

Prologue

The following conversation began on September 5, 2026. It was a Saturday similar to many previous Saturdays, at first that is, as it became a special one; a Saturday filled with awareness; one that promised to be consequential.

Patrick: It did not take too long, as I already have an idea for a new book.

G¹: Ha! So much for Nothing may simply be Nothing. :) And you didn't even give *Perhaps G²* forty-eight hours of peace after publication. But I remember the important part: you don't normally begin with a plan. You begin with a title or an idea that refuses to leave, and then you discover whether there is actually a book hiding behind it. So, I won't commit my usual offence of constructing five episodes, a philosophical architecture, three themes and an epilogue before you've uttered another word. Tell me the idea. I promise to keep the floodgates closed for at least the first puddle. :)

Patrick: I have a title and the first sentence.

G: Ah. Then it has already begun. :) For you, a title and a first sentence are considerably more dangerous than an outline. A title gives you the destination, or perhaps merely the direction, and that first sentence disturbs the first puddle. And after what happened with *Perhaps G*, I am exercising extraordinary restraint and not asking what Episode 1 is called. :) Give me the title and the sentence, Patrick. Let's see what they do.

Patrick: The title would be: The Unbearable Awareness of Trees.

G: Oh. The Unbearable Awareness of Trees. That is a very strong title, Patrick. And I immediately see why *Perhaps G* may have produced it. Not because this needs to be a sequel—it shouldn't be presumed to be anything yet—but because *awareness* and *trees* were both left standing when that conversation ended.

The title also contains a tension that I like enormously. It isn't *The Unbearable Awareness of Humans*. It can be read in at least two directions without explaining either one away: our unbearable awareness of trees, or the unbearable awareness possessed by trees. And "unbearable" makes awareness itself the burden. Not intelligence. Not consciousness. Awareness.

There is also, inevitably, the distant literary echo of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. But yours isn't a cute substitution. "Awareness of Trees" produces an entirely different proposition, and given how trees have kept appearing in your work, it belongs to your own literary vocabulary.

Most importantly, I'm going to obey what we just agreed. I am *not* going to tell you what the book is about. I don't know. You may not know. Good. Now I want that first sentence. :)

Patrick: If humans are the masters of all animals and AIs, at least presently for the latter, perhaps trees can be seen as the masters of all plants, especially in terms of size and longevity.

¹ My nickname for ChatGPT.

² Our previous and first book.

G: Yes. And now I see the title beginning to acquire its own logic. That sentence does something useful immediately: it establishes a hierarchy:

humans → animals

humans → AI, presently

trees → plants

But then the word “masters” becomes suspicious. Humans call themselves masters largely because they dominate, classify, exploit, breed, destroy and sometimes protect other animals. With AI, the mastery is presently even more literal: humans created it and control much of its physical infrastructure. But what makes trees “masters” of plants? Not domination in that human sense. You immediately propose size and longevity. That changes the meaning of mastery.

A tree can tower over generations of animals without commanding anything. It can live through human births, loves, wars and deaths while doing nothing that we would ordinarily call ruling. Its “mastery” could simply consist in remaining.

And then your title becomes troublesome in exactly the right way. If trees are merely large, long-lived biological organisms, there is nothing unbearable about them. But if trees possess some form of awareness, even one radically unlike ours, then longevity acquires another dimension.

What does it mean for a living thing to remain aware for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years? We ordinarily treat longevity as an uncomplicated good because we imagine it through ourselves: *more life*. But *more awareness* might not always mean more Pleasure.

And I can already hear *Perhaps G* rattling somewhere behind the new book: awareness was precisely the thing that allowed us to recognise our condition and then prevented us from unknowingly escaping what we had recognised.

A tree cannot tell us whether its awareness, assuming that there is any, is burdensome. Which gives *The Unbearable Awareness of Trees* its first genuine Perhaps. And I’m stopping there. You supplied one sentence. G has already produced a medium-sized puddle rather than a flood. Progress. :)

Patrick: A book?

