

Blood Magic

We were forestborn and dirt-loved. As children we scattered soil with bare feet and tripped on branches and when we caught our breath on the ground, the blood from our hands and knees trickled down like earth veins. We walked together for so long that we reached pavement—a place so silent and metallic that even trees and wild cats recoiled while we let our shoes imprint on the concrete. Just us and the leaf skeletons.

While soil had licked our wounds, the concrete forgot us and spat out warped wine-red stains. See us there: right next to garden gnome hats and crooked stop signs. Still we wedged ourselves down into the sidewalk cracks, squeezed ourselves down through each layer. Twisting around steel pipes, then plastic, then the gravel that ate our eyes and lungs and feet. There, where we clung to cement, our rustwater only pooled, never feeding, never giving life to mortar bones. Did you know how close we were to the crushed soil, just there underneath us?

When I lie down for breath once more I want to be cradled by a stout oak heart. Sturdy roots will twine with my fingers and I will perch on branches that sway back and forth with the breeze. I will feel the soil's muscles contracting, pumping blood through fractals. To the listening roots, my heartwords will linger in the space between leaves and footsteps and earth, saying, *I've only ever been dirt-loved.*