

dendrotelmata

*Mariia Soloviova*



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Betreut von Univ.-Prof. Jan Svenungsson  
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A few years ago, I was walking through the forest. I tend to do this when I'm going through a period of inner turmoil. It was the time of year when the summer rains had just begun. My gaze fell on the curves of the roots — the point at which the tree plunges into the ground — and I took notice of the small pools of water. Tiny lakes, which fill the hollows between the roots, forming natural reservoirs. New life existed within them. Microscopic. Almost invisible.

Later, I found out that these formations have a name: dendrotelmata (from ancient Greek δένδρον 'tree' and τέλμα 'puddle'). They appear in damaged areas where the tree's structure has been disrupted. It is precisely in these areas that they hold water. Right in those places, they create an environment for life.

Looking at these little pools, I thought: what if I could become small enough to hide in a place like that? To crawl into the curves of the roots, into these natural cavities where it is quiet and safe. Where one can wait it out. Recover. Gather strength at the feet of massive, century-old trees that cling to the ground despite their own cracks.

It seemed importawnt to me that these spaces weren't perfect. They weren't created according to some plan. They came into being simply as a phenomenon, as a coincidence. But they do exist. Each one carries within it the meaning of new life.

This idea made me look differently at my own experience and the experiences of others. I started to question myself and the women close to me — those who moved away, those who stayed, and those who live with this daily — about where small spaces appear, where one can hold on for a moment when the ground is literally and metaphorically slipping from under our feet.





A.N.




To ground yourself, you need to drop into the black soil of your grandmother's garden sometime in the summer, at the end of June. It doesn't matter if you don't have a grandmother with such a garden. It could be your friend's grandmother. Or your friend's friend's grandmother. It's easy to find such a grandmother if you want to, because there are countless grandmothers in our country who need help with their gardens and planting strawberries, potatoes, or whatever else.

After a full day's work, you need to flop down barefoot in old work jeans onto your back, star-shaped, as if into snow, but into the freshly tilled garden. Lie there like that for thirty minutes or longer.

If suddenly a warm summer rain starts with thunder and lightning — you absolutely have to start making an angel out of the mud that forms beneath you. That is undoubtedly what it means to ground yourself.

*Relocated from Kyiv, Ukraine to Düsseldorf, Germany in 2022.*



An aerial photograph of a wetland area. A central pond is highlighted with a light blue fill and a dark blue border. The surrounding terrain is a complex, textured landscape of brown and tan, likely representing different soil types or vegetation. The pond is roughly oval-shaped and occupies the upper-middle portion of the frame.

V.L.



When everything inside and around me is burning and it feels like I don't have the strength to endure it — the best thing that helps me is a hug. A hug from any loved one. But lately, there's only one loved one nearby. His hugs save me, extinguishing all the raging fires inside.

I really miss my grandmother — she always knew how to support me and I could always open up completely around her. Now I'm glad I have the chance to call and hear my family's voices.

I love crawling under the blanket, curling up tightly in a fetal position, and feeling protected from everything. I love going for a tough workout and letting all my emotions out. I love going to yoga and being able to focus solely on my body.

*Relocated from Kyiv, Ukraine to Cologne, Germany in 2022.*





D.K.



**D.K.**

I find it difficult to talk about this openly. But my memories are my anchor.


Perhaps it's a way of escaping reality. Right now, though, they're my solace — what gives me hope and the feeling that I can still feel something.

I want to return to those places that were temporarily occupied. I want to breathe in the salty air and just be there. I don't know what it's like there now. It will probably never be the way it was. But I practise this return by lying on my back when I'm feeling down. Sometimes it's harder; sometimes it's easier.

Memories transform. However, it's important for me to recall something positive on a sensory level — something bright and airy. I need to keep the ability to enter that state. Even if it hurts. Even then.

*Based in Kyiv, Ukraine.*





A.T.



