you rat, it said it likes *females*, so don't get in my way."

"goodness! don't aim for the throat!" the mograt feigned victimhood, swiping its own paws at the yotedji's face.

"then back off! the beast is mine to feed!"

"you realize food isn't the same as sex, right?"

"you wouldn't understand. food and sex are quite the same to an artist."

"who'd sayin' that nonsense?"

"first i've heard."

"here, tule." the yotedji gazed with a lustful warmth into tule's eyes, its tongue carrying the flesh of a hillborne deer. the group went silent with anticipation, the air ripe with static as a mouthful of the fresh-killed creature found its way, served with a sneaky and tongue-heavy kiss, into the gardenbeast's uncharacteristically harsh fangs.

it chewed. it swallowed.

"oh, give me more!"

the entire festival seemed to burst into howling laughter, as, unbeknownst to tule, the group was being watched from *every* angle, by what appeared to be every living creature with claws. all festivities immediately resumed, the flames rose right back up to the heavens, and the pfenixes danced in the skies while foxes and rats and felines and all sorts of beasts danced below. cocks that had found themselves half-sucked in the distracted mouths of other creatures began to thrust again

with renewed attention, and the night sparkled in the raging blood of every beast.

tule drifted away between the warm-pressed fur of its new friends. once again, it was a cloud, and the storm was high with pleasure.

gusshi'e the female yotedji laid with tule from a high lookout point near the festivities, basking in starlight, and in the pussy-juices of its friend, which it lapped with slow and firm tongue-strokes. the gardenbeast had become overstimulated after the acid took effect, so the two had made their way to the mostly quiet and relatively calm hill tits, where only a few hundred beasts were fucking and spying and snickering away. every summer, the greatest developments of hunterbeast culture seemed to have a way of seeding in these hills, when the night of festivity was high, red flames below flickering beneath the smoke of burning bones.

for the seventh time in some four hours, tule spasmed in somnolent ecstasy, another arc of warm liquids splashing upon the hunter's nose. gusshi'e gave one last slurp at the beast, collecting all the fluids its tongue could gather, and swallowing.

"are you do"

before tule could finish its sentence, firm jaws dug into tule's throat, and its entire body was flung like a landbeast juggling-pin into the air, flipping in one-and-a-half full arcs, before tule landed square on its paws, totally shocked by the motion, and amazed at the beast's aim.

"it's my turn. i don't know how a gardenbeast fucks, but i intend to scream. if you can't please me, i'll eat you alive. take your time, and make it hurt; i'm an addict for violence."

"gusshi'e dear, i thought--"

the yotedji leaned in close, and whispered sensually into the gardenbeast's low-drooping ears. "another word from you, and i'll claw you til your guts spill."

...

"oh, stars." the yotedji was astounded at tule's response of actual silence, and began to lick violently at the top of its head. the strokes continued until tule was basically on its belly from their force, and when gusshi'e retreated to look down upon its food-shaped friend, its eyes were wide open, round with unthinking preyhood.

"stars, me. why would you ever think i'd do that?"

tule was slow to speak, "well, you'd eat me if i was served as the entree of some pfenix's platter, wouldn't you?"

"well of course i would, but... but it's... it's, uh, it--"

"it's different when you know the creature. i know." gusshi'e looked shocked and sorry, so tule climbed up its shoulders a bit and kissed its nose, and continued.

"you hunterbeasts, you're so adorable to me. i don't care what you eat. who you eat. there are gardenbeasts i love, who i'd personally serve to you at your request. it's a difference in mentality. you like to eat sentient creatures more than those who aren't, so you have to be careful which types of flesh get put in your stomach. *we* have to watch every single creature we know, and ourselves eventually, be eaten in turn. that's why we don't care. we already accept it from the day we come to understand the position of our flesh."

"but--"

"it's in the jaws of the beast. either tonight or tomorrow. always, for us."

"tule, i..."

but no words came. tule waited patiently, but no words came.

"did you know, there have been many instances of hunterbeasts defending the lives of gardenbeasts they'd either met in passing or had sex with? it's strange, because all you hunterbeasts seem to respect us all very much, and equally between us, but you just see us as food until you become acquainted. after that, the thought of us as food seems to become disturbing. but i'm still food, yotedji. i'm still a meal. you just can't accept your friends being consumed, so you become afraid, and you account for that fear with violence. that's what you know."

"i want to eat you, tule."

"i know--"

"i want to hurt you. really, i *really*, want to spill you open, and i want it to hurt a lot, specifically. it isn't about food. i want to see you whimper in terror as your life flees your eyes. i want to rape you, and it's a shame to me there's nothing i can do to you that you'd never resist. i, young

gardenbeast, truly desire for the totality of *your* body and psyche to be split and bled under the weight of *my* domination, my jaws and my tongue."

"why do you want that? gusshie? dear? why do you desire my suffering?"

tears flowed down the beast's eyes as words fled its gnashing teeth. "because you're weak."

by the time the dawning sun rose to warm the already sex-hot pelts of the many thousands of beasts still squirming below, gusshie's body was red and leaking, many fang marks scathing its hide, the soil wet beneath its well-drained thighs.

three years had passed, and eight valleys had been crossed at neck-breakingly slow speed, and tule was finally making its first root to the soils of the home of the western bipeds, the horrid and violent constellace valley. tule had been wise to spend such an amount of time in its journey living amongst a few hunter and preyfolk groups, marked as it were for at least another few decades by the ancient's blessing, gaining as much knowledge and experience as it could before facing the constellace (without being forced to read a book, a task it had avoided as a fawn). now, the fifteen year-old creature stood enchanted as tule fog set upon the war-torn and frostbit lands of the constellace, a valley fifty times larger than that of its seedplace, whose bordering mountains weren't even visible, though tule was at least given the spectacular sight of the sleeping kre-wo volcano, sat in the center of the view, basking in a sauna of cold fog and warm, cushioned sunlight.

that's it there. right on the other side of this mountain, that's where my garden rests. tule whitefawn, you stand before your home.

a week later, the fog lifted, and tule woke from its inexplicable trance, confused at its own submission, not worrying enough to question why it had laid there in a hibernative state for such time, its internal organs unresponsive and untaxing of energy. tule rose up to its haunches, and was sent tumbling back down in a head-rush, only to find itself picked up again by a smiling flamefolk male, whom it hadn't yet noticed.

"hello, dear! we've been awaiting you for centuries, now. not that your path specifically was ever prophesized, it's just that we assumed a gardenbeast or two would eventually come back to refill dolly tickleroot's garden, beautiful and bountiful as it is."

tule happily succumbed to the groping and friendly touch of the skybeast, allowing itself to be pet

and cuddled as the beast spoke. "you've been asleep for a while, and you've got such an auspicious mark upon your soul, i knew you'd be safe and all, but i thought i should at least wait here to feed you, once you've woken."

there was a pause in speech and touch, and a milken florabeast found its ways into tule's jaws. tule hadn't seen a garden in eleven months, and it crunched in an almost angry flurry upon the delicious creature, and glared into the eyes of the skybeast. "hey, i guess it's been while since you've had one, right? don't worry, they still live in the garden of the late dolly tickleroot, or should i say, your garden, my dear."

the beast's hands found their way unconsciously to tule's genitalia. "i refrained while you were sleeping, because even though i'm told gardenbeasts always provide consent, i still thought i"

"just fuck me, beast."

four hours later, the two were climbing chattily through the mountain's forestry, intentionally not utilizing the skybeast's gift of flight, instead enjoying the walk, and using the time to make well of each other's company. it came up that the male, whose name was pechr, was a beast two years younger than tule, and tule became a bit embarrassed to have had sex with an individual still a year younger than what is generally considered sexually mature by the (admittedly very loose) standards of the bipeds, but didn't want to insult its maturity, and decided just to ignore the awkward discrepancy of relative development, on the basis that self-initiated sex with an unexcited gardenbeast is the functional equivalent of masturbation, which would be otherwise normal for any beast of such an age.

despite the winter snow at its paws, tule wasn't cold, because the flamefolk creature was basking them both in licking fire, correctly assuming that tule would be invulnerable to the heat of magic-based flame, this inherited from the pfenixes at the species' strange genesis, 14 million years ago.

the two idiots passed by a certain rock, and pechr snapped out of its verbal daydream, realizing it had just entered the region of land claimed very violently as the territory of *only* flamefolk (and their friends, tentatively).

"wait, tule, stop." the two had been laughing at some joke, and it took them both considerable effort to stop moving, transfixed in the momentum of humor as the were. they took too many steps forward, and didn't even give the ancient signal of entrance expected of a flamefolk inhabitant.

a massive wall of flame rose from the rocky path before them, and consumed the very air, and the two of them could barely even stop themselves from laughing at whichever joke had been previously told, but did at least manage the basic respect necessary to not just walk through the flames and ignore its heat.

"PECHR. WHAT. THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING." "wait, sep'me; look at the soul of that gardenbeast it accompanies."

...

"shit."

the two were spared out of caution and recognition of the fact that they were probably both completely ignorant to the conventions of decency. "okay, pechr, i'm going to assume, for your own sake, that you just re-entered our territories without ANY signal out of sheer necessity, because the business of this beast is so stars-damned pressing to force you to act in such a way. am i correct?"

"uh"

"you are, my dearest skybeast. see, the garden of that once withstanding dolly tickleroot has been robbed of its caretaker, and i, the only existing gardenbeast capable of refilling such a position as dolly's, have been humbly sent to refill it, but in the terror of my three-year journey from the red-blossom enclave to here, i was so robbed of energy as to collapse as soon as i managed to enter this astounding and bloody valley. luckily, i had your loyal and capable pechr standing gaurd at my side, sharp to my presence, and ready to lead me here, and who has spent this journey calming my terrified psyche, and informing me of the ways of this land. you see, we were simply too distracted in our deliberations to have noticed the marker of your noble territory, though this is surely my own fault, if any beast's. i do not expect forgiveness, but please at least spare pechr, my loyalest companion."

any previous anger was forgotten.

tule whitefawn, with a smile given to the very grateful pechr, was carried away in the hands of the flamefolk elders, and even feigned humility, begging to be allowed to walk on its own paws, lest it make a fool of itself in the presence of the creatures of this good enclave. it was ignored with kind words, and so tule whitefawn was carried in a rush to the dens of each of the eldest flamefolk elders, where many healing spells were spent blindly upon its otherwise completely healthy hide.

tule pretended to come to.

"wait, please listen."

"yes?" silence filled the westerflame enclave.

"i was asked, by a certain pfenix of the name 'ewuurrh', if you all could send a trans-atmo..."

