

Bury Me Under My Sycamore Tree

In loving memory of my Ammama's lack thereof

My Sycamore tree sprouted when I was born. Both of us were seedlings and green about the world. Before it had branches, I had to be careful not to step on its weak sprout. Now its strong. I can lean against its lusty bark. I can rest under the shade of its thick canopy of wet leaves. I can't escape it! It grew, its sprout is now a green woody vice-grip on my ankle. When I want to walk I carry its weight, but when I want to sit I can lean against its lusty bark. The newer fractals still bound to the whims of time and weather yield and sway to the hard breezes. Some break off and flutter helplessly into a roar of detachment. In these moments sunlight breaks through the canopy and in the dim light I see.

"Where are they?"

I see a woman's sharp brown nose carved in the relief of bright yellow light, fruit seed from the tree.

"The Green Boys! The Green Boys have run off!"

Its been days now. The Green Boys have run off. When my tree was a sapling I moved with ease. Its grip around my ankle was like the weak-armed boys clutching their mother's leg, and I have kicked *them* off to the world!

When I have the energy, I climb my tree. The lowest branches grew before I can remember. They are close to the ground and I climb them with ease. They receive little nutrition, no light. Sparse of leaves, I can see the hard grooves of weather torn about the thick limbs. When my tree grew strong enough it housed frail creatures who over the years fell and rotted into its dirt. Its roots drank rot, rain and ground, its branches struggled and stretched far, their leaves sucked in the sunlight. Seed of my tree, protected in my shade, strengthened by my life, weakened from the lack of light. She craned her branches out from under my canopy to receive her share of sun. Our roots are entangled. Only a careful observer could trace their source.

Green Boys covered in the debris! Dirty Green Boys painted their faces in mud. Head over to the well and pull out the bucket. Wash your dirty faces!

Here they come now.

One of them asks grinning, "Where are The Green Boys?"

"The Green Boys ran off! They ran off into the forest of Sycamore trees!"

Thirty-two shining real teeth. One boy stands on his tip-toes and pulls off an inedible fruit from my Sycamore tree. He smiles and devours it. Now the seeds are

lodged in his stomach. He will take my seed to sprout infirmly and die in a new world across the sea. Among their ranks there is a girl! She's combing through my hair. My hair's tangled up on top of my head. My hair is full of leaves and debris fallen from my ancient tree. Birds nests, dry leaves, naked twigs, rotten fruit. They are all untangled, exhausted, and disappear into the ground. The grey strands relieved by the female Green Boy wrap gently around my thighs and knees. What's your name woman?

"You don't remember?"

"The Boys. Where are The Green Boys? Have they been found?"

Who are they? Smoke from burning wood. Debris, old dry wood smoke curling up around my cataract eye. The Green Boys have brought snow from the land across the sea. Bright firelight. Cloudy smoke. Bright gaslight...

"The Green Boys are melting snow!"

"Are they okay?"

When my tree was middle-aged, a village took shovels and pickaxes, pulled my tree from the ground and moved it over two feet. They claimed my tree's roots were wrapping around water pipes, upending sidewalks, sucking water from newer Sycamores. They cut it from its roots. In the twilight of the displacement, an effulgence of green leaves reflected off the brown, dirt sodden Green Infants at that time. With impressions of glowing leaves etched along their bodies, they were fertile soil for brittle trees to take root. Wash them in the river I told their mother, pull the weeds, give them sun. Her anger flared, her hands conducted heat as she shook.

She's cutting beans at harsh angles. The boys are kittling about the kitchen. Smatterings of evaporated foodstuffs are work yet to be done, yellow turmeric textures the grooves between cracking white tile floors, memories of memories of meals dance in the enlivening heat of boiling water. I only whispered, but the leaves of my tree fall and tangle in the mother's hair. Dried up, the leaves crack and disintegrate, irritating her scalp with an unseen rash beneath the thick of her black hair. The electric stove heats a deep orange. What is this woman's name?

Cut the beans

Cut them right

Cut the beans we'll eat tonight!

"Why are the beans cut like this?"

"In your house, you can cut the beans how you like!"

Daughter-woman, don't flame-out! I will sit with my back against these wooden slat pillars while you throw your pots and pans. My tree feels a torrent of wind and rain, and its swaying branches whips your weak bark. Don't flame-out! I cannot command the wind or rain. The Green Boys shake down my dead leaves. They flutter down and irritate your scalp. The pots and pans are on the floor, the beans are in the trash. What will we eat tonight?

Rain flecked across a windowpane many years ago. Outside the glass my tree swayed barraged and nourished by heavy rains. In those days, the sharp-nosed men and women who walked by the pane never broke shape as they strode purposefully a life at a time. Now their faces overlap in a drifting syndicate of green memories. Their walk unsteadily floats like ghosts without direction. Now it seems the rain misses my tree. The bright sun dries and preserves the rude etchings along its decaying bark. Newer trees have sprouted from it and from many other fruit-eating boys from places unknown to me. They grew to challenge it, and I know it is a losing battle for me and my declining Sycamore tree. Perhaps the Green Boys have run into the forest to find it; to eat the rotten fruit and pray the seeds grow into trees of their own. But for now they are vagrants, wandering about the forest like they did their mother's kitchen.

Rain flecks across a windowpane. Can you not see it? The Green Boys are kittling cold, wet fires from the debris falling from my Sycamore tree. They're melting snow and boiling the inedible fruits. They mash the softened fruit into paste and paint their dirty faces. They tremble under the thick canopy of my ancient Sycamore Tree. How long will they survive in this stolen forest?

Its been so long now since I've seen my Sycamore tree. It must be knotted grey and vying pitifully for nourishment against the strangulation of its own spawning. I have heard that The Green Boys have grown lighter on their feet. They still wander about the forest, never taking root, the etchings of the trees still glow a dim green on their dark skin. They know the trees well, so they tell me. From stories of blurry faces I have learned of the inhabitants of my forest. I know them only by their mention, a familiar name, a breeze. The Green Boys have made maps and built roads. They live off the fruit made edible in the boiling of snow and the water dripping off the wet leaves. I see them floating among a crowd of detached faces and hear their laughter among the ghostly voices. I know for now their home lies in my forest. I have grown too old to detest them. I have come to like their stories, so foreign yet familiar, the stories of my own forest, of inhabitant trees. I don't mind your smiles, your dirty faces, or nomadic ways. I only ask you one thing. Whenever you visit the forest of frozen memories, if you ever find it between the decay of the floor and the canopy of wet leaves, please bury me under my Sycamore tree.