It seems to me that this place is me. Not my brain, not my body. But me as a person.

There is something inside me that stops me from breaking. I remind myself of that. It's been there since childhood — I just knew I had it within me. Even if it's not today, even if it's not right now, my strength will emerge. It doesn't belong to me. It simply flows through me. It's character; it's core; it's energy. You can call it whatever you like. It simply is, and cannot be overlooked.

When I was a child, going to the small window in my room helped me to return to that state. Outside was an old wooden balcony with sturdy windows that had been installed by my grandfather. Over time, though, the white paint had peeled away, revealing the bare orange wood beneath. Through the balcony windows, you could see the tops of the poplars and the sky.

So I would look out there. When things got really hard, I would go to that window and start a conversation. I don't know with whom. I'd tell them how I felt. That I was tired. That I didn't know how to make decisions. I'd ask for things to get easier. That's how I got myself back on track.

My other psychologist was the sea. More precisely, an estuary. To me, though, it was the sea, the great expanse of water. The clouds drifted slowly over the Black Sea spit — they don't drift like that anywhere else in the world. I wandered

among the reeds, barefoot in the sand, and spoke to the vast expanse of water. It listened to everything I said and brought relief to my feet on the shore.

My house still stands there. An imaginary one. I return there.

*Relocated from Mykolaiv, Ukraine to Vienna, Austria in 2022.*



J.A.



I've lived with anxiety my whole life. Neither I nor my parents knew what it was called or that anything needed to be done about it before.

Recently, a friend pointed out the constant, restless chatter in my head to me — a non-stop stream of thoughts, even when I'm engaged in a specific activity. The inner voice in the background never stops. "That's anxiety, my dear," she said.

My first step towards finding myself again is practising yoga and breathing techniques. I set aside time, sit or lie down, close my eyes and focus only on my breathing. Here and now. I hiss as I exhale, letting go of my thoughts with that breath. Maybe just one percent. Still, it works.

Next is talking to somebody. Not even about what's bothering me, but simply hearing the other person's voice. Realising that I'm not alone.

One more thing: in moments of anxiety, I hold on tight until I hear my mum's voice. It has the same effect on me as a hypnotist's pendulum. I immediately start crying like a child. Although, I love these moments. Because crying at other times can be very difficult for me. This is necessary — it releases, empties and makes room for the new.

*Relocated from Kyiv, Ukraine to Vancouver, Canada in 2024.*





M.L.



This year, I found solace in a small, brown chestnut.

It might sound strange. But the moment I held it in my hands, I felt calm, happy and grounded. I have asked myself for a long time: why exactly? How could such a small object evoke these feelings?


There have always been plenty of chestnuts in my town: near my house, near my school, near my favourite sweet shop where I used to wait for my mum outside while watching the autumn leaves. Holding the chestnut in my hands made me feel at home for a moment.

I associate chestnuts with autumn and autumn with school. Did I like that school? No, but it was a sign of stability. I knew for sure that September 1st would come. That sometime in October I'd be playing soccer with those little chestnuts while waiting for the tram home.

Perhaps that's why, even now, when I hold a chestnut, I feel calm again.

*Relocated from Kharkiv, Ukraine to Vienna, Austria in 2022.*





O.S.



My parents and I have always loved summer and the sea, so we used to go to the seaside very often. Throughout my childhood, that meant Crimea. After we lost access to it, we complained about it for a long time and then started flying to other countries instead. Soon after the full-scale war began, in March 2022, a rocket struck my home. To help me sleep better and cry less, I listened to a guided meditation in which a melodious, soothing voice said, “Be aware of the feeling you are missing right now. Imagine yourself in a place where you felt that feeling. Feel yourself there and take that feeling with you.”

