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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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853 Words

NEXT ARBOR DAY

Just before his fifty-ninth birthday, David turned into a tree. An indigenous Norway spruce, full of leaves and bush-like appearance ideal for ground cover. Figuring no one would notice if he blended in with the dense foliage surrounding Siltanen Park. He wanted to be quiet about it all. Not like other men who used their transformation to make big and bold statements. David wasn't that kind. He didn't make statements. Which is why he didn't choose to be a mighty redwood or a giant oak or prestige fir and plant himself in the middle of a field for all to see. Even if he had, David knew his wife would only come along to monetize his transformation and have him chopped down, milled, planed and lacquered before nailing him down into a deck. Not a pleasant way to spend your remaining days, letting other people walk all over you. So he chose to be discreet about his transformation.

To some success. The City Arborist didn't notice – which could've been intentional. Some of her newly assigned duties meant keeping tabs on arboreal conversions in open spaces because the City wanted increased vigilance. Especially after a slew of recent transformations popped up without a single permit issued or a fee collected. But if such life changing, man-to-tree transformations didn't involve an exotic or invading species, or show signs of rot, disease or termite damage, or detract from the park's extensive

beauty, the City Arborist didn't care. She'd just as soon leave those men to their choices and be about her day.

David's adult children, Maya and Jason, briefly took notice of his absence.

Thanksgiving arrived and they, after sending their respective spouses and children to the kitchen to greet grandma, looked for their father. Only to discover he wasn't sitting in his usual chair, napping in front of the TV in his den while football games played.

His chair was there, as was his indentation -- just not him. All his books were there, his Bartram and Thoreau and Emerson, but not him. The smell of his after shave and body odor, but not him. Leading to a sense of shock -- till Jason and Maya realized they no longer had to endure an afternoon of awkward conversations that rarely touched on their work or their children or what they were up to. Their father never seemed interested. Nor did they have to relate to his generally unspoken, unfathomable interests. They could simply give up the pretense of caring.

Before he became a tree, David thought about how few connections he'd genuinely made, and how little effort he'd put in, after a lifetime of years lived. Even more, with counseling and tons of self-reflection, he realized he never "reached for the stars" or "fought the good fight" or "lived his best self" from the outset, as his counselor suggested. David let fear and apathy direct every adult decision, frightening himself at every crossroad, till he always followed the inconsequential path of least resistance. Whatever fell his way. And by doing so, wasted most of his youthful potential -- siphoned away by a wife he never really loved, forty years working a job he never really cared for, and children he once adored, but discovered wasn't very interested in or close to. All while existing in a useless suburban hegemony of the American dream, bought and paid for by his own indifference.

David wasn't always like that. Once upon a time, he'd loved nature and felt content to simply belong. Hiking and camping and fishing along the Blue Ridge Forests of his

youth. Filling his days with the simple task of survival and his nights with the peaceful sleep of the content. Till adulthood came along, increasing his financial obligations, burdening him with responsibilities he couldn't leave unfulfilled, conspiring to keep him from returning. And he knew it.

Still, David decided there might be just enough time left to salvage his life. And make himself useful in the process. As a tree, he could offer people shade and shelter, exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, and be a place for children to climb, squirrels to gather, and birds to rest. All while standing tall with purpose and intent. He'd known other men who'd done similarly and they seemed happier for it. Or so David believed.

So David decided to become a tree. He walked to Siltanen Park, deep into the wooded expanse, and choose his spot. A lovely grove down by the river with Norway spruce, Baccharis shrub and indigenous grasses blended together in natural harmony. Of course, he wouldn't be a tree right away. Not until the following spring when all new growth occurred. First, you planted your seed in the ground, watered it, and waited. David understood. He dug a hole, lay his body down within, and covered himself with a good amount of dirt. Then cut his wrists deeply to water the soil. Closing his eyes in the meantime to sleep, perchance to dream, of the next Arbor Day. When he would rise again and be the man he wanted.

The End.