

The tree is tall.

Much taller than me.

The others are telling me to climb.

I want to climb anyway but yells make me nervous.

I start by putting my foot on the lumpy bit and reaching up.

The biggest lowest branch isn't too far, I lift myself onto it easily.

I already have green on my jeans, I don't mind but I know that she will.

The big low branch is smooth and worn because lots of people have climbed it.

The branches are now a ladder, one branch then the next, reaching then stepping.

The others are yelling at me still, voices of encouragement, challenging me to go higher.

Each new branch is slightly thinner than the last, bendier, and as they bend they groan, they creak.

The creaking is all around now, wind blows through the leaves, they rustle and chatter in the enclosure.

The voices of the others sound further now, wavering in the breeze, unsure, less daring.

My breathing is becoming more difficult, I remember stories of people climbing Everest, the air must be getting thinner.

There are many rungs to go, the ladder stretches far above my head, hands quivering in the half light, the moon peaking through.

With each step a memory, for each branch a year passes, images flicker into view; images chasing the dog, of wooden swords and tadpoles.

My hair stands on end before my ears hear a sound, a wailing noise, a mournful grown, something has awoken, either far above or far below.

Through shallow breaths my mind wonders to golden lights, I think of bared teeth and mud under nails, I think of mum, dad, and feeding the dog under the table.

No longer audible, I wonder what the others must think, so far below, I hope they're not worried or scared and that they have provisions for the night, I miss their peer pressure.

I pause and take stock of my surroundings, the canopy is total, a world of it's own, an ecosystem unmatched in it's diversity, the animals up here having fought hard for their dominance over the treetops.

Not far now, I can almost smell my bounty, my goal, I've waited so long for this moment, people are counting on me to make it right, to claim what is rightfully ours, to bring home justice, peace and honour.

As I pull my weight upwards, the branch gives, somehow, all this way up, the branch was rotten through and brittle, so brittle as to snap in my hand, my hand is holding the branch, the branch that should be holding me.

Sliding, my forearm grazes the trunk, I feel it all whizz past, every game I've played, everyone I've known, my loves lost and battles won, the others down there waiting for me, waiting for my needless victory, and my arm stings.

I look at my arm, it's grazed but ok, so I look past the arm and see that I am on the very same branch as before, my feet having never left it's safety, looking past my feet I see the others, they look small and worried.

My heart is in my throat I think I should climb down now.