

After *Quiet* oil painting 1942 Audain Museum

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Acknowledgement

There are many who have helped us walk our book along its road. We thank them all. In particular we name Richard Atleo and honour him as a bridge between two cultures, his own Nuu-chah-nulth culture and the settler culture of European tradition. With his kind permission, we have incorporated two of the stories which Umeek (his indigenous name) re-tells in his book *Tsawalk: a Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*.

These stories have been adapted from their original context and have allowed us to flesh out the totem poles that Emily Carr set out to record in 1907, believing with others of her time that the indigenous cultures of the Northwest Pacific Coast were doomed to disappear. In fact, the stories and ceremonies that incorporated the stories have survived thanks to men and women such as Umeek, and the emotional and spiritual resilience of their people.

The young trees wriggle their toes to find earth space and stretch their slender necks. They are growing and are hungry for the dappled light that dances through the forest canopy. Some will become tall trees, others may be snapped beneath the weight of a falling elder, or by the mouth of a browsing deer. Right now they are all busy whispering to each other. They are curious. Their elders have been talking about someone.

"Who can this be, the little rebel?" they ask.

"Is the little rebel one of us?"

A young cedar speaks out. *"No, the little rebel is a walking tree."*

"A walking tree?"

A chorus of wonderment sends shivers along the forest floor and cones begin to fall on the ground.

"What can be a walking tree?"

Now it is time for the great grandfather Cedar to speak. He has already lived for over five hundred years. His girth is wide and his wisdom is marked by the rings of each year's growth.

The young seedlings and saplings love to hear Grandfather speak. To hear him talk of their roots that feed on the mineral dressing of the earth, of their fronds that whisper to the whim of the wind, of their starry desire to lance the humus and play peek-a-boo over the edge of a nursing log, all such talk inspires them to become great trees brushing the sky with their feathery tops. Such talk affirms the very fibre of their being.

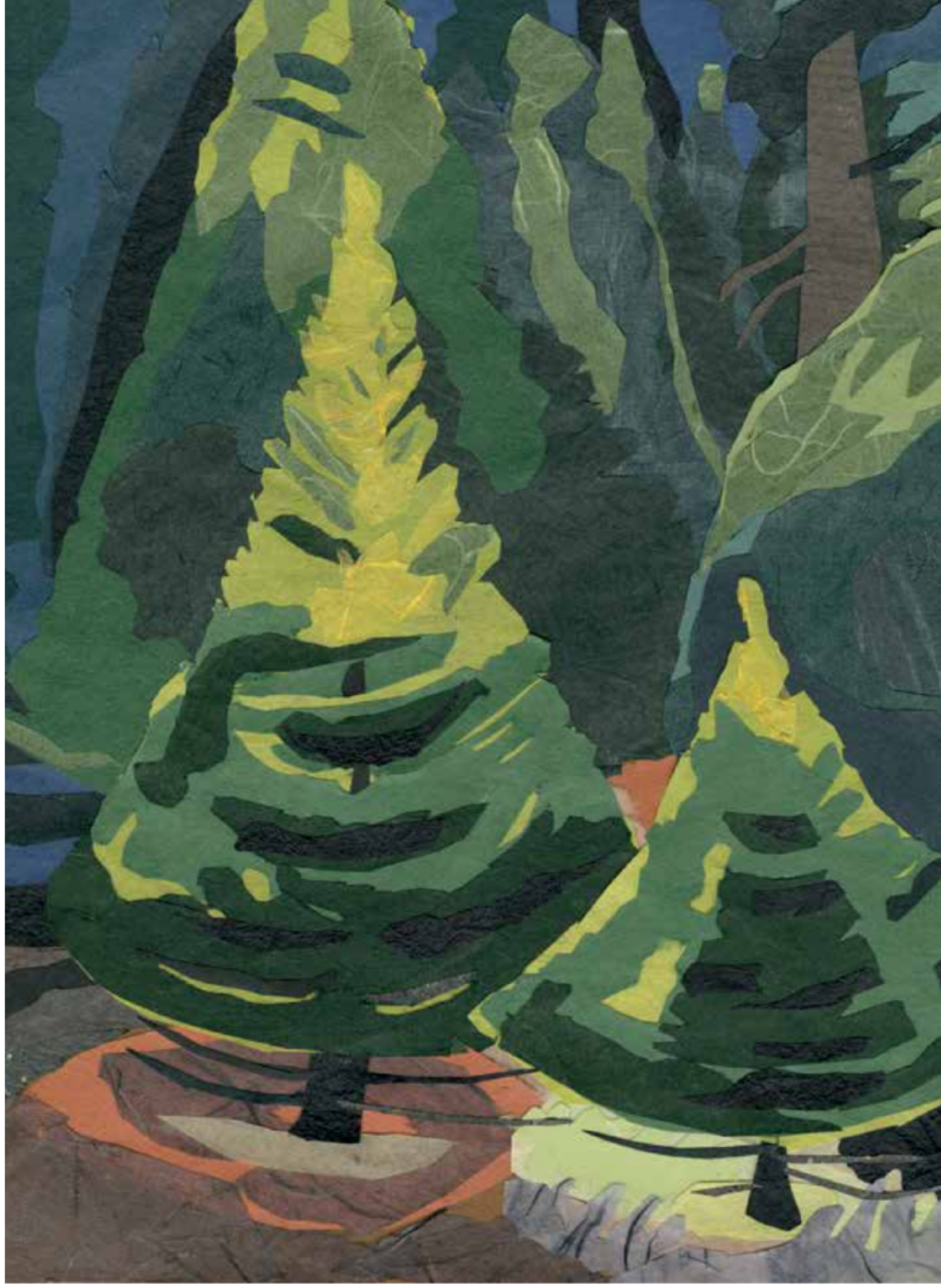
But today Grandfather has something else to say:

