



THE LONELY TREE

ZACH GOLDEN



There was a tree, and she was lonely. No owls, birds, squirrels, bats, beetles, ants, even fungi, would ever hang out with her. She was no different from the other trees who shared the hill, yet she sat unscathed by the busy ecosystem. Her isolation came for no apparent reason.

Most trees would take this as a blessing. To grow and sunbathe with no disturbances. No itchy little critters running about their bark. Leaves remain nibbleless. But this tree was different. Years of solitude had revealed an emptiness and a desire for company.

There was a human, and he was not lonely. He was a father of twins, Boy and Girl. He was filled with love from his children, extended family, friends, and everyone in between. The Lonely Tree lived in his backyard, hidden amongst the rest.

Man made it his routine to meditate under a tree everyday for half an hour.

He believed that if he made time to sit with the universe, Earth would continue to look out for him. Each day, Man sought a place to meditate, and, each day, intuition steered him towards the Lonely Tree. There was no particular reason why he always chose the Lonely Tree. Perhaps what isolated the Lonely Tree from the rest of the forest is what drew Man to her.

Even if it was raining, Man put on his raincoat and sat at the base of the Lonely Tree. No matter what, he remained dedicated to practicing.

The Lonely Tree had a distaste for humans. She understood them as the ones who turned air's taste from wind to farts. Nor could they overlook the ongoing slaughter of her family members. From grandparents to nieces.

Yet, whether it was the tree's crippling loneliness or Man was unique, she eventually made an exception. The thirty minutes he took to sit by her feet would become the most thrilling part of her day.

At first, the Lonely Tree simply enjoyed a living thing acknowledging her. But the more Man practiced meditation, his energy field grew. Over time, he began exuding colors strictly visible to her. Golds, purples, and blues would curl and swirl up and into her aura. Unknowingly, through this process, Man was giving the Lonely Tree access to his Spirit. His every belief, doubt, and fear.

She'd get a glimpse into his life story. But only for thirty minutes. Then she'd have to wait twenty four hours in the humidity, snow, downpour, or, some days,

nice weather in order to feel something again. Like anxiously waiting for a text back.

One lazy Saturday, Man came outside with the twins. Boy and Girl ran around playing together, as he began peacefully folding his legs, prepping to meditate under the Lonely Tree. She was happy to see him.

He closed his eyes and began intentionally breathing. This marked the transformation from an alert parent to a servant of Spirit. The way Man flipped his switch made visible the trust he had in his children in order to disappear for thirty minutes.

Upon entering his meditative state, hues oozed out of both the crown of his head and the center of his gut. Countless thin, complex green spirals from the upper. One brown thick and brute streak from the lower.

The Lonely Tree watched from above, daydreaming of a time when the two could become one. She began picturing days when Man would spend hours with her, not just minutes. Ideas flooded her big, beautiful intellect. Something that would bring warmth and comfort to both. More time together. And happiness for the children.

Twenty minutes into discovering the fluidity of body and mind, Man began seeing things. This wasn't so uncommon. But this time, a vision so careful and thought out that it could not have been human appeared.

A treehouse, where the nailed planks didn't harm the Lonely Tree, but acted as armor. A cozy and colorful central room built around her trunk. Comforting blankets, mattresses, and pillows useful for when Boy and Girl fussed with one another, as they do.

Man took it as a sign. The next day, around the same time, he walked out carrying all the supplies he saw in the vision to the backyard.

The image of a treehouse sat with him so much that he didn't meditate. He viewed the act of building as another form. To the Lonely Tree, this made sense. She had recently learned that his father was a carpenter who had passed just years ago.

As he began building, the Lonely Tree foresaw each step for Man. It was as if she possessed Man's body. Each plank swiftly nailed in the perfect spot, then effortlessly envisioning the next step. Like watching an artist whose work comes easy to them.

The construction of the treehouse was loud. His neighbor, whose backyard was symmetrical, was an older man. A widower whose children left the forest many years ago. One day, he built a tall wooden fence higher than anyone asked for. He could not stand watching Man, Boy, and Girl eat meals and laugh together on their back patio.

After the Old Man's wife passed, the house felt too silent and the yard too

wide. They used to garden outdoors and playfully debate over which bird species was which. The new fence was supposed to protect him from the sight of other people's joy, but all it did was trap him in the quiet she left behind. Until Man's treehouse came along.

