

**GOING GREEN IN
THE MUTANT RAIN FOREST**

Bruce Boston

Evelyn was beautiful. Evelyn was never satisfied. She'd had lovers, more than a few, probably too many. She'd had children, but none the courts would let her keep. Not that she tried very hard to keep them. With a manic and indiscriminate dedication that left little room for children, she was always embracing one dire addiction after another: a worthless man, illegal drugs, the stim-wire, some futile fantasy dream—becoming a great artist or writer or holo star—dreams beyond her means or talent. She pursued each with all of her being until she became disillusioned or bored. Then she would discard them and move on to her next obsession.

It was her old friend John who convinced her to come with him to the Mutant Rain Forest. She'd slept with him a few times, couldn't remember how many, but that was ancient history. Somehow they had remained friends over the years, perhaps because they were maladjusted to society in many of the same ways and had shared some of the same addictions.

One night John came to her one-room walkup in the Mission District. He told her about the Mutant Rain Forest, not that she didn't already know about it from the holo. John promised her adventures and riches beyond her dreams. He couldn't stop raving about the possibilities, his words spilling over one another.

Holding up one thin arm laced with old track marks, he told her he'd seen photos of diamonds and rubies as large as his fist. He either didn't know or failed to mention that such jewels were invariably mutations of the forest that dissembled their true forms to ensnare unwary travelers.

Evelyn had just abandoned kundalini yoga—it made her back hurt and gave her headaches—so she let John's wild-eyed rant seduce her. Besides, she felt ready for an adventure.

The pair took a tramp steamer south and debarked on the northern coast of what had once been Chile, where a lip of land remained the Mutant Rain Forest had yet to claim. There was a small human settlement here that catered to the needs of those who would venture into the forest. Ill-equipped with the meager provisions and weapons they could afford, Evelyn and John embarked upon their adventure.

Thanks to John, poor sad John, long since meat to some fearsome forest predator, it turned out to be the best decision of Evelyn's life.

The Mutant Rain Forest welcomed her and she was immediately at home in its presence. As soon as she entered its borders, she began to feel transformed. Evelyn swiftly adapted to the forest and rooted there for keeps.

Now her pale green leaves, tinged with lavender and aquamarine, edged with needle-sharp spines, twine upward in graceful curves about a sinewy and milky stalk. When her scarlet flowers bloom, each reveals a miniature replica of her human face in its corolla.

Yet don't look too closely or for too long, for hers is a visage insatiable to devour mammal or reptile, bird or insect. Her leaves will enclose you and her spines inject you with a venom that will slowly digest your body, flesh, bones and all.

Evelyn is beautiful. And Evelyn is satisfied at last.

AFTER THINGS FALL APART

Frazier

A rattling cadence of bone dry leaves
Her words flow in a stuttering stream
Her voice a wind fluting under dark eaves

She stands like Noah steering the Ark
Peering into some unknowable future then
Slumps against a giant ceiba's rough bark

Her hand detaches and crawls to her feet
Releasing motes of shining black that
Drift airborne in the stifling heat

Imagine too beneath her skull of ants
A seething mass of green-gray matter
It commands by imitation and blind chance

When the rain batters her face of vapors
An insect swarm sloughs from her frame
She collapses top down like a skyscraper

Then rebuilds—a precise imago of my lost wife

***CONSUMED BY THE SENTIENCE
OF THE MUTANT RAIN FOREST***

Boston

I am consumed by
the sentience of the
Mutant Rain Forest,

I am transformed to
a roiling hive mind
of mutated beetles,

voracious as piranhas,
swarming like army ants,
leveling flora and fauna

in their ravenous path.
I am something of a man
and something of a beast,

a creature once-cat,
with a distended skull
and enlarged forebrain

who now walks upright,
engaged in a mortal
struggle with a panther,

trying to obliterate
the lingering image
of my animal ancestry.

I am consumed by the
sentience of the forest,
its uncommon beauty

and inescapable horror,
more than a solo sentience
but a host of warring ones

which foster an awareness
that nurtures the riotous
and unchecked rampage

of its burgeoning borders .
I am a singular copse
of acid-violet poinciana,

transient, slowly dying,
starving for sunlight
and cloaked in shadow

by the swifter growth
that surrounds me.
I am an iridescent

great horned eagle
in stratospheric flight
with the continent

spread before me,
the mottled coverlet
of viridescent plague

reaching from Amazonia,
its tentacles winding
north to Guatemala City

and south to Patagonia.
I am a thick whirlwind
of smoke that streams

from active volcanoes
in the unknown depths
of the Mutant Rain Forest,

carrying spores that
catch the jet stream,
to traverse oceans

and snow-clad summits,
to infest the Earth
with diverse mutations.