*A Love Letter of Sorts,*

*My deep darling, my deep forest,*

*I miss you, and I’m trying to work out ways to get back to you. I’m always doing that. You make soundtracks in my head. We are epic, we are really old. We are timeless. We are tragic, we are powerful. We are immense.*

*I’m trying to remember when I first truly noticed you . Sure, there had always been woods, but it is you, your forest self that I’m trying to place, that moment when forest rather than wood caught my eye, my attention, my fear, my fancy (1) And yes, fear is part of the lure, that uncertainty that I may have got it all wrong, that you can hurt me, that I can care about you in ways that you can’t even see. I’m not used to being so small, so inconsequential, so vulnerable, but weirdly, I don’t care. You’re locked in me now, the idea of you, and fact of you.*

*As ever I ‘ve gone astray, lost my trail, my thoughts.*

*I first met you in France, in the Cevennes and the Lozère, where the horrific tales of the bête du Gévaudan were already infecting my imagination. I was running ahead, in my cobalt blue summer skirt covered in koala bears, and I jumped on a mound, a knoll. Imagine my horror when that mound exploded into a mass of wood ants running up under my skirt, into my pants, all over my body. This was the wolf, the beast, the fear. And yet, in spite of this, I still wear skirts in the deep woods. I dress for you. It’s easier to pee, to have sex, to get away quickly, but always there is that sensation of creeping things on bare flesh, of warm wood against skin, the catch and scratch of brambles on calves and knees. And yes, air, curling swirling air. Stupid really, I mean who really wants to attract ticks, to be infested with parasitic blood pustules. But maybe for the ticks the change of diet is a good thing, and I am the passing stranger. And you tease me with the threat of that, and the threat of bears, of wolves, of being eaten, to be taken by the forest. And yet you eat me, you absorb and consume me. . I want to be close and within, and I did do that once, curling up in a bear den abandoned for the summer, wrapped in the sweet smell of warm dry wood as I lay in your heart, but maybe that is cloying and claustrophobic, so you stretch your claws, cruelly misleading so you can consider the effect, to see if I see, that I have become the butt end of the joke. And you are careless in your concealing of playing with me in this way, blaming it on the fog, smoke or mountain bikers. It’s never your fault, but always mine. I didn’t pay enough attention. I was careless.*

*And I share you. Are they love rivals? I’m not original in my forest desires. And desire is about yearning, the untouchable, the intangible other. And it is it about you? Am I objectifying you, is this a form of orientalism and exoticism? Are you really as good as I think?*

*And yes, maybe I should say this. Because I do hurt you. I chop you down, I burn you. I peel you I strip you, I flay you, I carve my name into your flesh. . I lick ice-lollies off your slender spine. I chew your pencil ends. I consume you, and reshape you to suit my own fantasies. All the hallmarks of a toxic relationship? Maybe. But I love you, nevertheless.*

*All the Bella’s and Maria’s.*

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