

The Guardian of Campus

I know that I am but a guardian of knowledge. My peers and I have been tasked with providing passage into the heart of campus, where students learn, create, and teach. There are others around taller than I, shading me from the temperate northern California Sun. But I do not mind; my ancestors on the Canary Islands have passed the gift of expansive palm leaves down from generation to generation so that I may still enjoy the Sun's sustenance. In fact, I see my stout stature as being quite advantageous; as I am lower to the ground, I can better hear the conversations of those I have ushered toward their dreams. I know that I am but a guardian of knowledge, but these conversations have spawned aspirations of my own: to explore what I have promised to guard.

In all transparency, I only hear brief parts of dialogue, not enough to even understand the context or meaning of a conversation. Those I guard are busy, and have better things to attend to than update a tree on their life's work. More knowledge to create, more knowledge for me to look after I suppose. I believe I once heard two experts in computer science talk about the newest advancements in machine learning while briskly jogging along the ranks of my peers, but I am still a bit unclear about what a machine is. Also, it was hard to distinguish between the sounds of nearby construction. Learners need to build more buildings for more knowledge so that I may guard it, so I understand. Nobel prize winning astrophysicists once paused to debate what may be beyond my life-providing Sun, but I could not understand the scientific jargon to answer any of my own questions. Poets, screenplays, and other experts in language mutter to themselves new ways to describe old feelings. But I only guard.

New students line up along the pavement in cars as they set their eyes on the future, their loved ones elated. The knowledge I guard is waiting for them. I once overheard a young man declare to his family, who were trailing behind trying to catch up, that he would double major. He wanted to explore economics and his passion for art. What a lucky person! I am but a guardian of his journey, and such a journey of my own would only be a distraction to my duties. How would such a thing even be possible? With these thoughts, it's a miracle I haven't broken my self-imposed vow of silence. My job is a serious one, and talking would only be a distraction. It seems my peers have reached the same conclusion, as I've never heard a word from them.

Why was it I decided to be silent again? I feel like my goals were so different back then: guard. Now I am beginning to question my original stance. It seems I have even forgotten who has tasked me with guarding this place. I just assumed being placed at the front of campus meant I was supposed to guard its entrance. But, who am I guarding said knowledge from? Yes, I have gathered from collective interactions with newcomers that the odds of actually being a student here are slim, but the knowledge grown here is quite accessible to those outside. Why else would these ideas be created if not to be shared? I have come to a decision. I must break my vow to gain answers.

"Um, hello there fellow...guardians. Sorry to...uh...bother you, but, do you know why we are here guarding campus," I hesitantly questioned.

Silence. What was I to expect from trees, especially those with such an important job.

“W-wait, a-are we allowed to talk?” whispered the tall palm to my right.

“I’m...I’m not sure. When I got here, everyone was so quiet, I assumed there had to be an important...reason. Are you telling me there is no reason?” replied the tree to my left.

I guess even trees sometimes fall victim to herd mentality (a term I learned from two political students arguing one day). Before long, both rows of trees were introducing themselves. My taller right neighbor was a Mexican Fan Palm who had always felt sorry for blocking the Sun’s rays. The tree to my left let me know that they had wanted to tell me I had a bit of gum stuck to my trunk all week, but said I looked really focused on something else. We have all come to the conclusion that we are not guardians, but act more as an introduction. More surprising still is the fact that many of our numbers can be found throughout campus. Once we started to reach out, we began communicating quite effectively.

I continue to sit along what I have learned to be Palm Drive, welcoming those who wish to have their ideas celebrated and challenged. I now hear complete stories about our glorious Sun, and its many circling planets from my peers along the row. I hear finished poems crafted by those same poets who brainstormed under my fans. Once, I was but a guardian of knowledge. I am now part of its network.

Greenest of Subjects

“My greenest of subjects. I am happy to announce that your Queen has finally arrived once more. How long has it been since my somber departure? Too long... but now you may all appreciate the beauty of my glorious flowers!” I declare. “Please, let your celebrations be known.”

“For the thousandth time, we don’t recognize you as Queen, lady. Who...what...why would you think you were our Queen? We go through this every year!” cried one of the many green shrubs encircling me.

“Yeah,” shouted a younger shrub, “most of the year you’re silent, and then out of nowhere you start making commands like you own the place.”

I must respond with authority. “My greenest subjects. There is no need for confusion. I will provide all of the answers you seek. You see, my power comes from the beautiful pink flowers that cover my canopy. Every year, my flowers bloom, signaling the beginning of my new reign. Once they fall, and the world must sadly endure without their magnificence, I fall silent in mourning as my reign ends. Does that answer all of your questions, my simplest of green subjects?”

