

*Tennis Player with a Fig Leaf*

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In American English we use the phrase “talking in circles.” Talking in circles around the fact that it is unbearable to address things directly, sugar with the pill, we require dilution, gestures, hints, suggestions, a speaker’s sly winks at what we are meant to grasp. The sensuality of modesty, a desiring for what is hidden, what is not revealed but merely alluded to, signaled, and beckoned. We treasure things once they’ve concluded. We want to feel smart, we want to come upon the answer ourselves.

Her interest in astronomy was long-lasting, ever since her great-uncle who worked for the university brought his telescope to her grandparents’ woods. He carried the thick, heavy, metallic object shaped like a cannon into the middle of the sparkling field and plopped it down in the center. It reminded her of receiving an MRI, a scientific tin full of charge and omniscience. The fear she felt peering into the viewfinder for the first time, unsure what she would see, was akin to having been strapped down in a weighted vest and slid into the Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine. “Don’t be afraid.”, said her great-uncle.

At the time she was young and small enough that she did not have to fold herself in half or kneel in order to place her eye into the gooey, massaging eyepiece and strive to see Venus. She stepped up to the mechanism and instead of a planet, she saw a beast with leathery black and red flaps moving rapidly, like a tongue trills a roof of a mouth, and glowing like magma. She yelped, backing away, and her great-uncle took a look. “Oh, it’s a lightning bug! Let’s try again.” he stated, re-adjusting the instrument.

Suddenly an irregular pale-green hexagon manifested itself out from the stifling void. A spark, a flame-like entity flitted like a zebra fish flitted across her gaze. She stared harder, concentrating and interpreting what she beheld. The aether was a sunless ocean and the shape, a lighthouse, providing a goal for her awareness to move toward, drawing her into shore. The radiant outline revealed smooth white stone, its presence self-assured and backgrounded by blue sky. Its edges were gentle and feminine, and radiated a dusty excretion into the night sky. Luminous matter spilled from the hypnotizing puddle in the devices’s optical tube, and changed from chartreuse to puce to ochre to sepia.

“Can I see your phone?” she asked her great-uncle. He handed her his chunky iPhone 10 in a black otterbox case and it rested in her palm like a stone. She brought the camera to the eyepiece and snapped a photo.

“I want to capture the planets. I want to make them my own.”

The confines of the telescopic cylinder comforted her. Her claustrophobia faded, she became infatuated with its select visibility. Her very own court, a defined realm within which to bounce.

- Emilie Engel