

# Love of Trees

by Angie

*One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man  
....Than all the ages can*

- William Wordsworth

The children were taught biology Below, a matter of some concern to Father, as there was little of it to be studied in their underground world. He had authorized trips Above into the Park for the purposes of study, carefully supervised and circumscribed. The children loved them.

Over the years, the biology class had covered virtually all Central Park, and a large map on the schoolroom wall kept a record of what they found. It had found use in season for collecting fruit and nuts from trees. The outside classes were always conducted at dawn or dusk to avoid Park staff, which sometimes meant very early indeed, or very late, especially in the summer. No one minded.

They also recorded herb and berry patches, the former used by Rebecca in her candles, and the latter made into whatever William decided. Rebecca had made herself a botanist of note, through careful observation and study, and she was usually the person who accompanied the children on their infrequent expeditions above. She enjoyed the outings as much as they did, and often found inspiration for her candle-making in the riot of growth in the wilder parts of the Park. She collected fallen leaves, seeds, feathers, little rocks, even small branches for her purposes. The children often brought her things they had found for her to explain and perhaps keep as souvenirs, and she carried a satchel to hold them.

The wall map marked many 'great' trees known to New Yorkers, including some elms that had survived Dutch Elm Disease. The children were in awe of them, not only for their history, but because they were the epitome of 'spooky' trees, their branches going out in all directions. twisted with wind and weather, yet still strong and healthy. They were particularly fond of them. In winter the branches held huge pillows of snow, ready to drop at the slightest breath of wind.

At Halloween the children could easily imagine the branches hiding supernatural beings. A Halloween above was incomplete without a visit to these favourite trees. Sometimes they were lucky enough to spot an owl in one of them, which added a perfect aura to this one night a year when they were allowed to dress up and go Above.

The Park's Halloween festivities were popular too and the children collected candy and apples from that event. They kept the candy and the apples were gratefully received by William for his pies, muffins and sauces.

The great or interesting trees had to be visited in all seasons, their blossoms or seeds examined and drawings made and seeds collected. Father suspected the children knew more

about the Park trees than the staff assigned to care for the huge acreage, some of which was almost in a wild state.

Rebecca loved these walks and kept her own notebook of places where she could harvest what she wanted, and how the various patches were doing. She made sure to let the herbs seed themselves and even helped them along when it was needed. The children loved nuts and those too were sometimes helped along and planted so more would grow, wherever it seemed likely they would thrive. Of course the squirrels and birds did take some, but there was never a lack, if they watched for the right time. Nuts could only be picked when they fell, so it was a challenge to be there before the raccoons and blue jays.

One year, Rebecca decided that it would be nice to have a memento of these wonderful wanderings above, something the children could have to remind them of trees in their stony world. She liked to crochet, and after getting some inspiration from an old crochet magazine, decided to try and design something anyone could easily make.

It took her several tries, but she created what she decided was best described as a round '*tree of life*' motif. It could be crocheted with small amounts of any yarn. She tried a few different ones herself, and was pleased with them.

She warned Mary about what she was doing, so that she would know why there was a sudden interest in yarn. The two of them prepared a largish box of assorted scrap yarn. Crochet hooks, scavenged or donated like the yarn, were in every size imaginable of many materials – plastic, metal, wood, even a bone one or two. There was plenty for all needs.

When Rebecca presented a finished 'tree' to the children after one of their walks above at dawn, they were thrilled and wanted to make one right away. They had been taking regular classes with Mary to learn to knit and crochet, so were happy to have a chance to use their skills.

Rebecca went with them to Mary and helped each choose yarn and an appropriate hook. Then they all went back to the classroom and Rebecca showed them how to make it. It was a fast and easy project, so several children decided to make more than one.

When they had accomplished at least one, it was breakfast time and they eagerly ran to the dining hall to eat and chat about what they had discovered in the Park that day, as well as showing off their little trees of life.

It wasn't long before some of the teens and adults also wanted to make their own roundel. In due course, almost everyone had at least two of the motifs in their chambers, and some even wore them on their clothing.

Father was astonished when he became the recipient of several of them, suddenly.

"What a wonderful idea!" he commented, looking at the collection on his table. He was no crocheter, or knitter, and everyone knew it, so he had received a veritable forest of trees.

Vincent and Catherine, who happened to be there, each sporting one of the roundels on their sweaters, chuckled.

"Whatever shall I do with them all?" he asked his visitors.

Catherine gave him a large safety pin. "You can pin one onto your coat to start with," she suggested.

Father picked one of the smaller and more delicate ones and did just that. He smiled.

"And I think a few more would add some ... colour ... to this chamber, " Vincent remarked.

“Do you have more pins?” Father asked.

Catherine reached into the pocket of her vest and produced a handful. After being asked for them several times over the past few days, she had gone above and purchased a pack of several hundred large ones, deciding that that bigger was better, given the size of some of the motifs – and the challenge of finding a place a pin could be used.

Father thanked her and gathering up as many as he could, carefully walked around the chamber, pinning some of the brighter and larger ones to the fretwork on the library staircase, then to a likely openings on ornate candelabra and several lamps, then to the backs and sides of several old upholstered chairs – which nicely hid the holes. He really didn’t have a lot of places that he could pin to, so he placed a selection of the trees in a line along the back of his desk.

“Very nice,” Catherine complimented him as he sat down, puffing just a little from the work.

“The trees do add something special,” Father commented, looking around.

He had never complained, but the lack of living plants below, beyond the occasional few flowers in a vase, made him sad. After all, there was nothing to be done about it. Plants could not grow in the dark.

The trees were a reminder that the world Above could inspire in different ways. He remembered the scent of earth, grass and flowers, and smiled. He would not be going into the Park to experience these things, of course, since his leg prevented it, but the sight of all the little trees did lift his spirits. He was grateful. He had never expected this result from the children's forays above.

“I must thank Rebecca for this wonderful idea,” he remarked.

“We all owe her, and I perhaps most of all,” Vincent remarked. His forays into the Park were always at night, so he too appreciated a tree he could see well. He had received several from the children and a large and glitzy one from Catherine. He had attached that to one of his ceiling lamps, where it caught the candlelight in his chamber and put sparkly shadows on the walls.

“Sharing is caring,” Catherine commented.

“Yes indeed,” Father agreed.



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