

## **If I eat you, will we both still be OK? (*Plant*)**

### ***i. Puffball***

It must have been my father who first taught me about puffballs.  
I can't remember if I had the interest first, or  
if it began when I got  
a small book on mushrooms  
for Christmas.

Pocket-sized, palm-sized, I took it on Sunday walks.  
Wanting to identify and read out fungi facts.  
Be right in my natural history.

Fungus was appreciated family-wide,  
for their alien, mysterious, sponge-like bodies,  
And persistent desire to multiply -  
They occupied another realm.  
Their Kingdoms an unexpected presence, in cracks, gaps, fields and fallen Oaks.  
Inky black cap, creamy gills, Stinkhorn, Beefsteak  
We'd gather them and leave them in the bath.  
My dad even ate a red one once,  
drawn to fly with the fly agaric,  
longing for transport from the mundane.

Exploring, we found the remains of a huge puffball.  
White, chalky, a broken-edged base,  
must have been as big as a football.  
We stood around it,  
encircled,  
as if attending the aftermath of fire.  
My dad theorised it had been kicked  
and the image,  
alive, like a puff of spores,  
in my mind.

I was told that you could eat puffballs,  
a delicacy;  
this friendly sphere, risen from earth  
and then cooked, fried, sliced,  
knives and forks clinking,  
this small ball made edible.

We started to search for puffballs.  
My nature table at home waiting.  
A square, low cheap, pine surface,  
yet elevating, maintaining  
the status of special things I found.

Here lay berries, leaves, a speckled feather.  
Gathering puffballs meant staying close to the ground.  
Scanning the earth  
gave our walks particular purpose.  
The family united in my circular vision.

Some weeks later  
we found one:  
small  
classic white,  
fitted into my palm,  
carefully wrapped it  
proudly carried home,  
like pearl relics.

Running upstairs, excited,  
I took each item from my table  
making space for my prize  
so focused -  
I didn't notice myself,  
step backwards.  
Step onto something round - like sponge! -  
I squashed the whole puffball into carpet!  
Mushroom forced into lines.  
I didn't realise until  
about to place it into the space -  
I cried!  
Wept romantically at the loss of puffball!

Some months later,  
we did find more puffballs,  
and my mother kindly cooked and fried  
as I waited to dine  
on slices of this plant,  
with garlic,  
feeling royal,  
refined.

## **ii. Politics**

Plants are political.  
Holding the  
capturing and cultivating  
journeys of botanists  
in their stems.

Propagation histories  
and their colonial ancestors.  
Empires, seeds and winds determine their growth,  
Grand gardens frequently founded on such "glories"

Riches stolen from far-flung soil.  
Wildness sublimated,  
into a hierarchy of humans.

Across the world, plants are medicinal.  
Women died in defence of their properties.  
Aged 8 I wanted to be a witch.  
Would tempt my friend Eleanor into making potent herb potions,  
planting a succulent world of weird, wild women  
in her middle-class mind.

At Chelsea Physic Garden I learnt  
Of Agatha Christie and her poisonous research,  
How hemlock kills from the feet first,  
How sunflowers clean and detoxify soil.  
How Joseph Banks broke off pieces of Icelandic lava  
building English rock gardens as he sailed past.  
I heard of the fern-collecting habits of the Victorians too, viewing you as  
magical, mysterious, as you reproduced in clouds of spore.

As a family, we spoke in plant names,  
- Poor man's flannel, love-in-the-mist  
Not as a way to show-off or possess,  
instead, etymology as intimacy.  
A portal into their families directly from our own,  
an honouring of each plant's idiosyncratic limbs.

Abroad, my mother fell in love with the blues of Morning glories,  
secretly carrying dormant seeds across borders,  
your potential resting, until ready to bloom.

### **iii. Psychics and the people who adore them**

Plant, you hold properties  
I can only imagine.  
You are this other being, emanating  
with a mind I can feel, but only  
sometimes hear.  
Steiner and the early Mystics listened,  
plugged into other realms,  
tuning-in to finer frequencies,  
took notes as you spoke.

Plant you grow more when we talk with you.  
Sentient as the carrots who know when their fellows are being cut,  
Hints at an inter-weaving, inter-connectedness;  
a scene behind the scenes  
I long to marinate in, to understand, and touch.

Through Bach flower remedies,

I ingest you.  
Dropping families of you on my tongue,  
slip-sliding your bodies into my body.  
Elm diminishing overwhelm.  
Wild Oat helps you decide your own mind.  
Star of Bethlehem so often softens shock.  
Whilst Clematis invites us fully into the room.  
I once gave someone Olive and Gorse,  
And their depression drained away,  
like bathwater.

Whilst teaching, I discover orchids like company,  
long for lush lovers to warm a bathroom draught.  
Emanate air waves and chemistries, energies,  
prettily, yet secretly, they're hard at work on our etheric selves.

Plant, you take the heat out of my cheek,  
Ashwagandha and its psychological stores  
move my chi to a gentle simmer.  
I stuff my face in your face,  
breathing blossom up my nose.  
Drink your brown liquid herb-brothers,  
Sent in the post all the way from New Zealand.

Plant, your innocence,  
Is mis-perceived  
like a book,  
you function as a portal  
to other places.  
I don't need ayahuasca  
to travel  
but I understand how you companion.  
Remember  
picking magic mushrooms, in fields, as a teenager,  
my eye attuning to your vertical.  
We doubted your potency and doubled up on you,  
Eating your slippery stems on toast  
until you hit like vodka,  
the suburbs suddenly psychedelic in your gaze.

Plant, you magnetize people to you,  
transmitting a song  
for bee, human, bird.  
Sages love to be surrounded by you.  
Told for years, I didn't know how to look after you.  
I believed them, over our relationship!  
And it was only when I lived in the Artists Co-op -  
and everyone else ignored you,  
that we actually stood a chance,  
became intimate.

It was here that I brought you back  
from the brink,  
realised I could use my hands to resuscitate,  
your leaf-lets flourishing at my touch.  
I cared for your babies, learnt your symbiotic dance.

Plant, I feel like our love affair has just begun, And  
your mauve and purple now adorn my front door.  
You're mulchy green, you're verdant matter, you're  
sprouts and shoots and seeds and sex. You're petals  
and stamen and pollen.  
You're food and fuel, living enzyme matter,  
You're networks and fungi,  
an underground radio station in constant transmission;  
the succulents are having a party, and we're all invited.  
Plant, you are edible potential.

Rhona Eve Clews, 2024.