

# Letter to Myself from Carson City

Teresa Breeden

A wind slashes through the valley,  
not blowing or souging but massacring everything in its path.  
Only the sagebrush, grey bodies crouched  
low to the ground, leathery leaves held close as secrets  
to the rough skins of bark,  
withstand the gale.

I'd like to be built for my environment. A beast  
not of beauty nor grace nor exceptional  
in any particular art, but made  
to withstand.

But despite my attempts at endurance, I remain  
more *Magnolia soulangeana* than sage;  
deciduous and vulnerable, planted out of place,  
in a demanding desert terrain.

This is what they tell me:  
I'm good at what I do--  
a perfect fit for this job.  
You're making a difference, they say,  
somehow seeing a sage  
with their sand-filled eyes,  
even as the wild gusts  
scour the fragile magnolia surfaces of me.

I bear, with deliberate optimism, and with  
what almost feels like pleasure, the splitting  
of flesh as each new bud, pink-faced and earnest,  
shoves through the skin of my branches,  
remaining diligent; despite the vulnerability, despite  
the certainty  
of another late frost.

I know, all too intimately,  
the composition of barren landscapes,  
but somehow  
the remembered scent of a full flowering— the allure  
of all that smooth bare bark shockingly adorned,  
the elegant, eloquent silence of such blatant loveliness—  
has drowned out the howling gusts of wind.

And that's how easy it is  
lulled by the reverberations of longing and praise  
to fail —for decades—to notice  
that often the thing we are good at  
is not at all good for us.



Photo by Teresa Breeden (Note: Image is not a magnolia)