

SIDE TWENTY-TWO

POPLAR TREE

STOP!

LAUREL

She spoke!

POPLAR TREE

Listen up, everybody.

LAUREL

What is it, baby? You name it and it's yours.

POPLAR TREE

All I want is a moment of everybody's time....I'm not in the habit of giving long speeches, but you all need to hear what I have to say.

LAUREL

Of course we do.

POPLAR TREE.

Especially you, Laurel.

LAUREL

(Giddy.)

I think she likes me.

POPLAR TREE

I do like you, Laurel....But I don't love you. I'm far too independent to fall in love with anyone, particularly a human being. I'm self-pollinating, if you know what I mean.

LAUREL

It's all right, baby. You take your time.....

POPLAR TREE

It's not a matter of time. It's a matter of inclination....I just don't love you, Laurel. But that man does....Enough to give up his livelihood to save the tree you love, even though he despises me with a passion. Isn't that right, Mr. Duckfoot?

JIMMY

Despises is such a dirty word....How about "loathes"?

POPLAR TREE

You'd be a fool to give up a man like that for a tree like me.

LAUREL

But I love you. Not him.

POPLAR TREE

Do you really?

LAUREL

(Less certain.)

I think so.

POPLAR TREE

I don't. I think you're just stubborn like your mother.

GWENDOLYN

Thank you.

POPLAR TREE

Maybe you had a crush on me at the beginning, but now it's Jimmy you come out here to see every morning, not me.

JIMMY

You think so?

POPLAR TREE

I know so.

LAUREL

I'm so confused.

POPLAR TREE

It's okay to be confused. But be confused with Mr. Duckfoot....Human relationships are complicated enough—no reason to bring tree hormones into the mix. Trust me: When my xanthophyll starts flowing, you'll wish you'd chopped me up for firewood.

LAUREL

I guess I could try loving Jimmy—If *you* wanted me to.

JIMMY

That's all I ask for....Just try a little bit.

POPLAR TREE

In any case, I'm tired of being loved. Do you really think you're the only girl ever to pine away under my branches? Every summer it's the same weeping, the same pleading, the same ribbons. Well, I've had enough....Mr. Duckfoot, could I ask you a small favor?

JIMMY

After what you've just done, you can ask for anything you want? All of my plant food, my fertilizer, my marble bird baths—it's all yours. I don't know how to thank you.

POPLAR TREE

I'll tell you how....Bring over that axe.

JIMMY

Sure thing.

(Jimmy retrieves the axe.)

POPLAR TREE

What I want you to do is to chop me down. Right there at the base.

JIMMY

You serious?

POPLAR TREE

Have you ever known a poplar tree to tell a joke?

LAUREL

Please, baby. You can't.

POPLAR TREE

No, but Mr. Duckfoot can....I'm tired of being loved. I'm tired of being doted on and fawned over by a horde of pathetic teenyboppers. They're a dime a dozen—self-absorbed sniveling brats, every one of them—and I'll be glad to be out of my misery.

JIMMY

Watch it! That's my girl you're talking about!

LAUREL

I want to die. Chop me in a half too.

POPLAR TREE

Don't be stupid. You have everything to live for. You've got a man who'll love your doting and fawning and sniveling. What more could a girl want?....Now if you'll get to work, Mr. Duckfoot.