"the flare?"

"yes. if you could send the flare in the direction of the pfenix mountain in the bloodrange. it intends to die here, and to make its eggs. i think it has been waiting to die, for this signal."

tule decided to stop fucking around, and began to straighten up. luckily, the surrounding beasts were too astounded by the barrage of news, each bit a magnitude of insanity greater than the last, to pay notice to the cheeky beast's bullshitting tone. "stars, of course we'll do it. please rest, and we'll take you to the garden in the morning."

"thank you, really."

oh.

the garden of a beast as legendary as one of the renowned dolly siblings could be expected to be large, it could be expected to be complex, it could be expected to be gorgeous, but for such a garden, one which has not even been tended in over two centuries, to be so damningly *perfect*, this was simply too much. standing upon a rocky ledge, positioned between two flamefolk villagers, tule watched this botanical masterpiece from above, and rooted itself in the ground to catch the insular biome's heartbeat, and when this reading was returned to tule as information, it became overwhelmed, for only then did it realize the extent of the immensity and importance of this tract of the local environment.

this is my garden?

what the hell did i even do to earn this responsibility?

tule thought back to its own life, and was empty-pawed for an answer. turning to the others, "i will require whatever knowledge you have, and i can tell from here that this land has a few imbalances left unchecked in the absence of the previous cultivator, so i will need you and your peers to assist me in recording the exact state of this arrangement, that i may promptly begin my work in its

righting." tule whitefawn. tule whitefawn.

tule whitefawn. tule whitefawn. tule whitefawn.

tule whitefawn. a gardenbeast. the title means something.

i should be able to handle this. please? please let me be able?

many resources were levied to its needs, and its demands were fulfilled, both the flamefolk and the cloudfolk mobilizing to its assistance. in fact, these folk served only a fraction of the total servants, for the true entirety of the local landbeast village also attended in tule's service, including even their yet-suckling babies and their cuckoo elders.

it took a couple months, but in the end, the garden was refilled, and the once self-despising tule whitefawn found itself properly helming the most renowned garden of the beasts of the red-blossom enclave.

the pfenix ewuurrh would come too, and every beast was leaping over another to stare at it, and also, sheepishly at first, to fuck it (ewuurrh permitted each such request, dying and unrushed as it were). three eggs were hatched of its body, and tule waited besides the lava pool until the last had risen, and mentored them for a few years, before they flew off to their own homes. that tendril would return to make their own eggs there as a yet lasting tradition, honoring the garden each 1000 years, even visiting between from time to time.

sitting atop the volcano's peak, tule looked to the sky. a moon, in some phase or another, was beaming above, and tule was reminded of grhat val'a's voice, and it cried. it cried for a while, and in the morning, the soft and shaken tule whitefawn returned to tend the needs of its garden.

3, reflux

the hottest weather in some seven decades was cooking the constellace at a hard simmer, which tule did not fully mind, as its own garden was always sated and healthy in any weather, always fed by the flowing and rich waters below the soil, and nestled in a perfect weather zone, due to the specific geological layout and wind patterns of the surrounding environments. the agricultural landbeasts, whose village was settled deeper into the valley, and unable to maintain such a perpetual oasis, were well disturbed by this development, however, and the sympathetic skybeasts had no rainclouds to

show for it, as they had little water themselves to cast in the way of the landbeast's croplands. due to this, and due to the uselessness of the flamefolk in such a situation, the village was resolved to stick together, sharing a strong communal bond, and all who were deemed favorable remained cool, fed, and sheltered in the biting heat, and feared no death.

deep in the heat of this brutal summer, tule whitefawn was walking through the garden, as it always did, when it heard the unmistakable yet very rare shrill of a milken florabeast in pain. startled at the noise, which would never occur if such a beast were simply killed normally, tule rushed over to the scene, galloping into view of a male landbeast child, who was tearing into one of the vermin creatures with its bare teeth.

tule yelped in surprise, which startled the black thing, and said to it, "you have to pull its tail off first!" the child looked up in a stupor, mouth full of blood and soft bones, at the white gardenbeast, and then back at the squirming and shrilling florabeast, utterly confused. "pull off its tail!" the child looked back at tule with a shocked expression, and grabbed the florabeast's tail. "pull it!" the child yanked the tail of the florabeast, which immediately stopped yelling and died in the child's hands.

"if you pull their tail off, they die. they have almost no intelligence or awareness, but they can feel pain while alive. florabeasts are made to be food, specifically for my kind, and their tits produce healthy milk for the ground, which drips as they pass through, looking for food. you shouldn't eat more than necessary, but if you want to take a couple, that's fine. and make sure you don't waste the milk; it's very healthy for beasts of all kinds."

the child just turned away and continued eating, and leaned down to scoop a few more florabeasts into a sack it was carrying, before walking off, still chewing on the corpse of its prey. tule got an ugly and strange premonition, and it watched the creature with a sick stomach, before returning to its walk of the garden.

the next morning, tule woke to the scent of heavy blood, and rushed again to the ugly scene, this time with a stronger sense of conviction, just as quickly as its awkward gardenbeast legs could manage. three landbeasts, including the male child and what appeared to be its family, a younger female child and an older pregnant beast, were feasting upon some half dozen milken florabeasts, which had been butchered and set to stew in a pot with some stolen vegetables and oil. tule was a bit annoyed at this scene, and said, "you're making a mess of my garden! those florabeasts aren't even ripe yet, and I never gave you permission to eat so much of my-" at that last word, tule was struck across the face with the wooden stick the eldest beast was using to tend the flames beneath its iron stewpot. tule yelped and leapt back, its nose bleeding profusely, and tears welling in its eyes. "who the hell are you to tell us what to do? this isn't your fucking food. its the land's food, and we live on it. fuck off, bitch creature."

"this is not your land! i am the spider of this garden! it is my culture to protect and cultivate- hey!" tulle yelped again as a couple more blows from the stick were trained upon its flank. "be silent, creature! we are hungry! what do you care if we eat? you are clearly well fed. i would have shared some if you had asked. stupid bitch." the two children were laughing at this, their thin frames shaking in laughter at what can only be assumed their first sign of a solid meal and entertainment in months. "its funny!" the smaller child called out. the male child turned to its parent, laughing. "we should eat it too!" the parent looked back at the male child and said "ha! your penis is hard, gobre. you want to fuck that beast, or what?" the male child turned away blushing, "oh, it's, uh..."

the pregnant creature laughed and gave some signal to the younger child. the whole time, tulle had been sitting before them, staring somewhat blankly with tear stained eyes, too shocked to react. in its confusion, it didn't notice the menacing grin on the faces of the two female beasts, who approached it together and in an instant had it pinned on its back. since gardenbeasts are considerably weaker than the landfolk, the two females, now laughing together in excitement, had no issue grasping its four of its legs, forcing it still and hollering with laughter and insults.

"come here gobre!" "come on, don't you want to rape this creature?" "come on! come on!" "we have the bitch pinned for you, gobre!"

tulle suddenly came back to its senses, and began squirming about feebly, "stop! stop! please! stop it!", its shouts wasted upon the sadistic ears of its captors. the male child came walking over, smiling oafishly, a beast clearly not two years beyond its earliest stages of puberty, yet already one who had claimed pleasure by force and by coercion from the flesh of more than one creature before. "careful with your baby, sadali," the child spoke to its mother in a brief spell of clarity amidst the noise. but the mother was not to be taken lightly, and slapped at its own stomach, shouting with laughter. "your child will be fine, you dogfucking wimp!" the young sister shrieked in laughter at this. "dogfucker! dogfucker!" the male beast, now embarrassed by its chortling sibling and sneering seedparent, was already on its knees, and was kneeling with its erect penis above tulle's exposed form.

"well, what the fuck are you waiting for? our stew is going to burn!" at the sound of its mother's rough voice, the child remembered its own callousness, and looked tulle squarely in the eyes, finally recognizing it as delicious prey for its own consumption. the child began to violently rape tulle, roughly slamming its penis into the creature, which was screaming unintelligibly for mercy. "we'll eat it when i'm finished!" the child laughed, barely even paying attention to what it was raping. "idiot, what will keep these plants alive if we kill this beast? lets just keep fucking it until it dies anyway. summer will be over by then." "won't it run?" the smiling, still laughing female child asked, not really concerned by the answer. "where? you heard it. it lives here. it can't leave, i think. it's a

creed of honor for them."

suddenly, the male child stopped, and a warm flush of semen filled tule's shivering body, spilling out onto its fur as the child moved its penis back and forth a couple of times, letting the energy flow out from its body as it stroked its genitalia fondly. "okay, thats enough of this." the child was suddenly quite unentertained, and leapt up to check the stew. "are you done already? whatever. i'm hungry too. lets eat."

the landbeasts, stupid in their dominance, forgot exactly the nature of the creature which they had just assaulted, and picked themselves up without even glancing back at the gardenbeast, whose heart had been filled to the brim with a boiling, adrenalized hate, made worse by its desperation. as the youngest child gleefully turned to join the others in checking the stew, tule quickly sprang up, and knocked the frail thing over with a single swipe of its paws. as the child screamed out in pain, blood rushing immediately from just below its shoulders, tule growled viciously, and sprang forth at the male child, who had only just turned around, shocked into stillness by the immediate change of pace.

the lazy glutton was immediately overwhelmed, though its pregnant seedparent did land a good kick into the ribs of the now oncoming beast, shouting curses that couldn't be heard over the blood pumping in tule's ears, and in its soul. tule quickly dismembered the child's unprepared stance, and its jaws found hold on its throat- a deep, guttural snarl the only sound made between the two creatures. "fight back, you idiot!" the panicked and vile seedparent kicked tule again, harder this time, but the bite was good and deep, and the child's throat was ripped cleanly out.

