

What have we become?

I remember when I was just a sapling, back when people used to stay around. They would gather beneath me in small groups, and their laughter would blend with the chirps of the birds. I could never understand what they were saying, whether there were tears or smiles, but I understood their warmth. They would notice my habits like when my leaves changed color, the way ants marched in lines.

Every year as I gained a new ring and grew, so did they. The children who once played Tag around me were now in relationships and sat beneath me holding hands. Unfortunately I never learned to understand what they were saying but their voices held something genuine.

Then something changed. A man sat beneath me one day, holding something in his hands. His head remained down, his fingers moved quickly. I thought maybe it was urgent. But then others came, maintaining the same movements. They sat next to one another, yet spoke few words.

The laughter that once blended with the birds faded, like my leaves losing their color once fall came around.

Children still came, but not to play Tag. They sat still with their eyes fixed downward. They would still come and sit beside me, but it felt different. They used to lean onto me as something to rely on. Now it feels like they have something else to rely on in a physical state.

My leaves would fall and I'd grow them back, I remained tall through storms and sunlight. I even learned what they were saying. But the humans managed to change faster than I ever could. Groups still gathered beneath me, but their warmth turned into silence. When words were exchanged they were dull and meaningless.

The jokes turned into funny videos shared, meaningful conversations turned into words being exchanged through calls and texts. Now, their laughter has been replaced with ringtones, buzzes, and tapping of fingers.

One afternoon, an older man came and sat beneath me. His head was high and he was eating a bagel as he watched everyone walk past him. Once he was done with his bagel

he got up. He stood there. He was watching me. His eyes followed the movement of my leaves as the wind moved them.

A young girl was coming from school. She put her backpack on the bench beside him and pulled her phone out. At first, she looked down at her screen, her fingers moving quickly responding to everything she missed throughout the day. But after a while, she realized the old man was still there.

“What are you looking at?” she asked.

“The tree,” he said.

She watched. She watched for so long her phone turned off. She watched the wind pass through my branches

“It’s pretty,” she said.

Maybe the world hadn’t lost everything. Maybe it was just distracted.