The Old Man wanted to be seen again. He'd go to the end of the fence that separates their backyards and attempt to get the young father's attention to make him stop. Yet, Man was in such a flow state he could not hear the bitter old man. And the fence was so high that Man could not see him.

The Old Man took this as blatant disrespect, assuming Man was ignoring him. Blindly adhering to his suffering, the elder decided he'd build a treehouse of his own. As loud as he possibly could.

The following day, he boasted comedically large, blaring construction equipment. A beeping crane for a single wooden plank. A chainsaw rarely utilized but revved plenty.

The Old Man punctured his tree often with one too many nails. He didn't notice, though. He was too driven by the sight of his treehouse being larger and more polished than Man's.

While all of this was occurring in the Old Man's world, Man had no clue. He was nearly done with his prophetic treehouse. The wood, the tree, and the leaves all appeared as willing participants in an evidently happy relationship. A true

blend of nature and structure.

Days later, everything was complete. If you were to stand in the backyard and peer up at the treehouse, it would appear something divine had occurred. The Lonely Tree was covered, yes, but in enchanting, colorful clothes. She had on the perfect outfit – stylish, but her body, its curves, and all its elegance still visible.

And for the first time in her life, noises began to gather around her. Man hung shimmering metal wind chimes on each side of her face. Her first pair of earrings. Accompanying each chime was a bird house. One for Boy and one for Girl. Within days, curious chickadees made themselves at home. She had become a conduit, a bridge between stillness and play.

Man collapsed when construction came to a halt and sprawled onto the warm treehouse carpet. Creating took a lot out of him, but everything was how he envisioned it. All he had to do was turn on the lights, which he dramatically rolled over and plugged into the extension cord.

All of the lights strung along the treehouse edges lit up and symbolized to the twins that the treehouse was ready. Like a dinner bell. Or the Batman signal.

Boy and Girl came running from the house, up the spiral ladder, and hopped onto their father's belly. He lay there with a big smile and both of their heads lying on each shoulder.

All of this time the Old Man never slowed down. His tools had gotten larger. And louder. He was livid he hadn't been acknowledged and took it up a notch. He transitioned from wood to metal because it was stronger and more expensive. He sported a dark, oversized welding mask and a violent blue flame as he constructed the Other Tree.

Despite this, the Old Man's efforts remained unheard. Man and the Lonely Tree's house was built in such a way that she flaunted her big, healthy hair over the build. Its layers of lush leaves muffled the noise.

Boy and Girl played card games with Man all night, christening the space with happiness and togetherness. It was an unforgettable night for the four. The Lonely Tree felt different. They felt like a tree. Like their purpose was being served. Everyone was happy.

Except the Old Man. His treehouse was now three stories tall. He thought maybe if he climbed high enough, someone would look up and see him. It had an elevator and was rigged with a Bluetooth sound system, but he was unsatisfied. He tirelessly searched for what could be added, for what could get Man's attention.

The next day, Man enacted his first meditation inside the treehouse. He now had the perfect setup. For him, for her. He incorporated into the construction a tiny circular nook in the treehouse floor, a deliberate meditation spot where Man

faced the Lonely Tree.

In this meditation, the intent he placed was to express his appreciation, whether it was to his ancestors, the Spirit, the tree, he didn't know. But it didn't matter, as long as he expressed it. He had never felt so okay without his father. As if bringing the treehouse to life was his final stage of grief.

Once centered, pink and red strings emerged from his chest. They crept out slowly, gently overlapping each other, similar to DNA code. Once comfortable, like a turtle who finally became comfortable with having its head out, Man's ribbons of warm tones shot out and wrapped around the Lonely Tree's stomach and coarse bark.

Then, the Lonely Tree let loose her colors. Ethereal greens and browns intensely wrapped around Man and the whole treehouse like roots. Her first time allowing someone into her journey. Her imagination, sorrow, and trauma all communicated for the first time.

Then they were interrupted. A pained voice infiltrated both Man and the Lonely Tree's biofield.

"My roots will not feed on lies," Someone whispered.

A loud crash boomed and thundered, awakening both out of their collective effervescence. Man shot down the ladder to see what happened. If Boy and Girl were safe.

Then Man saw the Old Man's treehouse for the first time. Sideways and lunged into the ground. The Other Tree, exhausted by the weight of the Old Man's misery, chose collapse over being a symbol of agony.