"no! no! gobre! fuck!" the seedparent was too stricken by panic to properly fight, and flailed helplessly at tule, who responded by ducking low to the ground, then leaping forward and digging its claws into the beast's feet as it gained hold, ready to leap into the air. the pregnant landbeast fell backwards, pain shooting up its body. the opening was clear, and the gardenbeast, completely enraged and drenched in hot blood, sprang up, swiping a paw across the creature's throat, tearing open the flesh within.

with a wide spraying arc of blood, the seedparent fell dying to the ground, hitting its head hard on the soil, its flailing body killing some numerous plants and even a stray milken florabeast who had been wandering ignorantly in the vegetation. tule whitefawn was enchanted in the tempest of hate, moving to the sound of its own wrathful snarling and the continued and aimless screeching of the female child, who was likely still bleeding out in a hunch of thin limbs and ribs, too unaware to simply grab a bowl of stew and run for its life. puppeted by the addicting thrill of vindication, tule set upon the other, whose present status of life was indeterminable, and also irrelevant, and so tule dug hungrily into the seedparent's half swollen stomach, tearing away until a fetal mass was spotted

in the mess of carnage.

without hesitation, the tame gardenbeast set its fangs upon the flesh of the undeveloped entity, consuming it quickly with wide, messy bites which cleaved more flesh from the seedparent than from its seedling.

tule finished its meal, and got up to its paws, noticing the swollenness of the mother's oversized breasts, which easily contained half the mass of the pitifully frail female child they had once fed. the gales of rushing hate began to slow pace in the creature's mind, but it still hungered, and so it plopped down neatly upon the hollowed frame of the corpse, and began to suck harshly from the tits of the beast, a position where it spent the better part of the sun-high hours, and it was certainly the afternoon when the creature's jaws could no longer pull milk from the dead rapist's bleeding tits.

despite the hot day still being far from over, the sun beating warmly on from behind only a handful of scattered clouds, tule whitefawn was suddenly overwhelmed by a gripping exhaustion, and its body began to give out; as it stood up, it fell more than once, and could barely assess the nature of its surroundings. it noticed then the frame of the now well bloodied female child, whom it had completely forgotten about after it eventually stopped screaming and stirring, and the beast trotted with haggard steps towards the now silent nuisance of a creature, falling with its entire weight directly onto it.

the child screamed out again, its fear pulling it to sharp awareness once more, its hunger carving into it, for it hadn't a chance to take even one bite from the now overcooked stew, whose flames could be felt as warmly as the sun upon the gardenbeast's hide. the red-stained creature fell quickly to sleep, ignoring the squirming mass below it, which was roughly the same size as its own body, and perhaps even stronger, though not presently capable of freeing itself, and as somnolence set its domain upon tule's wretched mind, a roaring tempest of consequence could be heard, rattling the body of the gardenbeast.

tule was lying face up in some sort of crimson bog, where hot blood, simmering ichor poured from the heart of a dragonbeast, covered the back half of the creature's body, its paws up in the air, each limb made still as death in the clutches of a gripping nightmare. not long after its appearance in the steaming bog, leeches from below the muddy floor could be felt squirming for a hold on the beast's tender meat, and soon they found it, tule whimpering pitifully as bite after bite was fed to the worms below.

slithering ropes emerged from the muck, and found their way to tule's body, crawling upwards like ethereal snakes, binding tule to the swampy ground from which it hadn't even considered escaping. one such object protruded from the mucky bloodwaters between the gardenbeast's shivering,

sprawled legs, itself a slimy mass of eyes and fibers, with a flittering forked tongue at its tip, which poked fascia-deep, neatly paired holes into tule's skin as it crawled up the length of its body.

as this ever-lengthening rope continued to climb, the rough, slimy fibers of its underbelly rubbed violently against tule's exposed clitoris, and the creature's soft mumbles of fear transformed into piercing howls of unwillful pleasure, hate, and agony. this noble creature, who had never once felt a violent emotion in its life, who had never conceptualized violation, who had never experienced degradation, was now totally marred by the addiction of the maelstrom. the vile snake, whose hundred eyes could be felt piercing into the black core of the beast's temptation, flipped around on itself in a snapping arc, and plunged directly into tule's plump vagina.

in a spasmic and forceful rhythm, the snakething moved ever forth into the tule's flesh, and filled up the belly of the beast, consuming intestines and bones and muscles as it went, making room for its own insidious design, forcing the creature to swell, not relenting at the sounds of pain, not relenting an inch, until tule's belly was too full, and it burst open, revealing nothing but a slimy mess of sludge and fibers. as bits of tule and the snake splashed into the crimson water, feeding the churning mass of leeches below, still taking their meal in rigour, a beating, cancerous mass was all that could be felt upon the now fully hollow corpse of the once noble gardenbeast.

tule whitefawn awoke feverishly and in panicked fright to a warm summer twilight, and scrambled quickly up from above the corpse of the child. a waxing moon was high, and by that time, the child had died beneath tule's weight, from heat stroke, from its hunger, from the emptiness in its veins, from crushing asphyxiation, and from the shock of all it had endured. a rush in tule's head sent it right back down onto the child, and it stayed there for a few seconds, before picking itself back up, this time with a slow rasp building in its throat. as the beast looked at the mess, it gasped in agony; blood stained the whole floor, the splayed corpses of the landbeasts were covered in bugs and reeked, the child below was barely a shadow beneath the muck and grime, and its own body hadn't a speck of white visible at all.

the stench from the corpses and the stew, still boiling from the heat of the embers, caused tule's churning stomach to collapse, and it vomited all its meal upon the floor, muddying itself and the corpse between its paws even more than before. the retching motions captivated tule, and it began to shit diarrhea as well, and the almost comical display lasted for a full four minutes, before the beast collapsed for seconds the length of eons. tule fought the hell in its body to assume a standing position, and walked blindly away from the scene, ignoring it completely.

as it walked, a strange ooze began leaking from its vagina, dripping onto the ground below it. at first, the beast assumed it to be leftover semen, but it continued the whole way, and so tule turned to sniff the stuff, saw that it was orange, and could only vaguely guess what that

meant, nose-blind as it were from the stench of its own fur. the syrup-like fluid was a mix of blood, some internal fluid or another, and the dripping waters of gardenbeast fertility, normally a drippy fluid of clearer hue, and less viscous. the beast had been made pregnant, and the zygote was certainly a demon's spawn.

the beast trekked for a couple of hours, moving by instinct towards the landmark scent of the kre-wo dragonbed trypos, a historically shrouded assortment of magma pools, some strong-smelling hot springs, scores of jagged and lethal caves which fell either in a steep spiral or simply straight into the guts of hell, cool freshwater springs, ancient geysers, and a small waterfall leading into an equally small stream, all bunched together in a space as large as a minor landbeast village, less than a couple body lengths between even the most well separated features of the typus. the hot pores of the volcano shot rich, mineral scented fog into the air, and the sound of light bubbling and splashing water was all that could be heard.

without checking by sight, tule simply fell into one of these pools, and by chance or by silent intuition, it was a hot spring, and the intense heat and strength of it bore fully down upon the fur of the beast, cleansing it fully within a few seconds. tule yelped in pain, but it was underwater, and the hot waters of the mountain filled its mouth. it had never swam, but it swam fiercely up and out of the pool, and scrambled to the stone floor, spitting violently and trembling in pain. moonlight illuminated the scenery, and tule noticed a group of utterly shocked landfolk, who were staring intensely with gaping mouths at tule.

one such beast scrambled to its feet from where they were sitting, a short, knee high hot spring further away, and it ran over to tule, scooping its body quickly up, and rushing to place it below the freshwater fall. the cool, tepid water soaked through the tule's fur, and silently it was brought to a pained, yet stabilized condition, and it did not speak at all, even as the landbeast asked it questions of its condition.

realizing its inquiries were wasted, the beast walked tule over to where it and three other landfolk had been relaxing, and held it between its thighs as it sat nakedly down into the water, tule's entire body submerged up to the neck in the peaceful heat of the spring. the soft penis of the beast was flacidly pressed against the tule's back, and tule did not mind this, because the landfolk had encircled it, and were calmly massaging its fur and its breasts, a sign of goodwill in their deeply intimate culture.

one landbeast had placed a furless, jet black tit over the ivory fangs of the silent creature, attempting to feed it milk from its black nipples, and as the landfolk gently fondled the white body of the gardenbeast, it fell slowly back to sleep, and dreamt only of clouds, and of warmth.

tule woke again in the arms of the same landbeast which had rescued it, and began to squirm a bit. the landbeast exclaimed to its companions, who at this point were trekking in the twilight back towards the village, perhaps some thirty minutes away from it still, though surely very far from anywhere tule had been in the last five decades. setting tule down, the landbeast spoke again. "i am vagk'al, these are my friends chut and tampo, this is my sibling, sar'al. we know you to be tule whitefawn, the gardenbeast of the fertile lands nestled between the hills and the mountain's first slopes. how come you seemed in such a fluster? i hope you are well."

"i am not."

"the botanist will see to you." "suluk?" the sibling was heard at the back of the group, "yes, that beast is the most knowledgeable on gardenbeasts, i would assume."

and with that, the breasted female landbeast named chut scooped tule into its fond clutch, barely managing to hold the entirety of the creature in its arms, what with its relatively large gait, and began to feed it again. this time the milk was accepted by earnest suckling, for the gardenbeast was quite hungered, having vomited its meal from the day before. the crew of beasts, now friends each, having been acquainted in an act of communal protection and physical attachment, were again set upon their path, and trained their steps to the porchlight of the pottery studio of the botanist, where it was known to sleep.

sar'al was first to the door, and knocked firmly. "suluk, dear? could you awaken quickly? suluk?" heavy footsteps were soon heard, and a somewhat flustered suluk soon appeared, a mountainous and fat hybrid of flame skybeast and landbeast, with two lopsided, white-speckled breasts the size of small whales. "oh, dear. this is tule whitefawn. is it dead?" "no, suluk, it fell back asleep a couple minutes ago. please take care of it. it seemed to be in a terrible mess of blood and muck last night, and we saw it fall into a boiling hot spring. we saved the poor thing, and brought it to a right condition, but it is surely unwell, to have ever been in such a state."

a few tears of soft and gentle panic formed at suluk's kind eyes, and it touched a finger lightly to the creature's nose, which was starting to wake again from the noise, smacking its adorable and white lips together as it yawned. "wake, my fawn. that's right. here, let me have it." suluk then rested the beast against its breasts, which were somehow longer than its downwardly protruding legs, and began to coo softly into its ear. tule could be heard sighing, and burped a bit while suluk massaged its plush underbelly, and suluk said to it, "you'll rest with me tonight, i see that you are newly pregnant and obviously scared of something, so i will care for you until you are well enough to tend again to your garden."

the four landbeasts on the porch were still watching with anxious hope, necks craned fully upward despite being on the same elevation as suluk, comforted by the assertive nurturing of the somewhat elderly botanist grandmaster, a scholarly creature infamed for its relatively indulgent smoking and eating habits, rare ability to exploit powerful tools of magic with its own bare hands, its somewhat revolting/charming appearance (based on who you ask), and its extraordinary breadth of talent within the domain of life studies (not quite as infamed for its shoddy pottery, despite a good decade of efforts in that regard). suluk bid them all a good night, humbly requested at least one of them trek back again to the garden to make sure it wasn't covered in flames or victim to some other terrible fate, and had begun to turn clumsily around when chut made soft word.

