

*Atlas Revisited &
Where the Trees and River Meet*
Poetry

Atlas Revisited

The first time I saw the sun,
I cried—the place my mother stood
moments before
was an empty hole
in the canopy through which it could shine.
Mother's wail mixed with the purr of saw blades
as they chewed at her trunk
until she toppled. I hear her still
when the wind blows from the east,
where Old Man Willow bends
over the creek to converse
with the frogs and water birds.
I watched the sun float across my mother's
little slice of the sky
for the next fifty years, straining upwards
to fill the gaping wound she left—
where the sky might cave in
had I not been there to stop it.
I joined the whispered anthem
of my brother-sisters. *We cradle the Earth.*
We carry the sky.

I cared little for my duty,
my branches poked and prodded at the satin
sheet sky, shredding clouds crafted from cotton
and wool with leafy fingers I once used
to push through the forest floor.
At least here, the sky draped
over my shoulders, it is quiet.
Gone is the incessant scraping of beetles
and worms in the ground and the chirps of
birds and squirrels locked in argument,

replaced by tap of rain on leaves and the soft murmur
of the wind telling its secrets. And here, I can pretend
that I am the sun's only companion.
She, as perfect as a golden apple
dangling just beyond my reach—soft and unblemished.
My roots sink deeper into the soil,
tasting bitter loam and sweet rot, branches reaching
a few more inches upwards
to brush her lovely face
if only for an instant.
And I know one taste of that golden apple
would set fire to the entire glen, turning water
to steam and *we who cradle the Earth,*
we who carry the sky
into torches,
then little more than ash.
And it would be my fault
for taking the sky upon my shoulders,
wrapping the Earth in my roots,
and daring to touch my lips to the sun.

Where the Trees and River Meet

The trees are old but still stand strong.
She wants to be like them, she says, stretching chubby fingers to the cloud-streaked sky.
Time marches ever and ever on.

Her father lifts her onto his shoulders, pointing to three shapes
standing on stick-thin legs, tearing leaves from low branches. They startle at her laugh.
The trees are old but still stand strong.

A stream bubbles up beside a trail beaten smooth by boots and sneakers.
Her claps ring through the valley like clarion calls. *Fishy! Fishy!*
Time marches ever and ever on.

The bridge they cross gleams red. He sets her on the railing
to watch golden leaves race downstream.
The trees are old but still stand strong.

Oak and Maple still recognize her laugh, though she's grown taller
than their saplings. The wind teases strands of her yellow hair away from her face.
Time marches ever and ever on.

Orange leaves dance in circles around her ankles, and she rests her chin on her palms,
elbows on a red railing long rusted brown. *Is this good?* The camera clicks.
The trees are old but still stand strong.
Time marches ever and ever on.