

The First Who Shall Enter Shall Enter Last: The Grove of Fallen Dreams

(AN ANECDOTE BEST FORGOTTEN BUT HEARD IN TIMELESS PLACES IF YOU CAN LEND YOUR EAR)

WRITTEN BY: LaJaveyon Saunders (IceFireWarden)
With Musings From Other Characters Of The Bungle Bog

Proxi-Images From The Dreamsleeve Online Grid, With Gratitude

Dedicated To The River Without Water,
Which Quenched My Thirst



"If one decided to follow one of the many clotted waterways during the pink rays of twilight deeper into the land of dirt and marsh they would discover that no sound but one could be heard on this day. No ruffle-flutters could be heard calling out to potential mates, and no groanerpents could be heard sliding across the dirty white stone that littered the ground like half submerged grave markers without the

dead inside them (because who would take the time to bury someone in the mud?). Because today was the Growing and only a fool would make noise during a moment of silence.

But note that 'no sound but one' could be heard on this day, which means that there was such a fool who would disturb this moment. And of course this noise was not a pleasant noise either, and one could follow the sound of it as its emitter ran through the cringing grass and tense waters that would had told the Noisemaker to shut up themselves if they weren't supposed to be quiet too. The source of the noise only grew louder with previous noise, and the Noisemaker ran out into the muddy lands and into the sun chasing after a rather silent Thrut even though it was running, and revealed himself to be a rather disobedient Root stripling playing his bone-winds."

Of course one must be wondering what a Thrut *is* exactly. Scaly creatures they are; fearful, swift, and more loving to the muddy lands than the other creatures of the marsh and especially

the quiet sounds. Many Root striplings thought of them useful in many ways from hunting to moss-patterning, but they most valued their scales, because when one struck a Thrut with a Xiati-stick (or any kind of stick, one shouldn't be picky) their scales would spring up like quills and reverberate the sound.

But let us stop wasting non-time and abandon this talk about Thrut this and that and concentrate on the young Root stripling, who was very much disobeying the customs of the Growing. The young male's name was Vel and just Vel, because he had yet to learn the true meaning of Names and thus was not given new ones. Vel had decided to chase after this particular Thrut because his older sibling had caught his own and had gotten to participate in the Naming of Names sooner than he did (which was very rare indeed), which made him jealous. But the noise he was making came from his bone-winds, that drew in all the quiet breezes and blew them out as crying zephyrs that made the waters jump from their banks with joy. But Vel was rather poor in the use of bone-winds so all he succeeded in doing was making the surrounding creatures very, very angry.

And so Vel chased after this Thrut-that-wasn't-his while dancing the traditional Stalking Timbre, and blew on his bone-winds a very simple but awful tune that went along the lines of this:

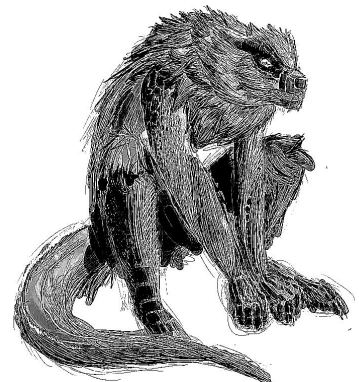
*"Shu-zu, come along with me to,
And I will dance a song with you!*

*You'll jump into my arms and bite my hands,
And we will see how hard you can chew!"*

[At this point the song goes on, but reciting it with unscaled lips is risking the anger of the rude spirits of mud rills and sea foam].

Vel chased the Thrut with his bone-winds throughout the rivers and the streams making much ruckus until even the clouds became annoyed by his playing and let loose their coffers of tears. The torrents of water flowing down from the sky was so much that it began to flood the various waterways until overflow and started to drown the fleshflies and ruffle-flutters in midair spectacularly.

The stripling was so focused on the Thrut that he did not notice that his running had become swimming and he was now under the vastly swelling water until he was swept by a very large current into an old rock and got knocked silly over sideways.



“Oh my, what’s going on?” Vel wondered out loud as he watched the birds and the grass flow past him upside down. “Where did all this water come from?”

