

## **A balmy Wednesday in March.**

Today feels comparatively tropical. As I trace my path upwards through the Goose's Wing, I am hit with the heavy perfume of the coronilla that runs along its inner edge.

Shy and subtle last time; now it oozes into the surround, its lemon-yellow flowers bursting from their buds. Even a metre away, it is wonderfully intoxicating.

I step out from under the Goose's Wing into the light and walk across to the rosemary bush

The same one, always the same one, although I don't know why.

I take its spindles between my palms and embrace it with that rare enthusiasm I reserve for plants and animals. I cup my face between my hands and breathe in its soothing medicinal tincture.

As ever, I am grounded instantly.

a few steps southeastwards  
to the buddleia

now brimming over, excessively, with fresh vegetation

its withered old body fleshing itself out, obscuring the  
wiry, leathery mass of splinters beneath.

I reach beneath the flush of young life to touch and  
remember what was already there.

I sit down in the nearest chair and realise it has now  
been released from its red and white bondage to the  
buddleia; that dreadful scene now dismantled.

What's this beautiful plant?

someone asks me

Buddleia!

I enthuse

Not that one, the other one, with the bright yellow flowers. The bubbly one.

Oh

I reply deflated, but amused

I don't know. My friends down there will, though.

With a little help from the wardens on duty, I figure out that it's a euphorbia. It is so bold, so playful and voluminous that I wonder how I never paid the plant any attention before now (distracted, I expect, by my affinity to the humble buddleia).

I feel that tight pressure in my bladder and excuse myself to walk over to the toilet at Redcross Garden

with every step along Redcross Way // Redcrosse Streete I cherish the knowledge that I am walking the path of Southwark ancestors gone by.

losing myself in the glow of pinks and purples scattered  
across the flowerbeds, something small and brown  
bounces past the corner of my eye

Facing the pond, I see more frogs than I have ever seen  
before, frolicking in the water. As the sun hits the pond,  
its murky depths shine a deep turquoise. I am one of  
many spectators, suspended in awe.

Aren't they amazing?!

There must be forty of them here: hopping furiously in  
and out, skimming their bodies along the surface of the  
water, hiding in the depths, locked in polyamorous  
embraces.

I stop and chat to someone from BOST, who tells me  
that the full moon brings them out to mate.

silently

I wonder if this is what prompted the frogs to take flight from Glengall Wharf Garden the other night, a couple of miles southeast.

They had flung themselves over a ledge onto the cycle path; my partner and I picked them up in the hope they'd return to the pond.

The ones with broken legs didn't go far: we found one of them dried up on the ledge the next day. For one terrible moment, I thought the frog was still alive.

I think of all the squashed and frazzled frogs and suppress the urge to mention them, knowing it would ruin the joy in life and being that exists here in this precious moment.

After using the toilet, I wash my hands vigorously with the cheap antibacterial soap, which will no doubt irritate my sensitive skin, so prone to breaking open when the wrong things touch it. I close the door behind me and douse myself with hand sanitizer for good measure.

As I arrive back at Crossbones I sanitize my hands again. This might be the tenth time this shift.

A week ago, this would have been neurotic, but now it feels compulsory.

All this, despite the blithe discussion Nic and I had about the whole thing earlier today.

you alright?

I'm fiiine - not sure about everybody else though

the world's gone a bit mad, eh...

we're bathing in filth... there's no getting away from it

what can you do?

I pace around the garden

clockwise

to check in with the hollyhocks.

The lanky flowering stems are still standing, chased by  
the new season's leaves in rampant patches.

I follow them around to the Irish Corner, pause to watch  
life stirring in the crabapple tree

mistletoe grasps at the air, parasitic roots embedded  
deep into its trunk

waxy buds eek their way out like fairy lights

between smatters of furry boils

white blue black

calling me to touch

I run my fingers over a fraying, pale gold ribbon tied to  
one of the tree's erupting branches.

Decaying along with the tree, its trajectory is  
unimaginably different, full of awkward, synthetic friction.

I long to touch a grubby pigeon feather strung up next to  
it. Newly hyperaware of my body's edges, I hold back.

Basking in the winter sun, I neglect to notice that my fingers are numb until I sit down to write

as words disintegrate across the page

I follow the sun around to the northeast corner

Before I pause long enough to think about grabbing a chair, I find myself sitting down cross-legged on the tarmac.

Usually the coldness of the ground feels hostile; today, its pull is comforting.

I sit amongst the emergent hollyhocks, broad, tattered leaves springing up from the north-south crack - the long axis of our accidental crucifix -tangled up with many other species whose names I do not know. I have learnt to identify 'weeds' by behaviour not names, that is enough, apparently.

For the first time this year, I notice ants going about their business.

They seem drawn to the mossy islands of organic life, floating lusciously on this asphalt sea.

looking closer

turning into ebbs and flows of

texture colour species depth

mosses become the forests of this little world; tufts of grass and tender saplings become mountains.

I realise I am sitting on the edge of the island and hope I have not hurt any ants in the process.

Later, as I wait for my coffee my legs tingle and sting and I wonder who else I am carrying with me.