

## Trees in the 1<sup>st</sup> Degree

My (not-on-paper) husband sat outside on the back porch, at 1:32 am, smoking, staring into the empty lot next door, with 6 wide, towering maples. A downhill slope of wetness, maple leaves, and small creatures. His skinny butt balanced on that wobbly waterlogged fold-up wooden chair that needed to go back to Goodwill from whence it came. I had woken to pee and he wasn't next to me in bed. I knew where to look, moving past the stove in the dark, bare feet on the dark tile floor. Bracing myself for his dark mood. And the smell. Tobacco and pot: his hands and lungs had reached for these, over the last month of rainy Spring Seattle-ness, breaking a rhythm of sobriety. Three Saturdays ago was when the first big white permit sign was pounded into the ground in front of that lot of trees, which we had grown to name, like kids name imaginary friends. Merkilt. Stillsong. Skygrabber. Thunderbolt. Rootsy. Canopy. The slanted ground – we never thought anyone would try to build on it. The trees were as old as the owner: a centenarian whose son lived nearby and got her to write it in the will to give it to him. The neighbor gossip was that he promised to keep the trees. But there my guy sat, stoic and whispering about the guy who was about to let our friends die. He was already in phase one, yelling at the people in the city permit office, to get pipe and drainage approval.

Letters were written. To him. To the neighbors. To the city. To the trees. And dropped off to the developer himself, across the schoolyard, carried by hand to his pretty little Seattle-esque Craftsman house, into the mailbox, under a large tree. His wife peering out the window at me. Without using the word murder, except in my first draft, I cited statistics on trees and health, trees and home value, trees and root systems and erosion prevention, trees and animal habitats, trees and eye candy. In the blueprint plans, which were secret, but we found a certain someone who knew someone who let us in to the city hall secret room of rolls and rolls of paper in drawers, there it was: murder in the first degree.

It showed lines and circles and arrows and measurements. I saw the trees. The 6 circles. Awaiting execution. Old growth. Not legal. Not enforced either, but hiding in an ecological study legal document was reference to a city law against taking down trees older than 100 years. We measured. We photographed. We hugged those trees and told them each by name that we were working on saving them. We threw tobacco at their feet.

But we also worried too much, hoarded Swedish Fish, and nightmare'd about it, he smoked substances I had no stomach for, and I wrote bad tree poems. A teeter totter back and forth between killing ourselves, or saving the trees from being killed. Tall, mama and daddy trees, elders who seemed to have created the word canopy all on their own. Calls were made. Hopes were spoken. Plans were torn apart. The plans with the lines and the circles. ONE tree was going to stay, and the house had to be reduced in size, and built around it. Mean letter came to us, flaming rage, at how un-neighborly we were and the costs of the revised murder paperwork. Rootsy was staying. A micro celebration.

On the day the huge saws finally came, months later, summer green in the maple's leaves, I was alone in the house, empty of furniture, broken inside. Him moved out to an apartment. Me on my way to the cottage where I remain. Piercing machinery. Trees screaming. Finally the sky opening up above the downed towering monoliths. No police report. No witnesses. Just me. Becoming a tree.