The Well-Loved Tree
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The familiar crunch of iced-over grass under shoes alerts the oak tree of a persons’ presence at the usually busy park in the centre of town. Although, it was winter, so everyone would be rugged up inside their warm, cosy houses away from the cold. This must be why these footsteps sound different, more determined.

The tree smells petrol, hears the dreaded buzz of a chainsaw, sees various other tools strewn across the grass, and a heavily-built man reaching towards a fellow tree with the chainsaw, ready to snuff out its life before the tree’s very eyes. Not that the tree had any eyes, as it could see everywhere, from no particular view. It felt pain, as if it was itself being cut down. It saw the magnificent creation of nature fall, slowly, and crash to the ground, its branches snapping easily from the exposure to the chilling winter weather. The tree felt the ground vibrate where it stood, as it mourned for the lost life and thanked the heavens that it hadn’t suffered the same fate.

As if in reply, the sky split open and large droplets of rain came gushing down upon the park, matching the emotions of the tree. The tree loved the rain, as it nourished it to help it grow, just as the sun does, which is bound to come out soon, bringing along the birds and other animals. The oak tree always thought it was nothing special, until it felt the wonderful sensation of various animals skittering across its branches and nesting in its leaves one spring. This was how the tree realised that it gave life to other creatures, just as the sun and rain does for it.

This spring is no different. Always a sign of new life and new love as couples repeatedly approach the tree to engrave their initials into its worn bark, to remain there for many years to come. Every time, the tree is honoured to bear their names upon its trunk and is delighted as it always feels wanted, needed.
This summer, though, was different. It wasn’t the fact that numerous families come to sit underneath the tree’s branches, in its shade, as it is the largest tree in the park. Or the fact that many children climb its outstretched branches and merrily swing from each one of them. It was the mere fact that one of these many children, a little girl, belonging to one of these families, develops a fondness for the tree, becomes very attached to it, and eventually gives it a name. “Alvin”, she had said.

The tree had never had a name during its long, methodical life. It had names carved on it, but never had it claimed one as its own. It felt strangely content, and complete, after being given a name, as if its whole life led up to this one moment.

The little girl then starts talking to the tree, confiding in it about her family, issues, opinions, and, for the first time in its life, the tree wants to talk back. It has been able to do many things, but it hasn’t been able to talk in order to order dogs away after relieving themselves on its roots, forcing it to taste their vile waste, or to welcome the families under it branches as they relish the shade it gives them during scorching days. Or, even now, to reply to this thoughtful little girl, who gave the tree its name.

When autumn comes, she plays in the piles of leaves falling from the tree painted in reds, yellows and oranges, giggling to herself as she does so.

As each year goes by, it sees the little girl grow into a teenager, who still talks to the tree, but this time about school and love affairs, even bringing someone to engrave their names upon the well-loved trunk.

Then into a beautiful young woman, confiding in the tree about work and marriage. But as each winter comes to pass, the girl visits less frequently and then not at all, and the tree witnesses an alarming number of trees struck down by the humans’ tools, until there is only Alvin left standing.

So one winter, as if it was meant to be in the end, the tree hears the familiar crunch of iced-over grass under shoes at the usually busy park in the centre of town. It smells petrol, hears the dreaded buzz of a chain saw, sees various other tools strewn across the grass, and a heavily-built man reaching towards the tree with the chainsaw, ready to snuff out its life before its very
eyes. It feels pain, but this time, its own, as the chainsaw digs deep into its trunk. Various emotions of confusion, anger, and sadness, fly through the tree’s mind in that moment. Now, more than ever, it wants to scream out “stop!” to the man with the chainsaw, but had to settle for rustling its leaves vigorously. The tree thinks about its life, how beautiful it has been, made clearer by that little girl who gave it its name so many years ago. It silently thanks her for the love, kindness, and friendship she showed the tree.

This is its last thought as the tree accepts its fate, feeling as though its life is now complete and its time has come. With this, it falls, slowly, crashing to the ground.

The biggest, most-loved, tree in the park.