

I Wish This Tree Were My Friend Jody

I look out the window at the red oak
by the curb, silhouetted in the sunlight
like a tall dancer on the sidewalk. Small fans
of spring leaves wave from each branch like a hankie.

I wish that tree were my friend Jody
carrying some treasure down the sidewalk
to show me – a silver charm, red pebble,
old photo of us, young. I'd run out the door
as she lifts her arms and wriggles
her hips and calls *yatehay!* to greet me.

One hot summer we drove my blue Pinto
to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico,
to listen to a washed-up country
crooner rasp his top hits through tinny speakers.
The radiator blew driving back. We sang
rolling me down the highway behind a tow truck
those 90 miles to home.
The next night we crossed over
to Juarez to shoot Davy Crocketts till dawn.

That oak is an odd standout – she keeps her leaves all year.
Autumn, she's a mad dance of neon tangerine apricot salmon.
First winter snap, her notched leaves fade
to russet and hang there like loss until spring.

Jody gave me her heart-
leafed philodendron when she moved to NYC.
Its green vines climbed the walls
of every home I've had these 30 years since.
Her letters came a few times a year, handwriting
curvy, each word lifting off the page with a kick.
Divorce, drinking, recovery,
third marriage. I wanted to see her.

It's April again. Lime green leafbuds

push the ruddy weathered leaves to the street.

I tell Jody I've searched for her online
as we stroll past the oak to the park.
When I found her obituary, I was left wanting
to know how she died. I ask her
to tell me, but she just says
she loves the yellow balsamroot
blooming everywhere we walk.

Frida Kahlo Paints the Antarctic Forest

"A rainforest that flourished in Antarctica 90 million years ago is locked under the ice"
~ Discover Magazine, 1 April 2020

My head spins since I learned of the frozen rain forest.
I want to paint that *selva, pero* what pigments
to make trees locked in ice nearly forever?
The color of a tree's bark tells the story of its spine.
I'll work with the browns I used in *Wounded Deer*,
pero I'll add a wash of blue for ice that seeped
into each grain, the way steam from a *caldo* can be tasted
on my lover's face after we've dined. It gets inside.
I am hungry for these trees. I can see
ochre and russet and sienna bleeding
in the bark held motionless like a woman
suspended in bed with a body cast, her spine
straightened like a bent pole. My friend
fears invisible germs killing people *por todo el mundo*,
like infinitesimal arrows pierce
and kill a deer. I fear what we can see – a streetlamp
stabs a city bus and the woman inside who a moment
before was gazing at small patches of sky.
Our futures impaled before
we can reach them, pasts
frozen before we can see them.
Mainly, I wonder what happened
to the leaves, if they were able to hold on
to their greens, if emeralds and parakeets
diminished to crocodiles and olives. *Ay*, thinking *sobre colores*
makes my hands itch for my brushes and paints.
My perspective will be standing above the treetops
looking down through clear frozen water, a few
ripples of mud. *Posiblemente* I will paint
parrots in the branches. Our sorrows
are the same colors as our pains.
I was once a tree frozen in ice.