

Evergreen

Late on an overcast day in early December eight-year-old Adira Durant was feverishly looking out her bedroom window waiting to glimpse her father's car turn into the driveway. She was excited for this occurrence more than usual because today was the day he had promised to take her out to buy this year's Christmas tree. It was a day she treasured every year since they started the tradition. It was one of those rare times on a weekday when she could have him all to herself. She cherished the time she could spend alone with her dad, as he did with her, especially this year. It's not that Adira minded having her mom accompany them whenever they went out and did things. But doing holiday things like this was different. She didn't like having to share him with anyone, even her mom. Besides, Adira spent all day with her mom during the week and it made her long for the time he returned from work even more. It was hard because he often worked late and was tired when he came home, especially since her mother stopped working to stay home with her. She liked to sit with him while he ate his dinner alone. Most times he would ask her all kinds of questions, like what she did that day and what she liked and didn't like about her schoolwork. Sometimes he would ask her harder questions, like what she was thinking and what her opinions were on certain adult topics. She especially liked it when he asked her those kinds of questions.

On this day he was barely inside the house when she started jumping all over him trying to rush him back out the door. He was tired but just smiled, kissed his wife Kate, and quickly went into the bedroom to change. As he closed the front door behind him, Adira was already outside jumping around on her tippy toes like a pogo stick on the driveway in front of the farthest garage door of the three attached to the house. She had on a beige winter coat with the white fluffy faux fur on the shawl collar and cuffs, a pink knit cap pulled down over her ears, jeans, work boots, and pink mittens.

"Come on Dad, hurry up!"

"Okay, okay... I'm coming," he replied, pulling the car keys from his pocket.

He pressed the small grey button on the black remote attached to the key chain and the last garage door slowly went up. Inside the bay was a 1952 Chevrolet 3100 half-ton pickup truck that Thomas Durant purchased at auction when Adira was three. It was a five-window model that he had repainted in a two-tone color scheme: Linen Ecu and Windsor Blue. Adira loved riding in the "old truck," as she called it, and Tom dreamed of

it being hers one day. The old truck was the vehicle they took when it was just the two of them going to the store or to a ball game, and of course, when they went out to buy the family Christmas tree. Adira climbed into the truck. He placed an old blanket and two pairs of work gloves in the bed of the truck underneath the back window. Tom, accustomed to the frigid New England weather at this time of year, was also wearing jeans and work boots, a sherpa-lined long-sleeve flannel shirt coat over a black thermal base shirt, and a heavy gray wool cap. He blew into his cupped bare hands as he warmed the truck up for a few minutes. Their destination was the Congregational Church parking lot where Christmas trees were sold in Winsted, Connecticut.

“How you feelin’ sport?” he said after a few minutes, not taking his eyes off the road.

“Good,” she replied tersely, wanting to immediately change the subject. “Dad? How long did it take you to learn how to drive?”

“Oh I don’t know, not very long. Grandpa taught me. I wanna say three or four lessons.”

“That’s it?”

“Well, I already had experience driving the lawn tractor and go-karts, so it wasn’t as if I started from scratch.” He looked over at her and could see that she was pondering his response. “I think you’re a little too young to start driving, sweetheart.”

“I know,” she said. “I was just wonderin’.”

When they arrived at the church parking lot, Adira left her mittens in the truck and put on the smaller pair of work gloves. She handed the larger pair to her father and sprinted away to give this year’s allotment a visual inspection. Roger McLennan, who managed the tree marketplace for the church, spotted her coming. McLennan and his wife, Margie, did many things for the Congregational Church, including being leaders for the scouting troops and supervising charity events throughout the year to raise money for many worthy causes, including children’s cancer. Roger was in his late sixties and recently retired as a manager at a railroad parts supplier in town. He had flaxen hair, wore outdated wire-rimmed glasses too big for his face, and had added quite a bit of heft to his five-foot-eight frame since retirement. He looked even stockier in his red flannel jacket. He stopped tidying up one of the wooden stalls that supported the leaning trees to acknowledge the young girl who just darted past him.

“Aren’t you going to wait for your dad?” he said cheerfully as she flitted from one side of the aisle to the other under the white canvas tent. His eyes always lit up when he saw her.

Adira was oblivious to the question posed by the older man and instead was consumed with giving the dark green trees wrapped up in orange plastic netting a once-over.

