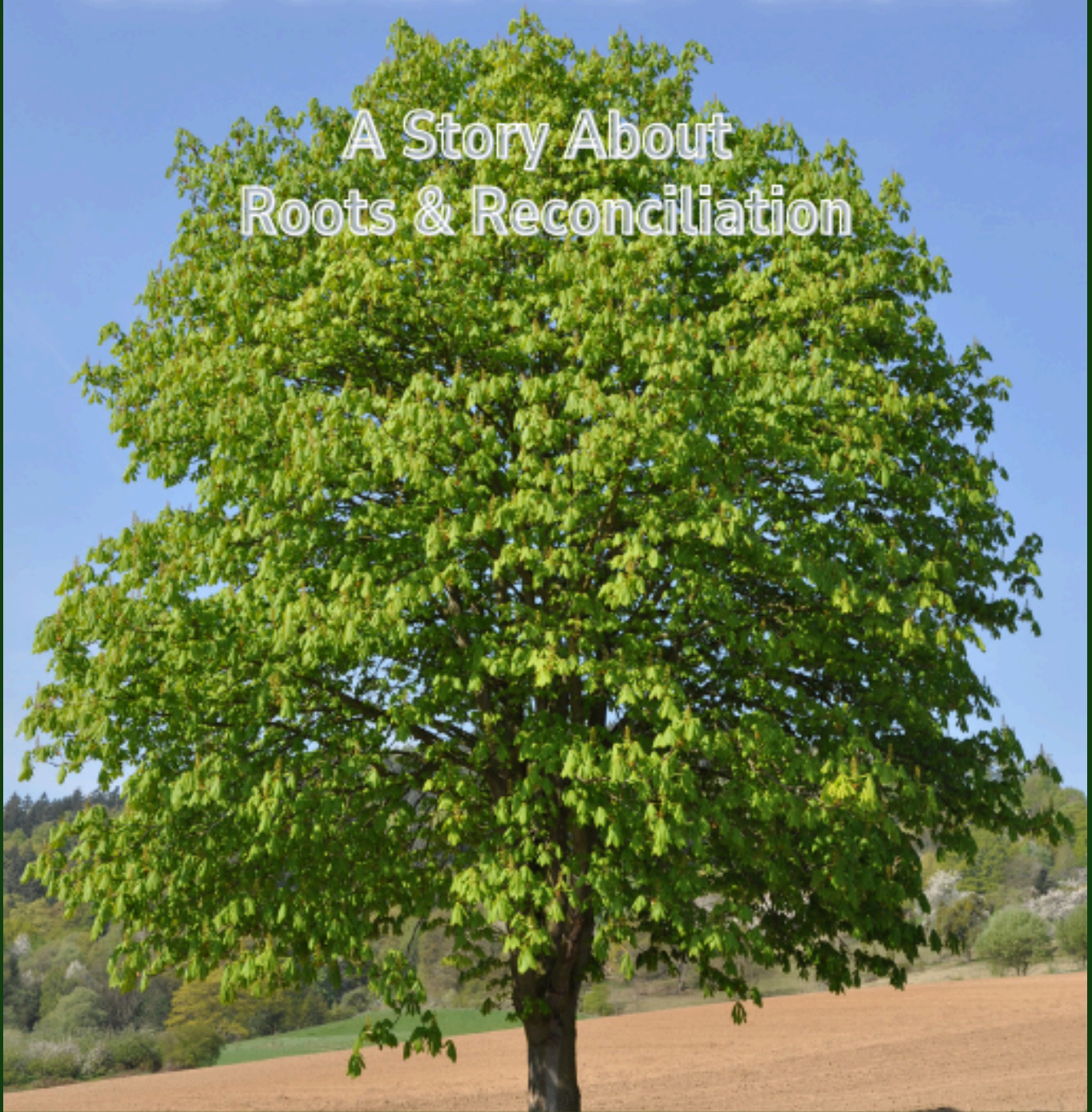


# THE PROPERTY LINE at the OLD CHESTNUT GROVE

A Story About  
Roots & Reconciliation



**Ron Laney**

THE MERCY HOLLOW STORIES

**The Property Line**  
**at the**  
**Old Chestnut Grove**  
**by Ron Laney**

A Short Story About Roots & Reconciliation

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## Hebrews 12:14-15

**Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.**

(NKJV)



