

The Tree

Summary of the Poem The Tree

Animals by Adrienne Rich

Stanza 1

The trees inside are moving out into the forest,
the forest that was empty all these days
where no bird could sit
no insect hide
no sun bury its feet in shadow
the forest that was empty all these nights
will be full of trees by morning.

The speaker of the poem observes that the trees in his house are moving outside into the forest which has been empty for a long time. It is important to understand that the trees are not actually moving, but it has been used as an imagery by the poet to show the destroyed forests and the false nature that humans have tried to keep in their houses. Since the forest outside was empty, no birds could sit on the branches of trees, no insects could hide in the trees and sunlight could never disappear under the shadows of the trees. The speaker feels that the empty forest will be full of trees by the next morning.

Stanza 2

*All night the roots work
to disengage themselves from the cracks
in the veranda floor.
The leaves strain toward the glass
small twigs stiff with exertion
long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof
like newly discharged patients
half-dzed, moving*

to the clinic doors.

“It seems like the trees work silently in the night in order to complete their mission of getting free from the boundaries of the house. Therefore, they work all night to free themselves through the cracks on the veranda floor. The leaves of the trees try very hard to put a lot of pressure on the glass so that they could break it. The small twigs have become very hard due to applying so much pressure to free themselves. The larger branches of the trees that have shrunk because of being inside the walls and under the roof, where they cannot grow much. They try to move slowly from there and look like newly discharged patients from a hospital, who become half-shocked on coming to the outside world.

Stanza 3

*I sit inside, doors open to the veranda
writing long letters
in which I scarcely mention the departure
of the forest from the house.
The night is fresh, the whole moon shines
in a sky still open
the smell of leaves and lichen
still reaches like a voice into the rooms.*

The speaker, who could be the poet herself, sits in her house, writing long letters, the doors of which open to the veranda. She hardly mentions in her letters about the trees that are moving out to the empty forest. It is a full moon night where the moon is shining in the open sky and the night is very fresh. The poet can smell the leaves and lichens coming from the trees that reach her like a voice.

Stanza 4

*My head is full of whispers
which tomorrow will be silent.*

*Listen. The glass is breaking.
The trees are stumbling forward
into the night. Winds rush to meet them.
The moon is broken like a mirror,
its pieces flash now in the crown
of the tallest oak.*

The speaker listens to the sounds coming from the leaves and lichens of the trees. These sounds will not be there in the morning as the trees will move out to the forest in the night and will not be in the house by morning. Now, the speaker can hear the glass breaking due to the efforts of the twigs. As the glass breaks, the trees hurry outside and in doing so, they fall on each other and get struck at different places. As the trees go in the open, it seems like the wind is moving fast towards them to meet them. The tall trees can finally stand straight as they are free. They are so tall that they have broken the moon into pieces like a broken mirror. The moon now sits like the crowns on the heads of the tall oak trees. Again, the use of moon is an imagery to show that between the ground and the sky stands the trees; and one can only look at parts of the moon, and not the full moon, from under the trees.