“Hi Roger,” Tom said, walking up and offering his hand to the other man.

“Good to see you, Tom,” Roger replied with a warm smile, shaking Tom’s hand. “She looks good,” he whispered, cupping one gloved hand around his mouth.

“It’s day-to-day, some good, some not so good.”

“How’s Katie holding up?” Roger asked.

“She’s good,” Tom replied.

Neither Kate nor Tom had the nerve to tell Roger that she didn’t like to be called Katie. It made her feel as if she were still a little girl. To Roger and Margie, who had known her since the day she was born, she would always be little Katie Stockton, and then Katie Durant, after she got married.

Tom lightly slapped Roger’s back. “Let me go catch the tornado and see if we can settle down long enough to pick out a good tree.” Roger smiled and shouted after him, “Good luck with that.”

Tom Durant could be particular when it came to selecting a Christmas tree. First of all, he was a perfectionist, and that affliction certainly didn’t help matters. After years of working as an actuary in the insurance industry in Hartford, he had learned to be meticulous. But it was more than that. He had a good eye. As far back as when he was a teenager, he would go with his dad and his younger brother to pick out their tree each year, and he was the one who almost always located the best one. He had a knack for spotting straightness and symmetry and fullness while the tree was still wrapped up—all the attributes often found in a well-balanced tree. And this year was no exception. He wanted to put his unique talent to use more than ever to find the perfect Christmas tree. “I found it, Dad! I found it—this year’s tree!” Adira shouted as she came running up to her father with the happiest, proudest look on her face. “Come on, let me show you!” she

added, pulling on his jacket sleeve. She was eager to demonstrate to her father that she too possessed the skill.

“That’s great, sweetie, but I haven’t even started looking yet,” he replied gingerly, not wanting to dampen her excitement but letting her know that they weren’t going to settle on a tree until he had put his time-tested process to work.

“Okay, but I’m telling you this is the tree,” she insisted, not discouraged at all by his response.

“It might be honey. Let you and I have a look together, like we do every year.” Tom put his arm around his daughter and led her to the first stall.

Adira and her dad began going through each of the four wooden stalls where all the trees were uniformly stacked. There was one stall with six-to-seven-foot Fraser firs and another filled with eight-, nine-, and ten-footers of the same species. Each tree had a colored plastic ribbon tied to it near the top to identify its height and subsequent price and, unless it was opened already, was wrapped tight in orange plastic netting. There was also a double-wide stall dedicated solely to the Douglas fir tree, and it contained a multitude of heights of that species, all the way up to ten feet. The last stall featured just four or five tall Colorado blue spruce trees on one side in the back corner and a dozen or so small trees on the other side. The small quantity of blue spruce trees came at the request of a wealthy Winsted resident who was raised in the Rocky Mountain region and preferred that species for his Christmas tree. Each year he picked out one tree from the selection they bought and paid for the remaining spruce trees with instructions that they be distributed to the neediest of local families, which Roger and Margie had no trouble locating.

Tom’s tree scouting process was not complicated, but it was thorough. In each stall he entered, he would give them a once-over as a group and then start pulling out certain promising trees for a more detailed inspection. The first test was to see what the bound tree weighed. If it was too light when he lifted it up, he didn’t go any further. If it was heavy to lift, then he would spin the tree around to try and gauge its straightness and fullness. He looked at the top of the tree to see that there weren’t major gaps or flaws. He only cut open the netting and examined a tree further if it met all of that criteria. When an encouraging candidate was opened, lifted, and dropped on its trunk several times, he would spin it around and have Adira examine it from every angle. That’s when issues

would become apparent, and several auspicious trees during this process were abandoned and returned to their respective stalls. It was at this point in the process that Adira developed a keen eye for what her dad was looking for in a tree. Tom preferred to find a tree in the seven- to eight-foot range, but he kept an open mind if no decent trees could be found at that height level. He had sometimes gone to ten feet or higher to find one that met his discerning taste.

“What do you think?” Tom asked his daughter, holding an eight-foot contender around the middle with one hand and spinning it around.

“I think you should look at the one I picked out.”

“I will, as soon as we look this one over.”

“I think the one I found is better.”

“Okay, let’s go and have a look,” he said, not in the least bit annoyed by the interruption.