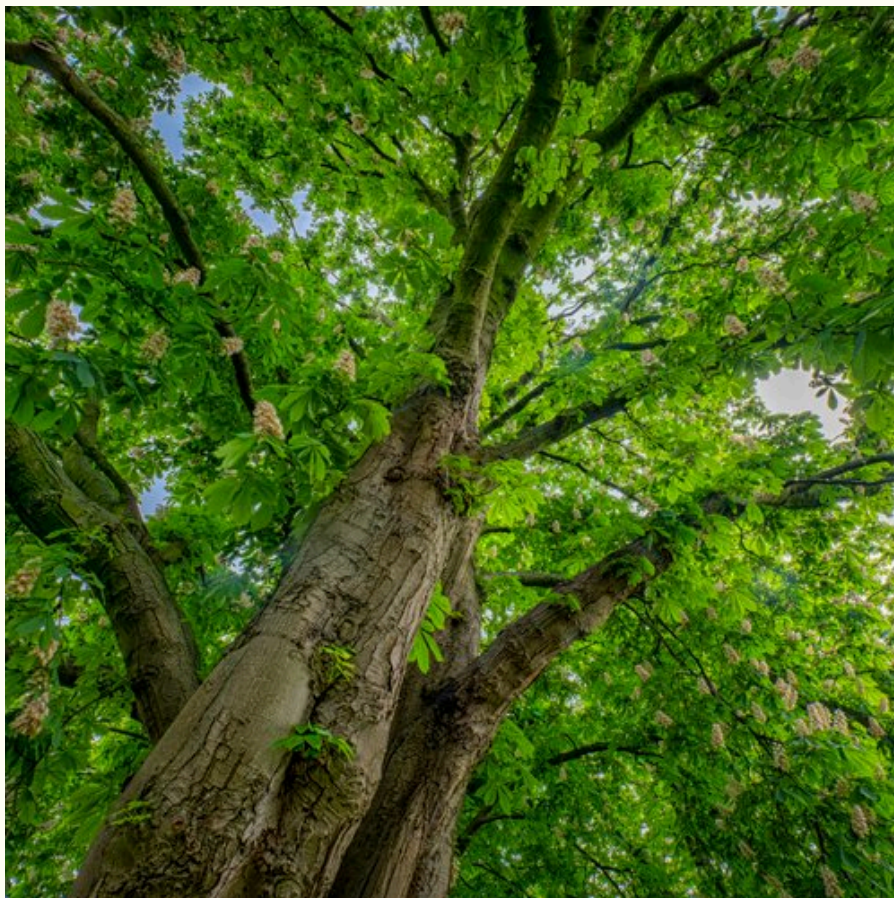
# Welcome to Mercy Hollow

The grand old chestnut grove had stood for a hundred and twenty-five years. People came from three counties over to enjoy the chestnut trees of Mercy Hollow. They loved to sit in the shade, to let their children run between the trees and to breathe the cool air that seemed to belong to a better world than the one they'd left behind. And the roasted chestnuts were more than worth the drive.



Ole Clem Calloway had planted the first tree himself. He had pressed the very first seed into the rich soil on the hillside with his own thumb. He said a quiet prayer over it and walked back to the house to wait. He waited forty years before the chestnut grove became a glorious place to gather. Ole Clem had done a good thing. He died a happy man.

The chestnut grove was passed down in the family through the generations with each year being better than the one before. Then the care of the grove fell to Cade.

