

A photograph of a dense forest of tall evergreen trees, likely redwoods or sequoias. The trees are tall and slender, with thick trunks and lush green foliage. In the foreground, a large, thick, fallen log lies horizontally across the frame. The ground is covered with green ferns and other forest floor vegetation. The overall scene is a lush, green forest.

Maps

We Are All Green Here

Hello, where are you from?
she asks,

In enchanted trees
Small blonde girl walks up to me
Smiling in wonder

Look at these giants
I nod greenly and agree
I've been looking too

Why are they dusty?
It's because they're very old
Ancient and magic

A labyrinth of
Emerald leaves glinting
With sunshine and time

I am not from here but feel like I am,
I could get lost in here and wouldn't mind



Lost. 24" x 24". Oil on Canvas.

REDWOOD NATIONAL FOREST

When you're driving in the waning light of the late afternoon through an army of trees taller than you've ever imagined trees could be, entering into a mythical world so entirely unlike your own, you feel a sense that maybe magic is real after all. Maybe this magical forest is proof of that— proof that there is something ethereal about the beautiful simplicities of nature, something that transcends reality and fills you up with awe and wonder and something you don't quite have a name for but can feel in some deep, untouched, part of your being. Something *eternal*.

At least, that's how you might feel. If you're not busy being scared out of your mind. I imagine that's how it would feel. And I think I felt a glimmer of that magic when my heart would stop beating out of my chest— just for an endless second— and I would pause to see the golden sunlight leaking through the leaves and feel a sense of eternity and beauty and reverence. But up in Northern California, within Jedediah Smith National Forest, there is no internet. And there is no cell service. And there is no way to figure out how to get from Point A to Point B without using a physical map or asking for directions from strangers. Which I did. Which was horrifying.

The drive from Southern California to Redwood National Forest is about thirteen hours, sixteen if you count getting lost endless times, stopping in seedy but weirdly intriguing areas, and the endless need to get out to breathe in the Northern California air. But I leave my friend's grandpa's house in Fullerton at around 2am to ensure that I'll be able to check into the campground by the early afternoon, and what I learn is that exhaustion is what really slows down the drive. And I'm in a group, lots of options for drivers to switch between, but for some unanswerable reason, absolutely none of us sleep a wink on the drive up. Maybe it's the exhilaration and the palpable excitement as we watch the golden sunrise in the middle of nowhere, maybe it's the caffeine from our middle-of-the-night Starbucks run, but it definitely is not a well-thought out plan. Because our cell signal lasts quite a while, even remaining trusty in the most seemingly abandoned areas, long stretches of grass

and hills earning a five-bar status. And we're doing really great with time, so what's the harm in stopping at the beach on the way to the campground, the harm in feeling the warm(ish) sand underneath our toes in this place that I've never experienced?

The answer comes to us when the GPS stops working. We're passing the beach, oo-ing and ahhh-ing at the massive rocks in the water contrasted with the huge trees towering on the other side of the road. It's such a huge difference, so amazing and absolutely different that we completely miss the fact that the phones weren't working any longer. Just like we miss our turn.

It's petrifying being lost in the Redwoods. Because the trees, at least when you're scared that you'll be lost there forever, look like the villainous woods from *Snow White*, all teeth and dust and *how dare you disturb us with your obnoxiously loud crossover?* And, like Snow White, I'm just quaking and racking my brain with how to possibly get out. But still, it's a weird sense of fear. Because while your heart feels like it's about to pump out of your chest, your breaths crushing you with the uncertainty of a phone with no connection, you still are rolling the windows down to smell the scent of overgrown moss and dust and trees older than anyone you know. And there's so much stopping to take pictures, even as the sun sets, even as it gets dimmer and dimmer in the dense woods. And so I'm in the driver's seat, stopped again to shoot a photo of a gargantuan tree trunk, bigger than the car itself, and I'm just thinking *at least they'll know we were enjoying ourselves before we were lost and died out here.* Needless to say, it is all very melodramatic. I'm running on no sleep as I weave the car through the narrow roads, slowing to a near stop at every turn. I'm yelled at by an old European man for going too quickly. But it's only after a few hours of this aimless weaving that we pull over, horrified and exhausted, and finally find someone to help. We end up catching a bit of light for the tent, but dinner is cooked in the dark.

The point is, the GPS is unreliable.

