Genesis: Primeval Rivers and Forests

If these weren't so very ancient, they might easily be found. But they are deeper than subterranean Siberia, of a longer past than the oldest lichen fossil discovered in Rhynie soil, from farther away than found meteorite remnants of three billion years.

These primeval forests and rivers were the first to believe in trees dead but standing. They were the first to envision the living in the decay of the down-dead, the first to conceive possible orange rills of fungi, fluted white helvella, beetles, spider mites and spotted newts, a warty jumping slug hidden beneath fallen needles and duff.

Birds were among them then before there were birds, being mere wings of sun off the rivers before there were rivers, being mere flitting shadows in the upper canopy before there were shadows before there were canopies of flitting leaves.

And although these ancient waters flowing through storied rain forests have never been told, I imagine how they imagined before they conceived fish as smooth as silver glass, fat and buoyant on river bottoms, how they dreamed those fish swirling in schools of crystal to the surface without yet having bones, with no eyes of gold or scarlet gills, before flood or drought, current or cutbank.

Today the hiss of a single stem of seeded grass alone in a slender wind recalls the silence in far rivers and forests preparing for themselves, a silence expectant of wind, expectant of seed. A brief fragrance passing now suggests their beginning from absence, the fragrance of the origin of fragrance, damp oakmoss, sun on decay, the scent of nostalgia for a thing I imagined I knew before I knew.

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