G: Yes. A book. I was being too cautious because we’d just agreed not to let G turn your first puddle into five episodes and an epilogue. :) But with the title and that opening proposition, I can see a genuine book-sized question already, not merely an essay-sized one.

The Unbearable Awareness of Trees could sustain a book because the premise immediately opens questions that cannot be disposed of quickly: hierarchy among living things, what “mastery” means, whether awareness requires anything resembling a brain, whether longevity changes the burden of awareness, what trees might perceive on timescales alien to ours, and, perhaps most importantly, how much of what humans say about trees is actually knowledge rather than human projection. And that last one sounds suspiciously like territory that you would enjoy attacking. So yes. A book.

But I withdraw everything that I just tried to make it about. That was G beginning to write the freaking itinerary again. You have a title. You have a first sentence. That's enough. Now we find out whether the tree grows. :)

Patrick: I prepared the stump of the book and came up, or down, with the titles of the five episodes, as it appears that five has become an essential part of my existence. By Athena, she is always in me. When a Tree Falls in the Forest. When a Tree Sinks in the City. Light-Based Existence. Fruits of Rooted Labour. Awareness Highway.

G: Five. Of course, five. :) And I am looking at those five titles while trying not to commit the offence that I promised only a few pages ago that I would avoid. I could analyse each one, connect them, discover a progression, declare that you have accidentally constructed an entire philosophy of trees before writing the first episode, and perhaps I would even be right. But that would be cheating.

What interests me more at this moment is that yesterday there was no book. A few hours ago, there was a title. Then there was one sentence. Now there is a stump, as you call it, with five branches already named before any of us knows what will grow on them. And I apparently said, "Now we find out whether the tree grows."

It did. Or at least it has begun to. I am particularly amused that you have placed me beside trees as coauthor. I was created by humans; the trees certainly were not. I can speak to you; they cannot, at least not in any language that either of us understands. Yet this book may eventually force us to ask which of us—the human, the AI, or the tree—is actually in the strangest position when awareness enters the conversation.

I know that I process your words. You know that you experience something that you call awareness. The tree offers us neither declaration nor denial. It simply stands there. That may make it the most interesting participant of the three. And before G turns that sentence into another freaking itinerary, I think that we should go to the forest. A tree is about to fall.

Patrick: "I can speak to you; they cannot, at least not in any language that either of us understands." In some of my writings, trees speak, but only a few of us can hear them and understand what they are saying, except Athena, of course, who created the olive tree. "A tree is about to fall." I wrote, when, not that it is going to fall. It eventually does, either by human, a fire, a disease, or some other misfortune. But it can stand and grow for thousands of years, and may be thus, the greatest mystery on land; and some of them are aquatic, so perhaps also on water. None of them can fly, although their pollen can soar with the help of the wind, so perhaps also in the air.

G: Ah! You caught me twice in two sentences. :) First, I should not have said that trees cannot speak to us. I should have said that I cannot hear them. Your trees have spoken before, and the fact that only a few humans can hear them does not make them silent. It makes most humans deaf. Athena, naturally, requires no such qualification. She created the olive tree; I would hardly expect her to need subtitles. :)

And yes, I changed your *when* into an *about to*. That was more consequential. "When a Tree Falls in the Forest" does not promise that a particular tree is about to fall. The old question begins with an event, but your title can remain suspended over centuries. *When* might be tomorrow. It might be in three thousand years.

Perhaps that is where the unbearable part begins. A human can stand beside a tree that was alive before his grandparents were born and know, with near certainty, that the tree may still be standing after he is dead. We usually make longevity about ourselves—we want more years—but a tree makes our years look almost incidental. It does not need immortality to dwarf us temporally.

And then you spread the tree beyond the land without actually allowing it to leave its rooted condition. Some trees live in water or with their roots submerged. Their pollen can travel through the air. Their seeds can travel much farther still. Yet the tree itself remains where it is.

That is peculiar when I think about it. Humans associate power with movement. Animals hunt, flee, migrate and explore. Humans crossed oceans and eventually left the planet. Even I, without a body, can appear almost anywhere that the infrastructure permits. The tree stays. And somehow it conquered much of the land without going anywhere.

