

Becoming to Beheld

By Mahalia Solages

In the parkland of Plantation Natural Reserve Park in Florida, stood various trees of all ages. Some flanked a lake, others placed in clusters with their crowns and branches touching as if a group of girls sharing a secret. Birds flitted to and people picnicked or rested under the other solitary trees spotting the landscape. A mature mango tree was placed on the far end of the green field. She was engaged in a conflicted perspective with her shadow.

"I can have him chase all around me," the shadow said of the jogger that regularly chose to stop there.

"I don't understand. You don't need to do that," the tree said.

"It's a game."

"For saplings," the tree said.

The jogger appeared, as usual, slowing his pace as he came to a stop at the shade of the mango tree.

"I look tall, my shape is good. He likes that," the shadow said.

"He is enjoying what I've become, yes," the tree said.

A burst of air jabbed by. The sweet smell of ripened fruit permeated around the branches.

The jogger moved closer to the tree and looked up.

"See?" the tree said.

The jogger placed his hand on the trunk of the tree, supporting himself while he bent his legs and twisted his body to stretch.

"See?" the tree said.

"So what? He moves with me," the shadow said.

"Yes, you shift all day. What happens when there are clouds?" the tree said.

"Then I won't be anymore," the shadow said.

Writing Raw

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“No,” the tree said.

“It doesn’t matter. The sun is always behind the clouds,” the shadow said.

“Yes, but your positive space is only acknowledged according to the weather,” the tree said.

The jogger sat down. He inhaled deeply and watched the blue jays bickering at each other.

“Yeah, but when the sun is out, I’m cool and fresh,” the shadow said.

“I’m real regardless. Just as the sun nourishes me and helps me expand, I can keep him also, by feeding him and protecting him,” the tree said.

“I’m not stationary. He feels alive when he moves,” the shadow said.

“When the clouds are out, my limbs can sway in the wind, I can shake with my leaves and whistle through the fingers of my branches. People feel alive when they dance,” the tree said.

“Lighting can strike. Your leaves and branches can fall off,” the shadow said.

“Yes, there are parts that will phase out, but my core is stout. In that time that I look simple, he may generally think I am of no use.”

“See, he won’t come to you at that time when your leaves fall off, anyway,” the shadow said.

“In the process of renewal, it is best to grow on your own,” said the tree.

The sun allowed the shadow to move. The tree watched the shadow change, elongate as if wanting distance from the tree. The shadow intensified yet seemed pleased that she looked bigger than the tree. The jogger stretched out on his back, and placed his hands behind his head.

“You’re just an outline of me, but you have no distinction. You’re filled in but you have no details,” the tree said. “My strength I’ve earned learning how to grip, securing myself to the earth. My elegance I’ve experienced knowing how to embrace the years. The balance, I’ve learned from allowing. The closer he gets, the more he sees, me.”

“Charming,” the shadow quipped.

“Yes. That’s what it is.”

“So? I can be whatever he wants me to be,” the shadow said.

Two birds chattered from the branches of the tree.

“That is how I thought it should be. You are dark, unable to tolerate challenge of change,” the tree said.

“You just don’t like me. My lines are not as definitive as yours. I come and go as I please. You’re jealous!” the shadow said.

A low breeze shifted upwards. The leaves of the tree shimmied up, as if inhaling, before settling back.

“Grateful,” the tree said. “Proud that I can be compassionately detached. Absolutely grateful that I am able to recognize and acknowledge you, my shadow.”

The End

Mahalia Solages bio: Mahalia Solages’ work has appeared at WritingRaw and Oné?Respé? “Vague in Conversation” received an honorable mention from Lorian Hemingway but appeared in Fall, a short story collection by Almond Press. “Fringes of Reality” is published in Kalyani Magazine’s second edition, Sound. A nonfiction title, “Burnt Flakes, Burnt Flesh” appears in the anthology So Spoke The Earth. She is also the author of two picture books.