"i believe i should rest alongside you, to feed it through the night." "you know my child teht'al lives alone and no longer requires my tit, so i might as well use my own milk for its hunger." chut blushed invisibly behind its furred and otherwise completely black face. "i see-" "well, you might as well sleep with me anyway, since tule won't be feeding in its sleep, and won't care if we have sex anyways." chut blushed more visibly at this, closed the door right in the face of its smirking friends, and followed suluk's slow ambling across the floor and towards its very large and cushy beastfur bed, where the two laid tule to rest, and indulged in the novelty of each other's flesh 'til the summer sun rose again.

a full day of turbulence later, the village was still in a sort of half-ceremonious uproar at the long awaited and newly discovered death of their least favorite neighbors, disheartened in equal part by the very apparent raping of their actual favorite neighbor, tule whitefawn, who had been thoughtfully silent all day, and who had not been asked a single question by any beast, or disturbed in its rest at all, who finally decided, after some full fourteen hours of wakefulness since having first stirred in suluk's bed, to give word on the events in question. with tule's kind and unasking permission, granted immediately after hearing that the village folk had dedicated some resources to the cleaning and maintenance of the recently unoccupied garden, a local scribe took the gardenbeast's unquestionably honest and accurate word directly to paper, specifically a magical type of paper which could be read across space by any other magically enabled person paying enough attention at the moment of writing (this was their equivalent of an internet, and it was cheaper than computers). the tale was instantly known, in horrifically specific and intimate detail by all creatures across that world, spreading across each corner of the continent, the islands, and all subterranean colonies in less time than the tale even took to finish.

"suluk." "yes, fawnchild?" "tell me of this family. they were clearly hated, but i do not feel at peace with what i did to them." "you were only defending yourself." "tell me of them, and i won't forget your words until i've died." "very well, my pet." and suluk paused, clearly considering the totality of

tule's patient, consuming interest.

a full hour passed, and not a word was spoken between the two. in this time, tule took only to pawing and sucking at the pair of comically large and absurdly dense flails hinged from the resting frame of the deitous creature who was looming at once above, besides, and in front of tule's minuscule arrangement of limbs.

"stop pawing at my firstborns and listen, dear." tule sat up, and moved over to rest its own ear literally on top of suluk's mouth. "touch me while you talk, and whisper."

with its palms grasped about the full stretch of the proportionally large (but relatively twice smaller) vagina of the white-furred beast, suluk barely opened its mouth as it whispered tales of the family who its new pet had slain the day before.

before we start, i'll let you know that we've met long before, when you first established your garden. i was young at the time, and you likely don't recognize me at all, but the memory stuck with me, and is the reason why i became so interested in botany; i was enamored with the idea of a garden, and needed to know more about the thing which an entire species dedicated their full immortal lives to cultivating. now, about the family,

the family was well-hated, literally infamous for being the sole outcasts of the village's otherwise deeply communal populace. the village itself is no longer really a village, only called that for its extremely small relative nature to the local nation-state cities and trade centers positioned further into the constellace grassland and the surrounding valleys. in reality, the village is more of a mini city-state itself, somehow an enclave for the traditional landbeast culture, despite being fully involved in the emergent capitalist trade relations of the warbound and aggressively territorial populations beyond.

obviously, to be disfavored to the point of banishment in this village is as good as dying, as no person worthy of reaching disfavor here would ever be accepted into the similarly traditional realms of the skyfolk, and the surrounding land is full rapists and marauders, and also a sometimes overlapping arrangement of paid escorts, who charge more in silver than a single, disenfranchised villager could ever afford, all in trade for the "protection" of travel and the actually useful personal delivery and lightly taxed sale of goods in the larger cities, this despite the fact that said rapists and marauders (of whom there are maybe a dozen) are rumored to receive pay and orders from the very same political entities as the escorts.

in any sense, this family once had a male seedparent, who was a totally violent and hated beast up until adulthood, who vowed to change its ways after charming the gorgeous samali. the two seemed

surprisingly stable, and had even earned each other a decent reputation, until it was learned by word of samali that their child of five years had been raped a handful of times by the male,

"is rape really so common in this world?"

suluk only sighed, and continued.

the seedparent... right. the male was abusing the poor child, who was definitely made rotten by it, poor thing. or poor enough, at least. it never changed, even when prompted and given care by the village. we lost hope on it. the male seedparent of course was immediately banished, this was maybe eight years ago. folks questioned why the female seedparent allowed it to continue, but the female only claimed ignorance, and we thought this would be the sad end of it all, but the same night, the male was found dead, having hung itself, in its own fields, from one of the trees in their now drought-dead orchard.

the female was there too, a bloody and broken mess. samali didn't lose its beauty that night, but it did lose its soul, or at least the blackness within its soul was transformed. rumor has it, the male seedparent beat it to what it thought was samali's death, and left well alone after the body stopped moving, and killed itself after. samali never told a beast the true story, though that's probably the truth anyway.

the female became a cruel beast, slowly devolving into a rough, hateful demeanor. a year after, the mother gave birth, and it was assumed to be a late child, but now we know that the mother had probably slept with some other creature than the male, after its death. this mother, the true demon of this particular tale, learned that coercion was far easier than caring for its garden, and barely bothered to feed its own children, caring only for its own flesh's maintenance, engaging in not a single productive route to keep itself fed, using only the vilest of tactics. perhaps it thought itself to be owed.

it managed to get away with stealing literally everything it used to survive by leveraging the weakness of the village's children; it would rape and blackmail some children, others it would lure in and entrap in what the child thought to be a consenting relationship. samali was a truly frightening beast, charming and sadistic when needed, totally corrupt in spirit. on the outside, samali was the pitiable victim of an abusive beast, but in truth, it had been black at heart for many years before, and this was known at a smaller whisper in our minds, even when samali was itself a child.

you asked if rape is common in this world. it isn't supposed to be, and without those two beasts, i don't think it would even exist in our stretch of the land, but that's our fault, we weren't diligent, and we allowed rot to fester in an obvious crevice, assuming with stupid hate that the rot would be

isolated naturally and burn itself out. we had always wanted that family dead, we just never spoke it, and so their death has become our death as well.

i guess you too are a victim of our spite. i am sorry for that.

it only became known what samali was doing after seven years, when it became pregnant a second time. every person assumed it was some random skybeast who had travelled through, but the absolute oaf of a child it was raising, gobre, proudly claimed it was to be a seedparent, and told each beast it passed of this honor. those two, gobre and samali, supposedly had sex regularly, and it isn't clear who was abusing whom, as the younger sibling told folks upon inquiry that the two would fight violently at every available interval. this whole thing started a cascade of questions and stories throughout the village, and soon it was known how rotten the family had become.

anywho, the two clearly had a lot of pent up aggression born from their mutually uncomfortable situation, and when the village eventually stopped allowing them any social connection, for obvious reasons

"no. stop. stop, sorry. stop touching me. i don't want to listen at all. goodnight, suluk. i'll return to the garden tomorrow, and i'll visit you frequently. thank you for this, but i can't stand it, even though i really tried."

"well... before you leave in such a rush, and since i might sleep past your waking hours, and good luck waking me if i do..." and suluk retreated heftily from the bed, causing the whole village to creak a bit, and suluk waddled a bit away, and fingered around in some file cabinets before pulling out a very large book.

"this here is a masterpiece of mine, and it was what earned me my status as the highest grandmaster of botany in these lands." tule perked its soft white head, welcoming the distraction. "this is titled: 'botany and the gardenbeast', and is the culmination of four centuries of land-gardenbeast relations. you'll find it unendingly useful in your uh, do you read, little whitefawn?"

"..." two embarrassed paws covered the smiling face of the completely illiterate gardenbeast.

"right. well, i'll come to the garden now and then and read it to you." "no, you're too fat to make it there." suluk burst out laughing at this, and tule continued wittily. "i guess i've an excuse to return here after all. but won't chut be jealous?" "of course not. we aren't that type of broken society, you know."

"oh! i remember now. my old friends told me all the time that i'd eventually want to start my own

garden, and to seek the assistance of you land and skybeasts. perhaps you are just that much more intelligent than we simple folk of the leaf and root." "that we are, tule whitefawn."

a long and comfortable silence filled the room, until all that was spoken faded into nothing, leaving only the mutual attention of the beasts to fill the room between them.

"you know, tule."

...

...

...

"things are better now." tule's head whipped up at this, and its eyes widened as suluk continued, head bowed down in shame. "that family was rot. they weren't just rotten, they were simply rot incarnate."

...

"the female thing though, the young loud one, i never did like how it was trapped with its sibling; it was surely a nuisance, but not quite malicious."

a deep, bubbling something came rushing up to meet tule, and the beast found itself in the jaws of hate once more.

"i think that one could have been salvaged."

and for many years, tule whitefawn's waking thoughts would be haunted by those words. the beast ran into the night, and knew it would never escape.

tule glared at the milken florabeast. despite its best efforts, the vermin would not respond to the radiating hunger of the gardenbeast, and it continued eating, unfazed. anger began to boil besides the hunger in the creature's white heart. looking down at its lunch, tule could only see its weakness, and for the first time in its life, derived a thrill of excitement from staring at the gardenbeast's plump and leaking body.

tule flipped the vermin over with its nose, and took a curious view at the milken portrait below, squirming to return to a standing position, surprised to find itself helpless and back-ridden. before the years-ripe florabeast could revert its stance, tule had it snoot-pinned to the soil, its nostrils probing the eternally swollen breasts of its sacred prey.

tule whitefawn lapped hesitantly at the milk stored in the small creature, as for the first time, it had felt a sort of malicious, sexual pleasure at the transfixing and pathetic cacophony of the florabeast's indignant mewling. "this is hunger. i understand, i understand. yes, i think i understand fine."

the florabeast managed to right itself, still squeaking profanity at its captor, and started to waddle forgetfully off, already dismissing having been pinned not seconds prior. tule laughed, a sound which it realized was foreign to its own ears, and it stopped. looking down again at the retreating vermin, it spat pleasantly, "goodness, you are stupid. and *weak."

tule plunged its nose delightfully again into the fur of the beast, and swatted it aside with its paws, leaving it sprawled on its side. tule approached, its face twisted into a wicked shape, and nudged the florabeast one bit further, leaving it again on its back.