And then the Thrut he had been chasing swimming after turned around and bit him on the left second horn and tugged the little Root boy out of the water and into the air, causing the young Root person to cry out in shock and pain.

“You crazy thick branch!” the Thrut growled after he let go of Vel’s horn. “Look at what you’ve done! You have flooded the marshlands and the mud rivers with your awful noises. That may be fine with you and the rest of the Root people but what about everyone else? We can’t breathe water! And on the Day of Growing at that!”

“Y-y-you, you can **talk**?” the Root stripling said in wonder, reached out to touch the Thrut but the creature snapped at his fingers and growled again.

“Talk? Of course I can talk! You can speak, and you don’t look so different from me,” the Thrut looked at Vel with pity. “If you don’t know that I can speak, then I guess you don’t know that I have Names as well. You probably don’t even **have** a Name yourself.”



Vel scoffed and placed his hands on his hips. “I do too have a name! I am Vel.” The Root boy said the words proudly while patting his own chest.

The Thrut shook his head. “That is not a name. I said if you had a **Name**. Totally different things, you silly little rotten root. You see, my name is—” And the Thrut spoke his Name, and his Names, and his name so powerfully that it cannot be recorded here, so we’ll just call the little creature Su. “-see, that is a Name. You just have a name.”

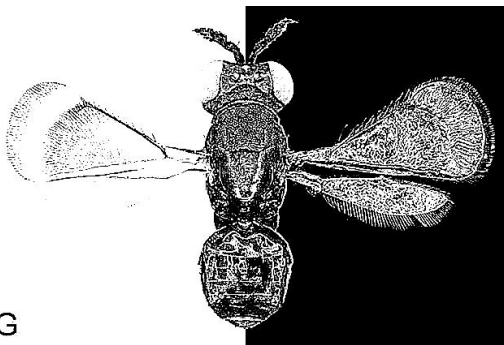
“I don’t see the difference, to tell you the truth,” Vel said as the two drifted in the current. “Isn’t a name and a Name just the same—”

“THAT ISN’T IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW AND YOU ARE WRONG ANYWAY!” Su hissed so loudly he caused the water to pop in several places. “You ruined the Day of Growing and the Preservers are probably sending their Eyes and Ears right now to take you away and unmake you. You’ll never get a Name!”

“But I already have a name. My name is Vel,” the young Root stripling said with a smile as they

reached a bank that had not been swallowed up by the water and climbed into the muddy soil. The stripling reached down into the squishy dirt and pulled up several green-worms and swallowed them whole, because all that noise making had made him hungry. “And how do you un-make something? I don’t think even the Preservers can do that.”

If Thruts could make their jaws gape Su would have done so with gusto. “How can you speak like that of the Preservers, especially during the Growing? You are a Root person.” And then the Thrut’s eyes grew wide when it realized something drastically horribly important. “I’m talking during the Silence! Look at what you’ve made me do, you idiotic Root person! I’m going to get in trouble because of you! The Preservers are going to un-make you and take away my Name—” Su suddenly stopped talking as Vel raised his hand and pointed above them.



G

“Buckle-bugs!” Vel cried out delightfully as the nine-legged insects descended from the canopy of Drowned Trees in the thousands and began to perform their rainbow motifs. “I never thought I would ever see a Buckle-bug!”

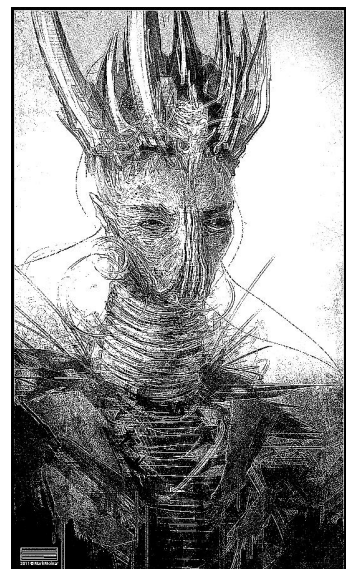
“Impossible, Buckle-bugs don’t live in the marshy-muddy lands like we do you rotten root, they live with the—” Su suddenly howled in deep despair when he realized what had happened. “We’ve washed into the lands of the Pelted Ones! They’re the only ones who can use and control Buckle-bugs. Oh, now I actually want the Preservers to send their Eyes and Ears after us!”

