

**a gift from somewhere, 2021**

## **The Tale of the Great Tree**

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There was once a great tree that stood in a flourishing forest, a flourishing forest, which stood on the edge of the plains of a small town. Winding and sprawling, the great tree branches resembled something like a medusa. Its deep green leaves made for a beautiful bed of snake hair. Intertwining and interlinking, spreading upwards and outwards, the tree was admired and praised by all who came to see it.

The trunk of the great tree was so wide that it would take several arms to join together to embrace it. And its height was so tall that tens of bodies would have to stand on top of each other, foot to head, to reach its peak.

Every season, on the days of the festivals the nearby townspeople would show their respects to the tree. They presented offerings of honey, and would sing and dance and celebrate with all the other trees and vines and shrubs in the forest.

And on the nights of the full moon again they would gather, under the arms of the great tree recalling the stories of their mighty warriors and the courage of unnamed heroes.

You might have heard a number of tales of how this tree came to be.

Some say, as they were creating this earth, the Gods threw the tree and it landed upside down, with all its gangly roots clawing at the sky.

Others claim the tree was a stairway to paradise. But when the Gods sent the humans and animals down to earth they kept climbing back up. The Gods didn't want this, so they chopped off the branches of the great tree, leaving the humans and animals on earth.

And yet there's another tale that says the humans and animals were beneath the earth rather, and that it is through the trunk and the roots that some among them could still visit the land from before.

The one thing that all tellers of tales could agree on, however, was that the tree was one of the most spectacular in the land. It was said that lives in this world and in other worlds could be connected through the great tree.

Creatures great and small looked to it for sustenance and shelter. The tree's thick roots, ran through the forest into the town absorbing rainwater during the monsoons, harvesting it to last throughout all other seasons.

Its hollow trunk provided respite from the rains and the heat of the mid-noon sun. Its fruit, sweet like mango and sharp tamarind, were abundant in nutrition. And its bark and leaves could heal a whole manner of maladies.

Every year people from faraway lands would come to marvel at the great tree and its majesty.

"Oh how wonderful this tree is!" They'd exclaim as they poked and pushed it. "Its flowers are so yellow and bright and its fruit beautifully purple and large, with its magical properties and grand size, oh how wonderful this tree is."

During one particular season, an old visitor came to see the tree. When the old visitor approached the tree, she tugged its branches, causing them to fall off and be lost from their sister stems.

"Oh Great Tree," the old visitor said. "How magnificent and majestic you are. But after all these years I can see that you are tired. Allow me to ease your load by trimming some of your branches. You have so so many, you won't miss these at all."

The great tree then became aware of the creaks it felt in its branches. It was true that when the winds were at their strongest the branches would bend so much that strains shot through its root-like stems. "Aye aye aye!" The ringing memories of the pain.

"Ok old friend, you and I have known each other for many years. You may trim some of my branches so that I might feel less pain when the big winds blow."

The old visitor grinned with glee.

"Aarrghhh!" The tree let out a booming cry.

The old visitor didn't just trim the branches. No, not at all she hacked away at the branches, leaving some hanging like a body wavering between this life and the next. The branches shook and the leaves shivered.

The old visitor continued steadfastly. "Not to worry," she dismissed, "I'll be done soon." Once she chopped her final chop she trotted off in the direction from which she came. "Dear tree, you have such strength you'll be back to your old self in no time," she smirked over her shoulder as she left.

The great tree was silent. The other trees and vines and shrubs in the forest quivered.

Later that night, the townspeople gathered, as they always did on the nights of the full moon, to tell stories under the tree's great arms and canopy. But as they arrived, they saw the sawn off branches and fallen leaves, gathered brooms and brushes, baskets and boxes, to collect the lost matter.

The tree felt their warmth and was comforted by their presence.

"We are together, we are together, we are together," they sang as they swept. "We are together, we are together."

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### space is the place

The sound is different here. The small bubbles that carry the vibrations bounce and fly off of each other, creating tiny, soft, beautiful explosions. Up here, I twirl and whirl, I'm free.

When I was down there I swam with the water beings. We would spend our days splashing around in the rivers, until one day I went with them down into the deep, below. And I found this place.

It's dark up here too, like the deep, below. Maybe my water beings are also here, somewhere. Down and up. I'm not sure the difference even exists here. In the deep swimming is flying, and so maybe here, flying is swimming...

I'll return, some time, but until then I'm twirling and whirling, flying and floating, listening to the soft and explosive sounds of the bouncing bubbles.

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The seasons passed and the festival days came and went with histories and honey. The tree regained much of its strength, and the townspeople and the trees and the vines and the shrubs sang and danced and celebrated.

One morning, the tree received another visitor. This one was young and spritely, ever ready with a sharp smile and a quick quip.

“Oh Great Tree,” the young visitor said. “You continue to be the most marvellous in all the land. But old tree, these leaves of yours that were once a youthful green are now limp to the touch and yellowing at the edges.”

“Allow me to assist you, Great Tree, in removing these leaves that you will surely shed soon enough. In exchange I can spread wood chips and pine straw around your grand trunk. They will enrich the soil that feeds you, great tree. They’ll serve you far better than these old leaves. Allow me to find some use for them.”