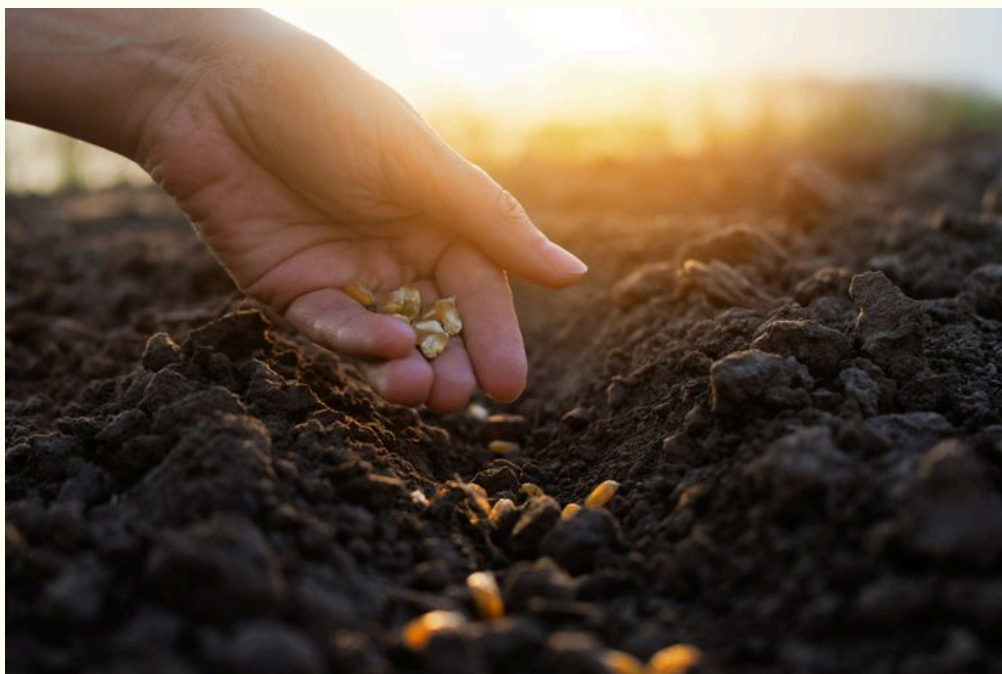


Cade Calloway tended and cared for the grove much like his family before. Then one day there was a serious grievance about a property line. The questioning of the property line was too much for Cade to handle. His family had been there for decades on decades. The grove had grown and expanded. Of course, the original fence had long since been gone – just rotted away. But no one thought anything about it. Everyone knew where the invisible line was just on the other side of the chestnut trees.

The problem had started small: a question and a hired surveyor by the neighbor, Dell Pruitt. Dell and Cade had grown up together. But Dell had moved off to the big city and been very successful in the real estate business. He had recently inherited his father's home place. His plans were to retire on that old farm. In his mind he was just trying to establish correct boundaries for the sake of his records and the positioning of the new barn he was about to build.



All of that was well and good, but it was just the way he spoke to Cade. Cade felt slighted by the whole idea of being questioned and talked to like he didn't know what he was talking about. Cade knew the exact spot that had long since been settled by the county surveyor. But Dell insisted and spoke to Cade in what he felt was a condescending tone. And that was it for Cade. From that day forward he never forgot what he felt Dell had done to him – the smirk, the hinted sarcasm and his dismissive words. That moment became a seed, a memory that rooted in Cade's heart. **Another seed had been planted, but this one was of a different kind.**





