

“Do you hear that?” My mother asked me many years ago. I was five years old and about to dive into a pile of crisp autumn leaves almost three times my size. I stopped and turned my ear to the wind.

A second passed. “I don’t hear anything,” I said, looking up at my mother.

Her eyes were closed, a small smile blooming across her florid cheeks. She swayed with the breeze. “Listen carefully,” she said.

I squeezed my own eyes shut, my brow crinkled, and listened: the light swell of September breeze somersaulting through the silver maples and weeping willows, the faraway birdsong seesawing from branch to branch, the quiet drone of late-summer bees collecting the last of the pollen. I concentrated, letting it sink away until –

“There it is!”

I squealed and looked at my mother. She was singing. The trees bent and swayed around us, caught in her song. The sunlight-song; the essence-and-flesh song. A sound like the earth opening for a root to find water.

Now I think of that day and remember how my mother sang the song of the trees to me, the song of people from times long ago, buried deep underground, where the roots coil around their bodies like pythons slowly spiralling around logs of crumbling driftwood, forgotten by everyone but the trees themselves. I remember the softness of my mother’s voice as we sat amongst the mottled gravestones, tracing circles against my forehead. As if unwinding the hours, just for them.