

# Tree

Jorie Graham

Today on two legs stood and reached to the right spot as I saw it  
choosing among the twisting branches and multifaceted changing shades,  
and greens, and shades of greens, lobed, and lashing sun, the fig that seemed to me the  
perfect one, the ready one, it is permitted, it is possible, it is

actual. The VR glasses are not needed yet, not for now, no, not for this while  
longer. And it is warm in my cupped palm. And my fingers close round but not too  
fast. Somewhere wind like a hammerstroke slows down and lengthens  
*endlessly*. Closer-in the bird whose coin-toss on a metal tray never stills to one

face. Something is preparing to begin again. It is not us. *Shhh* say the spreading sails of  
cicadas as the winch of noon takes hold and we are wrapped in day and hoisted  
up, all the ribs of time showing through in the growing in the lengthening  
harness of sound – some gnats nearby, a fly where the white milk-drop

of the torn stem starts. Dust on the eglantine skin, white powder in the confetti of light  
all up the branches, truth, sweetness of blood-scent and hauled-in light, withers of  
the wild carnival of tree shaking once as the fruit is removed from its dream. Remain I  
think backing away from the trembling into full corrosive sun. Momentary blindness

follows. Correction. There are only moments. They hurt. Correction. Must I put down  
here that this is long ago. That the sky has been invisible for years now. That the ash  
of our fires has covered the sun. That the fruit is stunted yellow mould when it appears  
at all and we have no produce to speak of. No longer exists. All my attention is

free for you to use. I can cast farther and farther out, before the change, a page turned,  
we have gone into another story, history floundered or one day the birds dis-  
appeared. The imagination tried to go here when we asked it to, from where I hold the  
fruit in my right hand, but it would not go. Where is it now. Where is this here where

you and I look up trying to make sense of the normal, turn it to life, more life,  
disinterred from desire, heaved up onto the dry shore awaiting the others who could  
not join us in the end. For good. I want to walk to the left around this tree I have made  
again. I want to sit under it full of secrecy insight immensity vigour bursting complexity

swarm. Oh great forwards and backwards. I never felt my face change into my new  
face. Where am I facing now. Is the question of good still stinging the open before us  
with its muggy destination pitched into nothingness? Something expands in you  
where it wrenches-up its bright policing into view – is this good, is this the good –

under the celebrating crowd, inside the silences it forces hard away all round itself,  
where chanting thins, where we win the war again, made thin by bravery and belief,  
here's a polaroid if you want, here's a souvenir, here now for you to watch, unfold, up  
close, the fruit is opening, the ribs will widen now, it is all seed, reddish foam, history.

*This poem, first published in the London Review of Books on 8 February 2018, is shortlisted for the 2018 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. It is reproduced here on the Forward Arts Foundation website with the kind permission of the poet and of the London Review of Books.*