Tom put the tree back that they had been inspecting, and an exuberant Adira led him by the gloved hand to the stall that held the six- and seven-foot Fraser firs. Her choice was a six-foot one that wasn’t deep into the pile. In fact, it was on one of the ends where most of the six-footers were stacked up. Tom grabbed it and instantly felt that it was lighter than it should be, indicating that it wasn’t as full as it needed to be. Sure enough, when he examined it, he could tell it didn’t have much girth. The trunk wasn’t straight, and there was a conspicuous gap at the top. It was a tree that he would put back immediately under normal circumstances. The only thing Adira’s tree did have going for it was its color. It was a vivid dark blue-green, more so than the other trees next to it and more so than ninety-five percent of all the trees under the tent.

“Why this one sweetheart? It’s not very heavy, and it’s rather thin,” he said gently. “It’s also a little shorter than we typically like to get. Why are you convinced that this tree is the one?”

“My eyes were drawn to it the minute I saw it. I don’t know; I just knew it was a good tree,” she said, shrugging her shoulders.

Tom Durant thought it odd and wanted to tell his daughter that “I knew it...” wasn’t a sufficient reason to settle on a Christmas tree. He felt he shouldn’t have to explain this to her. She knew what the process was. Why was she deviating from it this year? But he thought better of it.

“This is the tree you want to get?”

“Yes, yes,” she cried out joyously, jumping up and down on her tippy toes.

“Then this is the tree we are going to get,” he declared emphatically. He didn’t even remove the plastic netting to give it a more detailed inspection, which was shocking in itself. He picked it up with one hand and delivered it effortlessly to the cash register, where Roger was in the midst of sweeping up pine needle twigs and remnants on the pavement from the cutting table. He looked up and noticed that the tree was still wrapped in its netting, which immediately resonated with him as being strange. Roger knew Tom Durant and his fastidiousness when it came to picking out Christmas trees. Two years ago he told Margie he could swear that Adira and he were under the tent for nearly an hour and a half.

“Aren’t you going to open it up and have a look at it?”

“Not this year Roger,” was all he said.

Tom carefully leaned the tree against the back fender of the old truck and meticulously laid out the large blanket on the varnished wood floorboards of the truck bed. He set the bundled tree down on top of the blanket in the middle of the bed, and it fit lengthwise, allowing him to close the liftgate with a Christmas tree in it, the first year he was able to do that.

When they got home, Adira ran into the house to tell her mom about the Christmas tree they purchased. It had been a long time since Kate had seen Adira so happy, and it made her feel good inside to see it. She didn’t question her husband when he came into the house carrying the dark green tree stand. Nor did she question him when he returned carrying a smaller-than-normal and thinner-than-normal tree or that they had returned home so quickly. She thought it was odd but didn’t say a word. While they were away getting the tree, Kate had brought the cardboard boxes of Christmas decorations down from the attic, and the boxes were now scattered about the living room on the hardwood

floor. She didn't have time to open them up and start sorting through the lights, garland, and ornaments, as she had done in previous years when they were out getting the tree. But she did have time to make dinner, and the table was set, and she urged them to sit down and eat before they got wrapped up in the tree and decorations.

After dinner Tom began to prune the tree, cutting the lowest branches and bending limbs down in certain spots to make it as acceptable to his eye as best he could. He was struggling to find contentment with this tree. It had faults that his scrupulous mind was having difficulty accepting. Adira was helping her mom empty the boxes and test the lights, but every now and then she would glance at her father. She saw that he was agonizing and wasn't very good at hiding his frustrations. She went up and put her arm around his waist and gave him a squeeze in a comforting way.

"It's a good tree Daddy; you'll see."

A tender smile emerged on his face, and with tears filling his eyes, he gave his daughter a strong hug. "This is our Christmas tree this year, and I'm going to learn to love it as much as I did all the others."

Over the course of two days Tom and Kate finished decorating the tree and the house—indoors and out—with their only child. They baked Christmas cookies together. They sang Christmas songs together. They were as engaged in the holiday season as a family could be, knowing that this one was special. Neither one of them could recall when there was more love, joy, and laughter in the house.