“Oh, be quiet Su,” Vel said patiently. “The Pelted Ones know a lot about bone-winds and the clouds, maybe they can tell us how to make all the water go away.”

Suddenly, the sound of waterlogged-buzzing reached the ears of the unfortunate companions and a swarm of buckle-bugs reemerged from the sort-of-forest in a condense cloud of moving rainbows and blew apart and standing in the falling legs was a Pelted One, standing tall and high and imposing with its split lips.

Su was so frightened that he involuntarily raised his quills in mock battle syndromes, but the Pelted One raised a hand and the buckle-bug formation panned out into multi-colored water rift glyphs that spoke in rumble-tongues of ancient power:

WHY DO YOU COME? ARE YOU NOT



AFRAID?

At this Su collapsed to the ground in a series of terror-shakes but Vel stood indifferent as tremor ripples swell over his youthful form.

“Are you a Pelted One?” the Root stripling said in uncertain certain tones before shaking his head. “Of course you are a Pelted One, that was a really dumb thing to ask. Why would I be afraid? Your face is ugly, but not terrifying.”

Su stared at the Root stripling in disbelief and horror unknown currently to the present possibilities as the Pelted One began to laugh, a laugh that traveled forth and back and sideways. The Pelted One opened the folds of its lizard skin robes and redrew from its depths a large staff made from the slivers of bone prisms and stabbed it into the ground. The swarm of buckle-bugs realign motifs and new air glyphs speak.

YOUNG ONE HAS INITIATIVE, AND BRAVERY. I AM
COLOR-WARRIOR NINE OF THE COUNTER CIRCLE WISE COVEN,
THIRD TRIBE. SPEAK, AND BE TOLD.

“My name is Vel, and this is my Thrut Su—”

“I am not your Thrut, I am a free creature of the marshlands,” Su growled low, baring his teeth. “I have half the thought to leave you here too, getting me involved with Pelted Ones...”

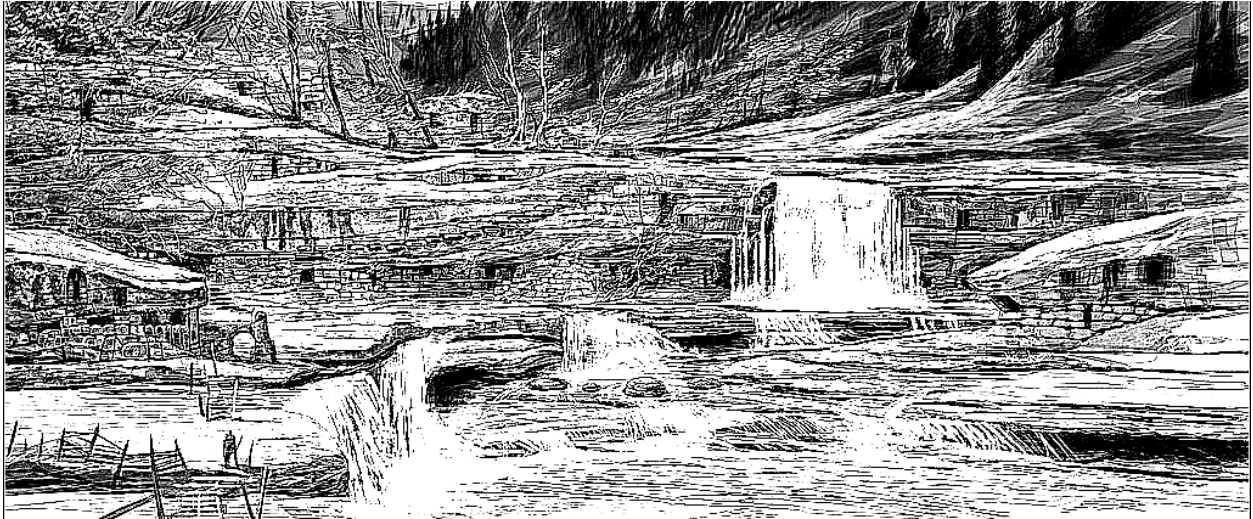
“— and we are in terrible trouble. I was playing my bone-winds while chasing after Su, but the song I was playing caused the clouds to pour out much water and flooded most of the marshland and mud hills and I know that the Pelted Ones are really good at bone-winds so I really need help!” Vel said in a burst so fast that the wind broke the sound of the words.

