

EATING FALL

It is true that the sunglasses heightened the visual impressions—for I checked repeatedly—but they altered none of the authenticity with which the colors refracted on the white space of my system, a performance space that was unhealthily accustomed to urban impression with only architecture of man, not nature. No, this performance space was used to reflecting images that made for drab viewing: prosaic construct where every space was coated with city style and expediency. Kudos were given to symmetry of structures and block store fronts that were easily redressed by new management. And on this day, the monochrome city screen I was accustomed to was gloriously replaced by another, a respite: trembling individual units of green and browning canopies that dressed hills upon hills. As we sped along, I simply watched how the unstructured organic horizon flowed over New England and I delighted in the horizontal configuration, not missing the vertical massing I was familiar with. After a couple of hours of commute, just as my system was becoming comfortable with the change of situation, an unexpected blast—of, what... Uniqueness? Life? Dream?—pulled me in and made me want to jump from the ride and swing from New England canopies.

About this first visual blast... Our cruising speed demanded I take a snapshot or forever miss the image. So it was a print to me, where the tree froze in existence: a modest being with thin bark and leaves sharp like bleeding drops of passion—aged port—that hovered around the frame in unsymmetrical beauty. It was as if the tree were weeping warm liquor and the tears locked in space and time as identity among the otherwise ordinary, green and brown, drops.

This visitation of subtle passion made my system *ache* with enthusiasm. I did my best to record the image. I considered placing a glass beneath the leaves, willing time to crawl forward so the tears of port collected as a warm pool in the container for prolonged consumption.

The road ran by at ninety miles per hour, so I correctly assumed it would not be long before I spotted the next mutation in the population: a fiery, orange blaze, not demure like the port, but brilliant in clarity and commitment to its frequency. Sharing a unity in unique timbre, immeasurable pieces crowded in a volumetric mass teetering on a thin bark that stretched down to dirt. The vibrancy and sharp tint of this delight brought to mind a phosphorescent fixture, and I envisioned *interacting* with the image: crowding the orange lips into a bottle and infusing carbonation so light slid through my sweet soda and glowed the drink an orange hue. After considerable manipulation, the screen displayed an icebox full of the sweet liquid, precipitation marking the units.

Now I was addicted, and my head was thrust out the side of the convertible, scanning the green front for more.

After a spell of relative plainness, another sight rolled onto the screen: the softest, lightest peach tinge I had seen outside of the fuzzy skin itself. Each leaf a slice of fruit, from a distance looking soft like a rose petal, that was waiting to be shaken from the tree so it could fall with gentle gyration into a baking cobbler or fold into a browning pie. Though never agreeing with the fruit's savor, I was salivating at the thought of cutting into these desserts and ultimately licking the fork smooth, sticky because of my verve in consumption.

As we continued up north and the colors appeared more frequently, I stretched my head farther out of the car—not able to hear either radio or conversation anymore—hoping closer distance would refract the colors that much more vividly on my system and that I might be able to dissolve the screen and truly consume to these port, soda, pie fantasies.

Next came a yellow blast of citrus, like a lemon explosion that escaped a spotlight sorbet to find itself misplaced in the woods of Vermont. This color was so shocking and powerful, I was hesitant to wager if its juices would fulfill my sugar craving or if its tart timbre would shock my glands into mournful production. I craned my neck behind to see if the leaves would reveal something about their sweet or sour core, and pebbles bounced off the road to sting my neck. I came to the conclusion that that yellow savor would never be positively identified; it was too powerful a glow for it not to have some ambiguity in its structure.

My retelling of the experience is unauthentic because it builds the road as if lined by a warped rainbow, clear delineation between sharp colors stacking north. Reality was that once introduced to the palette, a color continued to echo throughout the trip, without losing intensity, so port, lemonade and peach portions steadily built population. And I continually slipped a glance over my sunglasses to reassure myself that the spectacles were an anti-filter that let dying skins vibrate with sharper colors than naturally blessed on them. I re-secured my tint, like it was a submarine window that separated mariner from busy coral reef.

Next I saw something unprecedented in the trip, far from the bright shining yellows and oranges, there was a dimness refracting on the system. These leaves were black, like chocolate shavings that dangled from wooden arms and wished to be cut from their perches to fall into the warmth of a low-heat flame. There they would melt, dripping onto each other, making a fluid chocolate source I could cool and spread on my wet, willing tongue.

As the car sped north and I collected nicks on my arms and face from rogue pebbles, I lost count of the tints these leaves died in, thousands of shades on the generic color sets: yellows, reds, blacks, oranges...

I recall numerous yellows that deviated from the sweet or tart lemonade I pressed from the first leaves. One tree donned a smaller leaf, size crucial because these pieces looked like butter-damp popcorn dancing as if riding a column of streaming heat. And another yellow seemed diluted, somehow, like the leaves' essence could replace the lemon water passed around the Thanksgiving table.

A patch of terribly dark purple graced the screen. These leaves seemed so fragile that mishandling would pulverize the skins, like butterfly wings. Their transfer to tepid water would require utmost detail to caution, and I would warm my hands by the mixture as the leaves dissolved and the solution slowly reduced into thick tamarind chutney that I could drizzle on brittle pappadoms.

And so autumn spread a buffet before me, mountains of clustered flavors crowding each other, but not blending, so isolation of any given flavor was a simple exercise.

When we finally reached the White Mountains of New Hampshire, sun was setting, dimming the luminosity of the screen. I still skimmed the world through the anti-filters, and I was pressing my face to the convertible's raised window, much-needed

sneeze-guard. The volume of consumption was so tremendous and the quality so outstanding that the aftertaste continues a persistent tenant and the screening room still vibes with residual flickers. And they will continue to, long after the leaves, source of enchantment, are fallen and decomposing under snow and a horizon of barren trees.

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