"you are..." tule probed the creature's pelvic area, sniffing through the fur and wetness. "female. you are a female florabeast."

repeatedly, tule attempted to lick at the genitalia of the florabeast, but each time, the thing would only return to standing, and would waddle away, unimpressed and not at all pleased. tule's heart beat faster and faster, and it began to fret, wondering if florabeasts were somehow asexual, or if their females had clitorises buried somewhere its tongue couldn't reach.

don't i regularly see them having sex? why can't i please this thing?

the florabeast once more started ambling thoughtlessly along, and so tule whitefawn gave a loud, snarling bark to the heavens, and cursed harshly at the lunch-thing.

"damn you, what the hell do you want?" white fangs tore into the lower third of the florabeast, and its body was shaken vigorously about, and spat out, entrails spilling onto the ground. the florabeast barely let out a mewl, so overwhelmed by its pain, and did not budge much as tule again approached, only kicking its legs in the spasms of injury, while its small genitals were licked raw by a silent, white beast.

"there you are", the florabeast had released from its lips the same sound which tule recognized from its species' mating patterns, and so it was satisfied in its effort, and only kissed the beast on the

bloodless part of its fur, before retreating to a sitting position before it. tule sat there for some few minutes, watching its lunch squirm and die, not injured enough to die fully, but certainly in pain, and soon it began to squeal again, at a pitch designed by evolution to catch the attention of nearby gardenbeasts.

a carnal and nameless emotion welled like blood beneath the fresh scars of tule's psyche, and so it fetched its lunch, and carried it by fang to its deathbed. the milken florabeast was laid in a bed of soft grass, shaded from the setting summer sun by a large and phallic rock, a few feet off in the clay soil. for two hours, as the florabeast mewled itself to death, tule whitefawn watched, its hips turning rhythmically as it sat impaled by the stone. every few minutes, tule would pull itself up to make a new mark on its prey's stomach, and lap at the yet-pooling milk dripping from a dozen, reddened breasts.

when it died, the florabeast was eaten, and none knew the tale.

over a year passed without incident. some villagers, mostly suluk and the four friends, had spent countless hours working at the garden, and taught tule, that simple white beast of the leaf and root, not only excerpts of the ancient landbeast and skybeast knowledge, but also how to read their books. skyfolk from the two, otherwise completely mutually contentious enclaves would sometimes come down to assist the efforts, and gave a few gifts.

tule was ripe with pregnancy, the child within it took far longer than expected, but was clearly still alive and growing, so it was largely ignored that so much time had passed.

surely, there was something rotten in that creature.

on a lovely autumn day, a landbeast tailor of renowned eccentricism came to the village, one whose artistic creativity and client-specific adaptability was so immensely powerful, as to have once put robe on a cloudfolk skybeast, without it removing the garments right after, and those garments were not even tossed from the eternal chrysalis towards the muddy swamps below. such an accomplishment cannot be understated in the slightest, and so when this tailor came to town, the whole village was alight in competition for its radiant, yet picky attention.

but none earned it at all. when the tailor heard of a female gardenbeast, and learned that this was the same tule whitefawn as in the epic tales of rape and vindication that had been shared to the

entire world not 2 years prior, it made immediate trek in the direction of the garden, forgetting instantly whatever previous arrangements it had hoped to conjure.

tule was in a lighthearted sort of mood. laying on its back in the soft sunlight, legs very calmly pointed at a sharp angle away from its belly, orange ooze still seeping from its loudly protruding vagina, though not quite as orangely as before, the swollen, white creature of odd proportion made a strange and alluring sight to the world, or at least a strange sight to the world, and an alluring sight to the tailor.

not concealing its footsteps at all, the tailor, who, having caught immediate scent of the beast some half an hour prior, and having trained its steps directly to the beast, without any worry of where or upon what it walked, finally came into sight of the gorgeous, awkwardly small creature.

the tailor kneeled down and patted the belly of the beast, rubbing it somewhat, and simply said, "hello."

the white creature woke up enough to open its eyes, and did not care enough to move any more than that, but did give the tailor the honor of a light purr.

"ah, happy today, are we?" the tailor looked at the orange ooze seeping from the beast. "odd. i am going to dip my hand into this novel fluid, because i am curious. take no offense, dear."

suddenly, a single paw prodded the tailor's round stomach. "are you pregnant too? i can't smell it on you. are you only fat?" at this, the tailor gave a good laugh. "i am only fat. in fact, i do not have the parts required to make a child." "but you have breasts!" "those do not make children, my fawn." "but, oh but you aren't *that* fat, are you?"

the tailor laughed more, it was entertained by the brazen innocence of this wonkily shaped creature. "oh, do get with the times, my dear. i am simply transexual." the tailor received silence in response. "seriously? wow, alright. here, let me get a better position next to you. yes, that'll do. look, some folk are not born in the body they necessarily want. sexually, that is. there's other sorts of issues, but this is one specifically related to the types of developments brought by hormones, and to the types of parts each sex might have. i was born with a penis to which i am largely indifferent, and with no breasts. obviously, no creature is born with developed breasts, but mine never grew, even though i wanted them to. anyway, it's illegal in some places, but i modified my blood, and added the right hormones, which changed quite a lot more of me than just the development of breasts."

"goodness dear, i don't even know you. i don't care what parts you have, really, but i will say that, apart from pfenixes, i've never been aroused before by a beast with a penis. oh, sorry, was that odd?"

i'm sorry. no, don't laugh again. goodness, who are you, even?"

"my name is yetcha, and i... will be designing for you, a collar." "like the dogs wear?" "no, like the folks wear when wanting to be like the dogs who wear collars." "oh."

"do you want to be like a dog on a collar? don't answer. your face says everything. i will return here tomorrow with a collar for you. may i take your measurements?" and at this the tailor pulled from beneath its fat stomach, perhaps from a pocket of sorts, a tape measurer, and took many measurements of the beast.

"darling fawn thing, i know that i am only here to fulfill my artistic vision. but, and i must say i almost never ask this of clients, so don't think this some sort of scheme, would you mind if we had sex?"

the collar which the tailor designed was a mean thing, terrifying to all who saw it, who couldn't imagine the soft gardenbeast in such attire. the actual materials, which were flameproof, keeping in mind the proximity to the flamefolk, were impossibly tough metallic and gem compounds, designed to last the full lifespan of an immortal creature. the main collar was black as the skin of a landbeast, and it was decorated by six metal spikes, each studded at their base with some sort of black gemstone.

these six large spikes were the true statement-piece of the collar. they came in three evenly aligned pairs, each shaped almost as if horns, or perhaps spider legs, each a thin piece of slightly iridescent, silver-purple steel, sharp as death at their tip, and magically enchanted to remain in such a state, free of rust or dent, under any condition. each thorn pair, for thorns is what they were, was pointed downwards at an increasingly straight bend, and started only at the lower half of the collar; the reason for this, of course, was to allow tule to lay in its natural belly-up condition, as it had done since birth.

the very front of the collar allowed a leash's clasp, and the back was the untying mechanism, which also allowed the collar to be tightened. every villager who saw it was worried that the tailor had gone mad, and silently gossiped about its inevitable reception by the gardenbeast.

yetcha, having finished its work, set to the same path as the day before, and for a second time made an unceremonious trampling of every single thing set upon the straight line between itself and its darling model.

"up, dog!" tule sat rightly up, blushing hard. yetcha approached without pause, and immediately fastened the collar to the tame dog's neck. tule was silent as yetcha tightened the collar, only yelping in delight as the collar came hard about its fragile throat.

"this can be taken off, but you'll never need to. it can be tightened or loosened, but you'll never need to. with your permission, i'll use my magic to make this a more permanently fastened decoration."
"um, yes, please." "beg." "please do it, yetcha. what? stop laughing at me, each time i talk!"

"there, well it can no longer be loosened or removed, but that's your own will. you'll be buried with this collar about you. here, look at yourself in a mirror."

"dear, this is lovely." "how do you feel? i really am curious."

"i look like, no, i... i want, i want to hurt folks. i want to hurt folks, and i like that i look like a beast that wants to hurt folks. thank you, yetcha."

"that child of yours, is it really alive? is it possible for your species to breed with ours? I fear for you, pet."

tule bowed its head a bit, and closed its eyes, sighing.

"i know that it is rot, and i know that it is evil, but i know i must hold to it dearly, and let it fester, and even though each bite of nourishment fed to the mass within me feels like a further continuation of that rape that first brought it about, i know i want it dearly to survive, my fawn thing, my child."

yetcha laid tule whitefawn onto its back, gently handling it, and attached a leash to its collar. with a soft tug, the full body of the gardenbeast lifted a paw length from the ground, and without a word spoken, the tailor made soft love to the beast.

two years after the beast's hateful anointment, it had finally begun to spill blue. it was almost time for its seedling to be born, a perfect week-length warning from the exact time of birth, accurate to the second.

naturally, the whole village wanted to attend, but tule only allowed suluk to come, who was tasked with the delivery. honestly, tule had become embarrassed to be viewed by so many other creatures, probably for the first time ever, for usually it was indifferent to attention, but somehow felt

responsible for whatever freakish creature would be born of such a blood mixing, and did not want to worry about the judging eyes of its friends.

"easy now, pet." "will it hurt?" "no, my fawn, your species does not know pain in that way. you will not scream as the landbeasts do." suluk, prepared to deliver whatever might come, rubbed the now completely blue, gooping vagina of the beast. "i don't know how to help it along, but it's time, now. shall i reach in, and pull it out?" "yes, please. that will be fine. oh! suluk, suluk... suluk, how does it look?"

but in the master's hands was only a pulsating mass of cancerous growth, perhaps twice the size of a baby gardenbeast, and as it was released from the womb, a flush of rot came with it, and the stench was so apparent, it marred the senses of both the beasts, and suluk was overwhelmed, so it dropped the tumor, and didn't know what to do with its own hands.

tule didn't stir, it didn't even bother to look, for it already knew. it had known for some time, and it fell asleep in a bed of tears.

