

Uprooted  
by Tim J. Lord

*For Britney, Faisal, & Richard*

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*Lo's Private Garden. There are high walls, street sounds beyond. A door into the house at one end.*

*DAPHNE stands in the middle of it, her arms extended above her head, apparently holding branches, surprisingly still.*

*LO enters, carrying a papaya, looking low.*

LO

*Dios*, has it been really been twelve years since I first met Daphne in that dingy, little town? No... It's been a hundred and twelve. She was cutting a papaya that first time I talked to her. She didn't laugh at me even though I didn't know what the fruit was. She didn't look down on me because I made bizarre blunders next to her perfect Spanish. She just went on her way, doing social justice type things and turning all the drunken men's heads.

It was Daphne that provided my only peace in that town. I can only imagine what lovely times I could share with such a beautiful soul when asshole men are not vomiting on us, or when things are as easy as she made cutting a papaya seem. NYC should worship her.

DAPHNE

Um, hello! I'm right here! It's creepy when you talk about me like I'm not here.

*This startles LO, but not as much it would startle you if a tree started talking to you.*

LO

...Fascinating.

DAPHNE

Ugh! I hate when you say, "Fascinating." Talk to me like a person.

LO

But you're a tree now, not a person. It would be weird if someone walked in and saw me talking to a tree.

DAPHNE

*¡Pendejo!* And why am I a tree? And why am I stuck here in your private garden in some unknown city?

LO

Who knows the ways of nature and the whims of the gods?

DAPHNE

You do!

LO

Keep it down. You'll bother the neighbors.

DAPHNE

And seriously? Walls? You put me somewhere where I can't see anything at all! Well, I'm growing, you know. Taller and stronger. Just you wait, I'll soon be tall enough to see over your stupid walls—

LO

Silence, girl. Trees can be cut down. Trees can burn.

DAPHNE

You wouldn't—

LO

Trees can be replaced.

DAPHNE

You wouldn't have dug me out of the earth and brought me here if I wasn't special.

LO

Trees are only special when they're beautiful and peaceful. Your job now is to bring serenity to my hectic days. Not to threaten me.

DAPHNE

Oh, you'll know when I'm threatening you. I will break these roots, shatter this bark—

LO

I'll have to ask my servants not to water this silly tree for a bit, to hide its face from the sun. I like it small and not so...vibrant.

*LO exits into the house.*

DAPHNE

Come back here, *cabron!* I'll become the host of seagulls! I'll rustle my branches just as they're nodding off so they fly off and up, making such a racket, such a mess—

(quieter now:)

Assuming I'm near the sea. Assuming there are seagulls. I miss seagulls. I miss the river running past my home on its way to the turquoise sea. Now, I'm... Who knows where I am—?

*From over the top of the wall comes flying a knapsack and a coil of rope. On the top of the wall, SAM appears. Despite this adventurous height he is no adventurer—more like a dorky professor.*

*He hauls himself up onto the wall, collapses, trying to catch his breath.*

DAPHNE

Hello? Who's up there?

*But SAM doesn't seem to hear her. DAPHNE waves her arms and the movement catches Sam's eye.*

SAM

What?! No! Can it be? *Laurus nobilis argentum!* The silver laurel tree, rarest of species! Here! I hardly believed in its existence at all but the tales were true. To find it here though of all places—

DAPHNE

Where is “here” exactly? Help a girl out.

SAM

I must get my hands on this beauty—

DAPHNE

Excuse me?!

SAM

Just have to get down there... But huh... Where is my rope?

DAPHNE

Down here, you dummy. You threw the whole thing over the wall.

SAM

*(checking his pockets)*

No— Oh right...

*(He spots the rope on the ground.)*

Oh dear.

*SAM tries to figure out how to lower himself to the garden floor.*

DAPHNE

So I guess this isn't a rescue attempt— Oh lord... you're going to kill yourself!

SAM

This is sure to work— Ah! Uh! Oh noooo!

*He falls, but DAPHNE manages to catch him and lower him safely to the ground.*

SAM

*Laurus nobilis argentum*, you are so much lovelier up close, well worth nearly dying for. Quickly now, I must take a few samples.

*SAM begins digging through his bag.*

DAPHNE

You're lucky I caught you. I could have just let you fall.