Color-Warrior Nine raised his staff from the ground and placed back into his robes, and the buckle-bugs blinked out new motifs.

I HAVE NOT THE ANSWERS. ROOT STRIPLING FOLLOW, BUT
COMPANION STAY LEST BECOME CHAMOIS. WE SHALL
SEEK THE FAR-SCRYER OF-THE-SEVEN-TOKS.

Vel smiled broadly and tapped Su on the head. “I guess you can’t come, Thrut. Be careful, and don’t drown in the sinky areas.” Su hissed, and without a word fled on padless claws into the Drowned Forest and did not look back.

Color-Warrior Nine grabbed Vel by the shoulders and placed him on the side of his neck and began to run through the withered trees and jump over the spongy pockets so fast that Vel began to see in double-vision and blacked out and awoke in the midst of three Pelted Ones in the center of a doxi-pitt filled with multiple buckle-bug swarms.



I AM TOK-KNIGHT FOUR OF THE COUNTER CIRCLE WISE COVEN, TRIBE ONE. WHY HAVE YOU LED THIS...ROOT STRIPLING TO OUR HOME, TRIBE-KIN?

I, COLOR-WARRIOR NINE, BROUGHT THIS CREATURE NAMED VEL TO THE VILLAGE BECAUSE IT NEEDED HELP. I THOUGHT THE FAR-SCRYER COULD SUPPLY SAID HELP.

WITHOUT CONSULTING SAID FAR-SCRYER FIRST? YOUR FOOLISHNESS IS DISAPPOINTING. LET YOUR LAST THOUGHTS BE OF PAIN.

Tok-Knight Four drew his vine-blade and slashed Color-Warrior Nine's throat with nine wind-strokes, and the Pelted One fell into the stream and out into the watery beyond of the Far Reaches. Tok-Knight Four wiped the blade on his lizard tongue skirt and faced Vel with a quizzical expression.

SPEAK, LITTLE ONE. BEFORE YOU MEET THE SAME FATE.

Vel turned and looked at the Tok-Knight Four and the Cloaked Pelted One and scoffed. "I'm not

afraid of a vine-blade and why should I be? My Egg-Siblings told me that the Pelted Ones understand bone-winds and clouds better than anyone. Can you help get rid of the water in the lower marshlands or not?"

IMPUDENT-

The Cloaked Pelted One besides Tok-Knight Four raised a hand, causing the buckle-bug swarms to go into a frenzy before resettling themselves into a bland color motif.

STAND DOWN AND CLEANSE YOURSELF
IN THE FEATHERED WATERS TO COOL
YOUR TEMPER. BEGONE.

Tok-Knight Four bowed stiffly and left the doxi-pitt by scaling the rock among the right angles, leaving Vel and the Pelted One alone in the center. The buckle-bugs began to swirl in complex maneuvers as the Pelted One pointed at Vel with gleaming copper-skinned fingers and smiled.



I AM FAR-SCRYER-OF-THE-SEVEN-TOKS. IT HAS BEEN A
LONG TIME SINCE I HAVE SEEN A ROOT STRIPLING.

"So there was another person like me? When?" Vel said, polite for once in his short existence due to the captivation of his mind, and the Far-Scryer arched one of her eyebrows as she instructed the buckle-bugs to rewrite their sequences.

WE HAVE NOT THE TIME TO DISCUSS SUCH THINGS. STATE
THE QUESTION THAT DWELLS ON YOUR MIND, YOUNG ONE.

"I was using my bone-winds to chase after a Thrut, but my playing made the clouds rain and they rained so hard that the lower marshlands and wet forests became flooded, killing all the animals that can't breathe underwater like my people. My nest-siblings once told me that you Pelted Ones knew a lot about bone-winds, so I thought you might—"

VEL CREATURE TALKS TO MUCH. HAND ME WHAT YOU WISH
ME TO SEE.

