

ROCK ORCHID HYPHAE

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Cutlass-shaped

leaf, rigid sandpaper sheet

smoothed from use,

but with gritty aftertouch.

Margin and midrib

surprisingly resistant when

strummed between

thumb, index and middle

finger. From tip

to base, faintly traceable

veins break out

in browning blemishes.

Profound gouges

found on hide-leather edge

where beetle mandibles

chewed abscesses—

charred blotches with rimes

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of ash, like cigarette

burns on old mattresses.

Fitful wind shakes

organs of rock orchid—

whole stiff gorgon quakes,

transmitting shivers

along ridges of stretched

stems, those pseudobulbs,

half-clothed in membrane,

feeling of filthy paper

lantern material left outside

over many winters,

disintegrating and peeling

back. Bulbs, at distance,

reminiscent of plump

asparagus spears—squashy

rotten, half-heartedly eaten,

forgotten in refrigerator

bottoms but, to touch them:

sensation speaks truth,

upends expectation—fleshy

antennae of lithophyte,

as dense as antique wooden
umbrella handles,
fists clenched around them

on some squally amble.
Between stalky assemblage,
shaking slightly on verge,

and lichen-splotched rock
surface—rootlets
sprawl in air, their merest

earthly medium there,
extract what nutriment they
can from odds and ends,

aggregated miscellany
of gum trees—lumpen, dry,
wavy, uncooked noodles,

springy to phalanx pressure,
sachet ripped open.
Another dendrobium holds

vigil overhead, suctioned
firmly to sharp pitch
of granite—miniature grove

of yellow palms leans to old
medusa below, getting

closer yearly by millimetres.

Things live by touch, live by
being touched—
thrive in becoming touched.

False lily, soilless at gulch
brink, miraculously, yes,
but savvily too—how things

must reach out continually,
across yawning hugeness,
wayfaring by yank of feeling

like hyphal filaments,
unseen, spindling through
inner orchid circuitry.
At Paradise Rock Lookout,
fringes of ecosystems
interbreed in ravine creases,

stone anatomies at horizon
are femoral heads
articulated with acetabular

rims, waiting, for millennia,
to stand upright,
stride off into opaque light,

across terrains of glacial
reminiscence—

landscapes echoed within
bodies roused by
feltness. Termite moundup,
conical adobe oven,

concrete-tough from sweat
and spittle epoxy
of billions of wood ants in

holy clearing of burnt
eucalypts, acrid with scent
of carbonised stumps

growing potent with sun,
ripening among young
sheoaks and mossy pendula

which insinuate rainforest.
Whiff of fire incites memory
incised in Apsley gorges,

limbic impressions of being
in touch, of beings
in touch—bunches of herbs

with downy peach fuzz
fragrant horehound, palmar
arches open in welcome.

Other shrubs bring to mind

rosemary but with-
out woody camphor aroma,

hemlock-like evergreen
needles pliable and yielding,
to wit, neither briery nor

wielding ordnance of any
kind. Jurisdiction
of king orchid, outstanding

dendrobium, imperfect
rock lily, not-yet in blossom
but soon-to-be, creamy

flowers about to awaken
synchronously,
scent glands over perianth

poised to perfuse stingless
bee-dazing
polyphony of boulder ledge

attar but, for now, there is
touch—most profound
and immediate of senses,

for Diderot. A skin-
knowing not always in flesh,
but of cuticles of beings

in communion nonetheless,
to stretch filaments
in airy possibility, to breach

chasmic spaces between—
threads of hyphae,
unseen reach to deep green.