

Quite the Tree

I must have been asleep for a long time because when I woke my body was tangled high in the branches of a tree. My eyes, unused to the light, were narrowed to slits and the lashes blurred all I could see. I shivered. A few tattered rags aside, I was naked, cold. My penis had shrivelled to a small bluish-pink ball that, because of my bonds, I was unable to cover. I thought about urinating and, in thinking, developed an urge to do so. I strained. The first squirts ran onto my legs and then my penis unfurled and I was able to propel the piss away from my body. It stung then warmed my cock. The sound of it splattering against the ground and the pungent whiff of it, pricking up against my nostrils, pleased me with their familiarity. This went on for some considerable time then the piss petered out and ran onto my legs once more. I grunted and squeezed to get the last dribbles out, but then, worried I might shit, eased off; to drip dry was fine in the circumstances. I looked around. Things were getting clearer: a walled garden, a house; down below a woman with a dog watched me.

‘I didn’t think you’d ever wake up,’ she called, an attempt to smile was jerked from her face as her dog tried to go elsewhere. She hissed at it through clenched teeth and gave a sharp tug on the leash, jolting the animal around to face her. It

yelped and collapsed miserably onto the grass. Next a muscular man, grinning stupidly, bounded from the house and put his arms around the woman. He went to kiss her but she moved away, raising her eyebrows in gesture at me.

The man glanced up. 'He can't stay,' he muttered.

A sudden realisation occurred to me. I opened my mouth to speak but coughed as I made to do so, getting the attention of them both. My mouth felt dry. I ran my tongue over my teeth and gums, stirring up all the saliva I could muster, sloshed it around by way of lubrication, then swallowed. They kept their eyes on me, waiting patiently, as if I were about to give a sermon. 'Get your hands off my wife,' I croaked, twisting my hand, bound at the wrist, to wag a finger at the man in the jog-suit.

He looked at my wife, who nodded and gently pushed him away. 'You go ahead,' she said, holding out the leash handle.

Mumbling huffily, the man dragged the dog, head turned in the direction of my wife, to the end of the garden, then glowered at her. Upon leaving he slammed the gate so hard it hit the frame and rattled back open.

My wife hugged her arms around her body. 'You must be freezing,' she simpered.

I tried to shrug but with little effect.

'You were asleep for a long time,' she simpered.

'Hih.'

'You were!' She snapped, then glanced sheepishly around our grounds. 'You were', she repeated in a sharp whisper.

I nodded to the side. 'Who is he?'

'Darren.'

'You don't waste time.'

Head bowed, she began teasing a loose clump of earth with her foot. After several moments her shoulders gave a shudder.

'You're not crying?'

'No, I'm not,' she said in a cracked voice.

'Christ.'

She sniffled and wiped her eyes. 'I'm not.'

I laughed. 'Well you obviously are.'

'I'm not!' She shot me a defiant stare. 'But so what if I am! What's it to you anyway. You useless...' She snorted and waved a hand dismissively at me. 'And you expect me to wait! Christ I hate you. Why did you have to go and wake-up? You always spoil things for me.'

I scowled. 'I swear if I could uproot I'd...'

'You'd what? You'd wither and die, starved of water. You'd topple over. Or maybe you'd just get lodged in a bigger tree.'

'Oh, ha ha. Very droll.'

She drew a deep breath, then exhaled deliberately and cupped her hands like a beggar. 'Look, I don't want to argue. If this is going to work out we have to be able to get on. You, me and Darren... otherwise.'

'Otherwise what?'

She shook her head and made to leave. 'I have to go.'

'Otherwise what Rachel!' I shouted, the effort grating my throat. 'Otherwise fucking what!'

Gripping the gate handle, ready to pull it to, she turned to face me. 'Otherwise we'll have to cut you down.'

'Cut me... What, did you think you could leave me here?'

She said nothing, the corners of her mouth turned up slightly. Then I realised; the branches had grown into as well as around me. Up my arse, into my pores, even

burrowing new holes where once there were none. I bit into my lip, scrunched my eyes tight shut. After several moments I opened them and writhed violently in all directions: branches rustled, twigs cracked, a chorus of terrified squawks burst from my foliage and shot skywards. Exhausted by my effort, I slumped back, panting, into my predicament.

Rachel raised her eyebrows at me. 'Finished?'

'I suppose you think this is my fault,' I said.

'No. It's not like that.'

'Well what is it like then?'

'It's nobody's fault.' A trace of a smile rose on her face. 'It's just how things turned out.'

'Him in my bed and me a tree!' I shot forward, hitting my neck against one branch and conscious of a tugging at the nape. 'You think this is how things turn out?'

I waited for an answer. She plucked a leaf from an overhanging branch and folded it between her fingertips, then let the fragments fall. 'My husband.'

I thought of men whose wife's stand by them through thick and thin; soldiers, convicts, men in comas, with debilitating diseases, paralytics, alcoholics. They overcame their obstacles, used them to strengthen their relationships.

Not us.

'I'll kill you,' I said.

She sighed and walked over to the gate. There was a minute or two of silence and then a rattling sound started up. She was tapping the latch with her thumb. 'Oh Robert, *what will we do with you?*' she said, calmly. Then left, closing the gate, making sure the latch dropped into place.

Long ago now.

Sometimes I see them at night. Rachel and Darren. They draw the bedroom curtains but their silhouettes are just as obscene. It pains and excites me in equal measure. Though nothing stirs. Not now. I am quite the tree now, quite the tree... And what will become of me beyond this garden? I imagine myself getting felled, chopped, chipped and pulped. Then what? Paper maybe. A government decree. The first draft of a great work of literature... No, not me: fish and chip wrapping, a losing lottery ticket, or even a marriage certificate. Ha! Yes! Perhaps I can make a success of it yet.