The Root Stripling unstrung his bone-winds from around his neck and handed it to

Far-Scryer-Of-The-Seven-Toks. The Pelted One took the bone-winds apart inside out and divided them among their shafts, constantly rotating them in the wind. Finally, she put them back together and began to play them softly with the lower part of her split-lips, but the sound that came out was like a wamasu burping up mud bubbles.

“I thought the Pelted Ones were good at using bone-winds. Your playing was just terrible,” Vel commented after the Far-Scryer stopped playing and handed the bone-winds back to him.

SOUNDS FOLD WHERE THEY SHOULD CREASE, CLOSINGS HAPPEN WHEN THEY SHOULD BE OPEN. WHILE ROOT STRIPLING ALREADY PLAYS HORRIBLE ON HIS OWN, IT IS YOUR BONE-WINDS THAT ARE BROKEN.

“But my mother made this herself and she’s the best bone-wind maker around. That doesn’t sound good! Do you know how I can fix it? Tell me how to fix it.” The Far-Scryer shook her head.



TOO DANGEROUS. DO YOU SEE THE ETCH ON THE BOTTOM OF THIS PIT? ROOT STRIPLING ASKS TO DO SOMETHING THAT HAS MANY REPERCUSSIONS-

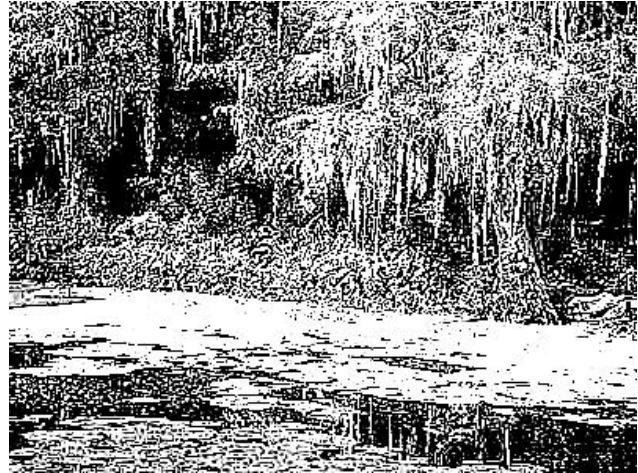
“I don’t care if it’s dangerous! If the Preservers find out that I flooded the marshlands I could get in a lot of trouble. If you know something, just tell me and stop standing there breathing air!”

The Pelted One sighed and looked at Vel sadly, and beckoned for the Root stripling to follow her, which he did. The pair left the doxi-pitt and walked to the edge of the Pelted Ones village, where they stood before the entrance to a forest filled to the brim with black water that Vel had never seen before, and this slightly frightened him (even though he would never admit it) because the Root People always knew where all the forests were (even when they disappeared).

YOUR WORDS HAVE PERSUADED ME TO USE TO ALLOW YOU TO USE THIS, CREATURE NAMED VEL. WITHIN THIS WOODLAND LIES THE ANSWER TO YOUR PROBLEM...IF IT DECIDES TO HELP. BUT LISTEN CLOSELY ROOT STRIPLING; THIS FOREST CONSISTS OF A REALM OF POSSIBILITIES THAT SHOULD NOT EXIST BUT DO. THERE IS A CHANCE YOU MAY NOT RETURN FROM THIS JOURNEY.

“Bah!” Vel said as he mustered up his youthful courage and grinned boldly at the Far-Scryer as she stood there in her Keptulylic robes. “I’m not afraid of anything, and especially no Drowned Forest.”

