

The Infinite Family Tree

Once you can see the years of your life
Sprawling across the backs of your hands like tree roots,
I figure you probably have a few good stories to tell.

I can picture her, in the rocking chair,
With skin that crinkled at the corners of her mouth,
Waving her tree-root hands in the air to the beat of her stories.

Some stories that really got her hands waving
Were her stories of when she was a little girl;
Were stories about a man named Hitler.

With a single wave of her tree-root hand,
We were no longer sitting with her in a rocking chair,
But sitting with her in a dark and airless space somewhere between walls.

We listened through the details of not knowing when night was,
Of cringing at every sound while going deaf from the quiet, from the stillness,
Through the fear of a little girl who did not know what she was scared of.

Senior Question 2

Back then, before I had ever heard his name in a classroom,
Before I could comprehend the magnitude of her stories from between the walls,
She described Hitler to me as a hateful man who knew the power of words.

Now, I comprehend her stories and his name has come up in many a classroom.
Now, I look at her tree root hands, and I wonder what she sees in them,
I wonder if uses those roots to tether herself.

I wonder if those roots sprawling across the back of her hand
Are what remind her that she is in the present,
That her past is stories of memory inscribed in the blood flowing through her tree roots.

I see her hands, and I think of the roots of the tree from her backyard as a child;
I imagine that though the house may no longer be there, the tree was too strong to fall,
And I picture those roots sprawling under the grass like the veins under her skin.

Whenever I imagine the dirt her old house sat upon, I think about what it feels like
To know that our people's blood was spilled into their own backyards,
Their memories were lost into the very soil that they were meant to live upon.

When I am old with skin that crinkles around the corners of my mouth when I talk,
I will tell my grandchildren about the people who were lost in their own backyards,
About the woman in the rocking chair, her stories, and the memories in her hands.

I will look at my own tree roots waving in the air as I speak, and imagine that
When I die they will plant themselves in the soil of my home and the blood of my people
And grow into a forest of stories.

I will have a rocking chair of my own,
And even before my grandchildren hear his name in any classroom,
To them, Hitler will be a hateful man who knew the power of words.

I will say to them, *words do not pick sides,*
They are malleable and love to be bent, worked with, written and rewritten;
Words do not care if they are used or misused, they just love the attention.

I will tell them, *children,*
Do not be like words:
Use them.