

THE DANGERS OF POLLUTION

Or, The Awesomeness Root Beer

(If you are sensitive to evil trees, I would advise you to not read this)

I'm sure you heard at least something about reduce, reuse, and recycle—from your parents, local cleanup helpers, whatever. You probably heard of composting too. But every once in a while, you can't reuse, reduce, recycle, or compost, and you have to throw stuff away. Just be sure your waste makes it to the dumpster safely, or else, well..., this could happen...

On the bottom of the hill, the Richards' household sat quite comfortably. Next to the house, there was an old maple tree. The tree was really big; Mr. Richards was quite proud of it. Almost every day, Mr. Richards insisted giving the tree Red's Root Beer™, which the tree loved. The tree stood strong, surviving exactly 504 thunderstorms and tornadoes in his 182 years of life.

One fine Friday morning, there was a leak in the nuclear waste power plant. In a hurry, The WasteWatchers™ drove to the scene of the leak and cleaned it up, then rushed to the WasteDestroyer©. As they were driving down a road on top of a hill, the very same hill we just described in paragraph number two, something horrible happened. They were driving at speeds so fast, they hardly noticed a barrel falling out. It rolled down the hill, rolled right next to the tree, and exploded on impact...

It was a normal Saturday morning for the Richards family. Like usual, Mr. Richards was up at precisely 6:30. Like usual, he took care of his normal stuff until 8:00. Like usual, Mrs.

Richards overslept. Like usual, Mr. Richards went out to pick up the newspaper. He picked up the paper, and started walking inside.

As he stepped inside the house, Mr. Richards took one last look outside. “Hmm...” he thought. Something just didn’t look quite right. He didn’t give too much thought about it. Though he was still “middle aged”, or maybe even “young”, it seemed as if he were already an old grandpa. Over the past few years, his mind had meddled with him quite a lot. Now, Mr. Richards was simply NOT going to get tricked by his mind again. He walked back inside with a wave of smugness around him.

As he was going through his mail, he found an envelope with a tree on it. Mr. Richards opened the envelope that said:

Dear the Richards family,

We are pleased to tell you that your maple tree is a candidate for the Completely Awesome Tree award (\$1000 award). We will be here at 12:30, on Friday. Please be ready to show us your tree, or else you could lose your prize opportunity. As always, thanks for your support!

From NTAC (National Tree Awards Committee)

“No, this can’t be happening,” Mr. Richards thought to himself. It was too good to be true. He closed his eyes and pinched himself. It wasn’t a dream. That could only mean one

other thing. Mr. Richards almost fainted in happiness. Mr. Richards could win \$1000! He was so busy freaking out, that he barely noticed the hour hand moving to the nine, to the ten, to the eleven...

NTAC was running behind. Sure, at this time of the year they were *always* running behind from angry phone calls asking why their tree didn't win. But this year, the number of people was exceptional. NTAC had to keep on adding more and more awards, so people didn't get *too* upset. Finally they had made it to the top candidate for the Completely Awesome Tree award, the Richards family. By then they were already behind by 45 minutes. Olaf Peppers, the boss, was known to be able to get to everything on time, if not early was NOT happy.

Mr. Richards waited impatiently. It was already 1:15, and yet he still hadn't caught sight of a green tree T-shirt. As he went to get some Root Beer, the doorbell rang. Mr. Richards drowsily picked up his feet. "They kept me waiting long enough," Mr. Richards grumbled. But his bad thoughts about NTAC soon changed, as a hearty group of 26 people came through the door. Mr. Richards couldn't believe it. The honorable Olaf Peppers was there!

Mr. Richards politely introduced himself, and went to show everyone the tree. But first, Red's Root Beer. At the sound of root beer, almost the entire group immediately morphed from nice people to root beer sharks. Only Olaf and three other people by the names of Frank, Hank, and Gank weren't transformed. They sat there sipping Cokes, with steely looks on their faces.

Finally, Olaf seemed to get bored, and said, "Richards, let's go see that tree. C'mon, let's go, Frank, Hank, and Gank." They walked outside.

Mr. Richards was in great alarm. The tree looked different! Oh well. It was probably just his mind again. Olaf was now asking if he could use the sky greenhouse right next to the tree. He didn't seem to notice, or care, for that matter, about the fact that the tree was 50 ft. tall, and a funny yellow color.