GOOD, VEL CREATURE. BUT REMEMBER THIS: LISTEN TO THE SOURCE OF MUSIC. FOLLOW ITS CALL, AND YOU WILL FIND WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

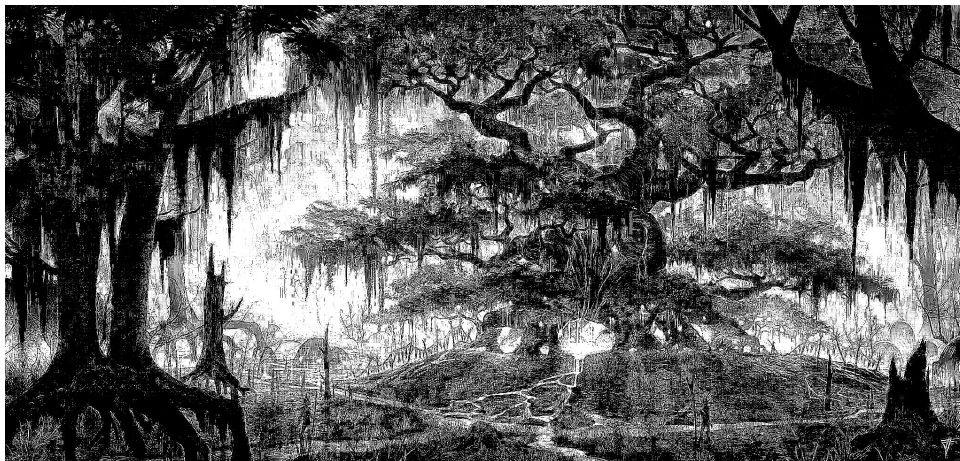


And with that Vel walked through the black water that hung like a wall made from pond scum and entered the forest. He was surprised when he realized that on this side of the wall that everything was bright and sunny, just like his own nest. There were also no water.

There was a scurrying of feet and Vel turned around to see his older brother running up to him grinning. “Come Vel, or you will miss the Growing!”

“The Growing? But what about the flooded lower marshlands! Aren’t the Preservers angry?”

His brother looked at him strangely. “What are you talking about? Hey, didn’t mom told you to stop playing in those smoke holes? Whatever, come on or we’ll be late!” And then he ran off and soon Vel forgot about his journey as he ran after his sibling, thinking that maybe he had dreamed of what happened due to the effects of the smoke holes.



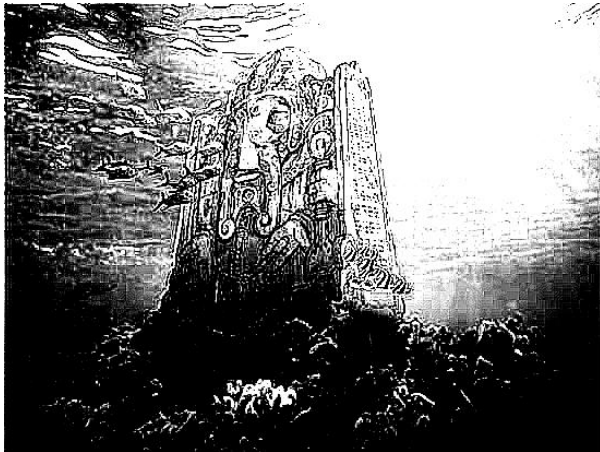
The Egg-Siblings soon reached nests, and Vel smiled as he always did when he saw the Preserver standing before him, beckoning for him to take his place with the rest of his people at its base.

“Hey, too bad your buddy Su couldn’t come huh?” his brother asked Vel, who was beginning to join in the chant.

“Sure is—” The little Root stripling began to say when he remembered that he never told his brother about Su. Suddenly, his home disappeared as the false memory destroyed itself when the foundation of its untruthfulness crumbled and Vel found himself within the sea of black that was the mysterious forest.

“That was weird,” Vel said out loud and watched the bubbles escape from his mouth until he heard a faint sound that sounded strangely familiar but yet unfamiliar at the same time. “That must be the music the Far-Scryer had been telling me about. Let me see where it leads.”

The Root stripling followed the faint music as he ran through the dark water, passing by many great and weird things that he had never seen before. Giant fish flew past him on bird like wings, and humans with the faces of sharks swam by without noticing he was there. Huge mosaics of what looked like his people’s buildings jutted out of the ground like mountains.



“I’m a bit nervous of this place,” Vel said with a shiver. “Something about it feels like it wants to eat me, but a forest can’t eat you though.”