The great tree took a look at its leaves, and saw that indeed, many were yellowing at the edges. Even with the change of season the new leaves never quite returned to that youthful green the tree once held. The greying leaves wilted before their time. The great tree imagined that they might fall off one of these days anyway and decided it might be better to have them snipped away now, before they became lost to the winds of the season’s gales.

“Ok my young friend, you make a good point. These leaves are certainly not what they used to be.”

And so it was settled. The young visitor would return the next day with his equipment to snip off the leaves, and spread wood chips and pine straw around the great tree’s trunk.

As the sun woke with its orange rays the next morning, the young visitor had already arrived with a large machine with nozzles and knobs, whistling and whirring. It was like nothing the great tree had ever seen before. And the visitor wasn’t alone, behind him was a gaggle of beings. Some leaned against the tree’s trunk, others swung from its branches, snapping twigs as they did,

another plucked some of the great tree's young fruits and threw them around in a game of catch.

"My dear friend this is more than I was expecting," the great tree exclaimed. "I thought it would be a simple snip here and there and off you would go. Who are all of these beings? And what is that thing?" Said the tree, gesturing towards the commotion and the contraption.

The young visitor flung his arms in the air.

"Oh but great tree you did say that you wanted those old leaves removed didn't you?" He said, exasperated.

The tree was quiet for a moment. "Yes, yes, I did say that..."

"And wouldn't you want it done as quickly as possible?" The young visitor asked.

The tree looked to its great body, still unhealed in parts from the hacked job of the old visitor. The gaggle of beings bent its limp branches.

"I suppose...I suppose I do." The tree said quietly.

"Good," The young visitor beamed. "I'll get these folks to settle down and we'll be done before you know it."

The great tree sighed, and agreed, reluctantly.

Without warning, a deafening noise filled the space around the tree. Through the leaves and in between the branches, along the dugouts that the birds lived in, past the mites crawling around the foot of trunk, down to the roots. The tree was stunned by the sound; it could barely move.

Leaves flew and blew in the air. Brown ones, red ones, green ones, yellow ones, circling the tree in billows of dust. The gaggle of beings ran after them laughing and jostling with each other. Grabbing handfuls of the fallen parts of the tree and storing them in their sacks. And as quickly as they came, they left. The tree stood there, near bare. Shaken.

The other trees and vines and shrubs in the forest fell silent.

That evening, the townspeople gathered around the tree. They saw once again that it had been reduced to its barest parts. We cannot continue to allow this to happen, they told themselves.

As the season neared its end, more visitors than had ever been seen before came from faraway lands into the forest to see for themselves the great tree that bared so many gifts. But again and again the townspeople turned them away. If anybody tried to resist, the townspeople bellowed through the forest and bellowed through the town, "Leave here!" The uninvited visitors would retreat.

The seasons floated in and out, and the townspeople tended to the great tree, and it thrived. Soon enough its sprawling branches cut through the air any which way they pleased.

The tree continued to grow and grow, and grow, and grow, and grow, and grow until one day after many many seasons its crown reached the clouds. Here, near the edge of the world, the tree could see further than ever before. In the distance, in its line of sight the tree could just about see branches, different, but not too dissimilar to its own, interlinked and intertwined, twisting and turning in the air. Medusa-like.

The tree looked down to its old scars and then back to the branches in the distance. A feeling of familiarity held in the air.

"Could it be..." The tree whispered.

The crowns of the far away trees shone and echoes of memory charged through the tree's core.

Every day after that, the great tree looked towards the lands far beyond to catch a glimpse of the twisting and turning branches. Sometimes full white clouds obscured its view. On other days, the grey rains would blur it. But on the good days, the crowns glistened in the distance.

Then one night, a faint murmur began to fill the air, bubbling like a warm spring. The tree's heartwood shivered.

"We are together, we are together, we are together."

The murmur grew into a hum. The hum into a rumble, thrumming through the tree's leaves and fruits and flowers. Filling its hollow trunk.

The tree burst into song.

"We are together, we are together, we are together, we are together, we are together. We are together, we are together..."

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### **Audio description**

Billie Holiday - Strange Fruit (Live 1945): 00:30

Windy Forest Sounds and River: 00:37 - 05:39

Morning birds: 01:03 - 01:49

Wind: 01:36 - 04:39

Birdsong: from 01:43 - 15:38 with short in-between breaks

Tree Falling Sound Effects: 03:31 - 03:34

Rain: 03:43 - 04:30

Tree Falling Sound Effects: 04:32 - 04:56

Billie Holiday - Strange Fruit (Live 1959): 05:04 - 05:44

Ocean: 06:16 - 07:28

Ohenhen & His Feelings – Ezeghigbebe: 06:18 - 06:21

Adamosa - Osanobua Igha Tama: 06:18 - 07:34

space is the place: 06:22 - 07:25

Windy Forest Sounds and River: 07:34 - 10:10

Rain: 07:46 - 11:44

Billie Holiday - Strange Fruit: 08:58 - 09:07

Cutting grass: 09:35 - 11:27

Windy Forest Sounds and River: 10:34 - 10:43

Windy Forest Sounds and River: 10:50 - 14:55

Felling Tree Machine: 11:02 - 11:17

Rain and wind: 11:05 - 14:55

Billie Holiday - Strange Fruit: 11:16 - 11:25

Billie Holiday - Strange Fruit: 14:25 -14:57

Birdsong: from 01:43 - 15:38 with short in-between breaks