I look around my paradise of vegetation that constitutes my domain in the concrete square. Tall palm trees tower over all I rule over, presumably my guardians. My greenest of subjects form a ring around me, honoring my royalty and superiority. Human guests rest on the edge of my territory, or mill about in unknown areas. My pocket of land must make other rulers embarrassed of their own. I look through a small gap between my guardians and see the church that must have been built to recognize my reign: “Memorial Church.” I have heard it called that by many human tourists. My domain is a peaceful one. I feel content, a sense of ...

“Hey!” interrupts an older shrub that inhabits my green ring of subjects “we do not like you. And no, that building over there was not built for you. Every time you stop being silent, at one point or another you brag about ‘your’ building, so I just wanna get that out of the way really quick. Second, it just so happens that we were put here in such a way to look like a ring. We did not gather here on purpose, so stop thinking there is any correlation. Finally...there are many, many species of tree that flower, and you just happen to be one of them. You. Are. Not. Special.”

“My greenest, ignorant subjects. Jealousy is not a valued trait. But, I do understand. My beauty and royalty threatens you. If I were a crueler Queen, you may be punished for such an outburst. But I am a Queen that rules through peace. So I will just say...chill a little bit, ok?”

Anyways, I feel content, a sense of pride overwhel...

“Quick question...um...what do you do when you are...think you are...uh...Queen? It seems you just sit there like the rest of us. Isn’t a Queen meant to lead” rudely interrupted one of my innocent green subjects.

“Hmm...good question. My beauty leads others to understand that I am beautiful.”

Despite the confused shrugs of my shrubs, I feel content with my answer. A feeling of pride overwhelms me. That is, until I notice one of my oh so beautiful flowers fall to the ground.

Insulting Trees

The three trees were arguing as usual. None had names, but were not afraid to give each other crude ones. It was incredible that all of the passing people, busy with work or simply visiting campus for the sites, could concentrate over all of the noise. To make the following summary of today's disagreement more palatable, let us refer to these trees based on the perspective of a bystander sitting on Green Library Fountain's circular bench.

Middle was angry about space. He had been dealing with these issues ever since being planted in between his two companions. Today was the day he would make his disapproval known.

"Hey, both of your roots are touching mine constantly, and I do not like it. Move!" Middle screamed, interrupting the conversations of the birds in the chilly Palo Alto morning.

"Hey, I don't know if you understand this, but trees don't move. You're an odd one aren't you?" replied Left.

"Yeah, not gonna lie, that was a pretty stupid demand. Almost as stupid as Left" retorted Right, "if anyone should be complaining it's me. These squirrels keep bouncing between my branches. It's making me quite nauseous."

"*It's making me quite nauseous*" mimicked Middle. "I told you to stop making me feel dumb Right, especially when there is no possible way you could feel nauseous. You're a tree."

"Now he gets it," muttered Left as she fanned her branches out, hoping to get a quick bite of sunshine.

This squabble went on for several hours. A few surrounding trees kept yelling for the trio to quiet down, only to be met with a variety of smart remarks; these are the only instances it seemed the three could agree, and they were actually quite a good team when it came to combining insults. The united front would only last until the next complaint from one of the three.

Later that day, a group of students were jumping around in the Green Library Fountain, presumably participating in the tradition of fountain hopping when the comment of one caught the attention of Right.

"You know, they call this the 100 Years Fountain. That sure is a long time isn't it" innocently acknowledged one fountain hopper."

"That's a hot take for sure," said Right, surprised. "One hundred years does not seem like a long time to me. In fact, I think that may be a dumber take than anything Left has ever had."

"I do agree with Right in this case, don't you Left," said Middle.

"I agree with most of what she said. No need to insult me though," asserted Left.

"When I think about it, these humans are quite weird. Riding around on those bikes when they are lucky enough to have legs to move around. Showoffs! And their backpacks. They just look...odd" said Middle.

"I heard they keep paper in those bags" whispered Right.

“PAPER?!” screamed Left. “They just walk around with dead trees in their bags. The stupidity! Hey you all, why do you walk around with my kind in your bags? That’s kinda weird, isn’t it?”

Of course the humans simply ignored the question as they splashed around.

“Middle, Left, this...this deserved to be made fun of. I would like to call a truce. There is no way I am going to just sit around arguing with you dummies and not make it my mission to insult every person I meet for that dumb way of doing things. What do y’all think?” asked Right.

“I mean, I heard they also have laptops, which kinda saves paper, but hey, I like insulting y’all, so I am sure insulting these people would be interesting” agreed Middle.

Left’s leaves nodded in agreement. It was then that the trio had a shared mission. No longer did they bicker among themselves. Instead, they found their life’s passion in mocking each and every person that strolled by them as they waited along the edge of the 100 Years Fountain.