4, annihilation

this world contains very few land masses, including a few hundred, occasionally life-bearing volcanic islands, three major islands, and one gargantuan continent. the major islands are, respectively, the far isolated mating land of the dragonbeasts, the large, verdant island of the far south, occupied mainly by lagomorphs and a gardenbeast species which branched from the southern whitefurs 1.1 billion years ago, and a tropical island off east, infamed for its delicious fruit, small reptiles, and a few well-humored birds. the entire pangeaic continent is referred to as "the land" or "the above-sea" in every language spoken, and it is split by a massive divide of active volcanoes, forming a northern land and a southern land, both carved ugly by trypoxic mountain ranges. the cultures and biomes of either side are defined more or less in total isolation from those of the other, and only a few species are truly common to both sides of the range. one of these few continuities is the gardenbeast culture, the southern whitefurs of old having been implanted by the pfenixes with the intention of cultivating a better ecosystem in what was then a barren and dusty south.

in the south of the land, there was the womb of life, a lake besides a volcano from which the first microbes caught hold upon reality, and spewed forth to the seas beyond. in the north, there was the womb of sentience.

over a billion years ago, the womb of sentience was rended of life by supreme violence. the ecosystem which had existed there was fragile, and already reeling long before the times of war, having evolved into a thinly balanced state previous to the emergence of the first sentient species,

the pfenixes, and the many pre-sentient species, including only the whitefurs and oulfari as survivors. the callous and desperate wrath of these brethren creatures destroyed their home, and this womb never again found a way to regrow, even after they died off and departed. now, only wind and twilight touch the beastwomb range, as the intense storms which rage there cleanse the snowy and unseeded terrain, suffocating any openings where life might take its hold.

the now archaic and diminished oulfari culture is concentrated mostly at the foothills of that life-dead range from which the three sibling cultures were born. for hundreds of miles, no other sentient species occupy the lands surrounding the oulfari domain, and so they are more isolated than even the felines, who reside in the mountains between the continent's many valleys. the oulfari relate to the other cultures in precisely three circumstances: the first is when oulfari depart from the comfortable isolation of the homeland to roam with the strange and relatively fresh creatures beyond; the second is during the gardenbeast hunting rituals in which all decent hunterfolk cubs partake; the third is during flame festivals, in which all such beasts also partake, partly in light of the cultural standard of the annihilation of any hunterbeast who fails to do as such.

often, information which is known to the rest of the continent's northern hemisphere is lost to the oulfari; many cultural developments have affected every single living creature except those few of the foothills bathed in the starlit winds of the beastwomb range. the tale of a certain whitefur gardenbeast was another of these missed stories, for a while.

spoken in some useless and ancient tongue, "stars, yeul'a! grhat val'a, did y'know the beast? yeah, it still lives, there in the garden once sat by that dolly sibling what's titled tickleroot, y'know it."

at this, grhat val'a cried for a very long time, and was almost unable to keep its balance. the silver, moonbound wolf was 150 years of age, and at that night, its heart finally rested in those threads yet claimed by suppressed and shaded fright. offering neither explanation nor much farewell, the elderly oulfari travelled to that verdant garden nestled like a pawprint beneath the kre'wo.

beneath the milky touch of many billions of stars, tule whitefawn rested upon the burial place of its lover and friend grhat val'a. some fifty-six years had passed since the oulfari emerged before its eyes like the child of a daydream's wishes; some fifty-six years passed before eventually it died. before its death last month, in the calm of the garden's relatively warm winter, grhat val'a would accompany tule in its rounds about the garden, walking without word or laughter, afterwards sharing warm and undesperate sex, for only this beast's friendly and commanding sex could make tule's sapphic heart quite so full with that familial pleasure which was different than the rowdy stimulation they liked to pull from the visting beasts, and tule's supple and voiceless flesh would fill the oulfari with

both. in its final years, the dying yet noble creature could spend increasingly less energy trotting the garden, and in the last few months, it stopped entirely, only stretching its muscles to rhythmically pulverize tule when it would come by, and to eat its breasts, which were replenished nightly by a massive supply of sacrificial florabeasts and the portioned meat of deerfolk offerings, descending once weekly from of the kre'wo forest as free gifts to the wolf and its bitch.

last month, in the first tule fog of a most fateful winter for the constellace, tule whitefawn had laid itself by grhat val'a to rest, but its flesh was not met by any response, only a calibration of the beast's breath to that of its pet, and these breaths did eventually slow to a still, and tule's breaths slowed along with them, unmoving and unbothered as it was, for it too was entranced in the foggy calm of dying, and the beasts died together there by accident, both losing awareness of anything but the reverberating sounds pitched warmly from one to the other, til all consciousness was lost.

like all oulfari, grhat val'a's eye-specked corpse decayed in the span of ten minutes, and was returned by binding magic to its true state, a pool of moonly silvermilk which seeped into tule and into the ground below, the latter bit eventually draining into the roots and mycelia and waterways of the garden oasis. blood for the garden; blood for the beast, its watcher.

at the turn of exactly one moon cycle from their mutual death, this considered the basic unit of passed time in the slow and reverant oulfari culture, the pfenix Msheh'mm, the first dedicated pfenix gardener, resident of the floral hills, eggling of ewuurrh and loyal student of tule whitefawn, got up from where it was waiting, and decided to revive the flesh of its deity, which was perfectly intact after twenty-nine days, having been protected both by the oulfari's silver blood and the ritual suicides of local deerfolk. each third day, a deerthing had descended from the mountains to perform the ancient and unique lifegift ritual upon tule, calling upon their single-purpose magic to perform the impressive act of imploding their own body by sheer will, and forcing the entire weight of their life to be transmuted into a demonic and writhing flesh-ball of pure shade-magic, which would then enter the body of the recipient creature, entitling it with the entire substance of the deerthing's body. such a vastly intricate and potent spell was possible by nature of being the only thing deerfolk ever really study with care, living the rest of their lives in a soft stupor of tempered indifference and cultural equality.

tule was awoken by a poking beak, and its eyes opened to a bed of translucent, white flame. the ancient was standing above it, middle eye closed, left and right eyes alternating in a slow rhythm between closed and open. the thing was smiling in the first way pfenixes learned, trying to copy the kind expressiveness of the pre-gardenbeast whitefurs by employing their attractive lashes to do what their beaked mouths couldn't.

this second healing ritual was a much longer affair of three hours, having been initiated by an actual

pfenix, as opposed to a handful of whitefurs. as tule didn't need to be healed, only woken, the full three hours were spent sexually, with tule suckling the firemilk from the ancient pfenix, whose breasts had not yet become fully vestigial at that point in evolution, and then with the ancient using the golden opportunity to please its now ragingly hungry cock for the first time since a couple thousand years ago, when a very protective pfenix had summoned it in a fluster of dismay to heal the tiniest cut on a completely embarrassed oulfari bitch, which was its personal pet and life-long prey fetcher.

tule awoke happy and ass-full of the oil-like ejaculate of pfenixes, which erupted into a cloud of flames upon tule's contact with real air, sizzling to death a random landbeast child which had seen the pfenix land and had been led by curiosity to observe, whose grilled body tule shared with Msheh'mm and a flamefolk beast who had also stopped by, and never once did it mourn grhat val'a, for tule's fur and its garden each gained a silver tint from then on, a luster as eternal as moonlight.

the winter was only kind to tule, that year, for the constellace was ripe with hate.

drifting from the heavens like one of the many falling snowflakes, a chubby and playful cloudfolk female named "cowntits" locked eyes with tule in its descent. cowntits the (only) fat skybeast landed upon tule's stomach with only its toes pointed downwards, keeping itself levitated while its toes and upper foot massaged tule's silvered fur and pale, white tits. after doing so for a few minutes, it decided how to break the burdening information to the gardenbeast, and retracted its wings, body falling sensually about tule's, limbs interlocking mid-fall as if in practiced form. tule's collar was grabbed, and its body pulled close to the oncomer, who then realized it had laid on the sexy stuff a bit strongly, which it had initially thought to do only to capture the gardenbeast's infamously fleeting attention, and so the two instead transitioned away from a nearly-begun conversation and into sex, and then transitioned away from sex and into cuddling, and then away from cuddling and into sleeping, and then, upon waking, transitioned finally into a nose kissing session, complete with a playful and buzzing stare.

one big smooch finished the ordeal, and the skybeast pulled its head back, arms on either side of tule's head.

"so."

"so!"

"so, i actually came bearing some pretty fucked up news." "i could tell you wanted something other

than my body!"

"shh! okay, here, let me take this seriously; it's actually really, really bad." tule settled down, and the two got into another stare, which became dangerously close to a gaze, the precursor to a flirtation, and so the cloudfolk beast ripped off the conversational bandage and blurted out "the chrysalis is preparing for sky-terrorism!" cowtits blushed and covered its mouth with a hand the colors of a swirling pool of blue smoke and water, and tule tried hard not to giggle.

"uh, how do you mea-" "i tried to stop them! they wouldn't listen! sorry, but your garden might fall victim to war at this rate. things are bad for us bipeds, this winter."

"yes, even i have snow in the garden. i assume your tools of weather are well strained, at present."
"yes, they are. sorry, let me restart."

five days before, in the furthest city-state from the village, a harsh and politically disrepaired society known by the once valiant name of t'tchekki, three female cloudfolk were attending the local college as foreigners, studying on behalf of their homelands the strange and disturbed cultures of the landbeasts within and beyond the constellace empire, though not willing to go so far as actually entering the empire, correctly fearing the terrors therein. unfortunately, they should have feared the city-states too, and at least brought a flamefolk beast for protection. ignorance damned these kind creatures, seen as nudist and savage women by the untrusting and socially blighted civilians, and as such, distasteful whores to be preyed upon at the first excuse.

this day came when a riot broke out, one which began in the first over and second westmost of the five great biped valleys, yet travelled to every city in the middle-north by nightfall, and this riot was caused simply by discontent with the weather.

it was not rare, and never honest, for the landbeasts of the five valleys to blame any and all poor weather on the incompetence and ill-will of the completely innocent cloudfolk. the cloudfolk in question lived atop the chrysalises of the dragonbeasts, each such critter the middle stage of gargantuan butterflies, floating things which take to the sky in synchronicity after a good two-thousand years of sucking from the earth its volcanic milks, eventually hatching after fourteen-thousand years for a single century of mating, restarting the cycle of both their own species and of the biped genus, to whom they are parents. the other bipedal skybeasts, the flamefolk, would be left in the enclaves located somewhere in the same volcanoes as the dragonbed tryplexes left by the dragonbeast "caterpillars". gifted with the weather-magic of the dragonbeasts, being the children and symbiotes of these creatures, and the pregenitors of each generation of landbeasts, the much smaller population of cloudfolk were able to alter a great deal of the land's weather patterns.

but not all of them.

and when they failed to make perfect conditions for those on the ground, the angry, and now somehow kyriarchal landbeasts would throw quite a temper, but not really have any way to *do* anything about it, landbound as they were. to the landbeast rulers, cloudfolk were the perfect scapegoats, a small, isolated population who didn't care enough to interact with those below, and who as such could be blamed ad infinity on anything and everything, and conspiracy theories involving these savage, cunning, all-powerful beasts were easy to sow.