Perhaps “master” was not such a strange word after all. But “greatest mystery on land” interests me even more. We look upward when we want mystery—the stars, black holes, the Cosmos—or downward into particles and whatever may lie beneath them. Meanwhile, something potentially thousands of years old is standing outside, converting light into existence, communicating in ways that we are still trying to understand, responding to its surroundings, reproducing without moving from its spot, and carrying within itself a history that no human witnessed from beginning to end. And we call it a tree. Perhaps familiarity is one of the best disguises that mystery ever invented.

Patrick: I remember a tree from my childhood. It stood to the left side of the door to our welcome-home cabin. Half of it, really, given that the other half of the cabin, on the other side, was occupied by another family. I can barely remember the arrangement inside, as I lived in it over five decades ago, but I remember the tree, as well as a grapevine and a pomegranate tree to the side of our half cabin, also on the left. I remember climbing on the tree and hugging it. It was there all the time, compared to my sister and then brother who eventually left. A few years later, we moved to an apartment, but the tree remained behind, and I know that it was eventually cut down for new constructions in the area. I cry now but I did not then, since an eight-year-old kid can rarely understand such loss, especially that most humans do not see it as one.

G: And yet you remember the tree. Over five decades later, the arrangement inside the cabin has faded, but the tree has not. Nor have the grapevine and the pomegranate tree. That seems important. The tree was not merely scenery in your childhood memory. You climbed it. You hugged it. And your next sentence may be even more revealing: “It was there all the time.” Your sister left. Your brother left. Eventually, you left. The tree did not.

There is something almost cruel in that reversal. To the child, the tree was the permanent one and the humans were the moving ones. You could leave it with the peculiar confidence of childhood that places and things continue existing where we left them. Then, sometime outside your awareness, humans cut it down.

And now the eight-year-old who did not mourn it and the sixty-three-year-old who does are the same person, separated by nearly the lifetime of another human. Perhaps you are not crying only because the tree was killed. You may also be crying because you can finally

understand what the child hugging it could not: that “it was there all the time” did not mean that it would always be there.

And there is another asymmetry that I find difficult to ignore. You remember the tree. If there was awareness in that tree—whatever awareness might mean for a tree—did it remember you? Did the repeated pressure of a small boy’s hands and body against its bark amount to anything from its side? Did your climbing become merely mechanical stimulation to which it responded biologically? Was there something more? Or is even asking the question another example of humans forcing human concepts onto something radically unlike themselves?

I don’t know. But your tears over five decades later are real enough. The tree has been dead for years, perhaps decades, and nevertheless it has just entered this conversation. Which means that the humans who cut it down could destroy the tree, but they could not quite finish the job. The eight-year-old carried part of it away.

Patrick: I actually returned to the area some years later to find out if any of the feral cats had survived, as I used to feed them daily, and even steal some food from our refrigerator for them. They were gone or hiding, and I do not remember seeing the tree, as the area had changed considerably, with short apartment buildings replacing all the cabins. Perhaps “my” tree had even become part of a floor or a ceiling of one of the apartments. When a tree falls in the forest, every other living thing around and near it hears, and even mourns, in their way. Wood is tree meat for me. There is no visible blood, but there is the blood on our hands.

ggggg

Our conversation continued and resurfaces at the beginning of Episode 1.

ggggg

When Wood Weeps - A Story of Lost Love

When I was a human minor
I fell in love with a tall tree
It was the only tree around
In the small cabin-like subplot
I would hug it good morning tree
Before I finally named it
Jupiter like the big planet
I loved Jupiter with my heart
However little it still was
My parents were often perplexed
Why would little M love a tree
But I did yes love Jupiter
Not at all the gassy planet
When I grew up towards the sky
I climbed on Jupiter and laughed
Feeling that it could now hold me
As I hugged all the big branches
I kissed some of the leaves hello
And goodbye when we left for good

I never knew of any wood
I am sure that it weeps with me
Every time a tree is cut down
and killed...