

# TO – ING

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To-ing is a parable about a tree and a man.

For most of the time they lead separate lives but sometimes they meet in the middle. He comes to visit. There is the tree. The tree came first, appearing some fifty odd years ago as a self-sown sycamore seedling (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) slowly taking root near a perimeter wall of a municipal park. The man was then a young child. He frequently played in the park.

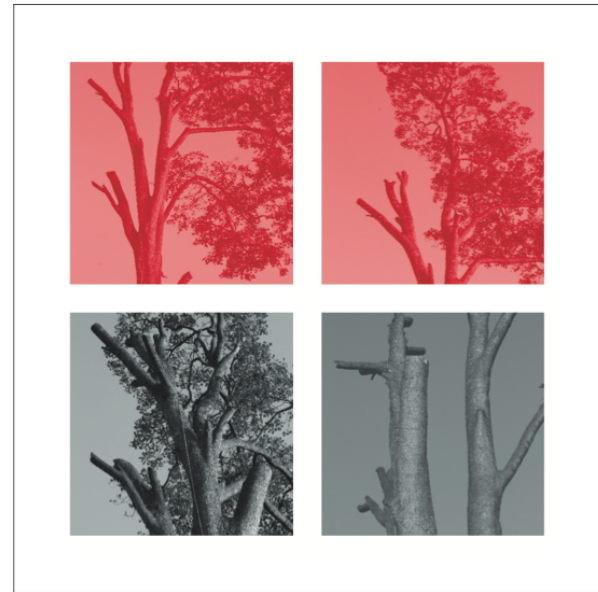
The park gardeners did not notice it at first and, when they did, it was already putting on vigorous and determined growth. The more senior gardener, a local woman of considerable resolve, was all for forking the sapling out, calling it a weed and evoking the sycamore's derisory sobriquet 'evermore'. Her junior, a slip of a girl and a keen naturalist in her spare time, praised the sycamore for its ability to host 183 different types of lichen. By late afternoon they agreed to differ and turned their attention to bedding plants. The seasons passed and the senior gardener retired. Her junior worked her way up to an elevated position in a country house estate. The tree now has a bifurcated double leader trunk. Not the hallmark of a specimen tree but it now, at least, has become established.

When autumn takes hold, the five-lobed palmate leaves are often larger than the man's hand. He picks one up from the grass and spreads his fingers across it. The experience is disarmingly indexical, like a photograph or a blot. The tree is hit by a November storm and a chainsaw team arrives to lop branches in an attempt to save it but mainly to tidy up the park. Only a few strong branches are left to hang near to the ground in the hope that these will not cause any danger to public safety. Not all the deadwood was cut away by the chainsaw. The tree slowly becomes bleached by the sun. Ivy begins its relentless and never-ending climb. The tree continues in its mangled form. The canopy lacks symmetry.

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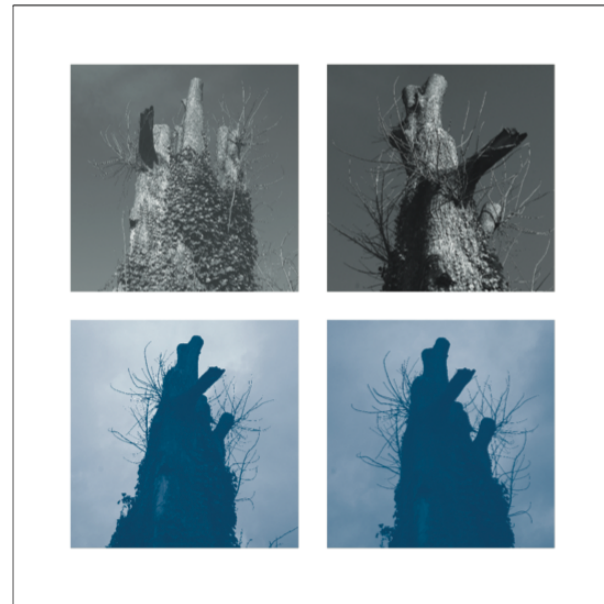
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