*(SAM pulls out a scissors and a large corkscrew-looking thing.)*

But then I thought, "Maybe he's got a shovel in that bag of his—" Um... What've you got there? Those don't look like a shovel—

SAM

I hate to deface a beauty such as you, but I just need one little—

*SAM uses the scissors to snip a leaf from  
DAPHNE.*

DAPHNE

Ow! *¡Que carajo haces!* You just cut off a piece of me!

SAM

Hm. It seems I must have hit my head—

DAPHNE

Wait. Did you hear me?

SAM

That depends. If you're hiding behind the tree, then yes. If you *are* the tree then I am suffering from fairly major brain damage—

DAPHNE

I think you're just stupid.

SAM

I'll have you know I'm a highly trained botanist.

DAPHNE

You're a butcher! And what is that thing? I am not a bottle of wine!

SAM

It's an increment borer. So I can take a sample of your wood tissue—

DAPHNE

I'll give you brain damage for real if you come near me again!

SAM

No! My brain is the only thing I've got going in my favor, my great passion for discovering long-lost flora being a highly unmarketable and unprofitable skill.

DAPHNE

You know a lot about plants then?

SAM

“A lot” is not enough to describe how much I know.

DAPHNE

Do you have a shovel in that bag of yours?

SAM

No.

DAPHNE

Go away then. You’re no help to me.

SAM

But what are you? In all my readings on the fabled, silver laurel tree there was nothing to indicate that it might be able to...communicate.

DAPHNE

Well you only got a small part of the story.

SAM

There’s a story? An evolutionary origin story? I love those—

DAPHNE

*Dios*, you are a terrible hero. I never get the good heroes.

SAM

I’m no hero—

DAPHNE

I know!

SAM

The story! Tell me the story!

DAPHNE

Ok—

LO

*(off)*

What ho! What’s that noise out there?

SAM

Who’s that? Did he just call you a “ho?”

DAPHNE

No, he’s just *really* old school. You should, um, hide. He doesn’t like to share the garden.

SAM

Ok—

DAPHNE

And he's meaner and tougher than he looks.

SAM

So where do I hide?

DAPHNE

Um... Here.

*She attaches some leaves to his face as if they are a moustache or beard.*

SAM

What do I do with this?

DAPHNE

Improvise!

*LO enters. He is not happy to find SAM there.*

LO

What's going on here!

SAM

Uh... Are you the—um—owner of these premises?

LO

I am. Which means you're trespassing. You've got thirty seconds to explain yourself—

SAM

Or what?

LO

Nevermind. I'm just gonna kick your ass—

DAPHNE

I wouldn't do that if I were you.

LO

Not now. Shut up—

DAPHNE

He's an inspector for the city.

LO

Inspector? What are you inspecting?

SAM

Uh... Yes! I work for the Environmental Control Board. I'm investigating the presence and spread of invasive plant species.

LO

Still don't understand why you're in my garden.

DAPHNE

Duh, you dummy. Me!

LO

I hope this doesn't have anything to do with my prize tree.

SAM

So you admit that it's your tree?

LO

Well, I—

SAM

This tree is non-native to New York—

DAPHNE

*New York?*

SAM

So I need you to explain how it got here.

LO

Well, obviously, I brought it with me when I moved here.

SAM

From where exactly?

LO

My papers are in order.

SAM

What about the tree's papers?

LO

Trees don't get papers.

SAM

If you brought this tree into the country legally then it would have to have been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and if it's to stay in your garden here, I'll need to see that paperwork.

LO

Aren't there bigger issues you should be dealing with, Inspector?

DAPHNE

I think he's pretty serious. Guess I'm getting out of here—

LO

Shut! Up!

SAM

Excuse me, Sir?

LO

Not you!

SAM

Then who?

LO

Just... Wait here please.

*LO exits.*

SAM

It worked! Now will you tell me the story?

DAPHNE

We don't have time!

SAM

But I still don't know what's going on!

DAPHNE

You're in serious danger. He's probably going to come back with his bow and arrow. You've got to dig me out and get back over that wall! So please tell me you brought a shovel.

SAM

Well, I did bring...

*(SAM pulls a shovel out of his bag. Only it's not a shovel; it's a trowel.)*  
...this!

DAPHNE

Oh lord... Well get going. But maybe you should try to block the door first.

