

A Dead Tree's Life

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On the corner of 15th and Thompson, hidden behind the ramshackle gables of decayed houses, there grows a tree. There are two notable things about this tree: one, it grows in reverse, and two, it is covered in wishes.

It began its life as a rather sickly dogwood which had gamely made an attempt at life in the poor soil of a curb cutout. No one planted it there; it seeded itself, life springing unbidden in the wasteland. It might have been a moving and poetic symbol for the many people that scurried by it on their way to and from whatever errands occupied their time. It might have inspired a budding poet or unawaken artist, or simply lifted the spirits of the people who passed under its leaves. Unfortunately, however, five years after its first green shoot rose from the ground, it died.

The leaves browned and shriveled, blowing off in the wind until all that was left of the tree was a barren skeleton whose branches reached imploringly towards the sky. Because no one had planted it, no one felt responsible for removing its carcass, so the people got used to seeing it as they passed.

One morning, thirteen months after the tree had died, a man was hurrying past. His head was up but his eyes were vacant, mind already wandering to other places even before he started his shift driving a backhoe downtown. Yet his dreams of sunny islands and cold drinks were interrupted as he scuttled past by a flicker of movement. A single leaf fluttered on a low branch of the dead tree. He stopped, curious despite himself. With clumsy fingers, he grasped the small green oblong. It was paper, tied to the branch with a piece of white string. Written on one side in neat black pen were the words "I wish for life." The backhoe operator stared at the wishful leaf for a long minute, his mind turning over and over. Another flutter of movement caught his attention, and he noticed the small stack of green paper leaves and strings pinned under a rock. He reached down slowly for the little papers and, using the pen tucked into his front pocket, wrote "I wish for a rest." A small quirk of a smile lifted his lips as he tied the little leaf onto the branch next to the first. With this small act completed, the man hurried on.

In the months following the first wish, the tree flourished. Once more, its branches were full of leaves which whispered in the breeze and shaded those walking by. Sometimes, the rain or the wind would take some of its leaves, scattering them across the city or driving them into the ground, but they were always replaced by more wishes. And thus, the tree grew out of the whispered dreams of the community. It still stands today, in fact, as a monument to hope, resplendent and green.