

PETRIFIED

By James Still

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Two(C)

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THREE COLLEGE FRIENDS -- PEG, CHRYS,
and CHANCE are gathered around

their friend SIMON -- who sits in a chair
staring straight ahead.
He doesn't move.

For a long time... he doesn't move.

But the thing that's even weirder -- his
hands look like branches of a tree --
extending from his arms -- autumn leaves
clinging to the branches.

The THREE FRIENDS stare at him, unable
to look away even as they whisper loudly,
panic in the mix.

PEG

...what the hell is going on?

CHRYS

Shhh. You don't want to scare him.

PEG

Him? Scare HIM? What are you talking about? What about me? This is freaky -
- what's wrong with him?

CHANCE

I don't know, it's weird.

CHRYS

It's definitely weird.

PEG

OK that's obvious. Less obvious is just what the hell are we going to do?

CHRYS

I don't know.

CHANCE

Maybe he'll wake up.

PEG

Wake up?!? The dude is turning into a tree.

CHANCE

I don't think we should jump to conclusions.

PEG

Look at him! Look at his hands -- and those leaves. And the rest of him -- there's -- my God! is that tree bark on his shoulder?? And he's solid rock, like he's a statue or something.

CHANCE

You don't know that --

then touch him and see

PEG

Open your eyes, Jesus!

I'm not touching him --

CHRYS

He does look a little different.

PEG

Different? How can you be so calm? Your ex-boyfriend is turning into a fucking tree. Or a statue of a tree. Or -- something!?

(snapping her fingers)

Simon! Simon? Are you in there? God! Can you blink or -- something?

They lean in and look at him.

PEG SCREAMS and all three jump away.

CHRYS

Why did you scream?

CHANCE

What are you doing???

PEG

I thought he moved a little.

CHRYS

Peg --

I swear, something moved or --

You gotta get hold of yourself.

PEG

Why? Something weird, something awful has happened to Simon and you guys are acting like it's no big deal.

CHANCE

That's not true.

PEG

Then why aren't you upset or pissed or anything --

CHANCE

I am upset! OK? This is me being upset. I just -- I'm mean I'm trying to figure it out, OK? and not lose my shit.

CHRYS

Peg is right --

PEG

Thank you!

CHANCE

About what?

CHRYS

Simon? Simon!

They look at SIMON who still doesn't move.

PEG

OK we gotta think, think about this, we gotta be smart.

CHRYS

Maybe we should call somebody.

CHANCE

Like who?

CHRYS

I don't know, 9-1-1 or something.

CHANCE

I don't think so.

CHRYS

What about the campus police?

CHANCE

I don't think so.

PEG

Why?

CHANCE

Right. Because we have an alibi.

CHRYS

Which is what? How do we know we weren't the last people to see Simon before he turned into -- a tree. Or a statue or whatever. Simon? Simon, dude, baby -- your fun is over. C'mon. Simon!

SIMON still doesn't move.

PEG

Remind me to never be with either of you in a crisis ever again. You're both worthless. Did either of you talk to Simon today, tonight, anytime?

CHRYS

I texted with him when I was in Spanish class.

PEG

Where was he?

CHRYS

Um... I think he was in class.

PEG

What class?

CHRYS

Greek Mythology.

CHANCE

Why is he taking Greek Mythology?

CHRYS

It's the closest thing he could find to Game of Thrones. Now he's obsessed with all those crazy Greek Gods and nymphs and shit.

PEG

Did he seem OK?

CHRYS

What do you mean?

PEG

When you texted him! Did he seem OK or -- I don't know --

CHRYS

Well he texted me so obviously his hands hadn't turned into tree branches yet.

CHANCE

Maybe it wasn't him.

PEG

What does that mean?

CHANCE

Maybe someone else did the texting.

PEG

That's just stupid.

CHANCE

No, really, like, as a way to make it seem like he hadn't turned into a tree.

PEG

Why would someone do that?

CHANCE

To throw us off course.

CHRYS

I don't know, dude. It seemed like him.

CHANCE

How do you know?

CHRYS

Well I don't know, but I mean, it wasn't like I got his text and thought "Wow, I wonder who's pretending to be Simon because that text was shit-assed weird."

PEG

What did his text say?

CHRYS checks his phone.

CHRYS

Uuuuuuuuuuum -- got it. "WTF".

PEG

That's it? That was his text?

CHANCE

Here's another possibility. Maybe it's temporary, you know like, I don't know --

CHRYN

Like amnesia?

CHANCE

No, more like werewolves, you know -- werewolves spend a lot of time being regular people.

PEG

So... what? Our friend Simon who we've known since freshman year in the dorm has secretly been a tree this whole time and we're just now finding out?

CHRYN

If I were a tree I'd keep it a secret too.

CHANCE

Why?

CHRYN

It would be so awkward talking about it.

PEG

We're his best friends.