SAM

Good idea!

*SAM shoves a stone bench in front of the door, then begins digging, one tiny scoop at a time, stopping occasionally to track Daphne's root system.*

SAM

But I don't see how this is going to help. Maybe I can climb back over the wall with your help, but I can't possibly get you out of here as well.

DAPHNE

You'll see. Once I'm free, I'm a very fast runner.

SAM

Fast *and* talkative? Are you sure you're a tree?

DAPHNE

I'm not a tree—or, I am right now, but I was originally a girl. That creep fell in love with me and wouldn't take no for an answer. I ran away from him for a whole year—running every day from one end of my island to another. Hiding wherever I could, setting traps for him along the way. I dropped two hundred boulders on his head once—he still didn't stop. Eventually, I couldn't take it anymore—I asked my dad for help. He seemed to think it was my fault that this love-crazed god was chasing me. So he took “pity” on me and turned me into a tree to protect me from him. But it wasn't enough. He'd visit me everyday, cut branches off me to carry around with him. Sometimes he'd give them to his friends to show off “how pretty his girl was.” Then one day, he came with a big machine. Yanked me out of the ground—the shock of it knocked me out and I woke up here—

*(She says it like it's a foreign language:) New York.*

SAM

That's so sad. What a jerk!

DAPHNE

Right? How's it going there?

SAM

Great. I think...

*But SAM stops and tracks some roots that appear to spread all the way to the wall.*

DAPHNE

I doubt my roots can grow in this weird soil—plus, I don't want to get too attached to this place, so they should be fairly small and shallow—

SAM

Uh...

DAPHNE

What?

SAM

Well...

*LO appears on top of the wall armed with a vicious-looking bow and arrow.*

LO

You've been planted here for a hundred years, Daphne. Your roots go deep. They're spread all over the island.

DAPHNE

A hundred years? No—!

LO

You were unconscious a lot longer than you thought. I kind of figured you'd never come back—and that was...disappointing, but at least I still had you, forever preserved in your silvery bark. And then today, all of a sudden you were back, and now I have all of you again, and I've taken good care of you for all this time. You're not going anywhere.

DAPHNE

So I'm stuck with you.

LO

Yep.

*(to SAM:)*

And you, tiny man, whoever you are. Sorry you got caught up in this. I'll pretend like it wasn't your fault and let you go. But only if you leave right now. If you don't though—

*(He nocks an arrow and draws it back.)*

Well, blood makes for excellent plant food.

SAM

Um... Yeah. Okay. How should I—?

LO

You can use the door this time.

SAM

*(to DAPHNE)*

I'm sorry I wasn't more help to you, but your roots really are strong and widespread—they probably go deep under the wall even. And I'm sorry you got turned into a tree by your dad, but I know trees that have outlived gods. So maybe that's some consolation—

LO

Hey, loser, I'm starting to lose my grip on this arrow!

DAPHNE

Wait, did you say—?

SAM

Oh yes! There are some very old trees. There's a bristlecone pine that's over five thousand years old—whole religions have come and gone—

DAPHNE

No, that my roots go deep here.

SAM

Very deep.

*DAPHNE closes her eyes and reaches deep inside herself. For a moment, nothing happens...*

LO

I said leave, you worm!

*(And then the rumbling begins.)*

Um... What's that?

*(The wall begins to shake and crack.)*

What are you—? No! You can't! Noooo...!

*The wall tumbles down, LO goes crashing down with it.*

*The dust and the noise settle down, leaving a beautiful view of the Hudson River on a sunny spring day.*

DAPHNE

So... This is New York. Well that's not so bad. There's a river at least.

SAM

Uh... WOW. That was... That was really cool.

DAPHNE

Yeah. Thanks for your help... What's your name?

SAM

Sam.

DAPHNE

Thanks, Sam.

SAM

But I didn't do anything.

DAPHNE

Knowledge was the only weapon I needed.

SAM

And do you think he... that he'll—?

DAPHNE

I'm not worried about him anymore. But I could use a good botanist to keep an eye on me.

SAM

That I can definitely do!

DAPHNE

Not a boyfriend. I need a little...space, you know?

SAM

Of course. Just an ally.

DAPHNE

And no more walls.

SAM

Never.

DAPHNE

Good. I can work with this.

*Blackout.*  
*End of play.*