

SITTING HERE UNDER THIS BIG OAK TREE, I am enjoying the oncoming spring. I have always been able to sense the life and change in the air when the sun's rays begin to re-warm the frozen countryside on which I live. The area I am in right now is a large open area, one where the tree I am leaning against is the only tree within a circular area of probably one hundred yards; beyond this there are multitudes of trees and shrubs, flowers and small animals. There are also many small but powerful streams and cricks, in which, runs clear, cold water. The grasses in this approachable area are begging to turn green, but there are still patches of dead and brown scattered here and there.

I lean up against this tree, letting the sun warm my pasty winter skin that will, by the end of this afternoon, give it a tinge of pink.

I close my eyes and recall my days as a child.

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I still lived on this land, just as my family had for the past four or five generations. I once saw a picture of the very tree I am leaning against being planted by my great grandfather, over one hundred years ago. My

memories now run through my mind of the days I've spent exploring the many acres on this property.

I remember always having a respect and appreciation for the flowers that have grown around our home. We had a white rose garden on the side of our home; one which my mother gave me the responsibility to water every day during the heat waves of the summer. Once after finishing my daily duty, I dipped my nose into the pool of scent; it intoxicated me with pride to know that these delicate petals and scents were alive because I took care of them. My nose swam in the moist blooms and encouraged me to discover more of the aromas of the world.

I camped in the woods here when I was young, and still even today. I used to enjoy the small streams that ran like veins through the meadow and throughout the woods. I remember when I was about six, making my way to a stream that ran through the thickest part of the forest. Removing my little sandals, I dipped my tiny toes into the chilly water and wiggled them deeply into the sand and mud that lined the bed of the flowing current. Once they were numb and red I removed my

toes up into the surge of liquid and let the grit filter out from between them. I pulled them out and stumbled over to a near by patch of tall grasses and miniature white flowers, probably considered to be weeds, and I wiped my feet in the warm afternoon overgrowth.

I looked around as the water evaporated off my toes and ankles and noticed that it was mostly very tall pines in this area; they filled the air with a scent of sweet, sticky sap and their needles padded the surrounding area. I walked over to the tallest tree and observed it's structure; it's crusty bark was peeling and being clotted with a thick sap. Small bugs that had been attracted by the tempting smell and ventured into the sweet treat now faced a bittersweet end. I saw a single ant lodged in the trap; he struggled to lift his legs and he moved his head to and fro clenching and unclenching his pincers in attempt to free himself. I picked up a thin twig and pried him up from the sap, two of his legs stayed attached. I released him just the same thinking that it was better to live in pain and as a cripple then to not live at all. Hunching over from placing the ant and the twig down, I decided to rest awhile against the towering pine,

much as I am doing now. I looked up to the multitudes of needle swaying in a light breeze; they swayed and delicately fell to the ground like a bird's feathers might fall out during a flight in the clear blue skies of day. There are also pinecones hanging gracefully from the branches. They reminded me of the decorative ones I made in my class at school and hung on my Christmas tree during the holiday. However, these cones seemed to be much heavier, their umbos were fat and bloated. I learned later on that the pine cones I observed at the bottom of the pine were actually female cones that had become impregnated by the falling pollen of their thin male counterparts dangling from the tree top. A few of these weighty females had dropped to the ground and seemed to be more comfortable resting in the bed of needles before they finally released their fertilized seeds to create a new generation of pines.

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Reconvening my mind back to the present, I open my eyes and take in the beautiful day. The sky has many puffy white stratus and cumulus clouds floating in the blue sky. I see cumulonimbus clouds in the dis-

tance, towering like skyscrapers and with many shadowed crevices and darkening valleys in them, intimating to the summer shower we are going to receive. I'll continue to sit here, supine, I am anticipating the storm; my white rose garden is in need of more of a drink than my watering pail can deliver. I watch the sky. I enjoy the new shadows that are being thrown across the landscape.

The leaves that are in the oak I am resting against have begun to shudder from the touch of the imposing gusts, yearning for a downpour. The clouds have now changed the palette of the sky from a misty gray to pastel shades of pink and dingy yellow, the storm is here.

Quiet rumbles of thunder break in the distance and a crack of white lightning tares through the stacked clouds. Vibrations ran through the skin of the tree and emanated on to my skin, giving me goose bumps. Tiny drops of water speckle my skin. I step away from the tree and move into the open meadow where I sit Indian style. I look around me and take in all of the plants absorbing the rain that is beginning to fall harder. The parched and cracked

soil begins to heal itself, as if mending back together with liquid band-aids. It was pouring now, and I laid back to watch the storm clouds roll by before they were gone. Beads of water wash over my skin, lifting the sweat and dirt from today's outdoor excursions. I close my eyes and open my arms like I once had when I was a child making snow angels, except now, I opened them to embrace this powerful storm. Smelling the damp air, I detect a musky scent of roses, one that I had never encountered before, in the grasses around me. I breathe in this new perfume of flowers and reopen my eyes to find this pure new odor.

Looking around, I notice in between two delicate and slender tree trunks that branched outwards, a small and exquisite rose bush. I crawl on my hands and knees over to it. Laying my eyes on the single bloom that grew upon it, I gasped inwardly. It's like no rose I have ever seen; it is a white rose and along all the edges and especially penetrating into the tightly layered petals in the middle, it was stained with a scarlet pigment. Like blood, the flush of red seeped through the white of the petals giving it a new life.

Awestruck, I gingerly run the tip of my forefinger around the outside petals, expecting the sanguine color of them to dye my fingers. There are water droplets schematically placed on all the petals, as I observe, a single droplet rolled slowly into the pistil.

The rain stopped.

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To this day I remember the afternoon I discovered that blushing rose. Now, well into my seventies, I still search to find such a flower on this impregnable land. The beauty of that flower in my mind, still astonishes me.

Now I just observe the trees and their leaves. I am by the same tree that grows in the middle of the meadow. I run my fingers over the bark, my hand is almost camouflage with it; the wrinkles and sun tanned crevices run on the both of us. I look up to observe this spring's new leaves; their small and precise veins giving them life. Hundreds of paths spanning the breadth of the leaf remind me of my playful days in the woods as a small child and my fascination with the running streams.

To me, these leaves are something more though; they are the life of the tree. From the leaf to its stem, from the stem to a twig, twig to branch, branch to limb, limb to trunk, trunk to sky to roots, this is life.

Leaves are always there for the tree, except in winter when they leave the body to hibernate in a cold, dead sleep. In fall however, as if to say 'forgive me for leaving you', they change to brilliant shades of orange, reds and yellows. A visual gift that the world can remember as the harsh gales and heavy snow falls during the winter.

Leaving the twisting and winding roots and branches to cryogenically freeze, tiny seeds of buds are growing within the branches to sprout again. Once they feel the sensual touch of the sun's rays through the bark, tiny stems push out of the thawing cork.

Time is pressing on, it is spring again and soon after the summer showers come, it will be autumn again and then winter, but this passage of change will forever come again, with the blooms and sprouts of spring.

Life begins again.