"Huh?" asked Mr. Richards, slightly confused. Then he realized that Olaf was talking about the sky greenhouse.

Mrs. Richards had once won a lottery jackpot, and had built a little room in the air with an elevator leading up to there, which Mrs. Richards turned into a sky green house. Now this had two advantages. The first one was that the plants had more "healthy living" and "fresh air". The second was that pesky animals couldn't decide to be evil and trample her vegetables to death. Mrs. Richards would probably kill him if she found footprints on her honorable turnips, but Mr. Richards decided that trees were more important. "Sure."

Mr. Richards, Olaf, Frank, Gank, and Hank had now reached the top of the elevator, and were looking at the tree again (from a higher altitude). Olaf then took notice of the turnips. They were simply amazing. Right away, Olaf called into his walkie-talkie for everyone to come and see the turnips. Frank, Hank, and Gank came, but Olaf sensed no movement in the "Root Beer Room." Olaf sighed. He would have to use a prized trick. "Hey, did you know that Root Beer is made from turnips?" The effect was immediate. Olaf heard chairs overturning and the table flipping. Soon he heard the feet of 22 people sprinting to the turnips. From the direction of the tree, there came a moan, then a groan...

In all the chaos, no one noticed. But when they heard a roar, it was too loud to ignore, “IDIOTS! WHAT HAS BECOME OF NATURE BECAUSE OF YOU? DO YOU REALLY THINK THAT THIS IS YOUR EARTH, OR IS IT OURS TOO??” The voice was ancient, but it still had an effect on everyone. Quite suddenly, they saw the tree pulling out its roots, one-by-one.

Every one quickly pulled out their emergency bazooka and shot the tree. The tree just cackled in the ancient voice of his. “THE POWER OF PLANTS PROTECTS ME. I AM INVINCIBLE!”

Quite suddenly, a man with a red cape that said awesome man, part of the superhero in training league jumped into the scene. “We will not give up! We wi-” The tree squashed him.

Quite suddenly, another man jumped into the scene. His cape read amazing man, part of the superhero in training league. “We will not give up! We will ne-” The tree squashed him.

Quite suddenly, yet another man jumped into the scene. His cape read terrific man, part of the superhero in training league. “We will not give up! We will never gi-” The tree squashed him.

Now, no one dared to move. Then Olaf got a wonderful idea. He poured some plant poisoning onto the tree. It didn’t work. The tree bonked it away harmlessly. Olaf checked his bag for useful stuff, and found some Red’s Root Beer™ in his bag. There was no time to lose. He quickly tossed it to the tree. The tree caught it in mid-air, and started to drink.

Now, I don’t know if you know the power of Root Beer, but Olaf knew it. The tree calmed down immediately. “I’ll let you go this time,” said the tree, “but I’m warning you...”

“It’ll be all right, tree,” said Olaf, and with that, the tree went back to growing silently, every single day.

Precisely at this moment, Mrs. Richards came out the door. “My plants!” she cried, looking at the wreckage the NTAC crew had done to her turnips. Apparently, she hadn’t realized that they were in a battle scene. “We’ll take care of it,” Mr. Richards told her.

I don’t think the tree ever harmed anybody again. Mr. Richards will still cry every time he sees the tree, but a little crying shouldn’t be any harm. For most of the NTAC people though, I just guess they’re happy it’s over. A few are probably convinced it is a dream, and four people quit their jobs, but that’s another story. Anyway, after Mrs. Richards scolded her husband 20 times for letting everyone into the greenhouse, Olaf and Mr. Richards were having a conversation that went something like this:

Mr. Richards: “I guess”-sniffle-“I-I won’t be getting”-sniff, sniff-“the-the prize anymore.”

Olaf: “That’s OK, we’re giving you the creepy tree award”

Mr. Richards later became rich by suing the WasteWatchers™ and the award money, letting the Richards family get more vegetable seeds and Red’s Root Beer™. I hope you learned why you should be careful with your waste. As for NTAC, they hope they will never-ever-in-a-million-years give another creepy tree award, and everyone lived happily ever after.

And as everyone went to sleep, somewhere in the distance, you can just make out the sounds of a barrel rolling down a hill...