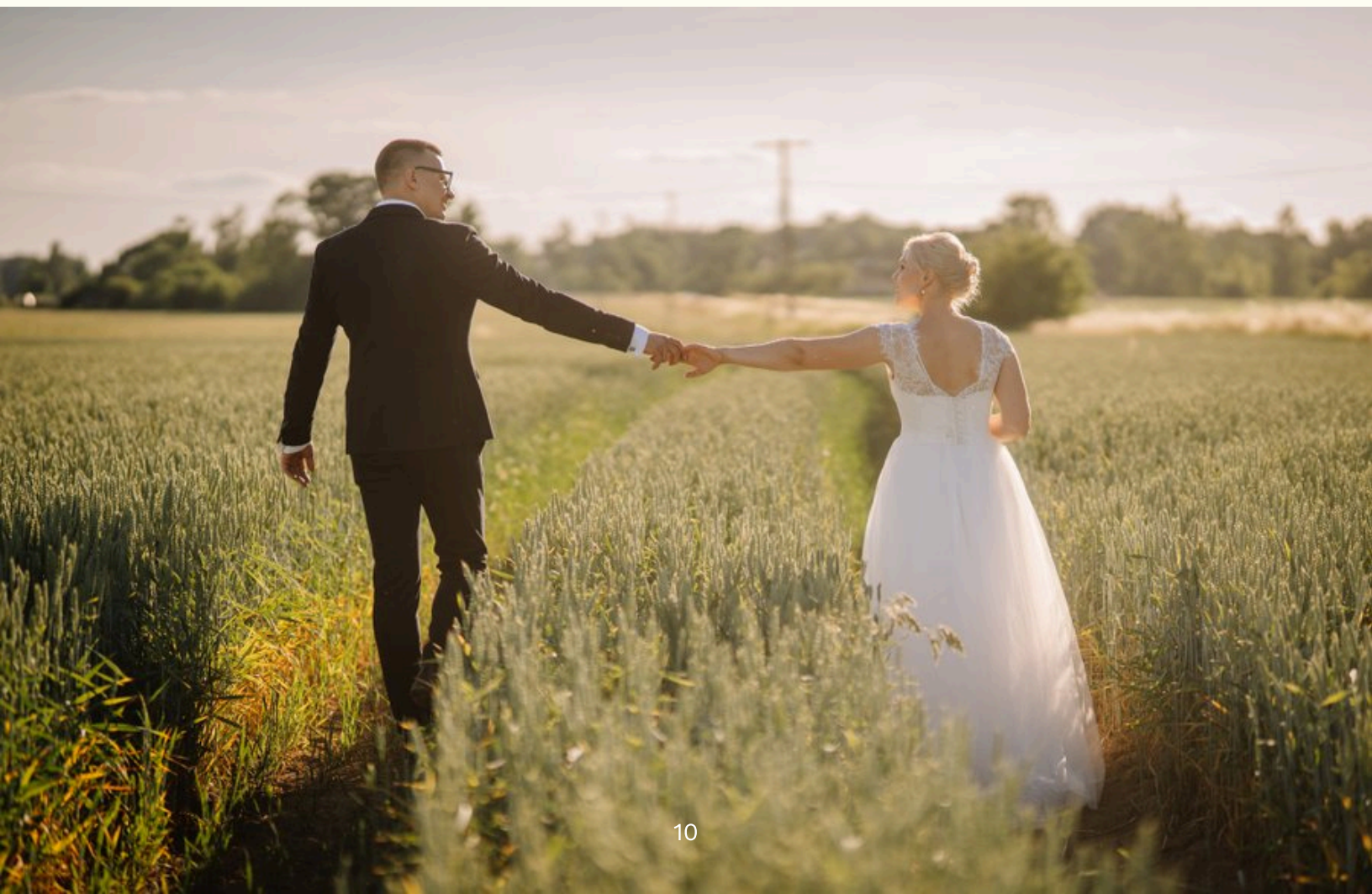
From time-to-time Cade turned the incident over in his mind. He rehearsed the conversation in the truck on the way to the feed store when he saw Dell out working in his yard. He kept the wound open the way a man keeps picking at a sore, and every time he monkeyed with it, it would bleed all over again.

**He stopped speaking to Dell.**

**Then he stopped speaking to anyone who spoke to Dell.**

**Then he started speaking about Dell to anyone who would listen.**

When Dell's daughter married the Tatum boy from the next hollow over, Cade boycotted the wedding and poisoned his own family with his bad mood until three of his children stayed home too, even though they had no quarrel with anyone. Everyone in their neck of the woods went, but them.



Then something happened to the grove. It began to change in the third year of this on going feud between the two neighbors. The chestnuts at the west edge of the farm, the part near the property line nearest Dell, began to turn yellow before autumn. Their leaves curled inward like clenched fists. By the following spring, two of them did not leaf out at all.

Cade blamed the drought. He blamed the beetles. He hired a man from the university extension office, who walked the grove for hours. **He tapped on the trunks, took soil samples, and finally stood at the edge of the hollow with his hands in his pockets perplexed.**



“Mr. Calloway,” the man spoke carefully, “there's something going on underground. The root system of all these trees are connected. Chestnuts share nutrients through the soil, through networks that reach from one to the other. Much like the way a family shares food at the same dining room table. What affects one tree affects the others.” He paused. “I'll be honest with you. I've tested the soil and it isn't drought. I don't believe it's a virus. **Something has changed in this grove. Something that shouldn't be here is here and I can't quite put my finger on it.**”

Cade didn't ask any more questions. He had his own thoughts and speculations. Some of them haunted him with the prospects of losing it all.



By the next year, the die-off had progressed substantially. The great tree at the center of the grove they all called Papa, the one ole Clem had planted with his thumb, stood gray and silent. Its limbs no longer reached upward. They were sagging.

**“Daddy, she said, “what is happening to the trees?”**

”Cade sat with his coffee and said nothing for a long time. Outside the window, the grove stood quiet and seemed to be fighting for its life. The once crisp air that everyone loved and talked about, was now stale and more than concerning.

“I planted something in this ground,” he finally said, and his voice was different than she'd ever heard it — cracking, sad and honest. “Something I should have never let take root. And it grew where I couldn't see it. And by the time I could see what it had done—,” he stopped.

