

Self-Gardening

by

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Abstract

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Self-Gardening seeks to explore the oftentime selfish rationale behind seemingly selfless decisions. In dissecting my motivation, I found insecurity. I don't garden for the joy of it, I garden to feel valuable. Beneath my desire for children, lives the terrifying hesitation of putting more bad into the world. While this thesis does look to shine a light on uncomfortability and insecurity, it has no interest in poking or prodding them. Acknowledgement and awareness are enough.

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Selfish Reason One:

I Garden to Sate My Need to Tend

I am a restless hands-worker. I am a kneader of dough, soil, and love handles. I am an incessant gripper, and a world-class cradler. I love being the rescuer of the stray-eyelash, the fixer of the accidentally tucked shirt, the one who gets to say: *here, let me do it for you*. I like existing a bit too close into your own space, and I want nothing more than for you to trust my hands.

This is all to say, I am a thing kept alive by the sharing of air. We can exist for some unknown reason, but I've chosen one for myself. I'm here to care for. I'm here to be warm, giving, and sunlight-esque. I want to be poured into another, belly-filling, satisfying and resolutely enough.

And, nothing needs my touch more than the timid greenness I've grown.

Pruning yellow leaves from my patio is a fulfilling place for my body to exist.

I am meant to kneel on painted concrete and finagle my way through tomato branches, patting the bigger fruits as one does the belly of a loyal dog.

Poetry is Gentleness and Sometimes Writing

If I stop
the cat's
belly
from pooling across
this page

I will lose
the title:
poet.

I'll
tend to it
instead

Write
about
and
around it.

I'll shift my
hand between
penning and
petting.

Sudden! Miraculous!

Has anyone told you that rats play? That they keep their rooms tidy and appreciate pomegranate seeds? It's colorful work, bringing the purple knife through the red bulk of the fruit. Bless the staining fingers, bless the eager gnaw of a rat with fruit in hand. Did you know that the mess of collecting pink sweetness for little paws was worthy labor? Or had you lazed into believing this life could be monotonous? Wake up! There are people! Peek into car windows and you'll see, *there are so many of them!* Each with destinations, each with even more people to arrive at and kiss! You're alive in a world offering wonder! How could you let yourself forget?

Poem-Writing Pace

Some of us are so good
at turning trees into reasons
to pray
but I'm watching this iguana
climb a palm
slow enough
to write about it.

when he makes it to the top
his sharp head
is crowned by fronds

and from the earth beneath
I see him
like a god.

Just Vaxxed

Now I know to spend my time
tonguing strangers
throwing the handful of my body into other
slicker, bodies
indulging in muggy
togetherness.

Living Together

I crochet a pink hat for my orange cat and believe there is a poem in the act.

There is construction across the way, but it's lunch time, and the workers are in the grass, sharing the shade of a ficus.

Years ago, I replaced my expletives with fondness. Now, when the big beige van cuts me off, I shout "whoa there, friend!"

Tonight, my love and I will venture into the night for gelato, and when the time comes to cross the parking lot, we will go holding hands.

It helps when this life feels communal, when our roots are allowed to braid together.

From my chest, the cat purrs until we have both fallen into sleep.

In Case of Emergency

there's a blanket
in my car.

Folded beneath
the passenger's seat
if we happen upon soft grass.

I'm prepared
for a high chance
of napping.

So, if we're asleep (and I'm not)
please, allow me
my glance over.

Let me savor the sliver
of your nose
peeking from behind my blanket.

Let me breathe from my ground
and know:
 this is everything.

Deerfield Beach Arboretum

Your
hair
collects
felled
leaves
beneath
rainbow
eucalyptus.

Sunlight
strings
itself
to
reach
you.

Behind
the
clamor,

I
revere
each
strand
of
you.

The Living Body, Living

Life as an accumulation of stretches
showing you how to reach your body
only ever pushing you with slow purpose
into the bed, floor, and placid air.

Life as these bodies and their weight
you've started to leave the bed
and the mattress' shift
pulls me toward you
gravity helps my pleading—
do you see the inarguable romance of that?

Life as a geometrist's notebook
I know you would laugh
at the shapes my fingers
have loved into your skin:
swirly little berries,
stars, faint ones with points that stretch
to reach each freckle
and hearts, the unrealistic kind.

Oh, the delight of being two bodies
taking up all of life's room!

