



Chapter 28

Weaning Vamps

The back of the shop is whitewashed concrete block. Vines cling where the sun hits, and moss spreads along the sill where the stairs block the sun. Antler addresses Mint while Mint contemplates a buckthorn that has erupted against the foundation.

“I try not to be prejudiced toward any plant, just like I try not to with people. That said I kind of feel like the Buckthorn is the bureaucrat of the Plant World. It digs its shallow roots anywhere, right in the middle of a cluster of gorgeous Lilacs, usurping its nutrients, or up against a foundation, weakening an important structure. And ironically, the bark is a strong laxative.”

With a hesitant exhalation at Antler's description, Mint hacks the end of a shovel into the ground about two feet from the trunk of the buckthorn, and begins exposing the root. Antler continues his surmising.

"It's never seen as good to have such soft dirt approaching the foundation, this is where these things get a grab. This would be trenched out and backfilled with some gravel. Or else all sorts of leeching will occur around the invasive."

"I've got some copper in the shop, I'll angle cut a piece of pipe, cut the trunk low, and drive it in." Mint explains.

"If all of it was that easy." Antler sighs. "Well... go kid go." Antler turns toward the Firehouse and sees a car pulling in over his shoulder. "Looks like a customer pulling in over here, go mind your business."

Coming into the back door, Mint sees Beth through the window at the pumps. He would love to not be here right now. He massages his temples, staying relaxed as he approaches the pay counter. Beth comes in to pay.

"Who told you that story about me?" She asks Mint "I don't know what you think you saw, but it's not true. Who told you that?"

Mint wants to avoid this discussion. "It's what it is, things are what they are, you don't have to fake it, why would you owe me any explanations? It's none of my business."

Beth extends a roll of one-dollar bills. "I would never do that in front of you."

Mint takes the handful of forty, moist; makeup smudged, perfume saturated singles and registers them. He would choose that this was not happening. Under his breath, he whispers, "classical comedy".

Beth turns away, and walks toward the door. Mint comes from behind the counter, locks the front door behind her and puts a "pay at the garage" sign on the window.

His heart goes out to Beth as she walks to her car. The comedy of the situation is already overtaking any disappointment or regret. As she glances back to Mint, it seems clear that her heart goes out to him as well, but nothing about her was ever

clear, really, so he doesn't even know what that means. This is just one of those things. Sometimes trajectories intersect despite wide variances. There is no escaping something that happens.

Entering the garage, Mint triggers the joke alarm.

"I had a girlfriend once."
"What happened?"
"I forgot where I laid her."

The shadow on the wall of the garage is ominous, colossal, furious-winged, seemingly thrashing the wind behind the light of an arc welder. The static of sparks and landing flecks of metal from a welding rod; Electric heat circuits complete with pops and arcs. Jasmine completes the affixing of giant steel wings to the back of a third scale model oil pump. The shadow dances like scorching flight against the Planet floor.

Ascending, the raptor, from its loft on the wind, sees its spawn, spreading outward, undermining the fauna and the tundra that sustains us. The predator turns, folds its wings, and dives like a spike. It strikes like a thorn into flesh; it crashes like Wall-Street trauma. Parasites rub their hands together, to clean up from the "clean-up", obfuscating their addresses.

Jasmine kills the torch and flips her mask up. She sees Mint glaring and she laughs at him. He won't relent his eye contact with her. "Hey, my tits are down there." She says.

"There is no room for me on your pedestal." Mint replies.

She looks at him from an angle, slanting a smile. "This is our thing, not my thing." She says, deflecting his adoration as she takes off the welding bib.

Mint looks at their sculpture. "I can't find any use for some of these tools any more. It's hard to find the good in tools that were born out of trauma. These smells, the heat, the history."

Jasmine sits on a stool, looking at him as she rubs her hands with pumice soap. "As much as we need to melt into green fields, the throes need hastening."

Mint can open up to Jasmine. "There is so much metal. They ship off our scrap metal overseas to be recycled by other countries so they can make bullshit and sell it back to us. The whole thing is subsidized. Now they want to blast holes in us to get more metal, they're just marauders."

"They canceled the mine, Mint." Jasmine says, coming near him.

"I'm just saying there's enough already. There's enough already, so enough already. If our country recycled all the metal we have lying around, including all the unused and unnecessary armaments littering the deserts, we wouldn't need to open another mine for 50 years. Even then, by that time we'd figure out how to do almost everything we need to with hemp. And, I'll never believe a word they say. They're the best liars."

Outside, glowing gold collects on the leaves across the street. The chrome on the pumps and the metal beneath peeling paint on street signs resound the northern dusky sun with a high pitch.

Jasmine faces Mint, each of them akimbo, to-to-toe. "Hasten the throes Mint, hasten the throes."

Mint leans on the workbench and Jasmine sits on the back of a chair as they look at a map of the Pacific Northwest.

"This is the route I would take between my parent's houses." Jasmine points on the map between her mom's and dad's towns. "When I was in High School, my dad bought me a motorcycle so I could visit him on weekends."

"Oh my god, I bet that drove your mom nuts." Mint replies.

"Oh, it did for sure, but it was a way to be sure I'd visit. I loved motorcycles since I was little. The courts did not mandate my visits because he hadn't been such a great family man. He really wanted to see me, so that was his way of seeing to it. The property is still there, he left it to my uncle, but he left all the stuff to me."

"Stuff?" Mint asks.

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"All his bike stuff, his welding gear, a couple of beaten Harleys and a cherry Indian. Mostly, a lot of really good memories."

"What's going to happen to it?"

"I'm going to go get it at some point. My Uncle is taking good care of it, it's all garaged and covered and he checks for rust and keeps a light coat of oil on all the bikes and metal."

Mint looks over his shoulder at the veggie oil conversion kit for the diesel flatbed delivery truck. He clears a spot on the workbench, then retrieves the boxed up kit. He removes the instruction book from inside the box and spreads it on the workbench.

Jasmine perks up. "Might as well get that motor converted now so it's working for the farms next Spring."

"Might as well." Mint smirks. "Might as well make sure the flatbed can carry a load."

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