**Lena spoke up, “Is it too late?”**

He looked up at the grove through the big picture window in his dining room.

**"I don't know," he said.**" "But I feel like I've got to go over to Dell Pruitt's house first thing tomorrow morning. First time in seven years." He set down his cup of coffee. "And I'm going to carry a chestnut seed in my pocket. If these trees can't be saved, then —," he didn't finish his sentence.

Lena seemed to understand. Maybe there was still some good ground that could receive a seed.



The next morning, Cade rose before sunrise. He fiddled around slowly, the way someone stalls when they know the day is about to require something they really are not looking forward to. He went to the jar on the kitchen windowsill. It was the jar Lena had filled with chestnuts from the last healthy tree at the grove's eastern edge. Cade placed one seed in his shirt pocket. He drove to Dell Pruitt's place slower than he had driven in his whole life. Dell answered the door with his coffee in his hand, **and for a long moment the two men just looked at each other across seven years of silence.** Dell's face was older and more worn and Cade's was too.



"I owe you something I should have given to you a long time ago," Cade said. He had rehearsed a speech. It vanished from his memory the moment he opened his mouth. "I let something grow in me, Dell. And it spread further and lasted longer and did more damage than I ever thought it could. I'm sorry for that. **Forgive me for thinking so ill of you all these years.**"

Dell Pruitt looked at him for a long moment. Then he opened the door wider and said, **"Why don't you come in and sit down for a minute."**

They sat at Dell's kitchen table for two hours.

They said hard things and true things. Cade admitted more than he'd planned. Dell admitted some things, too. Truthfully, Dell didn't know how bad all this had set with Cade. By the time the coffee was gone, something in the room had shifted. Not all the way fixed, two hours cannot undo seven years. But they were opened up to one another again. **Healing had begun.**



Before he left, Cade reached in his shirt pocket and set the chestnut on Dell's kitchen table. "I'd like to plant this on the line between our properties," he said. "On the surveyor's mark. Right down the middle." He paused. "If you're willing. I think the soil is still rich in that area."

Dell looked at the seed for a moment. Then he reached into the drawer beside the stove and pulled out a seed of his own. It was a chestnut from Cade's grove, one that had blown into his yard years ago and taken root just beyond his back porch. He set it next to Cade's on the table.

**"Two trees, let's plant two trees," Dell said. "Both side by side right on the property line."**

They planted those two chestnuts that afternoon, just a few feet apart, right next to the surveyor's mark. It was right where this whole mess started in the first place.



The man from the university came back out that Spring. He walked the grove again, slower this time, and stopped for a long while at the western edge, near the property line. Then he came back to where Cade and Dell were standing together and he said something neither man had expected.