Gratitude to the Muses: Kiwi, Arlo & Fern

1.

Cat carried in the air
petal nose pressing
into sky.

2.

Cat asleep in sun-pool
sink your face
into baking fur:
life-sharing.

3.

Cat across the neck.

Cat with face in yours.

Cat with tummy pink-up:

trusting.

Eyes

I was ten when I learned the world was meant to be clearer
with finer edges and non-oozing colors.

For the first time, I wore glasses and saw branches:
frail arms shoving into careless air.

I sobbed.

*Why had no one told me we were meant to see
each sparkling leaf?*

Ten years thinking myself insignificant
not knowing our smallness accumulated.

Selfish Reason Two:

To Leave a Legacy

I'm dying.

And, the thought of having children terrifies me, because, what if I make a bad person? What if what walks beyond me is someone spiteful, hollow, and in need of a better mother? What if I can't warm like the sun? If I die, and am succeeded by a person who just doesn't have the time to stop for the tortoise crossing the road, who goes *why is everyone stopping for this, honk, honk, it's just a turtle, let's go people*, I will sob from my place layers beneath the earth.

Instead, wouldn't it be nice to know unfurling is happening in your name? How delicate, the thought of the future golden pothos leaf bursting forth, grasping at the same sun, unspooling with the casual pace of something that'll never know rushing, and all of this from you.

Fear of Cats

I don't think I want
children, but I know I want dirt
caked to aged knees
as I place tomatoes
into the hands of something
I could call grandchild.
I blame this on my unearned
desire for a say in what gets passed on

more: earth tending, wall coloring

and less: knee bouncing, scarring from the swipe
of the cat.

The fear of too much me
in the world is a stalling thing, leaving
me anxious in the way the sweet
potato vine abandons her leaves
if the sun stays gone too long

rather recoil, rather reroot.

I may be too selfish
and womb-scarred
to be the bearer
and the tender.

But, I do want something to rest on my hip, and
offer the dough-covered spoon to.

Untitled, Not by Choice

What I want
is to believe he's home

spread across the couch
and covered in dog love

big burly drink
in his big burly hand

salt and pepper hair
further salting

his sunburnt face wrinkling
like a living thing's would.

I'm Paid Little Enough

to worry about buying peaches
palming sweetness in the store—
falling into the smell of
prepubescent south carolina, lil
kiddy-me
double-fisting peaches,
stickied cheeks some
grown up's
responsibility.

then
today—
losing five minutes
to mulling
over
peaches.
Considering the weight
of nine
dollars of
rent hikes vet bills and
costco memberships.

Resting little me
on my knee
to say:

we shouldn't.

I Bite What Asks Me To

the pop and gush of berries
being nipped at and bursting.
a hunk of shoulder in my mouth and
the sinewy mandarins
ten don te ar.

chewing life into swallowable life.

bubble-gum gnashing and pink-skin pinching.

this tiny
ivory—

clack!
you yelp,
I eat that, too.

Here's Another Ode, This Time

to the dilapidated recliner napping behind two pines and a spruce
each night I curl into its lap, sharing my time with moss and felled nettles
dodging the gaze of stars from beneath tree arms.

Here, I am a rabid thing.

If a neighbor were to point a finger, I'd bite it clean off.

Alongside Oatmeal and a Handful of Blackberries, This Morning I Ate My Want

Teetering over
earth's edge
with nothing
discovered but
the way desire
slinks back
each sunrise
a starving
snapping
mutt.

The misstep
it would take
to spill over
calls me
for supper
with the promise
of a finally
sated
belly.

Selfish Reason Three:
I Garden to Feel Good About Myself

because I don't, quite yet, but I do feel capable of it. I know that I'm light enough for things to blossom beneath me. Because I like when my hands are rightfully dirtied, and someone sees them dirtied, and I get to think that they get to think: *oh, she's an earth-tender, she must be a good person.*

My staghorn fern is standing proud, and my peace lily is pushing forth six buds. I have hands that coax roots, soothe kittens, and detangle others' curls, so I can't possibly be bad.

But, I'll admit I love the lightning flashes in the eyes more than the giving act that brings them. I pass growth on in the hope of seeing breaths hitch, in the pursuit of that gush of the heart. I birth newness to live past the time I've been given, for a vicarious chance at a little bit longer.

