

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

waxy buds eek their way out like
fairy lights

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

between smatters of furry boils
w h i t e b l u e b l a c k
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

tuning 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.