
The Origin Revisited

By Ada Limón

—After a visit to the Yaak Valley in Kootenai National Forest, Montana, where the US Forest Service has announced a logging project called “Black Ram.”

What is there to be done now, but enter
against abandonment, become a hollow sound

in the halo of labyrinthine green, become a crossed-
out word on the back of someone’s hand.

Once, all of this became

all of this. One not-yet-golden western larch
curves by a white pine, a white pine

curves by a western hemlock, no one here
is heroic. To enter here is to enter

magnitude, to feel an ecstatic somethingness,
a nothingness of your own name.

All words become wrong. A whole world exists
without us. But who is us?

Lichen, moss, grizzly scat, moose hoofprint like two
exclamation points by the drying frog pond.

How do you know you’re alive? What evidence
will you leave? So many myths

are unraveling; a yellow swallowtail glides by over
the sinless creek bed. A storm

wets the skin and we are surprised we have
skin. Woods’ rose, white-flowered rhododendron,

nothing here is unfinished. What it gave me? I saw
a new tree emerge out of a ground made of ancient trees

on top of more ancient trees, on top of more ancient trees,
on top of more ancient trees, and understood then

that this was how the Earth was made.

Ada Limón is the author of six books of poetry, including The Carrying, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry. Her most recent book is The Hurting Kind. She is the 24th Poet Laureate of the United States.