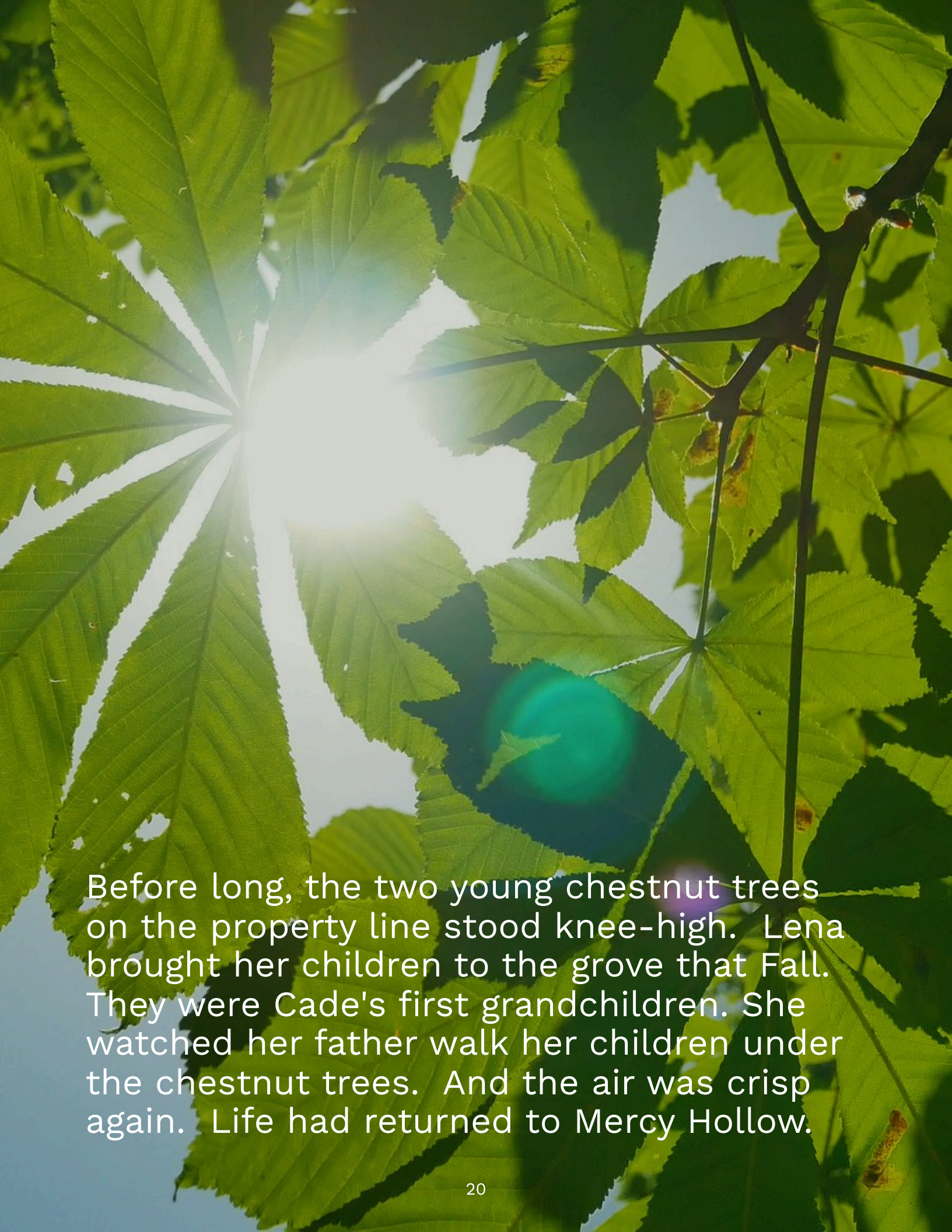
"They're responding." He showed them his findings. New growth at the base of several trees was beginning to show. Faint green buds on some branches that had been bare for a long time had appeared. It wasn't a resurrection, but it was a start.

Unfortunately, some of the older trees were gone for good. But the die-off had stopped.

Whatever had been moving through the root system from tree to tree had stopped.

"I can't fully explain it scientifically," the man admitted. "But I've seen this before. A grove under stress and the whole network suffers. Then something changes in the environment, the conditions shift, and the trees begin to recover."

He looked at both men. **"Whatever you did differently," he said, "keep doing it."**