As the music grew louder and louder soon Vel discovered that he was no longer swimming towards the sound himself – his legs were moving on his own. But he didn’t fight it; something about this was different but also reminded the young one of something.

And then he was there.

Vel stared at what he was seeing and knew that this was the ending of his journey and he grew strangely happy but also sad, for he had fallen in love with the music his ears were filled with and wanted to listen to it forever.

“Your not a Preserver, are you?” Vel asked the source of the music, which giggled and sent

pictures of times he did not know about into his mind. “Oh, okay. But why are down here, alone?”

The Source of Music sent another image into his head, an image of others surrounding this one. “But I don’t see them.” Another image. “Oh, are they all inside of you? That makes a lot of sense.”

The Source of Music beckoned for Vel to draw nearer to it, and so the small Root stripling did, floating in its center. “Still, I wish I could’ve met all of you back when you had other shapes.” The Source of Music sent another image, this one a bit more forced and demanding.

Vel raised his bone-winds to the Source of Music and said, “I was playing my bone-winds and I was playing so badly that I accidentally flooded the lower marsh and wetlands and I didn’t know what to do so I went to the village of the Pelted Ones with my Thrut, whose name is Su, and they told me that my bone-winds were also broken and that I needed to come in here and find the Source of Music, and that is you and you were supposed to be able to help me.” The Root stripling said all of that so fast that he lost his breath and couldn’t speak for takings of air.

The Source of Music sent him another image, this time one of weariness and Vel grew sad. “No! I couldn’t ask you to do that,” he said sternly, but the Source of Music mused a stream of images and Vel felt his tail quiver before he hugged the Source of Music.

“Thank you,” he said silently. “I will treasure it always, and never tell anyone. Except Su, of course.” He grinned, and the Source of Music laughed as it died, its life ebbing out of its ancient body and flowed into the young Root stripling until it was done.

Vel reached up and ripped off a piece of the Source of Music, and bound it to his bone-winds like the Source had told him before it perished before taking a breath and began to play.

And he played.

And he played.

The very marshlands bended to the will of his song that he played, and not even the Day of Growing could stop Vel as he played his tune in the middle of the forest that no longer seemed real nor fake, but in-between something that could never be explained. And then everything was gone but the song, which continued to play in his ears and would always play in his ears until listening itself became nothing all the same.



Vel woke up to the feeling of a barbed tongue licking his face, and opened his eyes to see the snout of a Thrut looking down on him. A really familiar looking Thrut.

“Lo, Su.” Vel said sleepily.

“I can’t believe it, you little rotten root, but you did it!” Su yelled out happily as he began to dance around the little Root stripling that was stretched out on the ground of the now dry marshlands. “You actually fixed the marshlands! Fantastic! Unbelievable!”

“Really?” Vel said excitedly as he got up from the ground. “I don’t remember it.”

“You don’t REMEMBER IT?!” Su said with a gasp. “Wow, you really are hopeless aren’t you? It was like the marshlands was never flooded in the first place. Aw man, I wish you did remember it. It would be an awesome you could tell me while we—”

“We?” Vel said with a smile, and Su recognized his mistake. “Are you saying that you’re my Thrut now, Su?”

“Ha, me be your Thrut? Maybe learn how to play some other songs than the Stalking Timbre and I’ll think about it.”

Suddenly a image erupted in Vel’s mind, and he grinned. “I know a new song! But I can’t remember where I’ve heard it though. Want to hear about it as we walk home?”

