

## My Trees

I used to be a commuter student. Driving to and from school every day. And every day I would take Huron River Drive to get into the city. A lovely commute along Barton Pond and the Huron River. Weaving in and around the beautiful natural landscape I get to call my home. I loved driving into the city and looking at the trees. In the early months of Fall, I drove through a verdant landscape. Lush crept all around me, trying to grab me as if to say, “Stay longer!”. And I wanted to. I craved to be able to sit by the river or under the trees instead of continuing into the city. But as Fall waned and the air got crisper, the trees stopped calling to me, and the drive became less enchanting.

October came and went, and the air felt colder, worse. The trees turned from beautiful green into sultry auburn. Still beautiful, but different. November stormed in, and I saw the trees get smaller and smaller each day, dropping leaves every day. I tried to hold on. Hold on to what it was in early September when my drives were magical and filled me with joy.

Now, the trees barely holding on to their last leaves, December appeared, and the crushing weight of Winter was upon me. Every day I drove, and every day I watched my trees as they grew more and more bare. Revealing their trunks and their grey bark.

Do you have to take all the leaves?

Could you just leave a couple for me?

I wish to see them on their trees, in their place.

I don't want to see what's underneath.

The semester ended, and I stopped driving to school every day. I kept remembering back to September and the excitement of driving through the trees and along the river.

Now, I didn't want to see them.

To confront what I knew existed, what I knew I couldn't hide from.

Not forever.

I understand this feeling in other parts of my life in ways that I wish I did not.

I watch my parents age.

And it's horrible. I see what time has done and how one day, time will *take* them. I worry for them as I see their leaves fall and their grey bark emerge. I think about my friends who have had their Trees die, and I dread the feeling I know I will have when my Winter comes. I wish for it to be Summer always. I don't want to see what Fall does, and I don't want to face the threat, the promise, of Winter.

I wonder if my Trees fear Winter.

The interesting thing about Winter is that it comes once a year for 3 months. That's it. It is as long as any other season and routinely appears and disappears as the Sun's rotation completes. I know this, we all know this. But somehow, Winter feels longer than anything else. The three months of Winter feel longer than the freshness of Spring, the warmth of Summer, and the chill of Fall. Winter feels prolonged and daunting. I'm scared for Winter.

I know what it will do, and I am scared to see my nightmare morph into my reality.

I wish that I did not fear the cold or the dark or the knowledge that one day my Trees will die and  
I will be there alone, standing in a pile of leaves.

The thought haunts me.

My grip on my Trees is so tight.

They're mine.

Please, don't take them.

I stand there, pleading with the hooded figure.

Dropping to my knees, I beg.

Wondering if a bargain can be struck to save my Trees and all their leaves.

Please, please not them.

I'm on the ground now, debilitated.

Please.

I need them, you don't understand, I *need* them.

I am nothing without my Trees, please.

I will do anything.

And that's true. I would do anything to keep the cold and the dark from touching my Trees if I could. If I could shield them from the cold and the wind, I would. Much like if they were small saplings, I would stand over them with an umbrella and a hair dryer. Keeping them warm and dry. Never letting the end months find them. Under my protection, I would keep them safe and untouched from the looming specter of a cycle finished. I wish I could do that for them.

My mom dyes her hair a beautiful reddish-brown, keeping the grey from letting loose, from showing the early signs of age. I never understood why she dyed her hair. The grey and silver peaking through were beautiful to me. Beautiful, until I remembered what they meant. How they showed that Winter was coming. I wonder if the trees on the riverbank would cover their grey bark if they could.

My dad's Winter seems to be coming later, but I hate putting a timeline on my Trees. His hair turning from deep black to peppered to white over the years. I have noted the change in his demeanor, slower than before, but still kind and still strong and still standing. He doesn't like it when I talk about his Winter, his death. Neither do I.

My dad showed me Redwoods in California when I was little. A hallmark of our home, a native beauty we were blessed with. He loves those trees, and so do I. A love I inherited from him. I never thought about Winter for Redwoods when we lived in California. It happens, of course, but I never thought about it. About what it would look like. How it would make me feel.

Probably because Redwoods are evergreens. Their bark doesn't become grey, their leaves don't fall.

I wish my parents were Redwood Trees.

Michigan is different. The Michigan trees feel Winter and you see it when you look at them.

The birches and the beeches and the basswood. I like these trees in summer but I hate seeing them in Winter. To face what I know is true, what I know will come.

