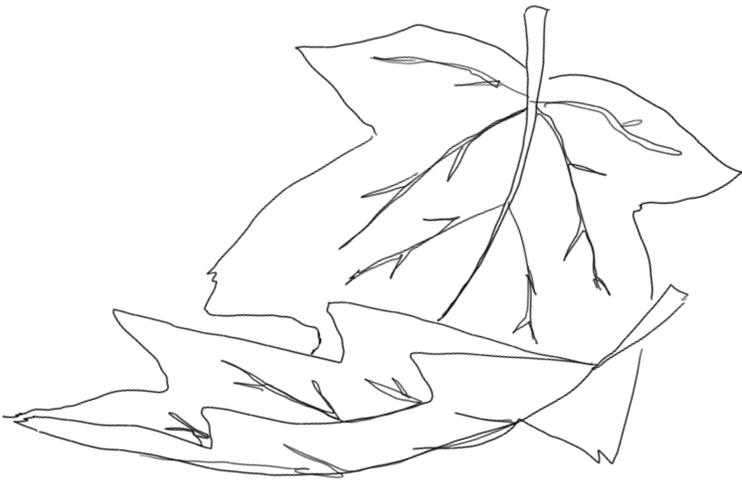


I.

who i was



My Childhood Began in the Trees

She ducks underneath the barbed wire fence, careful not to touch it because she knew the horse fences were live in the evening. She would sometimes hold a stick to it just to feel the little ants of electricity crawl up and down her arm. But, for now, she heads off into the fields, over the sticks and stubs of old, cut hay. In the expiring afternoon, the swaying trees of a late autumn day lured her away from the warmth of the blazing wood stove and into the chilling afternoon. She walks down the hill with her bare feet, past the rusted, red bailers nested in patches of overgrown weeds. The sky was deepening from lavender to navy as shadows cascaded down into the tree line.

A flock of black wings drifted over the treetops and blocked out the sky for a moment. Her wide, glassy eyes darted back and forth, taking in bits at a time, piecing together the scenery before her. One blackbird perched lonelilly in the branches of a walnut tree, looking down on the small girl, her skin the color of nutmeg pinewood. As the frosted breeze whipped, the creaking of bending trees grinded and snapped like frail bones. The rush of the pulsating wind flooded her ears and she closed her eyes tight, not wanting to see the dark shadows dancing in the branches around her. Goose bumps rose on the girl's skin and she wrapped her thin arms tightly around herself.

Her childhood began in the trees. The sudden awakening, arising from the dark swaddle of infantile amnesia, dropped her into the world, a second birth in an autumn wood. A lone black bird cawed madly from above, flashing his red-painted flags. I wondered where the winds came from. An unsettling, exciting rush filled my chest like a balloon, shoving at my ribs and crowding my lungs.

The forest floor stretched its rolling mounds of giving earth

beneath the brush, carpeted with sunset stained leaves. Chipmunks spiraled up the trunk of a tree, dexterous and swift. Alighted with the buzz of the vibrant blush of fall, the canopies of fiery leaves shuttered the evening sun. I looked through the branches the blackened evening sky airbrushed with clouds the color of Koi fish. Yippy strained hollers of a single coyote drifted over the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains and sank into the valley where it rattled my bones; sent a shiver up my spin. Fear gripped the back of my neck and held me very still.

Beneath the steadfast trees that seeded, grew and fell, I marveled at the ephemeral light in my heart, the elevated moment of my little consciousness. Standing on the rich and selfless soils that tended to my family for generations, I felt comforted in my loneliness there among the woods that were my guardians. The fear fired all my nerves at once and my jaw quivered in the cold, but I set myself firmly in protest.

by Kianna Dieudonne

