



And If the Woods Carry You

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Reader's Guide

Discussion Questions from the Author:

1. Fairy tales often begin with a journey into the woods, usually by a child who must find their way without the protection of a parental figure. The title and opening poem both evoke this trope of the woods as a setting in which the protagonist will face dangers and tests, but ends with a declaration that “the fairy tale, still open on my lap, is not a map.” Consider the ways the familiar tropes of fairy tales are evoked and the ways they are altered. How do the dangers and uncertainties of our current world disrupt the fairy tale narrative?
2. The title *And If the Woods Carry You* gives the woods agency, making the woods into a force (or even a character) capable of driving the narrative, rather than merely a setting. The woods of fairy tale, too, are often imbued with magic and described as “enchanted.” In what ways are trees and forests shown to have agency throughout the book? What is the role of enchantment as the setting shifts from the fairy tale woods to the post-apocalyptic forest in the parable? Where does the speaker find “everyday magic” in her world?
3. People who are very close (lovers, siblings, mothers and babies) often develop a special language between them, and this book is full of uniquely combined words (*griefcry*, *mooncaged*, *leafstrung*, *treetalk*, *whispersings*). How does this fused language create intimacy between speaker and reader, as well as between the speaker and the human and nonhuman figures in the book? How do the combined words inform the themes of interdependence and transformation?
4. Each section is peppered with “time capsule” poems, all of which are followed by a specific noun. In the real world, time capsules are a gathering of objects to represent a specific time period. They are often hidden away and intended to be unearthed by someone in the future. What do the poetic time capsules in the book have in common? What purpose do they serve?

5. The book is divided into four sections: The Woods, The Village, The Kingdom, and The Clearing. All of these locations have their unique roles in fairy tales, and each influences the protagonist's journey in important ways. In a fairy tale, the order of locations would likely be: village, woods, clearing, kingdom. The village is usually the opening setting the protagonist sets out from, the woods usually contains the clearing, and the kingdom represents the arrival at the castle. How does the shuffled order alter the narrative arc and the passage of time in the book? How does each section challenge each location's usual narrative role?
6. Various frightening futures are posited throughout the book, but one future is examined in great detail in the long poem sequence "Parable of the Bull." This poem explores a world that has become so inhospitable the human race decides, or is forced, to stop reproducing and begins to fade into extinction. Yet, as the author I can tell you, the parable is not meant to be instructive, is not meant to suggest that humans should follow this path. So what is the lesson in the parable? In the section "Parameters of the Parable," there is a line: "for the sake of the poem, the decision cannot be reversed." Consider the role of fatalism and the sense of inevitability in some of the discourse around climate change. How does that sense of it already being too late, of us being unable to change, drive the decreation narrative of the parable?

Writing Exercises:

1. Create your own time capsule poem. Is there a specific place you want to gather memories from? Is there a specific symbol or object that evokes a certain place or time for you? Gather a constellation of memories and stories, maybe even the lines of a letter. Who do you imagine opening this time capsule and in what kind of future? Use the answers to these questions to help you choose revealing details and potent images.
2. In my poem "Oh Artemis," I address a favorite childhood figure (in this case from Greek mythology), contrasting her myth with the way I ended up living my own life. Do you have a favorite figure from myth or fairy tale, perhaps someone you wanted to emulate? Try writing your own direct address to that figure. What do you want to tell them about their influence on your life? You could even make it a kind of prayer, where you seek their blessing or guidance.