



Dear Amy,

I don't think it is crazy to crave solitude and listen to the rain when it comes. When I was a little girl on Bull Mountain, I used to dance naked in the rain. I think, if more people listened to the rain, to rocks, to trees, we might come further as a species.

I say to you that the trees yoiked in June. I stepped out onto the balcony one dusk and the woods offered up a chant, now rising, now falling. I strained to see the singer, but there was none, only dense branches, and an unbroken green, unbroken as the song. I tell you, the trees yoiked – hazel, ash, spruce, maple, birch – branches and voice intertwined in one exuberant song: “We are here. We are here. We are here.”

*I sing roe deer, walking through woods on a winter's evening.*

The woods, Fusal Woods, will be chopped down. Five and a half acres of old lowland mixed forest will

*I sing great spotted woodpecker, drummer to the dance of spring.*

make way for new apartments and businesses in “the green lungs” of Asker. What green lungs? The lungs will be

*I sing wood anemone, stars strewn across the woodland floor.*

ripped out of the earth, the vocal cords silenced. I don't own land here. I am only a tenant; I borrow this space I

*I sing nuthatch and blackbird and wood pigeon, building nests of dreams.*

live on, and so have remained silent. But are we not all tenants, borrowing a slice of space, a sliver of time, before

*I sing red squirrel, burying hazelnuts in autumn.*

we ultimately return to earth?

*I sing shaggy mane, ghosts gathered in the gloaming.*

I tell you, the trees yoiked. And so now, I sing for the trees. I sing for all species I have seen here, that

*I sing tree bumblebee, fat queens drowsy on pollen.*

make these woods and its edges their home. Most are not found on the official ecological survey,

*I sing mallard pair splashing down each spring, I sing ducklings on the stream.*

commissioned, executed, on a timescale of expediency. I sing of timescales that span seasons, years, lifetimes

*I sing white-throated dipper, passing through, and his riverine song.*

for some species.

*I sing wood horsetail and lady fern and wood avens and –*

I fill my lungs and I sing and I sing and I sing.

*I sing sparrowhawk clenching at fieldfare, fieldfare strafing magpie, magpie plundering eggs.*

Asker takes its name from trees, from ash. We are a community of trees. I think of Yggdrasil, the ash

*I sing treecreeper, wizened old man, tapping up trunks.*

tree at the beginning of the world. One tree at the beginning – how many will there be at the end?

What is one small patch of woods, some will ask, more or less? After all, Asker is surrounded by forest. What does it matter if a few threatened fungi species disappear from this area? You, a fellow biologist, know the importance of preserving edgelands, the stepping stones and corridors for wildlife, the pockets of biodiversity. We live in a fragmented world, where habitat destruction is commonplace and where humans have produced more mass than all the living biomass on Earth combined. Concrete apartments and paved roads now outweigh blue whales and redwood forests.

We hack at the branches and roots, the network of communication, the intricate web of life. And in doing so, we leave both nature and ourselves impoverished. Fusal Woods is a refuge for nature, but also for people. Preschoolers explore its world. Dog walkers stroll the path. We know that green pockets like this are essential to our health and wellbeing, that forests take up about 30% of the world's carbon emissions from fossil fuels on a yearly basis. And the older a forest grows, the more it can store if we let it, and yet and yet and yet ...

I tell you, Amy, the trees yoiked. You will believe me, I know, and understand this grief I bear as I look for a new home, along with all the birds and squirrels and other displaced creatures. When the trees are no longer here to sing, I will return and cry, "You were here. You were here. You were here."

Your friend,

Sari

By Sari C. Cunningham

