

in the ink dark

*These are some words to wander with
as part of In the Ink Dark a new project
from Luke Pell and collaborators*

DAVID HARRADINE, AN OAK TREE
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PODCAST 4 TRANSCRIPT

This is an oak tree.

This is a leaf that unfurls into a mouth.

This is a body that unfolds into a landscape.

This is me holding your hand like a leaf holds light

Unspilled.

This is an oak tree.

* * *

We're standing by the beck, just up from that place where we used to catch minnows and stickleback.

We're climbing over that metal gate and into the bottom field.

We're thigh deep in thick grass, trampling a swathe through the soft wet green, dry clouds of pollen settling behind us.

We're passing the copse, that stink of garlic and celandine, that deep sombre shade, strange and elsewhere though it's just here, as it's always been here.

We're walking through the middle field and finally into the top field, the field next to home.

In this field, there are five horse chestnut trees here at the bottom, and then, across to the right, a single beech. Beyond that, another beech, then, back on the left, a lime, two more beech, more horse chestnut, and a single hawthorn. Beyond that, at the very top of the field, the final stand of beech, maybe seven or eight or nine or so, gathered in a rough circle.

But we don't make it to the top, because we stop at the tree that has your name carved into it. Thick letters, cut deep into the bark. And even now, five years after you died, they haven't faded much, just weathered in, sap spilled out beneath a darkened scar, a thin scrim of green lichen of some sort wet and still on the surface.

I set down the chisel, and blow flakes of bark and fine fibres of split wood from the letters
of your name.

Then we cut across the field and back towards the garden and home,

that garden we spilled out from as children, into this field,
to carve a swathe through the grass

and our names into the trees.

This is an oak tree.

* * *

Chlorophyll and haemoglobin are almost chemically identical. Replace iron with
magnesium, take out the hydrogen and add some carbon, and red blood becomes green
sap.

A body turns into a tree. This tree.

The sun is watery and weak here. The sky's a faint yellow, the colour of spilt milk on a
dark slate floor. The clouds are high and flat, white and brown and grey. Your eyes are
green, like mine. Devouring light. The leaves of this oak tree twist against the wind. It's
cold here where you are. But inside these leaves, light turns to life. Particles stream in
wave upon wave, absorbing blood red light.

Invisible explosion.

My heart fit to burst at the thought of how you've changed.

This is an oak tree. This is true. This is you.

This is an oak tree.

* * *

The Old English word *trēow* is the root for our word tree. It's also the origin of "true". But dig deeper down to *trēow*'s root and you come to the Greek *doru*, meaning wood, or spear, from *drus*, oak.

As *true*

as an *oak*

tree.

* * *

We planted the sapling above you. Roots fanned out in a bowl of red clay soil. Soil beneath my fingernails. A cold wind and a high blue sky.

This young oak tree, less than half the height of me.

Snow melts from these branches. Brown leaves of winter drop with the wet green growth of spring. A new leaf unfurls into a small green hand. Blood turns to chlorophyll. The world turns. The moon rises and the tree lifts up its crown to see.

Light passes through you. Time flows. Wrapped in darkness as your tree eats light, you change.

This is a true story.

We planted the sapling above you. A young oak tree, less than half the height of me.

The years turn. The tree reaches down its roots and lifts its crown up to the sky. A fibrous mesh of memory and time.

A tree is a reflection of itself. Symmetry above the line of the soil's surface, below the line of the soil's surface, symmetry.

This is a leaf unfurling into a cupped green hand.

This is a root seeking into the soil.

Beneath a high and watery sky spilling light I
stand by your oak tree. I close my eyes. I open
my mouth and gently take a single leaf onto my
tongue.

Dry and hard, papery, stiff and soft, cold, I bite into the bitter green.

The leaf attaches to the fine brown stem at the
end of this branch. The branch attaches to the
trunk, which passes the mirror line of the
surface of the soil and turns to tap root.

The roots reach down into darkness, deeper down, symmetrical, down deeper, patient
and inquisitive, until they reach

you.

Green eyed, we're walking together through fields of thick wet grass, trailing roots
behind us, clouding pollen and stinking of garlic and celandine, carving our names into
each other, cutting deep through skin and bark, through wood and muscle, drenched in
chlorophyll and blood and ravenously devouring infinite light.

Bitter green.

Blood red.

We've carved ourselves a shallow wooden bowl and it's brimful filled with time,

unspilled.

This is a true story.

This is a body that unravels into a leaf,

that unfurls into light,

and slips unseen into the
darkness of this speaking
mouth.

This is the story of you and me.

This is an oak tree.