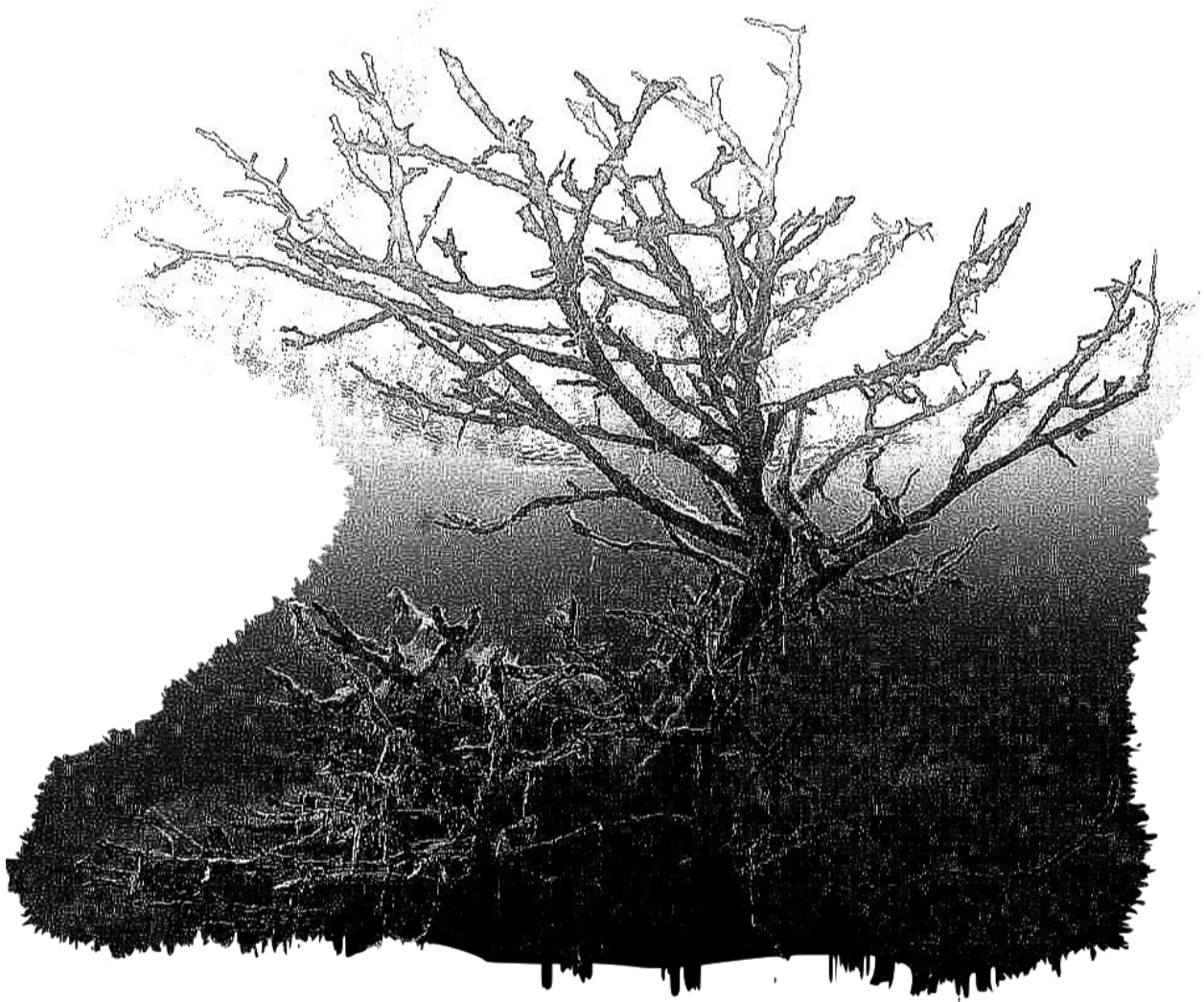
“It better be good, is all I’m saying rotten root,” Su growled as the two Not-Quite-Friends began to walk away from the spot and enter the Drowned Forest, completely unaware of the Pelted Ones watching them from a distance with tooth and spear.

“Okay, here it is,” Vel said and drew his bone-winds to his mouth. But these weren’t really his bone-winds, or were they? It didn’t matter to him as he began to play, and a sweet sound echoed into the dying night as Vel sang:

*“Whoever sings this song let the warning be dire,
Turn back now or build a pyre.*

*If you still wish to follow then cross the Hidden mire,
And join hand in hand within the Lake of Cold Fire.”*

And as the two companions sang and the Pelted Ones ran back to their village as the dawn approached, somewhere – hidden within the deepest corners of Vel’s mind youthful mind – the Source of Music laughed.



THE END.