

"Switch"

by
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EXT. RURAL WOODED AREA - AFTERNOON

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It is a beautiful spring day. The birds are chirping, and the occasional barking dog can be heard in the distance.

Seven-year-old HARRY, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, angrily walks toward a cluster of trees. We can see his small home in the distance. He talks to himself as he walks.

HARRY

Darn Tommy! *He* starts the fight,
and now I have to go cut a switch
so *I* can get a licking.

(beat)

I hate being a big brother!

He stops amid the trees. He pauses and stomps his foot.

HARRY

It isn't *fair*!

We hear the TREE VOICE speaking as though from nowhere.

TREE VOICE

You're right. It's *not* fair.

Harry looks about, alarmed.

HARRY

Who said that?

TREE VOICE

I did.

Harry realizes that the voice is coming from a tree in front of him.

HARRY

You? But you're a. . . *tree*.

TREE VOICE

I've been one since before you
were born.

HARRY

(chuckles nervously)
Trees can't talk.

(CONTINUED)

TREE VOICE

We're quiet most of the time, but
if we really need to talk, we can -
and I *really* need to talk. . . to
you.

Harry grows frightened.

HARRY

Me? What did I. . . What did I do?

TREE VOICE

What did you. . . Look at me!

Harry looks.

HARRY

(beat)
Yeah?

TREE VOICE

Look at my limbs! So many of them
are broken, frayed. I'm a *mess*,
and it's *your* doing.

HARRY

That's because I had to get
switches for Mom to spank my
behind.

TREE VOICE

Couldn't you use a *different* tree
from time to time?

HARRY

I tried that once: I went down to
those oaks over there.

TREE VOICE

And?

HARRY

Mom got even *madder*.

TREE VOICE

Why?

HARRY

She thought I was trying to put
off my punishment. "Taking my
sweet time," she said. The
whipping I got was even worse than
usual!

(CONTINUED)

TREE VOICE

I see.

HARRY

That's why I keep coming to you.
You're the closest tree to the
house. You don't want to let Mom
stew. Believe me!

TREE VOICE

You *have* to lay off of my limbs
for a while though. The other
trees are starting to laugh at my
looks.

HARRY

(beat)
Trees can *laugh*?

TREE VOICE

We can talk, we can laugh - just
like you. We're all connected by
our roots; we know what's going on
with every other tree.

(beat)
Can you leave me alone for a while
so I can heal? *Please*?

HARRY

But I have to bring back a switch
when Mom tells me to - and
quickly.

TREE VOICE

There's an alternative.

HARRY

What?

TREE VOICE

You could behave.

HARRY

Huh?

TREE VOICE

Don't make your mother angry. That
way, you won't get punished and I
can recuperate.

HARRY

But that's so hard to do!

(CONTINUED)

TREE VOICE

It's hard to behave?

HARRY

My little brother causes *most* of the trouble.

TREE VOICE

That toddler?

HARRY

You know Tommy?

TREE VOICE

Your family had a picnic under me the other day. Remember?

HARRY

Well, *he* causes the trouble, and I get blamed for it.

(beat)

Then it's switch time.

TREE VOICE

Your brother's only a little boy. He doesn't know any better.

HARRY

He makes me so *angry*!

TREE VOICE

Brothers will do that. I remember back when my brothers and I were just saplings. They made me angry *pretty often*. In the end, though, we got along because we're family.

HARRY

Yeah, but. . .

TREE VOICE

You could do without the whippings, right?

HARRY

I *sure* could.

TREE VOICE

Then you'll *have* to behave. C'mon. It'll be good for both of us.

(CONTINUED)

HARRY

(long beat)

I. . . *can't*.

TREE VOICE

What?

HARRY

I don't know how.

TREE VOICE

Sure you do!

HARRY

Uh uh. Sometimes, I don't know what makes Mom mad. She just *gets* mad. I can't behave if I don't know what *not* to do.

TREE VOICE

But my *limbs* -

HARRY

You'll be OK.

TREE VOICE

Easy for you to say.

HARRY

I'd better get that switch and -

A large limb snaps above. It drops and hits Harry on the head, knocking him unconscious. He falls face up onto some scattered leaves.

TREE VOICE

What a shot!

A wind starts to blow through the area, swirling the fallen leaves about Harry's face for a moment. Shortly, the wind stops, and the leaves settle.

Harry stands, rubbing his head. His voice now has some of the qualities previously heard in the tree's voice.

HARRY

(beat)

This feels *odd*. I haven't been in a human body for *some* time.

Harry looks at the tree.

(CONTINUED)

HARRY

(beat)
You had your chance, Harry. It was
you or me. Let's see how *you* like
being a tree for a while.

He calls out to the other trees.

HARRY

You'll see that he stays quiet, my
brothers?

The wind picks up again, swirling the leaves.

HARRY

I *knew* you wouldn't let me down.
(beat)
Maybe your time will come soon?
There are other members of his
family.

The wind blows even stronger and then dies down.

HARRY

I'd better get back to the house.
One spanking for what the boy did
won't be so bad. There won't be
any more! I know how to behave.
(beat)
I almost forgot!

Harry plucks a switch from the tree.

HARRY

This one shouldn't hurt too badly.
(beat)
Yes, I can live with this. . .
switch.

Smiling, Harry heads home.

FADE TO BLACK.