CHANCE

And what? you don't have any secrets? Peg? You've told us everything, every single secret there is to know about you?

PEG

I am not a tree! But if I WERE a tree -- especially a petrified tree -- I'm pretty sure I'd have to tell somebody.

CHRYN

Yeah but you're not good at keeping secrets, everybody knows that.

PEG

You're both useless.

CHRYN

We're just stoned.

PEG

Wait.

What?
CHRY S

Am I stoned?
PEG

You don't get stoned, remember?
CHANCE

But maybe I'm stoned from the fumes.
PEG

Fumes?
CHANCE

Second hand smoke, whatever they call it!
PEG

Even if you were, which you're not -- what's your point?
CHRY S

Maybe we're tripping.
PEG

You don't "trip" from smoking weed.
CHANCE

It's not acid or anything.
CHRY S

You told me you're not doing acid anymore.
PEG

I'm not, I haven't -- for months. Well, except that one time.
CHRY S

Here's something else.
CHANCE

This will be good.
PEG

No secrets, right?
CHANCE

CHRYS

I didn't say that -- Peg did.

CHANCE

OK whatever. My point is that if we're honest -- we've all made out with Simon at one time or another -- pre-tree.

PEG

Wait. You made out with Simon?

CHANCE

I was stoned. He was cute. Nothing really happened, we just made out, it wasn't anything serious.

PEG

But you're straight.

CHANCE

Yeah. But he's gay.

PEG

But you're straight.

CHANCE

And what's your point?

PEG

You're straight.

CHANCE

You say that like it's an accusation. And don't be so last century.

CHRYS

Simon and I actually hung out, you know. We were involved.

PEG

You were not involved. He was just your winter.

CHRYS

Exactly.

CHANCE

He was your WINTER?? I don't get it.

CHRYS

During the pandemic, you know, people hooked up with one person for the winter. It was a safe way to be safe. Or -- safer.

CHANCE

Why didn't I have my own winter?

PEG

Because you had me, asshole. This whole night reminds me what a great idea it was that we broke up.

CHANCE

We didn't really break up -- I thought we were just taking a break.

PEG

Yeah! A permanent one. Anyway. I made out with Simon once at a party. He was just so beautiful I wanted to kiss him and so I did.

CHRYS

Well now that we have true confessions out of the way, why are we talking about it?

CHANCE

Well -- we've all had time with Simon, you know "up close and personal" kind of time. And I for one can say for a fact I did not see or feel any tree bark, branches, or leaves anywhere on his body.

CHRYS

Anywhere on his body??? What exactly did the two of you do together?

CHANCE

I told you --

CHRYS

No, you said nothing really happened. And now you're talking about him like you've explored every square inch of his body.

PEG

Chance is right -- as much as I ever hate to agree with him about anything -- I didn't ever think Simon was anything but Simon, you know? No tree bark, no branches or leaves -- just beautiful Simon.

CHANCE

Although now that I'm thinking about it, his skin was really smooth -- alabaster kind of smooth. Shit. Like a statue.

CHRYS

Just because Simon doesn't have a hairy chest does not make him a statue! And he definitely was never covered in bark. This is so weird -- we're talking about him right in front of him like he's not even here. What if he can hear us?

They look at SIMON.

CHANCE

Remember in that movie "The Wizard of Oz" when the trees have faces and suddenly talk?

CHRYS

Shut up, dude.

PEG

What if Simon really is a tree, I mean, that's crazy -- but what if that's what he is now. Forget how it happened, or if he's always been a tree, forget all that. How are we going to be his friends?

CHRYS

I like trees.

CHANCE

Trees are cool.

PEG

I had a treehouse as a kid.

CHRYS

We had an old tire swing that hung from a tree.

CHANCE

I like Christmas trees.

CHRYS

I love when the leaves turn colors in the fall.

PEG

Last summer when I was doing my internship I went to the Redwood Forest. Those trees -- I mean: amazing.

(...)

CHRYS

Maybe all those Redwoods were once people too. Maybe all the trees everywhere were once people too and we just -- never knew it.

PEG

Maybe.

CHRYN

Maybe we'll all gonna turn into trees.

CHANCE

What do they call trees that turn to stone?

PEG

Petrified. A petrified forest.

CHRYN

Doesn't "petrified" also mean scared shitless?

PEG

Yeah.

The three of them think about it.

CHRYN

So maybe that's what happened to Simon. He was so scared, so petrified that he turned to stone.

CHANCE

What do you think he was scared of?

PEG

Everything. The whole fucking planet. The climate. Republicans. Homophobia. The Second Amendment. Covid. Plane crashes. Christmas music. War. The future. It's all pretty scary. We're all scared of everything, all the time. The whole planet, everything. It's all -- petrifying.

They look at SIMON.

A single leaf on one of his hands suddenly turns bright red and then drops from the branch and floats to the floor.

They watch the leaf.

They look back at SIMON.

THE PLAY IS OVER.