

Woodman, Don't Spare That Tree ~ Darrell Petska

How innocent they appear, standing stark and shrunken during the cold months, then brandishing greenery and birdsong in warm weather and extending their cloaked arms above us as if to protect our heads from sun and rain. It's a ruse! By now, we should know.

Cold months or warm, are they not likely to be in league with the wind, dropping their massive girths upon our cars and even our heads? A strategic flop onto main street can tie up commerce and travel for hours. Even a lesser branch cast against our roofs can dislodge the satellite dish and prevent us from discovering who won Dancing with the Stars.

Such recalcitrants! On a whim come spring, your beloved maple might decide to grace you with a mere pittance of viable leaves. Or worse, the darling may grow tired of bearing its load of leaves and dump the lot prematurely in June, then die for the ultimate insult because it'll cost a thousand bucks to cut the damned thing down.

Deviousness is certainly not beyond them, plumbers and builders will tell you. Your long-standing sycamore's apparent tolerance of your kids' discombobulating swing is merely a subterfuge: underground, its roots are scouring every inch of your sewer pipe to discover a leak. Once located, penetration and blockage occur. Hey Roto-Rooter!

An exaggeration? Admittedly, that tree root snaking through your foundation and reaching for your loved ones can be dispatched nicely with a pruning saw. But just a warning: tree roots don't know when to quit, so be prepared for an extended conflict. As a corollary, more problematic is the tree root that lifts the edge of your sidewalk slab just

enough to trip someone inclined to sue you penniless. Roots are

relentless and insidious.

They're also beyond unkind. Daily they shake our kids loose of their branches, then quiver with glee as little Johnny and Lily writhe on the ground. And baby birds naked and defenseless in their nests—shameful how trees pluck them from their mothers and cast them to the ground, only to be adopted by children who sob when the little babes die or to be gulped by cats who show no remorse. Trees have no use for cats, either, luring them to the topmost branches and blocking their descent.

Trees call down lightning on our heads, scratch against our windows like a Hill House ghost to frighten our children, conceal beneath their fallen leaves spiky rakes and ankle-busting dog stakes, and stuff leaves into the gutters so we'll fall from our ladders trying to dislodge them.

Fortunately for humanity, trees are regularly executed and hacked into lumber to build our homes. Yet, even in death they plague us by inviting to dinner every termite, carpenter ant and house borer in the neighborhood.

“Name one good thing...” my mother always scolded when I reeled

off litanies of complaints. Shade? Too transient. Heat source? Natural gas burns cleaner. Photosynthesis? Rain forests are disappearing but we're still breathing. A subject for poets? Like Kilmer's "Trees"? There's a fail. Sorry I wasn't a better son, Mom.