As the days trickled down to Christmas, Tom slowly began to warm up to the tree. Being fond of it may be going too far, but he was getting there. Adira, of course, absolutely loved the tree and teased her father every chance she could get for not showing more faith in her selection. When it was full of ornaments, enveloped with garland, and all lit up, it was hard to argue that it wasn't a splendid tree. One day, when Adira was not at home, Tom remarked to his wife that he believed the tree was still somehow growing and filling out because, remarkably, this "scrawny thing is turning out to be a decent tree." The comment provoked a wry smile from his wife and a playful rub on his bald head.

Christmas Day arrived with an inordinate amount of pent-up excitement. Santa had visited their house during the night and was unusually good to Adira this year—wink, wink. She awoke early in the morning and rushed to the living room to find a new

scooter, the latest model of iPhone, a new Apple laptop, a jeans jacket with her name embroidered in pink, several board games, two sets of books, and a new comforter set for her bed arranged neatly in front of the wrapped presents under the tree. She was wearing her favorite candy cane pajamas, as she had for the last two years, white socks, and a blue knit cap pulled down tightly on her head. She quickly went to her parents' room to get them out of bed and share with them what she had found. It was a mountainous display of gifts from Santa and wrapped presents. The wrapped gifts scattered under and around the tree were stacked so high they appeared to be lifting the tree up. When Adira finished opening all of her gifts, she had new work boots, new dresses for events and church, new school clothes, and a new pair of dress shoes. During this whole time, Tom and Kate had used their iPhones to take videos and photos of Adira with her gifts. They even opened a few gifts of their own when the time was right.

When the scraps of wrapping paper and bows had all been picked up from the floor and the glasses of eggnog had been washed, Kate remained in the kitchen to begin the food preparations for Christmas dinner. Tom helped Adira navigate on her new cell phone and MacBook before he carried out two black garbage bags full of paper and an armful of cardboard boxes to the garage. Hugging her mom by the waist as Kate prepped the sweet potato and apple casserole, Adira said she wasn't hungry and that she was tired, but she loved all of her gifts and that it had been "the best Christmas ever." Kate could tell that her spirits were still high, but she was fighting the fatigue and malaise that often beset her when she exerted an immense amount of excitement and energy.

"Go lie down for a few minutes and you'll feel much better," she told her.

Adira slowly and drearily walked to her bedroom. Having to miss even a few minutes on Christmas Day was torture to her. But her body was fighting a battle with her mind, and it always won these battles. It was saying that it needed to rest now, and Adira reluctantly had to succumb to it.

Christmas has passed, and so has New Year's, and the tree and holiday decorations are still up inside the Durant house. The outdoor holiday lights and wreaths are still up too. Tom and Kate haven't had the time or desire to take them down. Adira loved to leave them up for as long as possible every year. There is food from the neighbors in the fridge and desserts wrapped in cellophane on the counters. Tom has not returned to work for several weeks now, and much of that time has been spent sitting on the couch with Kate crying, hugging, laughing, and reminiscing. Other than watching a movie or a program

on television now and then to occupy their minds, they sat close together holding hands, embracing one another, sometimes saying nothing for several minutes, sometimes talking for hours, in an effort to console one another, if that's even possible to do. Sometime in mid-January they begin to take down the decorations, a little each day, more the next, until they have them all put away. Tom carries the tree out to the backyard. He is not ready to part with it yet. He remarks to his wife at how green it still is even after "What's it been, two months since it was cut down?"

Tom eventually returns to work, and Kate has started volunteering at a cancer institute in Hartford during the week to limit the time she is alone in the house without Tom. Before he leaves for work in the morning, Tom has developed a ritual of looking out the window to stare at the tree for as much time as he can afford. He does this for a week, never saying a word to his wife about this activity, until finally the weekend comes, and he goes outside to touch it and inspect it. He returns to the house and makes an innocuous comment to his wife that the tree is still as green as when it was in the house. She thinks nothing of it; her mind is elsewhere, as it often is. Another week goes by; Tom continues to engage in the same staring ritual on weekday mornings. Snow is entirely covering the ground and nearly concealing the tree during this interval, and yet despite the stark whiteness, there is still vivid green visible. Another weekend arrives, and Tom awakes at first light on Saturday to go outside and examine the tree more thoroughly. He brushes off the snow on the exposed side cautiously and runs his fingers through several of its branches to see if the bristles come off into his hand. Amazingly, they don't. He gently rolls it over ninety degrees to expose a different side to the open air and looks closely at the trunk where it had been cut. Still astonished by its condition, he returns to the house. Kate is awake and wondering what her husband's preoccupation over the tree is about.

