

# Erosion

*It feels good to slam a door.*

A thought that I have with some frequency, often on the vine-encrusted ramp down from the Community Center and Hall For Solidarity, Equity, Creation, Justice, Togetherness, Peace, Action, Collaboration, and nondisresponsability. I remember the meeting for that name; Hummus and carrots, mint tea with honey and deliberations that lasted till the stars blinked in weariness, and the sun yawned up over the river's limestone crust. The door, for its part, lends itself unrestrainedly to the art of slamming. Two and a half inches of solid oak, carved in a wreath of corn, squash, and beans, their roots holding hands. The thunder-rumble scraping against the ground crescendoing into a foundation-cracking Bang! It feels *empowering*.

Even now, as I stomp down the ramp and into the sunlight, my conscience itches like a prenatal yawn: maybe I shouldn't be so uptight, compromise *is* an important part of collaboration. I fight it off with a kick of a pebble, sending it soaring into the open community greenhouse. It nestles between the rustling tendrils of last-year's beanstalks knuckled onto wooden trellises. I keep marching on, peeling the papery layers in my mind. *Trolley tracks? On Division street?* No. I was right. It *was* ridiculous. Just think of the cost of construction, the resources and time it would consume. And to what end? The bike paths and sailboats were perfectly sustainable. And to make matters wor—

Something's off.

I swivel my head. Strange buildings loom, gilded with glistening solar panels. Where am I? Behind them, acrid plumes wisp beneath the stoney sky. Faraway. For now. Wheeling around, I take in the ivy cascading down old brick; rooves ripe with the diopsidian haze of new growth, emerald moonseed clamoring over skeletal juneberry stubbled with buds. No trolley wires in sight, an eerie lack of hemp-crete & glass bubbles: This isn't downtown. Guttural frustration emerges as I set my sights on the distant cloud banks, square my feet, and start off.

Each minute loiters and lingers in the afternoon sun as I propel myself onward. Eventually I come across a familiar copse of old cedars, the ones near Ira's house. Or rather Ira's *home*; you can't *own* a house, but of course a home is always your own. And besides, it's not just Ira's, I think right as Louise steps over the threshold.

She shoots me a tight-lipped smile, leans back and yells, "Jade's here!"

Moments later Ira appears in the doorway, hand-knit top a-fluttering. Xe grins and begins our sing-song greeting. I cut xem off.

“Wildfires. Again. We’ve got to raise the alert.”

Ira graces me with an inscrutable glance.

“The alert! The fires!” I repeat as if xe hadn’t heard.

“It’s April 29th,” xe remarks, regarding me expectantly. But my attention remains anchored by feathering swirls of blue haze in the distance, coalescing in bloated clouds buoying closer. I think I nod.

“The postings, Jade?” Xe prods.

“Hrmph,” I mumble, “there’s too many.”

Xe sighs, reaching into xer beaded leather satchel for dried fruit, “the controlled-burns? Swailing? The burn offs?”

I swallow a swollen knot. I think I should say something.

Xe hands me a wad of apple along with a profoundly unsurprised look. After a pause xe asks, “Wasn’t that meeting today?”

I shrug.

“Who got you this time?”

“Mnmph.”

I stare at the flora of a sidewalk crack, prying old cement apart. The ants bustling along these leafy highways. The apple sticks as I swallow.

“I’d have expected more enthusiasm from one of The Ecolutionaries,” xe teases.

“It’s not the meetings that are the problem,” I sigh, “collaborative decision making’s better than elite upper-class nitwits gobbling up the power, and institutionalizing an oppressive reg—”

“-ime of violence and destruction” xe finishes with a smirk, “I’ve heard the speech.”

I pause. “It’s just harder than I thought.”

Xe exhales, nods solemnly, and starts down the street with a you-need-a-walk face.

We stroll down Raglan, hearing wrens and flycatchers chittering in the greenery, ruffling themselves in dipped lids of rain barrels. Butterflies flicker over our hats and behind our backs. Ira points out a Prothonotary Warbler, its dandelion plumage spotlighted against the earthy foliage.

We're quiet when approaching the lakeshore wetlands, staring aimlessly into the hypnotic rotation of distant hydro-turbines. An invitation. I don't hesitate.

"Tracks. Street-car tracks. They want to put them down Division," I wait in eager indignation for xer reaction.

Ira rolls xer eyes, "What, did some dingbat oppose with their fuel-age mindset? And you stormed out so over-come with righteous fury that you couldn't dare *stoop to their level*?" xe elongates the last syllables. Then stops, "I do agree though, it'd be nice to have something efficient not to mention accessible."

A beat passes.

"Welllllll," I drag it out, "that's not exactly what happened," I cough, adding awkwardly, "I was just thinking about the cost of it all... y'know?"

An expression passes over their features, too quick for me to catch. Sympathy? Annoyance? Understanding?

I try to recover, "but, now that you mention, well, all that, I hadn't really considered..."

Xe sighs, arching an eyebrow. "You're telling me that no one in the meeting mentioned energy or accessibility? "

I look to the cattails, bowing their heads. I hear xem heave a drawling sigh, echoed by a nearing community bus; I continue to stare out into the rippling marsh. Mucky reeds shiver in the April breeze. Trilling with birds I can't see and plants I can't name.

Ira doesn't look at me. Standing on the precipice of words. Breathing over this chasm of frog and fish and bird and cattail. Soaking in the gunshot thwapping of torn flags. Xe stands liminally by the stretched-out horizon of twitching blue.

"You're not an ecologist, " Ira says to the rippling grass, "You're not an architect. Not a mechanic. Not an ability-supports expert.--" [I go to interrupt but xe persists]-- "You walked in, knowing your voice mattered, just as everyone's does. But you, you just--"

*Ira must not have slept well.* I scan xer face for telltale purple splotches that barnacle beneath their eyes (“--times get overly controllin-”). Xe’s hiding it well. I’m glad xe has me around, I’m always there with xem, knowing when xe need a shoulder to lean on, or a hand to pull xem up (“-try to just stop and thi-”). I listen when they need to talk. (“--like you don’t take the chance to liste-”). A force of strength they’ll call me. A fighter (“I’m not saying you’re a bad person, just tha-”). A Hero. I see the heads nodding silently in our discussions. My meetings. Ira’s just tired. Didn’t get enough sleep. That’s it (“are you listening right now?”). I’ll tell xem to drink less caffeine and try morning runs.

“It’s not just your story that matters!!!”

I blink back to the crisp, green world. The mechanical whistles of the bus slips and hisses like a salve on the blistering silence between us. It shrieks to a standstill only paces away.

I tell xem that I’ve got to be going now. Xe replies. I tell xem that I’ll see ‘em around. Xe replies.

I walk up the lowered ramp to the trolley. Turn around to look out the window. Ira’s cervine eyes wide. In judgment or concern, I cannot decipher.

The door huffs an out-of-breath ffumpt. And the landscape moves.