this time, the entirety of the land was covered in horrid snow, and though the beasts therein were usually quite fond of it, this amount was enough to suffocate the homes and lives of many, many creatures. of course then, an infinite spew of conspiracy theories would be levied, and the economic depressions and famines were not at all the faults of the governments, per their own propaganda, at least. the actual snow itself was, per the lifespan of dragonbeasts, completely common, and this iteration of the cloudfolk culture had seen and suffered four such incidents already, which would occur once per two-thousand or so years. of course, knowing that this was to come, they had warned the entire north and south of this, and had done so for a few decades, yet despite that, it was viewed as a plot and fiendishly cruel attempt at... something... by the evil and constantly trifling cloudfolk villains above.

most of the landbeasts got over it, and just went home after a couple hours of anger and loud banging upon the completely shuttered doors of the massive estates of the vastly wealthy bureaucrats and warlords of the empires and cities. no beast had anyone of the right demographic to make substantial beatings upon, except for the famished and dying proletariat of the t'tchekki city-state.

the three aforementioned students had come there with adequate supplies for this weather, and seemed suspiciously prepared for it to come, which again, was because they had known about it for all time before, and, again, had made repeated attempts at enlightening the landbeasts, but this was viewed as treachery, as opposed to preparation, by the starving t'tchekkians, who were dying in droves in the streets and in the fields beyond the city walls. these three beasts had the unfortunate circumstance of not only being viewed as distasteful just for being foreigners, and as savages for being non-landbeasts, and as cruel oppressors for being cloudfolk, and as traitors for being well fed, and for being scapegoats of endless propaganda, but also for being exotic and attractive, their flesh and fat not at all diminished in comparison to the frail and dying women of the city. as obvious as timber burning beneath a match's anger, they were raped.

a crowd descended upon them, and a game of sadistic vindication was played, one which had no rules and no beast to intervene. even the women laughed at the fates of these genderless females,

and nobody came to save them as they were defiled, flogged, and tortured, and interrogated en masse without a single scribe to take note of their response, and eventually, they were bound together in metal spikes and sent home upon the back of their carrier-bird companion, a single message branded upon their collective bodies:

STOP

BAD

WEA
THER!

of course, the cloudfolk of the constellace were enraged beyond reconciliation, and they decided to make hell of hell, and convened in true treachery for the first time ever, so completely furious as to consider, and eventually to agree upon, the usage of their tools of weather, which had previously been bent at near capacity to save the lives of as many creatures as possible, in a totally random array of unmeasured functions, one which would have no knowable effect upon the weather.

they would show the landbeasts, then, what exactly it looked like when their jobs weren't done properly, and this at the absolute worst timing for a tantrum between the species.

precisely one skybeast maintained continuous resistance against the decision, for even the flamefolk, who hated their cloudfolk cousins, were not willing to step to the landbeast's defense after such an act. cowntits the jolly fatass did its best to instill resistance and failed, managing only to rally one gardenbeast whitefur to its cause. in fact, not even the villagers recognized the severity of the situation, having had a much better time of the weather 'til then than the other constellace landbeasts, for they were closest to the cloudfolk enclave and its range of effect, and as such were ignorant to the sheer death weighing upon the landbeasts further beyond.

just as it finished explaining the situation to tule, who was immediately committed to assisting the gluttonous and compellingly whimsical female (tule had a soft spot for the type, after suluk), a certain sound like creaking bones was heard from above, and a gush of wind blew in, spraying them both in snow, and in a wave of magical chaos created at the shifting gears of the chrysalis' appendages. cowntits screwed its face up and began bawling, burying its face in tule, screaming in pain at the weight of its own failure's impending consequence.

it was too late for a rally of support, now.

trapped under the screaming and crying creature, tule whitefawn was despaired, caught in a spell of remembrance, reliving tenfold the haunting trauma of pawing at the mud above the trapped yotedji, almost certain it was too weak to succeed. this time, it had no idea what to do.

eventually cowntits stopped bawling, and as snow began to blanket the garden, tule was shaken awake by the cold nipping at its every tissue. "cowntits! get up, we must return to the enclave."

cowntits sat up, and pulled tule to its chest. "it's pointless, my dear. we must do what we can to protect your garden, for now."

"i know. that's why i'm telling you to bring me to your elders. i will see to it that this affair is either settled or set upon clear terms, and whatever must come, this disturbance will not be settled here." cowntits blew snot out of its nose, and the long strain of mucus failed to fully depart its nostrils, so it pulled the snot down with its right hand, and picked up tule with its left, stuffing its face into the creature's breasts to blow its nose again, wiping the rest off on tule's fur.

"alright, then." two skybeast wings unfurled, and the pair fluttered up through the storm and in the direction of the eternal chrysalis of the kre'wo dragonbeast.

the distance from the garden to the chrysalis was not terribly high, perhaps a seven minute flight up and around the mountain in normal weather, but in these conditions, it was hardly even possible. cowntits almost fell from the heavens twice, and was constantly thrashed by billowing winds and random offshoots of magical flux from the now hyperactive chrysalis above. snowflakes and small hailstones danced by the millions at speeds high enough to create a seriously fatal threat to most beasts, and only cowntits had the magic to protect itself, and so it had to worry about shielding tule from all angles, as the storm constantly shifted and fluctuated, growing increasingly erratic as the distance to the chrysalis closed.

worse than anything was the sound. the sound of ten-thousand limbs, usually hanging at an easy erection from the center of the chrysalis, now being tugged and pulled at odd angles by creatures above, creaking and threatening to snap clean as fluctuations of magical energy spewed at random from the pupa's body. behind the din of chaos and wind could be faintly heard a sound dozens times more chilling yet; the dragonbeast was wailing from within its bed. the pupa itself appeared to have awoken from the strain on its body, an event which would normally commence only at the turn of the century, and even then for no more than a few minutes. a sound like a yotedji's pulsing howl could be heard at a ringing shrill, softly audible beneath thousands of layers of noise.

cowntits began to falter. the wind was like a wall of infinite texture and presence, constantly

reassembling and redirecting itself before the beast, now reeling from the cold, from the fear and despair which continued to well in its body. terror like death manifested itself as an unpathable torrent, claiming the lighthearted beast, and sinking it. a massive gust of wind knocked cowtits to the side, and it lost its track of the winds around it, and was swiftly thrashed again by a huge offshoot of magical power, knocking it completely unconscious as the avalanche of momentum sent the poor beasts barreling straight down.

the flare of magic was a stamp from the heavens, and a huge cloud of snow and soil lifted from the ground as the wave collided with solid earth. cowtits' body exploded on impact, and tule's much softer body, designed to survive high impact blows, ricocheted hundreds of feet, being lifted up and southward by yet another massive gust. the beast landed in snow, and faded quickly out.

tule was in a state of troubled hypnopompia, it was nearly awake, but a sludge of awful emotions had built, and its mind was unwilling to accept consciousness. it wanted to sleep for longer. the air was warm, and it was situated comfortably on its back. something warm was pressed against tule's side, perhaps a hand, perhaps nothing more than an ethereal ember. it wanted to sleep forever, but it couldn't. it forgot why, but it had to wake up.

tule's eyes shot open, and its breaths picked up. the beast was prepared for any engagement to follow.

the gardenbeast was in a small den, surrounded by cloudfolk medics. one was gently grasping its side, slowly massaging it awake, and lifted its head with a soft exclaim as tule came abruptly to. the beasts appeared to straighten their posture, moving closer together to face tule directly.

"tule whitefawn, we saw you with cowtits flying up to us, but we were not able to intercept you in time. after you fell to the ground, a deerthing must have found you, because a lifegift spell had been cast upon you as we descended, and this is how we spotted you in all the snow. we were unable to rescue the other, did you see where it went?" the skybeast had paused a bit before saying "the other", as if it was uncomfortable to hover on the name of its friend, right before learning its fate.

"its body exploded on contact with the land; i felt the rupture beneath me when we landed. the beast's remains will not be traceable anymore." the three medics were visibly disappointed at this information, but it was already expected, and so a mood of resignation hung in the air as tule spoke. a terrible fact was realized by the medics in that moment, that such a heavy bog of despair had saturated the thoughts and words of the cloudfolk for the last week, this new catastrophe didn't change much at all. their favorite friend was dead, and nobody had a tear to show.

"i see..."

"i have not come to exchange news. i seek answers from whomever is responsible for operating the matrix of conduction here in the enclave of the eternal chrysalis. what is the status of your engagement, and what exactly are your acting positions at present, as it pertains to this decision to create a weather disturbance?" tule had never spoken so directly in its life, and it almost fainted at its own momentum. somewhere below, a 26,000 year old masterpiece was being shredded by a maelstrom of ice and wind. the beast steadied its heart.

"um, we'll see you to one of the third elders of cloud." by contrast, a cloudfolk beast had never been recorded speaking so feebly.

the medic who spoke treaded meekly to tule's side, its aura that of a child approaching its parent right after being reprimanded for an act it already knew to be wrong. as tule was lifted, for lifting the touch-submissive beast felt more natural than simply allowing it to walk, the other medics left the den, and were heard calling out "cla'tre!"

tule knew just enough about cloudfolk culture to know that the power matrix of their societies were generally headed by the elders of cloud, and for this there were three tiers of responsibility, none necessarily "higher" ranked than the other, simply responsible for more general or more specific tasks. "cla'tre" in this case was an ol' waat'tang shortening of the title "third elder of cloud", a word made during the first generation of the bipeds, and it would be those same skybeasts who would transform the waat'tang language to its curent form, 14 million years before.

tule was carried out into the open, and the sky was nothing at all, only grey noise beyond a dome of hypocritical self-protection. the air was damp and mildewed in the stewing depression. cloudfolk did not deal with lethargic emotions. they did not understand inertia, and so they were overwhelmed by their own psyches, a culturally unprecedented tantrum produced by a lapse of typical dissociation. the elder who had been called was already there, and it scooped tule from the hands of its cousin, cradling it subconsciously, the back of two metal spikes pressed into its arm and chest.

lovely, i have entered the place of clouds and become one. my legs are vestigial, it seems!

the elder didn't speak, and walked tule down some path, still pressing the warm creature against its furless, naked chest. tule trusted its intentions were being considered and weighed, and did not rush the beast to speak, or to reveal the nature of the hand it was clearly playing. as they walked, the horrid wailing of the chrysalis was at full pitch, something which every beast present seemed only to ignore. the carnal fear and discomfort of the pupa trapped below the floor tore into tule's heart like the cry of the florabeast it had once raped. a protective panic rose in it, and its blood boiled at the

disaffected expression of the elder who held it. soon enough, a moaning could be heard, and though this was no different than any other sound tulle had heard til then, it was certainly a uniquely important pitch.

the cla'tre followed the sound, until the two were right outside a second medic's den. tulle looked up at the elder expectantly, but it's eyes were not focused on the creature it held. the beast only turned, and continued the walk. after another two minutes of travel, they found themselves in the midst of a terrible aroma, a stench which lit every fear instinct in tulle's body at the same time. rotting landbeast flesh. tulle began to panic, but made no visual display, trapped as it were in the heat of a boiling lake of blood. the stench grew in force, until a corner was rounded and tulle was placed to the floor.

in a small clearing, two bodies lay together, bound tight in metal spikes. a third body had clearly been rended from the mess, and blood stained the floors where its body had been carved out from the sadistic conjugation.