"The needles haven't browned or dropped off, and it appears to be still alive," he says to his wife, removing his jacket and hat and rubbing his hands to warm up.

"How can that be Tom?"

"I don't know; I'm as perplexed as you are. But I'm starting to think that there is a reason she picked this tree."

"What? What are you implying?" Kate said, visibly agitated by his response.

“What I’m saying is,” he replied dispassionately, pausing for a moment. “I think Adira’s spirit is in that tree. I know it sounds crazy and that I’m probably imagining this as a way... as a way to avoid... coping with reality.”

“She’s gone Goddamn it! Stop this! Just stop it!” Kate runs off to the bedroom in tears.

Tom sits down on the couch. He wants to be angry and let out this incredible pain that is trapped inside of him, but he can’t; it won’t come out. He can’t scream out like Kate. He can’t break down like she has. He doesn’t know why. He just can’t. What he does know is that he isn’t ready to let her go. And it occurs to him, for the first time, that maybe his daughter isn’t ready to let go either. She’s so much like him. Finally, after contemplating on what to do, he puts on his coat and hat and heads to the garage and emerges from it with a shovel in his hand. He goes into the backyard and locates a spot where he intends to dig. Working almost frantically, he clears a wide circle in the snow with the shovel until a frozen carpet of brown grass is revealed. He places his left boot on top of the shovel blade and attempts to plunge it into the ground, but the shovel penetrates the ground maybe a few inches at the most. It’s frozen solid. He tries several more times in different spots but to no avail. It’s obvious that a shovel won’t do. What he needs is a gas-powered earth auger to make a large enough hole. He drives the old truck to the Tractor Supply store located on the outskirts of town and has them dig out their earth auger from the back room. Despite the strange looks, as it’s rare for someone to rent a hand-held auger in the middle of winter, they don’t question what he intends to do with it. They fill it with gas and start the motor to make sure it runs properly. He signs the paperwork and puts it in the old truck. On the way home, he stops at Winchester Hardware to buy several bags of composted cow manure and fertilizer. Again, his purchase raises eyebrows, but the people who recognize him at the store don’t dare question what this is for.

When he returns home, he uses a wheelbarrow to haul what he needs to the cleared site. Even with the gas auger, it’s a grueling job to make a hole large enough and deep enough to plant a tree in frozen ground. But Tom Durant is determined to do just that: plant a tree in the middle of winter. Not a sapling or even a living tree that had been recently dug up with its roots intact. This is a former Christmas tree—a supposedly dead tree—that had been chopped down at least a month and a half ago and has no roots. A tree, mind you, that has been lying out in the frigid air without water for the last two weeks.

After a large enough hole is dug, he stands over it pondering how he is going to plant this tree in the ground. This is where his agile and analytical mind goes to work. He decides to bury more than just the remaining trunk of the tree, which is approximately eight inches. He is going to bury the last row of branches as well. He deduces that this will give the branches an opportunity to regrow in the ground. His wife watches him from the window. She is openly weeping and visibly shaking, her arms crisscrossed on her chest and her hands nervously grabbing at chunks of flesh on her biceps. The sight of her level-headed, judicious, methodical, and pragmatic husband burying a dead tree in the ground in the middle of winter is quite unsettling to her. He has been her rock throughout this ordeal, and to see him—of all people—breaking down and going mad is too much to bear, and she can't watch another minute of it. She returns to her bed and curls up in a ball and continues to sob uncontrollably.

Tom spreads a good amount of compost and fertilizer on the bottom of the hole. He gets on his knees, and using his gloved hands, mixes the two soil amendments together and presses them firmly into the bottom and sides of the hole. He returns to the tree, carefully getting hold of it by the trunk at its midsection with one hand and painstakingly brushing off the snow on its branches with the other hand. When he is satisfied that he has it properly prepared, he places the cut end of the trunk into the hole, pushing it downward, and gently bending upward the bottom row of branches so they will fit inside the hole. He cuts open the two remaining bags of compost and fertilizer and, returning to his knees, empties them into the hole, mixing and spreading the organic material around the trunk and branches until it forms a mound entombing the section above ground. Satisfied with the result of his labor, he scrutinizes the top half of the tree that is above ground and open to the elements. Suddenly realizing that he has one last thing to do, he sprints off to the garage, then into the house, and returns a few minutes later carrying a folded twin bed sheet. He wraps the exposed portion of the tree with the opened sheet and reaches into his jacket pocket for the black binder clips that he uses to fasten the ends of the sheet together. One final look of admiration, and he loads up the wheelbarrow with the auger, the shovel, and the empty bags and returns to the house.