I grow greedily. I give self-interestedly. I conceive to further myself.

Is that it, then? Am I my selfish intent?

Can I not be the end result? I'd rather believe myself to be the inevitable bursting of life, the orchestral organic, the manifestation of goodness and being-aliveness. I want credit for the roots holding the ground in place. Can't you ignore that I urged those roots on in hopes of making this claim?

Self Portrait after Shower

I'm prettiest
in fogged mirrors.
Wet light dripping.
The orange cat
licking my calf.

My shapes
allowed to be
loose and hazy.
My limbs, clouds.

I grab wispy fistfuls
of myself;
squeeze my chest
until it rains.

I can't eat the bread your ex-girlfriend baked us

but baby
i can watch
John Carpenter's
The Thing.

i can stomach
the stretch
of bubblegum faces
skin turned ooey gooey
eyes melting with
pearly pops and
sizzles.

arms thrashing from
the cavities
of chests.
teeth snapping
from someplace
unexpected

razor-sharp-somethings
flailing and
seeking.

IDENTITY CRISIS LIFEHACK!

If you want to feel better, tell yourself
that you are the fringe trimming on a green pillow
and the peace lily's sixth, babies bud.

You are a prayer to a blooming jacaranda
and a Clairitin fizzling on a pious tongue.
The Irvine, CA telemarketer is you
it's you in the breeze the grackle wafts
and even more you in the syrup-pour
of sand past fingers.

You are both good and bad haircuts
each regrettably-tugged loose string
and an empty-enough-to-warrant-begging dog bowl.

You can decide to be the red flowers your love paints on her nails
and the pourer of the concrete slab
hoisting your home up.

But, believe me
you're not a body.

Desperate, Needy, Unbecoming

If I hunt down the end
and ask: *what of it all?*
and discover it's all in the basking.

I'd tend to you
with truths,
fill your belly
with the universe's ways-of,
breathe knowing into every kiss.

Working Toward Sated

I've lived in a hate-receiving body
all my life, but now I wear
underwear
around the house, and my skin
has pretty enough pictures on it
to catch my eyes as my reflection
passes me. I've playdoughed this mass to
resemble human, a decent enough sculpting
job that I think I'll soon
enjoy it, maybe one day
flower-field stroll through
this flesh. For now,
I'll take begrudging
acceptance. I'll take
the wrist measuring days
with the sunbeam-eating ones. I'll
like my eye color, but not the shape.
I'll 8 a.m. twirl in a dress and peel
it off with a gag at night, throw
it to the ground and say how did I ever think
that looked okay? Next week
I'll be wearing the same dress, loving myself
in it, but not enough.

Hypothetical

Today I drove into the ocean
and there's no chance at all I'll return.
You'll find me among the crustacean
as I never ached for an urn.

Don't fret, dear, my last breaths were joyful
for I finally got a good eyeful
of a still life, something so peaceful
as the water crept in, I took a lungful.

Biplicitous

I worry with a white-wall stare
I worry from behind an outdated lenses,
with tremorful, slowly failing hands.
I worry blurry-eyed and quiet.
I worry to dizziness, to solemn fatigue, to the
moment motor function's forgone.
I worry self-inflictedly, intestinally, in the way
my mother cleans without cause.
I worry yellow, a tinge green.
I worry in my left hand, hold
my breath in my right.
I worry small, self-enclosed, enveloped-in.

I worry jet-engine, firework-finale, small
dog with big bark.
I worry post-sensically, with snapping teeth
And to-be-put-down ferality.
I worry in public, outside of
just my memory,
I worry shut-down,
I worry floor-craving,
I worry hurricane-like
impartial, impatient, impeding.
I worry in your face and
apologize afterward.
I worry dam-burstingly, forest-levelingly,
remorselessly.

A Poem for the Fish on my Thigh

There are fish on my thigh because
I am impulsive and often want things.

There are fish on my thigh because
bee, snail, and frog could use the company.

There are fish on my thigh because
it's easier to like myself with goodness in my skin.

There are fish on my thigh because
when this life becomes a nauseating thing
I need the quick flash of minnows in the mirror,

the reminder: this weight is mine
to decorate carelessly and toss at the waves.

I garden
with the holy purpose
of seeing
the load bearing mangroves
and root-hidden tadpoles
breathe easy
and slow
in their purpose.