

Ada Limón

Instructions on Not Giving Up

More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor's almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate sky of Spring rains, it's the greening of the trees that really gets to me. When all the shock of white and taffy, the world's baubles and trinkets, leave the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath, the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin growing over whatever winter did to us, a return to the strange idea of continuous living despite the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then, I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I'll take it all.

Over dit gedicht:

MARCH 18, 2024 *Written by Myrna Keliher*

This poem gets me every time, especially this time of year, especially this line: "Patient, plodding, a green skin / growing over whatever winter did to us," — I feel a welling up of all the grief I carry, and as I automatically try to choke it back the poem opens me up further with that "strange idea of continuous living." I know it well. The early days after my brother died; the two times I've said goodbye to my mom when she was institutionalized; my five year old self deeply confused at my dad's sudden and total absence; my fifteen year old self shocked to find my stepdad gone in similar suddenness.

These things don't leave us. They become part of us. And the trees are indeed the best possible role model I can think of for how to integrate loss. How to live despite, and even because of what's gone. I remember when my older brother died, two different people gave me tree metaphors in the first week — both said, it's like a major limb being cut off. It never grows back, never looks the same. The missing is never not there. Picture how a tree heals that wound: year after year, a lip of new growth builds around it, smoothing the transition between the missing part and the rest, enfolding the sharp edges slowly.

Now think of your immediate family as a tree: your two other brothers, your sister, your mom. Each of you a limb, growing away from each other but also together, balancing each other always. No matter how much you may try to throw things off and get out and away, you're never not in relationship with your family, no matter how strained. With one limb gone, the whole tree's in shock, listing, completely off-kilter. Again, you'll grow toward the light. You'll stretch to fill some of the new space but it'll never be filled fully. You'll all find ways to rebalance eventually, still missing, still growing.

Ada's poem reminds me of all this and gives me permission to cry again. To cry about how damn hard the winters of our lives are. To grieve the new hard things even though they may be less hard than what you've already lived through. To not shrug off feeling scared, or hurt, or lonely. To be kind to the messiest parts of myself, and extend that kindness to others. There's a strength there, of course. I know I'm my strongest, best self when I'm being kind.

I made this broadside in the winter of 2019. I don't remember when I first read the poem or how Ada's book *The Carrying* landed in my hands but I do remember being gut wrenched and needing to print it. I got permission from Milkweed and Ada, and quickly settled on Caslon for the body type because it is sturdy and stalwart and not flashy, except for that lovely swash cap A that I couldn't resist. The illustrative element, the two lines that meet on the left side cupping a bit of green, is built from two beat up pieces of brass rule, which were in such bad shape I felt okay about completely ruining them by adding more bends with pliers. Each bit of color on the edition of over 300 is filled in by hand with a colored pencil called "apple green."

The image was inspired by the plant called *ćəḥwədac* also called osoberry or Indian plum, native to the Pacific Northwest, that is always the first to leaf out. Half of my walk to and from the Kingston shop was on a little trail skirting a patch of woods and the community center that filled with green quickly in late winter thanks to all the *ćəḥwədac*, whose early buds stir the memory of spring and the promise of warmth coming. It's so easy to forget what sun feels like on your skin in such a short period of time, isn't it? I get frustrated at this forgetting, but I also find comfort in the fact that my body remains relegated to the present no matter where my mind is at. I picked a few twigs to bring inside and help me remember.

Those twigs, with their tiny buds now all at different states of bursting, were sitting on my work table with a bunch of proofs of the broadside strewn about one day when my friend Carolina stopped in. I was debating adding color and worrying over the challenges of registration (after having done the work of adding the accent to Ada's last name with a whole separate press run — it's an 8pt Univers bold comma, I believe). Carolina asked where my colored pencils were. I pulled them out and she started playing around with them, adding color here and there just to see, easy peasy, as we chatted about all kinds of life things. Suddenly that certain green landed in the obvious spot and we both looked and said, that's it! When I balked at what it'd take to print it and whether I could get the color right (ink mixing is challenging for me) she said why not just color them by hand? And when I balked at the time that would take, she offered to help. And she did — she colored in more than half.

This broadside has found many homes across the country and overseas and I am so grateful for Ada's poem, and the life it is living, helping people feel. Remember. Continue. There's a lot to take, in this world. Many times I've felt I can't take more. But then I think of the trees, and I remember to root myself. To feel the ground. To reach up. And to breathe.

Ada Limón, vertaald door

Jeske van der Velden uit De lente bloeit van Angela Harding en Gaiete Jansen

Niet opgeven, een handleiding

Niet eens zozeer de karmozijnen klaroenen die uit
de sierappelboom barsten, niet het bijna obscene
spektakel bij de burens als de kersentakken
hun suikerspinkleurige bloesem in de loodgrijze lucht
Vol lenteregen, steken maar het groen worden van de bomen
is wat me opbreekt. Als na de bom van wit
En snoeproze, de tierelantijnen van de wereld, het trottoir
bezaaid ligt met de nasleep van confetti,
komen de bladeren. Geduldig, gestaag, groeit een groene huid
over wat de winter ons ook heeft aangedaan, een terugkeer
naar het onwennige idee van doorgaand leven ondanks
de zoi die wij zijn, de pijn, de leegte. Goed dan,
laat maar komen, zegt de boom bijna, als een gloednieuw blad
open krult van vuist tot opgehouden hand, laat het maar komen,
allemaal.

ćăŕwədac (uitgesproken als tseh-whuh-duhts) is de Lushootseed-naam voor de osoberry of Indian plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*), een inheemse struik in het noordwesten van de Stille Oceaan. Het is een van de eerste planten die in de late winter uitloopt, vaak gezien als een symbool voor de naderende lente en warmte.