These trees reflect what will happen to my parents. One day, the last of their leaves will fall, their grey bark will emerge, and Winter will take them. I like to think of my parents as Redwoods but I know they're not. I know that they aren't Evergreens, but they are each strong and beautiful

trees in their own way. The humor of it is that I wish to protect them from Winter as though they are baby saplings, vulnerable and helpless to the seasons. They are vulnerable to the seasons, but they aren't helpless.

But sometimes I feel like they are. I want to protect them, stop their Winter from coming.

Even with an umbrella and a hair dryer, I could never stop Winter from finding them.

I wish I could.

That is my biggest fear. Winter finding them. Finding them and taking their leaves.

I wish your harvest would stop.

These leaves, you don't need them.

You take so many already.

You won't notice these leaves, but I will.

I will notice when my Trees are bare and grey.

Please.

Please, they are *my* Trees.

Please, I need more time to sit under my Trees and admire their beauty.

Please, don't take my Trees.

I kneel at the altar of my Trees, assuming a position of prayer and devotion. Pleading with the looming image of Death for the life of my Trees. Whispering a hymn to my Trees as though it is a spell of protection. I cry my love at the base of my Trees, enshrining them in the everlasting protection of my holy offering. Keep them safe, I say. Shaking and sobbing I lay myself at the roots of my Trees, trying to soak in an extra minute. Any extra moment I can spend under their canopies, I need it.

I need to spend those extra moments with them. Because my parents' hair will get more grey, they will become slower, and I will watch it happen at every stage.

It is so painful, I wish to look away.

Now I don't live at home, I live in the city. I spend time away from them more often. There are longer periods of time I go without them, returning home to see more grey, to see them slower. Interactions like this pain me; it's becoming harder and harder to stomach their change.

I don't want to look anymore.

I want to believe that they are Redwoods, capable of a Winter where they don't lose their leaves and their bark doesn't become grey. My delusional aspirations for their future prove to be a momentary salve for my pain.

A hope I know will never come true, a future that will never come to pass.

Looking away makes it possible for me to deny what will come, but it doesn't change that fact.

I can't choose the apathy of neglecting to watch their seasons pass.

Even that paralyzes me with fear.

I dread seeing what happened to my Trees when I looked away.

Dread of seeing more grey, dread of waiting for them longer to catch up.

The cycle continues, I know it does. I know what will happen. But I keep praying and laying there, under their branches and in their shade. Hoping that in some way, I can pause or elongate or eliminate the cycle that will strip my Trees and expose their bark. If I could merge my cycle with theirs, if my tears could prove a draught for their roots to soak up and take in my life to extend their own; I'd cry a river to sustain them for however long I could.

However long my body could secrete that elixir to strengthen them, I would cry.

Until I, too, am gone.

Broken down and weak, I stay there.

There is no place I'd rather be than under my Trees.

Suffocating and rigid, my body rests on their roots.

I can't get up, I can't leave them.

I stay, in a pile of my promises and pleas.

If I die, I hope it's under my Trees.

The thing about my Trees is that I know Winter is not the end for them, not really. But it feels that way for me. Winter strips other kinds of Trees much quicker than Mine; the cycles of other Trees go much faster. I am lucky my Trees are standing and have their leaves but I feel the wind growing and the temperature dropping.

Each day it gets colder and each day I look for fallen leaves.

I dread my car ride into the city now, away from my parents. As I leave their house and drive down Huron River, I try to avert my eyes from the barren trees on the banks.

I dread seeing those trees without their leaves.

Mimicking the future that awaits Mine.

When Winter comes and their leaves fall to the Earth, I will be there for the final goodbye.

The last time they see the Sun's rotation complete.

The last time they lose a leaf.

The last time I get to lay under their branches.

Their memory will be seared into the landscape and Spring will care for the remnants of their being with the love I have imbued in their soil.

I will talk with Spring about this.

I will make sure She looks after them in the next cycle, as I have done in the first.

My Trees will stay together in the depths of the Earth as Spring prepares Her renew.

And when Summer comes again, I won't be there with them this time, under their shade, but I will be thinking about them and returning to their altar to pray.



## Reflection

I am happiest with the language I used and the story I told. I was really glad I got to write about my parents and relate them to nature, it felt deep and very true to the way I feel about them. I also really like a lot of my sentences and the specific words I chose to convey depth and feeling throughout the essay. It was really hard for me to write about this topic because it is deeply sad for me, so I had to take a lot of breaks and remember that I was just writing an essay. It was also hard for me to add things to it that didn't come naturally to me because it felt like I was betraying my story by doing so. I have revised this essay much more than I thought I was going to. I've added imagery and non-metaphorical pieces to compliment my prose and poetry. I got rid of a lot of initial sentences that do not actually help tell the story, which amplifies the rest of it. It was kinda hard to write, but I'm glad I did.