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The Beech Tree

by Olivia Sprinkel

It would take the arms of three, maybe four people to hug around you. To wrap around your smooth yet tough grey skin, with a veneer of mossy green, and patches of white lichen.

You are tall enough that your branch tips wave gently in the wind that passes over the top of the woods. Your branches are dream time bare. Just one brown leaf hangs by a thread now, not wanting to let go, and make its way back to the earth.

Your roots spill out over the soil, stake your claim to being here. They don't burrow so deep into this land of chalk, but wide. The folds provide drinking bowls for passing dogs when it has rained. Your roots sweep around you like a skirt on the woodland dance floor, keeping a clear space. You are the queen of the forest, after all. Your leaves and nuts gather around you, along with the small, storm-snapped branches, ready to become new nutrients.

Your trunk splits into two, with a third smaller division. A family, I think. Your body is tuned to the vibrations of birdsong, and picks up the passing of feet, human or otherwise, their tempo and weight, their hurriedness or their attention. In this season without leaves, your wind song remains silent. You listen to the evening song of the birds. I wonder how does the cry of the lambs for the comfort of their mothers reverberate inside you? The noise of the cars from the road at the end of the track? Do you notice more quiet now in these days?

A teenaged boy, his sister and his mother pass you by. The boy trips on your root. He utters an ow. They carry on.

You stand at a crossroads on the crest of a hill, paths leading in four ways from you. I wonder what you will dream tonight.

If the boy who tripped on you had looked for your name in the Oxford Junior Dictionary in his younger days, he would not have found you. Beech was one of the nature words removed, along with your neighbours: bluebell, ash, bramble, sycamore, holly, ivy. A wood felled with an editor's pen. And yet 'beech' is the root of the word book. Did the editor know what he was cutting down, imagination as much as tree?