

The groundskeeper of Hookhide Cemetery moves clockwise around the graves, tending to the greenery with the precision of a well-trained seamstress. In the winter, the leaves sink heavy with thin sheets of iron-grey frost; in spring and summer, they sprawl out from their branches, steeped with dew. Many years ago, the groundskeeper's mother taught her children the song of the trees: the circular song of growth and regeneration. When the groundskeeper first heard her mother sing it, a sound like the earth breaching for a sprout to find sunlight, she held her mother's hand and knew then how birds must feel against the open palm of the sky. Now, the trees sing to the groundskeeper as she works, telling her stories of the bodies their roots coil around, like pythons spiralling around logs of crumbling driftwood, forgotten by everyone but the cedars themselves.

The groundskeeper cannot remember the last time a visitor wandered under the rusted sign above the entrance of Hookhide Cemetery, itself overgrown with bramble. Still, each day she prunes, cuts, rakes, and sows, feeling the tree-song wash over her as if it blew life into the ground.

The groundskeeper reaches the final grave just before evening. The trees are loudest this time of day, when the sun is sinking and the birds are nested. She closes her eyes and breathes it in, the soft embrace of the leaves and thicket, the moss and soil. She smiles, reaches out to stroke the top of the gravestone.

"Hi, Mum."