

The Puddle and the Moss

Alex Sheriff

'It never rains in LA' is a cliché, and after one year I've noticed it to be generally true. One month it did rain much more than normal, the most in a decade I read, and a superbloom resulted in the following months. Though my backyard patio is ground level, it is walled in with tall concrete/plaster dividers and a thick hedge beyond that to further block visibility. There is a small drain in the concrete floor, as the patio is otherwise watertight. The drain did its job, but toward the end of the many consecutive rainy days, debris from the hedge began to block it. The water drained slower, then stopped, then pooled. Once the drain was completely blocked, it rained a full day more, submerging nearly the whole patio in an inch of rainwater, about two inches in the centre. The slight slope toward the drain had bought me some time and the water had crept to about five inches from my backdoor. This situation didn't bother me. I could open the backdoor, hop onto a patio chair like a little lifeboat and smoke. Also, I didn't need to worry about Francis, my cat, running outside now. If there was a more pressing threat of water seeping into my home I would have put some plastic bags on my feet and done something about it. It would take nothing to shuffle the debris away from the drain if I had wanted to.

The next day it stopped raining and a pool remained. It was still no trouble to me, so I let it be and observed as it receded day by day. The California sun had returned full-force a week later and I enjoyed watching it reflect off the 2x2 foot puddle, maybe a quarter of the bog it once was. A week after that it was a smaller, sadder puddle, but during my morning coffee/cigarette I stared at it still like dying embers, drunk while camping. At this point, this last remaining patch of submerged patio had been so for over two weeks. Procrastinating, I sat with my cold coffee on the patio, which the concrete had almost fully reclaimed, looking hard. I had wasted enough time that the sun was in position to directly illuminate the puddle's location. Everything looks better in the sun and for a moment I thought I might miss the puddle when it was gone, like a snowman or a sidewalk chalk drawing of a snowman.

Green contoured it. I hadn't noticed it, but out of shadow it was obvious. There was a sort of algae or moss or some other vibrant green plant life growing on the concrete, under the puddle. It had taken two weeks of still water (and other particularly favourable conditions) for this green to grow, and the rest of the patio where evaporation had left it dry too soon, remained grey and lifeless. A day later I came back to further receding and more exposed, slightly thicker, green. The next day the same thing, resulting in a gradient effect to a fuller, more opaque colour. It was beautiful, honestly, when the sun was directly on it. I don't want to be overly dramatic about a puddle and some moss, but sitting there I couldn't help but see satellite time-lapse footage of the Okavango flooding and life returning to the desert, narrated by Sir David Attenborough. I think I also felt a little responsible for this creation of life, and maybe even proud of it – I could have drained that puddle at any time. By the time the last bit of the puddle evaporated the green was an even emerald. It had even covered over the drain, completely masking it. Concrete seems like tough beginnings, and that pool was a total fluke to begin with. The whole thing was a miracle of life, really.

A few nights later I dreamed something similar to a Discovery Channel show. It resembled one of those shows that simulates cities in tens, then hundreds, then thousands of years from now, if humans were to go extinct. It shows how buildings start to deteriorate into ruins and nature starts to reclaim everything, wildlife moves back in, everything turns green etc. Well, in my dream, that was happening, but without an apocalyptic event. I didn't write it down, so it's very difficult to remember more than just this detail. There was a plot, but it's gone. It might have been utopic. The point is that I'm pretty sure it was something to do with the puddle and moss.

The next week I received a job offer for a dream position I had applied for months prior. I was soon relocated and left the apartment and the moss. It rained a little in Los Angeles the day after I handed over my keys and I thought about the patio for a moment, but mostly I was focused on my new job and the beginning of a big life change.