Every day thereafter, Tom returns to the tree, sometimes in the morning before he goes to work, sometimes in the early evening when he returns from work, and always on the weekends when he spends hours tending to it and fussing over it. He waters it religiously, unless a snowfall or rain provides the moisture it needs. He adds more compost and fertilizer to the mound as it slowly sinks into the ground. He reattaches the sheet ends when a strong wind has ripped them apart. And each day he inspects it, looking carefully

for any signs of life. He talks to it, or talks to himself—one or the other—often mumbling as he goes about tending to its needs. This regimen goes on for the remainder of the winter and well into the spring without any indication that the tree is alive or responding to his actions. He and his wife don't speak about it or much of anything these days. She is terrified that her husband has been permanently damaged by the trauma and is afraid to confront him about needing professional help or to tell him that she has been seeing a psychiatrist and has started taking medication. He doesn't tell her that he hasn't been able to do his job to his demanding standards or to his bosses' satisfaction. He's been making too many careless errors, things that were a rarity for him under normal circumstances. They have suggested he take a sabbatical to deal with his loss. He tells them that he doesn't want to sit at home every day with his wife. But errors in his line of work are costly, and they might not give him the choice.

At home, Tom and Kate go through the motions of eating meals together, watching television together, and sleeping in the same bed, but not communicating in any meaningful way and certainly not showing any affection toward one another. If Kate starts to get emotional, she goes to the bedroom and shuts the door. It's as if they are stuck in an unrelenting fog and can't find a way out. Whether their marriage survives this loss is in doubt. He is detached and withdrawn and has shown no desire for interaction of any kind other than going to work and tending to the tree. He hasn't driven the old truck in weeks. His life has become a joyless monotony of routine, and his wife feels helpless as she watches her husband sink deeper and deeper into his depression.

It's Saturday morning in late May, the sun is out and bright, and Tom is in the backyard, as usual, tending to the tree. He spends hours each day fussing over it, going off and tending to some other landscaping needs around the house, and then coming back to the tree, always coming back to the tree. He has been home now for several weeks, finally agreeing to take unpaid time off from work. He removed the sheet last week as the first warm days of the season were ushered in. On a daily basis he goes through the process of meticulously inspecting the branches of the tree, cradling them in his hands, looking for any signs of ... when he spots something. He bends down and looks closer, his face almost touching the branch, as if he can't believe what he's seen. It's what looks like a bud on one of the branches. It is a bud! It's a bud! That means it's alive! She's alive! She's alive! He is screaming at the top of his lungs and dancing in circles around the tree. Either Tom Durant has truly lost his mind, or there really is a bud on that tree. He quickly runs into the house to get his wife.

“Kate! Kate! She’s alive!”

The suddenness of his shouting and the sheer volume in his voice make her think this is it. He’s finally lost it. Deep concern fills her head. When he finds her, she is lying down on the bed with a book open next to her. He immediately starts pulling her by the sleeve with this joyful expression on his face, a look that she can’t ever remember seeing on him. He’s dragging her by the arm through the house and outside to the backyard until they are standing by the tree.

“Look!” he says, his voice still raised but calmer, holding a branch out. “Here it is. See for yourself. That’s a bud. It’s alive, and so is Adira.”

Kate looks at him as if he spoke to her in a different language. She bends down to have a closer look at the branch. The confidence and assuredness in her husband’s tone and demeanor demand that she inspect the branch. And when she does, she too sees what looks like a new bud growing on the branch he is holding. She looks up at him in wonderment and brings her hand to her mouth. “How can it be? How could this tree be alive?” Her eyes suddenly fill with tears; her hands and head start quivering when she too realizes what it means. He grabs her as if to steady her shaking and smothers her head in his arms and chest. His eyes are filled with tears as well. They look at each other, still tightly wrapped in one another, crying and laughing, laughing and crying, ecstatic over what it means. It’s as if they both never want to let go. Tom looks over at the tree once again, possibly more lovingly than he had ever looked at it before.

“You were right sweetie. It is a good tree.”