"Ah youngsters, listen well! The little rebel is one of us.

She knows what it's like to sway in the wind, to be rooted in the earth, to have arms that yaw to the shimmering light, to feel the rain and the dew at her fingertips. She is a tree soul.

But now she wishes to depart from us. She wishes to become a walking tree."

After *Trees, No. 1* oil on canvas c. 1932 Vancouver Art Gallery



The winter wind is whipping, sounds of creaking and cracking echo one against the other in the canopy of the forest. The snow falls in flurries through the waving branches of pine and fir. Thin tops keel this way and that, for all the world like a host of sparring birds their pinion feathers ragged and splayed. Far below the hems of the lower branches hold the snow at ransom until the inexorable weight of it flushes a fall.

A flash of lightning momentarily lights up the forest floor, followed by a cry that cuts into the downy softness that carpets the ground. As suddenly as the storm has arisen, it now abates and in the new quietness that precedes the dawn, Grandfather Cedar announces:

"The lightning has flashed and we have heard her cry, our little rebel has been born into humankind. She has started her journey and she will forget her tree soul. Her heart will ache with emptiness and she will not understand why."

The other trees are sad to think that the little one who has been born will forget her tree soul. They ask the great grandfather if there is no help for her.

"Yes, the animals will be her friends and they will help her if she will listen to them. But we know that she was born in a snowstorm. Therefore she is headstrong and she is not one who listens well."

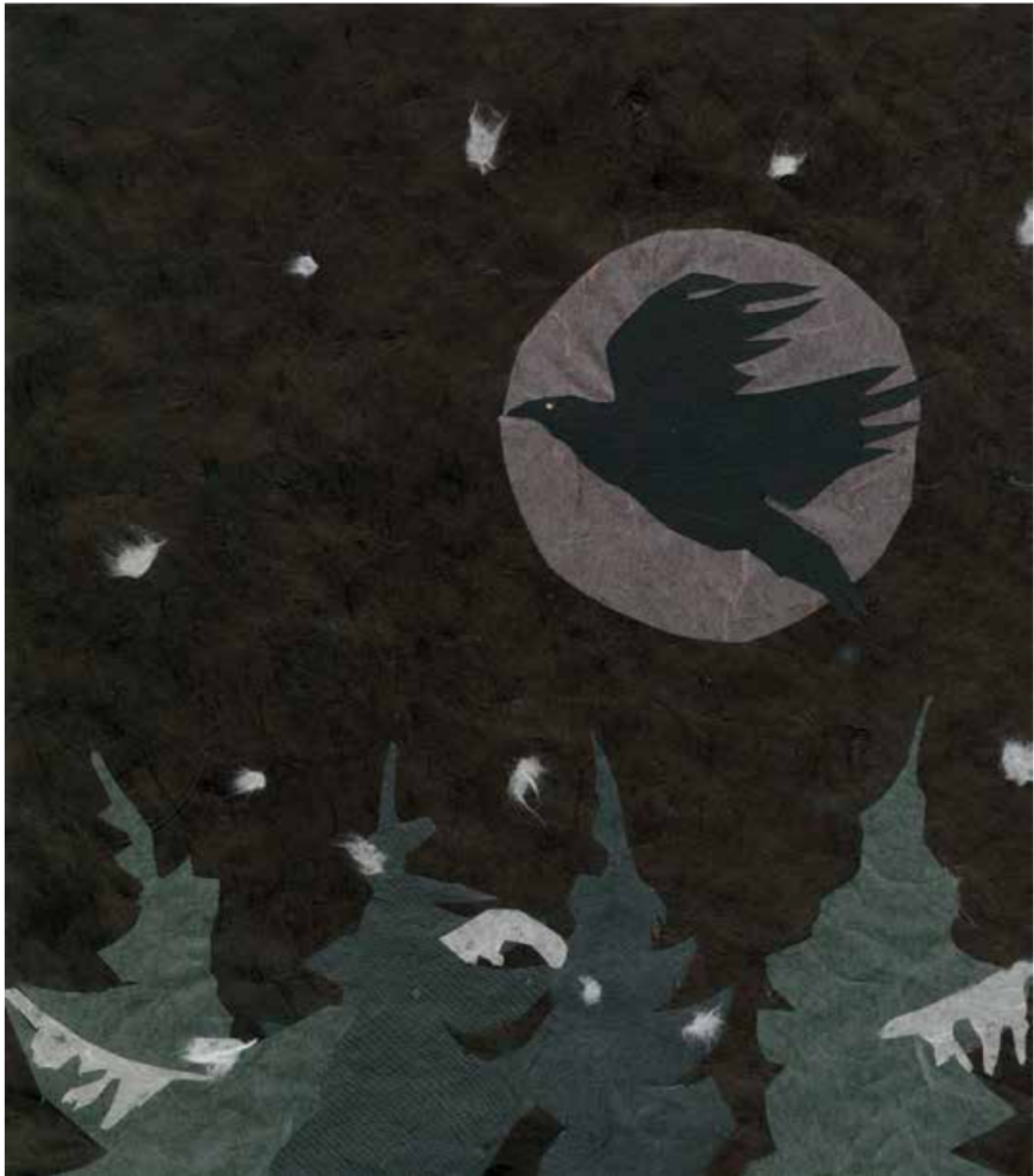
The other trees consider what the great one has said. They are anxious for the little rebel. Is there no other creature who can somehow be her special friend?

