

TIGER TIGER

The man was just there. One day. In my ratty backyard with its weeds and overgrown pampas grass. Its balding dirt patches and crapulous plantings. Always an area I avoided with my eyes when passing a window, because it offended my sense of order and beauty. Then, He showed up there one day, sitting perfectly still. His clothing was clean, but worn transparent in some areas. His face gaunt but electrically white for a human who most likely lived out of doors with nowhere to hide. He sat there and I was afraid. He did not move.

I did not go to him. I did not try to talk to Him or scare him away. I just held the secret mantra that He would go away. "Go away go away goawaygoaway" I would fervently whisper everytime I passed a window. Back door was locked. Cops on speedial, although my last interaction kept me from calling. The Man did not budge, in a frozen meditation. A statue that breathes. He seemed non-threatening in a way. Catatonia personified. Until he was no longer a statue.

He had been there for two days when he finally got up abruptly and started scooping dirt with his hands. Pulling dandelions with expert precision. Occasionally chewing on a leaf or smelling a root before swallowing it whole. He did this all day. My intruder broke stems and crushed spiderwebs. He organized clumps and worked tirelessly. An intriguing attempt to prove his worth? I did not know.

The next day, my yard was considerably improved. Rows of new plantings -- shrubs that created symmetry and well-placed rocks that created a fairyland out of what was once a neglected patch. I wanted to talk to the Man, but he had resumed his catatonic state.. sitting in the corner this time in the lotus position. I was unsure.

Finally, I went back there and walked slowly to Him. He did not open his eyes or move in any discernible way. Like a stalk immovable. I quietly told Him thank you and offered to bring him food and water if he would like to continue his work, and a sleeping bag in case the evening was cold. Not sure why I did this, but it seemed right to me. This Man did not seem a

danger. I brought him some supplies, which He dragged out of the way of the main area of the garden and set up a small camp for himself in a shadowy corner.

Each day, the yard changed. Flourished. Vibrant green sprouts. Bright yellow flowers. Birds of Paradise taller than I had ever seen. Trumpet vines that smelled of foreign perfumes drooping over bushes of rosemary and a bright red flower I have never seen before or to this day. A veritable jungle in my tiny yard.

And with the luscious jungle came the birds. Hummingbirds. Tiny green chatty birds. Larger winged birds that almost seemed big enough to be a cousin to the pterodactyls. The noise was exotic and transporting. And the birds seem to be friends with the man. His normally relaxed aspect lit up when they swooped by Him. He stared at them and occasionally one would hover by his face or land nearby. Was He communicating with them?

Then came animals. Ones that did not belong in my part of the country, or so I thought. A phenomenally large albino snake? What is that doing here? I had friends who would scream and call Animal control at the sight of such a thing, but I was not afraid. I was fascinated. Lizards of strange mutations - colorful frills and bright blue tongues. All seemingly drawn to my visitor and yet leaving Him to his business. There was not enough room to support this wide a variety of things, yet everyday I spotted a new creature lurking in a bush or bamboo stand.....

As time progressed, there came a day when the Man seemed almost finished. He would spend less time planting and pruning and more time in his lotus position barely breathing. I was wondering, what is next? I was used to him. I loved my yard as it became the fantasy haven I could only have dreamed of. A yard of many hues and pockets of solitude. He belonged there with me and I was happy to trade the bit of space for the amazing natural gift he bestowed.

One day, I stood gaping out the window. My mind and my eye blinked. I would never have believed it. I saw a tiger. A real one. A huge one. Weaving in and out of the shrubs and pittosporum.... slowly making his way

to the man's corner. The man sat there unaware. Meditating as He did was something to marvel at. Truly upon another plane, unaware of predators and friends alike. I RAN to my backdoor to tell my magic gardener to run, to crawl up my fence, to hold on and I would call the police or the fire department or someone to help! I ran as fast as I could through the house to the glass door that separated me from the predator and his prey.

But He was gone. When I had reached the backdoor. No sign of the Man or the tiger. I stood there watching, fearful to explore my tiny jungle. Fearful of the tiger. Fearful that my strange friend was lying in a bloody pile somewhere I could not see. So I waited.