I imagined myself on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea where a warm breeze ruffled my wet hair and I could taste salt on my skin. I stood watching the pink sunset. About 200 metres away, in the space I could see before me, a girl was practising yoga against the backdrop of that sunset. She did this every day at the same time and I always came at that time to watch the sunset. I felt carefree there. That night, I took that feeling with me — into my body and my breath. For the first time in a long while, I slept soundly. That memory became my inner safe haven, and ever since, in difficult moments, I often recall it to regain the same sense of peace that filled my heart back then.

Besides that, the things that help me are watching my tortoise, receiving hugs from my husband and loved ones, talking to my husband or those close to

me about all my feelings and anxieties and knowing that I'll be heard, lying in the sun outdoors, watching the ducks, writing in my phone notes, and going on a trip to my favourite café where I can enjoy the smell of coffee. I associate coffee shops with home because I used to own a coffee shop in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

I'm still looking for my own spots in this new city where I can feel relaxed and breathe deeply.

*Relocated from Kharkiv, Ukraine to Vienna, Austria in August 2024.*



P.H.



My memories of home and childhood remind me of who I really am. But there is one physical symbol that can be touched and even heard: my piano, a gift from my parents. One day, my father arrived with a large box in the boot of his car. Times were tough, and I still don't know where they got the money from. To me, though, it was a miracle. It was something impossible. Even before I touched the keys, the fact that they had bought it showed me the instrument's greatest value: my parents' love.

We call it our 'little piano'.

It's electronic. It has soft keys with a very gentle touch. It has three pedals, one of which is worn down. Although the piano resembles the classic string version in shape, it lacks the upper 'body' and looks light and elegant. I've always liked that about it. Having been modernised, this amazing instrument no longer looks massive and depressing.

After transporting my little piano from home to Kyiv, it acquired a few scratches and chips. They are as if a reflection of me, my family's history, and the fate of my home.

I treat it like a diary in which all my 'memories' are recorded. Even the cat has left marks from her claws. She died last year, but 'little piano' now preserves the memories of her in my life.

When I look at it or turn to it, I see my past: I see our large family around the table. We're laughing, with the little piano nearby. When I play it, I remember being a teenager and the sad songs I wrote with its help. I can read all my memories on it. But most of all, I feel a longing for home. I know that I will never be able to see it as it remains in my memories again. Now it's just a mangled pile of concrete and brick, covered in black rubble, the empty window frames like pupils staring into the void.

I think that is the central theme of this whole story.

The core of each of us grows from childhood. Childhood is often synonymous with home. The mere thought that I have a childhood home, and that I can return there if I need to, grounds me. You feel the ground beneath you.

But I feel a longing. My centre of strength has been taken from me. By force. This is why the memories of my childhood cling to me so strongly. I try to bury them deeper so as not to cause myself pain. I know I'll never be able to touch my walls covered in cheerful wallpaper patterns or open my drawers to find old exercise books scribbled in, full of memories that are so dear to my heart.

This fucking war is taking away the things that are most precious to us. For me, it's the soil in which I was raised. All that remains is my little piano, which is now my home.

*Relocated from Kurakhove to Kyiv, Ukraine in 2016.*



Me



**Me:**

When I talk about my own tools for grounding and healing, it's definitely about reconnecting with my body through all my senses. For this, I usually go into the forest or somewhere far from the city where I can walk barefoot on the ground and feel the wind on my skin as it rustles through the trees. Where my eyes can relax amidst the green of the grass and the soft blue of the sky. Where my breath synchronises with the earth's pulse and I simply become part of the world. In a moment of calm, you simply let go of control and begin to trust completely in everything that holds me here and now. I no longer ask questions; at some point, I know that I am home.

*Relocated from Kyiv, Ukraine to Vienna, Austria in 2022.*





These answers aren't grand or definitive solutions. They don't heal or solve anything on a big scale.

But they create small spaces. Like dendrotelmata, which are neither designed nor perfect, but simply exist because that's how it happened. And yet they contain something inside them. They sustain life. They give you a chance to catch your breath from the constant struggle to survive.

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