

*For Wirksworth Writers Newsletter:*

## **My Mother's Arm**

I find myself at the outskirts of my second home again. My favourite tree is easy to identify. She has a significant brick red branch that catches my sight from afar. A weight lifts off my chest from the very moment I walk into the body of the forest.

“Dematrithia! I’m coming..,” I whisper, increasing the pace of my walk, fearing that she might uproot herself and flee before I arrive.

I see her branch reach further outwards, as if in response to my voice; her painted arm sears towards me through the mist and I see it with profound clarity. Today, I feel weak. I have been wrongly accused but can find no way to prove my innocence. My head is lost in the clouds trying to find an explanation for the root of the problem; it is futile to search the skies for what can only be found beneath.

Furious faces dance around me in the darkness like tall and madly colourful hobby horses rocking left to right at a folk festival. My belittled self is lost in questioning and all the dazzling colours meld into a discomforting grey. Am I losing my sight? I can almost imagine the lens of my spectacles melting over my pupils to form insoluble cataracts.

Accusations. Ungrounded accusations. Yet, they find their base in me. I am young but the thoughts that repeat within my lair are old. They are old, accursed sounds that have found comfort in my lonely mind. My territorial self-doubt guards them like a cold and slithering black mamba.

The beckoning branch starts wailing like a siren now, snapping me out of my self-induced spell. Its cry rings through my ears and I force my eyes to meet the glowing branch before me which reminds me of a flaming red horseshoe glowing in a forge. It looks dangerous, lighting up warning signals in all the crevices of my mind. But like how a part of the horse’s hoof has no nerve endings, I am numb to the past.

When I arrive at the trunk of the tree, I cautiously reach for the branch that led me here. It is a study-looking branch that dips low and allows for a shorter person like me to easily climb onto it. Belly resting on the branch, I let my arms and feet hang down, the skin on my fingers and toes brushing against the damp soil. My cheek kisses the surface of the smooth branch.

“Dematrithia, my tree goddess..”I whisper her name again, letting it gently roll off my tongue into the woods.

*Mother of my heart. Mother of my flesh.*

As my breathing gets slower and heavier, I drift off into a memory that always finds me when I am in this sacred space. The branch I support myself on becomes softer and more supple. I feel my mother’s strong arm pull me close into her chest. My cheek rests on her moist red chiffon blouse. I fear it should be raining soon. Tears fall onto the top of my head and every time I feel a few wet drops seep through my hair onto my scalp, I shudder. I am not prepared for the change in weather.