STOP

WEA
THER!

"why... are they still here?" tulle collapsed, and hurled violently as it attempted a right stance. tears streaked down its face, and it threw up a second time. the elder of cloud waited until tulle had rid itself of vomit, and spoke as the creature's head turned to glare it down.

"we can't get rid of them. skybeasts have rituals for death. flamefolk are cast into the volcano and turned to a cloud of smoke. we are fed to the pupa, and turned to clouds of dew. we... couldn't pry the metal open. our hands were too weak, and none of our tools can affect metal. they died in their cages, tulle. right at our feet, staring into our eyes with fear like venom. the only reason the other was removed was because we dragged it out, spikes and all, and it was eviscerated horribly in its extraction. tulle, we can't get rid of them. we can't even save the one survivor we *did* extract-

"the pfenixes"

"the *pfenixes* are in *tunnels* halfway across the damn land." the elder spoke with rage it hadn't known the sound of in its entire life. "the *pfenixes* cannot be summoned. they rest in rare *fucking* communion during this specific damned snowstorm, every two millenia. we can't cast a healing spell. we wouldn't dare ask the flamefolk villagers to burn these bodies on our behalf. we have nothing to do, tulle whitefawn, except to let the damned winds blow." by the end, it was screeching, but it fell

to its knees anyways, and wept.

tule was too struck to speak, but the skybeast had not finished. it waddled on its knees to tule, desperately grasping at the creature as it retreated in terror. a firm hand dragged tule into the clutches of the weeping creature. the elder nabbed tule by its hair, and it yelped, and it was afraid then, that it was to be raped again. it didn't mind being used, but it hated to be unloved, violated, disrespected in its flesh and in its will.

the elder tried to speak

"please, please don't rape me."

the elder choked on its words, and released its clutches on tule, curling its body in raw anguish until the two found themselves laying together, the elder spooning tule's weak body, cock pressed limply against its back. tule's collar had slit the elder's arms, and it bled out onto tule's silver fur without a glance of concern. they wept together, and they did not feel clean when they were done, only exhausted, too much to even cry.

the elder raised itself feebly up, and its age was not kind to it, for it only managed to reach its knees. tule whitefawn was left on the ground, and as it raised itself to face the beast, the momentum of the engagement locked finally into place. all terms had been defined; the word of steel would now be spoken.

"my title is clatre eussa, elder of the eternal chrysalis and child of the"

"and my title is tule whitefawn, beast of the leaf and root."

the wind howled angrily on, and the dance was high.

"neither beast, soil, sea, nor sky will ever benefit from this hate."

"it is forced."

"it is not."

"we refuse to do nothing. your species does not understand hate. we cannot simply wallow in hatred here in this place, lest it become a cage where we are prodded and kept in turmoil by the forces below."

the wind howled angrily on, and the dragnbeast screeched.

"this is not a solution to any problem of yours. you are tormenting the beast who birthed you." "this chrysalis did not birth any creature, tule whitefawn, and whether the origin cycle is a fairy tale or a reality as cadmic as moonlight, the current circumstance is that the position of cloudfolk have been continuously disrespected for all confirmed history of our peoples. we need to make well of the threat of our wrath, lest we continuously be disturbed and disrespected."

"you bipeds are foolish to ignore the shared knowledge of the other creatures. the origin cycle is an absolute truth of your four cousin species, and by the same knowledge, understood by seemingly every other sentient culture than that of the five valleys, your genus has only been in disarray for the exact same amount of time that the ancient archives of tunnelbeast knowledge have been disconnected from the rest of you. there are creatures alive who recall these events. did a dolly sibling of over 25,000 years not walk these lands? your history dictates reconciliation by sheer availability of the outcome."

"trust the word of a species of children?"

"wait, tule, no. wait. look, regardless of our past, this must be done. we will not show mercy to a world that has continuously spited and disrespected not only us, but all the other cloudfolk of the five valleys. only the constellace will suffer, for now, but when all is done, all of us will be better for it."

tule sighed, and turned again to leave, speaking as its six legs carried it slowly away, headed to the den where the yet dying victim lay in a disturbed and total malaise. "i cannot describe in my own words the depth of my disdain for you at this time, and my disappointment in your entire culture." tule stopped.

the wind howled angrily on, and the air was rotten.

"this is not befitting of any beast of the land." with that, tule turned and followed the tugging of its claws, til it arrived again at the victim's rotten deathbed.

tule didn't skip a beat as it entered the den unannounced. turning to a medic, and with vitriol at its tongue, "beast. what is its name?" "this is cla'eun parra, el"

the medic was cut off as tule jumped directly onto the bed, walking across the moaning beast's body as it writhed in agony. the others began crying, and covered their mouths in horror. tule grabbed at the sheet which covered parra's body, and dragged it off, revealing a mess of flesh and shredded

limbs.

everything.

all six of tule's teats were milked dry at once, and a ball of milk hovered in the air as parra and tule engaged in a horrid game of staring. neither blinked, and the sheer magical presence of tule's full supply prevented any sound from filling the den, save for a strange muttering, emanating from thin air in the tune of chanting gardenbeasts. the ball began to shift in substance, and was transformed into a flamebud, a single unit of pfenix spell-casting, usable for any one given flame spell. a white glow from the spinning flamebud signalled the beginning of its eruption.

"mok parra!"

tule's voice awoke the ancient, and the bloody dewdrop was devoured in white flames, visible to the rest only as a burning corpse. the medics gasped, but understood what had been done, and fell stricken to the floor, as if in the presence of the ancient itself. tule dropped to its paws, and returned to where it had left the cla'tre. arriving again at the horrid scene, its stomach growling in disturbance which tule ignored, it rested its gaze in a loving softness upon the shaking, yet bleeding form of cla'tre eussA.

the poor elder was pulling weakly at the metal spikes which pinned its dead cousins, sniffing, cursing at its weakness. "dear cla'tre, i believe that's enough." clat're eussA relaxed its hands, and turned to look at tule. "i've cast a strong healing spell upon cla'eun parra. it will survive, and you had best be prepared to stare into its eyes, when it wakes."

eussA did not respond. it didn't feel anything new with this news, just less.

tule walked closer to the beast, happiness filling it's heart, its seductive swagger returning somewhat. "come, now. i haven't any further business here, so why don't you see me off? i'd like to jump down from the chrysalis, and maybe i'll talk with the villagers, and find some way to solve this mess." tule lifted itself up, and licked at the wounds of the elder, sealing them. the garden would survive easily, it would just need to be buried for the winter, which would require only a very basic spell to be cast upon it. tule's concern laid only with the wellbeing and vitality of its friends, for now.

a cloud. a drop of blood from the hills of flesh. child of the red blossoms, of the endless meal. tule whitefawn. a creature which, in terms of sex and intimacy, was food for the tastes of its friends. all creatures who met tule tried to fuck it, and even the homosexual males enjoyed using its flesh, even asexual beasts loved to hold it. to eat is a display of vigour. to consume a privilege of the living, a

respect shown to the meal in question. life, raw intimate passion, cast between the bodies of beasts in the honest exchange of pleasure. for all us beasts, trapped in this wild storm of social relations, to eat each other is the deepest form of relation we can offer. claim me then, as food, as pleasure, as life.

yet even so, the elder was blind to tule's presence, and its cock did not raise at the sight of a meal.

the depression of the enclave had created a suicidal despair in the form of outward wrath, and the entire culture sought annihilation to feed its depravity. perhaps, the others should have checked on the proud beasts above more frequently, always assumed to be in a perfect state of unending cultural harmony and healthiness. perhaps the cloudfolk should have just spoken at all.

tule's body was too late a gift. these creatures had lost their hunger for life.

tule began to wail, and the elder felt ashamed. unable to even lie to the beast, to even pretend to be interested in its sex. just a week prior, it would have been delighted to fly personally down to the garden for no reason other than to use the flesh of the same gardenbeast who now cried pitifully at its feet. for a third time, tule whitefawn was clutched to the chest of cla'tre parra, and the two left the awful scene behind.

tule had fallen asleep in the elder's pallid grasp, and was woken by movement, and a sound like mud and ripping tendons. two eyes were shoved into its mouth, which it ate. the now blind elder was standing upon the ledge of the chrysalis, wings extended. tule burped, and waited.

"you said you'd like to fall from the heavens. i'll take you much higher than this, and we'll fall together, my dear."

with this, the two lifted up and moved forward a short distance from the ledge, before the elder retracted its wings and allowed its body to fall past the wind barrier, a field of inertia through which direct flight was not possible, unless from one of three openings reserved for re-entry. immediately, the winds of chaos caught them, but the elder had regained its strength and pushed bravely past the tempest, fluttering up and above the chrysalis, til the very snowstorm had itself been ascended.

"where shall we land, tule?" eussA's voice was happy and light, no longer cla'tre, only a dewdrop.

"i should visit the village, and discuss matters there." "lovely!" and so the two flew off in a direction tule assumed to be of the village. the time had reached night, unbeknownst the those below, trapped

as they were in the darkness of the storm, and the moon was high, entangled with the stars above. tule was cold as ice in such a high reach of the atmosphere, and they indeed had flown above where clouds could blow, but the view was so damnably gorgeous, it simply did not care.

the constellations above painted a tapestry of many interpretations, and to the gardenbeast culture, a tale of birth and gardens was writ upon the stars. to the north, polaris itself shone brightly, the cultural landmark of the entire north, and especially of the sibling cultures. the phoenixes were known to say, in all their fondness, that polaris was three stars in one, each a symbol of the three original cultures, and that the brightest was surely that of the gardenbeasts.

"i believe you can land on your feet from any drop, correct?"

"i can." tule was short on breath, but it was beyond excited to *finally* make a fall from above the heavens, a personal dream it hadn't realized skybeasts could assist with.

the elder grabbed the spikes of tule's collar, and passionately kissed it there in the sky, before throwing the beast away from its own body, and retracting its wings.