"Yes," rumbled the Great-girthed one.

"There is one creature who is her ally. He is Raven. Still we must ask the question – will she know Raven when she meets him?"

Just then the trees hear Raven croak. He flies over the canopy and cries:

"She will meet me in the darkness of her dreams. She will see me black against black."



The tree of great girth knew Raven well. A cheeky fellow – but if anyone could catch the little rebel's attention, it would be he.

In Victoria, Emily met two visiting artists from Europe. They strongly advised, *"If you want to paint properly, it's London or Paris."* Emily had been saving money from her art classes in a pair of boots strung over the rafters of her cow-barn studio. She made up her mind to travel to London.

London was a long way from her family but Emily was prepared to go to the end of the earth if it meant she would become a real artist. She was saddest of all to leave her pony Little Johnny behind. She was afraid she would never see him again.

"Have you ever been sad, Little Johnny?"

"Not now, but I used to be when I was in the circus."

"Well, it's my turn now. I'll not like it any more than you, round and round a great big town, kicking up dust, imprisoned."

"Say hello to the horses for me," he whinnied.

London city was grey, full of tall buildings and darkened by smoke. Emily went to see the horses and their riders as she had promised Little Johnny. But the horses were just as uppity as their riders, prancing proudly and showing off. Once she was with a friend and they saw the Queen, who passed them in her carriage and waved to them. She liked the Queen – she was motherly. But she didn't like the English – she found them cold and snobbish. For their part, they found her crude. She spoke her mind too plainly. *"I can't, I've got work to do,"* she would say - she had not come all the way from Canada just to have tea and make polite conversation; she was here to become an artist!

When she took herself to the zoo in Regent's Park, she never told anyone. She was ashamed of a fear that she'd had since childhood and wanted to overcome it. She was afraid of monkeys, so it was to the monkey house she went. Coming away from the zoo one day, she chuckled. *"Well, I never did. Who's the bigger monkey, me or them? At least I can escape my prison if I want to."* Emily realised that London was suffocating her.

She left the Westminster Art School and went away as far as possible, to an art school in St Ives in Cornwall.



In the Cornish woods, she heard the English songbirds and her heart began to sing. Still the trees could sense her sadness. They reminded her, *“Walking Tree, you need the Light. Without the Light, your heart will always ache.”*

Emily pushed herself beyond her limits. She had to spend her last eighteen months in England in care. She went to a sanatorium for patients with tuberculosis. Although she was not tubercular herself, she came from a family who were. Besides it was a good place to hide and rest.

Her special friends were the song-birds. In the sanatorium they allowed her to rear them from hatchlings. They were the best healing of all.