As climate change becomes more and more widely accepted as an actual hot-button issue, I've done a lot of thinking as to how it impacts different ecosystems. I think when I imagine global warming it's all catastrophic hurricanes and floods and unstoppable fires. Huge, otherworldly and apocalyptic scenarios fueled by the contemporary love for bigger and better scifi.

I think people rarely imagine it as a loss. Not something that happens, but rather something that stops happening altogether. A world that just quits. Mass-extinction of species, less diversity, and a world that I don't recognize is how I've come to understand the impact of climate change.

It's interesting, because the Redwoods are pretty climate-change-proof. Like any plant, they love to eat up the Carbon Dioxide in the air and use it to grow, to thrive. If there were more gigantic Redwoods soaking up people's industrial impact, the world would certainly be a better place. And as far as change goes, this protected forest of ancient beings is fairly safe for years to come.

And really, the concern with the trees isn't change. It's the inability, the absolute lack of hope for change. Because whether it be in space or time or growth, the Redwoods are completely and utterly trapped. By us. By the people that surround the forest, our civilization that has it inescapably surrounded, like we're ready to ambush with our hyper-tourist tendencies any moment.

This idea of being trapped is a little hard to understand when it comes to thinking about unimaginably old trees or an ecosystem that will probably outlive anyone alive now, but time works the same for all of us. Humans and trees alike, we all need to move, to go where we'll be able to thrive. And with rising temperatures and changing environments, it's likely that the trees won't be able to live where they are forever. And forever seems nominal to these huge, ethereal creatures. These mythical ideas of what a tree might be in a fantasy novel or a collective imagination of what it might mean to live forever. I keep thinking of *The Twilight Saga*, how the vampires and the Redwoods seem to be trapped in eternity together. But, unlike the vampires, it is easy to forget that

the trees are living beings, capable and reliant on their ability to adapt to their environment. But we've made it impossible.

There is always the concept of assisted migration, the idea that we— humans— are able to change this fate that we've imposed. We're able to help, to rewrite our story and the story of the Redwoods. Instead of a GPS navigator mapping the way out of this doomed climate, people can be the red eye that the Redwoods catch, far away from here where their fate is set in stone. Assisted migration.

I think it's nice to know that people are willing to help— want to help. It's reaffirming that there is a way we can backtrack a bit, reroute ourselves to save what we've destroyed or what we've bypassed entirely in favor of our own needs. It's nice to know there are tree huggers out there.

And hiking in the Redwoods, this is about all you see. As we navigate our way through Boyscout Tree Trail, wondering at the fairy-tale landscape that surrounds us, not so foreboding now that we've figured out where we are and have gotten a little more sleep than necessary, this is a motif that we've come to notice. Looking ahead at the trail, looking around at the amazing (really, truly, *amazing*) surroundings, are people hugging gargantuan trees. And everyone is wrapping their arms around the trunks, barely stretching them across a portion of the surface. Smiling and beaming at the physical connection to nature and the Redwoods and the passage of time that it all represents together. Even in loving them, we're trapping them in a way.

Still, I'm not sure how to feel about this.

Are we smothering them to death?

Am I?

Because, like everyone else, I stretch my arms across the base of the trees. Lots of them, some bigger than others but all bigger than any tree I've ever seen before. And the bark scratches at my skin, rough and sometimes sticky with sap that I'm not entirely happy I've touched. Some have

that dark green moss growing up the sides of them— another navigator— and all of it feels so unlike me, but it is me in the way that I'm hugging this tree like a disheartened friend. I know it's just a thing that tourists do. Everyone goes and visits the redwoods and hugs the giant trees because it's a gimmick and this is where they filmed *Return of the Jedi*, but it really *is* special.

I recommend tree hugging to anyone. It feels like finding the thing you never knew you lost but then one day there it is in your pocket all along.

And I think it makes us feel connected— or me, at least.

Because maybe we aren't so different from these green giants, after all.

I'm not a tree, but it's important to think that I could be. Because it's important to think that I could want what they want or feel what they feel or have that sense of empathy that, yes, *I* could be one of these trees. Eternal, watching the world, confined to this wonderland. But this wonderland is confined in a looking glass and Lewis Carroll didn't write a way out of it. Instead we've gone ahead and trapped the trees— you, me, in this space of standing still. And I'm not a tree, but I think I can imagine how it would feel to be trapped without escape. Trapped by love and admiration, but the unwillingness to allow for growth or change or compromise.

No GPS to help get out.

Luckily, I've learned how to read a map.

I think it's time we find new roads.
