



My Lady of the Woods
Eric S. Miller

A girl in a white linen nightgown sits on a bench reading. She is pale and at first seems to have red hair, but on a closer look the hair turns out to be vines of red leaves. If this is a wig, it does not show. The bench is wooden, the sky is blue, and the canopy is dancing for spring.

From her right side a young man in the costume of a knight appears. He has no helmet, but a bowl of brown hair, a silver tabard made to look like armor, a large leather belt, and gray stockings. He is freckled and carries a foam shield covered in black cloth with a red leaf painted on the back. The colors in the leaf fade from brown, to red, to bright yellow. He is holding a foam sword, also covered in black cloth. He kneels before the girl, sword down, weight on the hilt.

She does not look up.

"My lady," eh says, "what name does the earth know such a heavenly creature by? I must know it, so I can praise it through the land."

She looks up, smirks, and says, "Siranya. But what do you see that is worthy of praise?"

"Your fair hair. Your fine skin. Your voice like the wind through the trees. Your sharp mind that asks such questions and searches tomes on bright days. Your smile like a wave on the sea. Your ice eyes that make me shiver with desire.

She laughs.

"But the qualities you so adore come from my impending death. A cancer kills me. I made this hair to show that I am about to descend to the earth. My skin is smooth because I have lost my hair, my voice crackles softly because I cannot speak above a whisper, my mind is sharp because it is all I have left, and my eyes, good sir knight, are cold blue because the heat of life escapes them."

The boy, for he is now a boy, is silent for a long moment.

"I love you all the more."

"Why? Because you want to have sex with my dead body when I'm gone? Are you a corpse lover?"

"No!"

His face contorts in shock as the girl smiles deeper.

"I think you are. That's okay, you can have me after death. I won't mind, but you'll have to time it well.

People evacuate their bowels after they die and the morgue will plug me up so tight you won't be able to squeeze in. But you probably know that. You probably have a manual."

The man wretched.

"No, I don't want that."

"Then you're some' cheesy cancer kitties need love too' guy, aren't you?"

"No. I love you, not your cancer."

"Then what on earth do you want me for?"

"I wanted you intuitively, immediately, because of who I see before me. I love you more because I love your hands that made such fine hair, I love every bit of heat left in your eyes, every dry pore where your hair once grew. Every word you speak is all the more precious because I know they may be your last. My love for you before has all the same roots, but now you have shocked it into growth, into reaching forms so strange and bright they are as innumerable and varied as the leaves upon an autumn tree."

"So you think they're beautiful because they are about to die?" She says with an unstoppable grin.

He stands, turns, seeming upset and then says, "fine, you got me. You're going to make a hot corpse. You win, are you happy?"

She laughs and says, "Yes!" as she stands and grabs his back. "Yes," she says in a whisper, now holding him for support. Her wig has fallen to the ground, lying in a heap, her head is bald. She shivers.

"Oh sweetest," he says, petting her head, "we need to get you to a bed don't we. Our games have worn you out."

He scoots awkwardly to the bench, making sure she can still cling to him, picks up her book, and then grabs her in one swoop, dropping his sword. He looks down at the wig next to his sword with a frown.

"Leave them," she says hoarsely. "They will still be here, but I may not be."

He sobs softly as he walks off with his shield still slung on his back. The autumn leaf shimmers in the late afternoon sun, brown, to red, to awful yellow.