

Since Shelter is All I Have to Give

You waited for two hours, leaned against me, kicked my roots. Muttered to yourself, scraps of a speech about love and life and how you wanted to share them both with her. You would sometimes take shelter under my branches on your weekly walks, but today she was supposed to meet you here.

You didn't tell her you were going to ask her to marry you when you made the plan, but it was in your voice. Sincere, urgent, longing, as though you couldn't wait for Sunday to roll around again. And with every passing moment your kicks became more insistent, your breath quicker, your muttering more frantic.

Eventually the sun went in, the air grew cool and I started breathing oxygen instead of carbon dioxide. With a final curse you trudged back the way you came.

Come back, I whispered, though I've long since given up on being heard by humans. My roots started absorbing something new alongside your tears, protein beyond any decaying mouse or insect. Can you hear them bristle and shift?

Brother? Father? Husband? Or just a man who thought he had a better claim to her than you. He knew her name. She knew his, pleaded through his anger. Perhaps he knew you would be proposing, or perhaps it was the first he'd heard of you. If you had known the risk she was taking, you would have been worried when she didn't come, not heartbroken.

His shovel left scars on my roots.

Listen.

Listen.