

The Purple-Leaved Tree

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I guess they had been right.

I guess the world had been right.

In the end, I really was nothing. Like that small tree, the one in the shadows of the red-brick house nearby, the one who refused to grow into the light. The one that never grew.

After making that realization, it all made a bit more sense. Just a bit. A small pinprick of light in the darkness that threatened to consume me. But, looking closer, the light wasn't really light. Just another obstacle that wanted to make things harder.

My feet caught on a vine and I stumbled forwards, looking around wildly for something to grab onto. Something to support me. But there were none.

At the last second, I threw my hands out and broke my fall.

Yes, that was right. No one was there to support me but myself.

And I wasn't even sure if I could or wanted to support myself.

It was like yelling into a void of darkness, yelling so loudly my throat felt raw and scratchy, so loudly yet to no result. It didn't matter how loudly I yelled. No one heard.

Just another crazy kid, they muttered, walking away as quickly as they could, trying to avert their eyes.

Then I'd see them go over to their fancy cars and relax into the backseat, hands lazily reaching for a box of hundred-dollar chocolates, before they drove away.

It's okay, my brain always tries to tell me. *Someone else will help you.*

Shut up, brain.

No one ever will come to help me. It's final. Thinking things will get better won't ever make them actually get better.

Wishing one day someone will offer a hand to grab onto, a lifeline that would never be thrown for me to catch. One that was always too short to reach.

A sea, one of inky darkness. Drowning. Trying to call out for help as my throat was filled with the rushing water. Coughing and sputtering, trying to grab onto someone's hand to be let into a boat and be saved.

A short walk. It was a short walk back to the abandoned garden, the one where dozens of lush trees grew on their own, treasuring every drop of rainwater they lived on, growing tall and green, not afraid to let themselves be seen.

I walked past them, not sparing them a glance. My gaze was fixed on the small, shadowy one, the one that refused to grow out into the light, the one that was too sure it would get burned. I agreed, as I stared at the stumps of the trees that seemed to be multiplying over the days. Sitting in the shade, trying to hide. The world was cruel. Never getting anything from trying to be strong, getting out of the shadowy place that was your comfort zone, the place you were so sure you had to stay in.

But over time, as I visited the garden that seemed to be slowly dwindling to nothing, I began to notice things. Noticing how the small tree's leaves started to stretch for the sky, thin branches supporting its leaves better than ever, how it began to grow tall and strong like the others. The big tree now, I supposed. The one whose leaves stayed the gloomy shade of purple, permanent scarring from that shade. That shade that would conceal you, the shade that will never let you grow to your true potential.

So when that day came, that day when the purple-leaved tree was the last tree standing, in that little abandoned garden where I'd heard they planned to build a new apartment, I darted back to the garden, to see the people in bright orange uniforms that stood near that tree, who had finally grown big and tall, people near that tree with their gleaming axes, and something inside me snapped.

I remembered the phrase I'd always looked at and sighed, since it had seemed impossible for me to be able to do it.

Show your voice.

I ran forwards, yelling at them to stop, coming out of that small shady spot near the red-brick house.

If I'm going to show my voice, be seen, be heard, then it's going to be now.