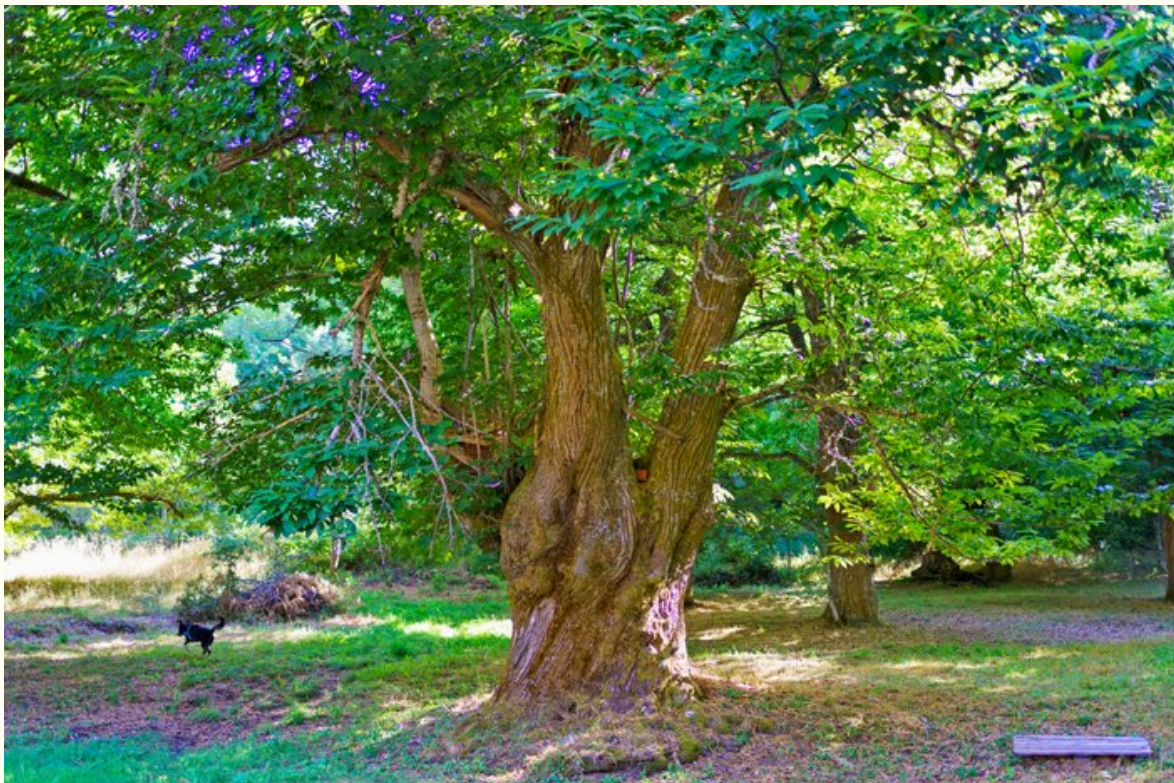
Before long, the two young chestnut trees on the property line stood knee-high. Lena brought her children to the grove that Fall. They were Cade's first grandchildren. She watched her father walk her children under the chestnut trees. And the air was crisp again. Life had returned to Mercy Hollow.

Later that evening, Cade was left alone with his thoughts. A certain gratitude was swelling up in his heart. His mind went back to the stories he had heard about his great, great grandfather pressing that first seed into the ground with his thumb. He thought about how long a grove takes to become what it was meant to be, and how much faster it could be undone. He thought about what had gone wrong and how it was made right.



Cade, now a much humbler version of himself, reflected on how it's all connected – his heart, his thoughts, his attitude, his work, his relationships, his farm, his family, his future. It all feeds from the same root system just like that old grove of chestnut trees. Cade understood that what lives in a person eventually lives in everything around them. And he decided that whatever years remained, he would spend them being the kind of man who planted good things and not the kind who poisoned the ground.

## **Mercy Hollow was thriving again!**



## Hebrews 12:14-15

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# Note to the Reader

The story you just read is a parable — a simple story carrying a deep truth. Bitterness rarely announces itself. It takes root quietly, in the dark, beneath the surface of things. By the time we see what it has done, the damage has already spread far beyond the original wound.

But grace is just as quiet, and more powerful. The same root system that carried the poison can carry healing, if something in the conditions change. That something is almost always the same thing: a man or woman willing to go first, carrying a seed of peace against their chest, not knowing how it will be received. Jesus called them Peacemakers.

If this story stirred something in you, don't let it go without spending some time with Jesus. There may be a property line somewhere in your life that is long overdue for something new to be planted on it.

*Grace & Peace!*

*— Ron Laney, Hope It Helps*

# Reflections

*Dig It Out, Talk It Out, Walk It Out*

## Dig It Out - Discover

1. Hebrews 12:15 says bitterness is a root and “springs up.” What does this teach about how bitterness begins and works?
2. The verse says bitterness causes trouble and “defiles many.” Who were the “many” defiled in Cade's life... the people who were poisoned without even having a personal grievance, but participated anyway? Ever seen this happen?
3. What is the connection between “pursue peace” and “see to it that no root of bitterness springs up”? Why do you think those two commands sit right next to each other?
4. The man from the university said the chestnut trees share nutrients underground. What does that tell us about how bitterness can spread in a group of people? or on the positive, how good things can spread, too?

## Talk It Out - Understand

5. Cade's bitterness stemmed from something that happened and then something he imagined. Does having a legitimate grievance make bitterness more dangerous or less? If you have a real or perceived point of offense, how should you handle it?
6. Cade kept the wound open by rehearsing the offense in his mind, over and over. What habits in your own life tend to water a bitter root rather than pull it up? Ever had a movie that won't quit playing in your mind? What do you do about it?
7. Humility is a big part of reconciliation and pride is the biggest deterrent. How was humility displayed by both men? Why is humility so important?
8. Cade carried a seed in his shirt pocket, against his chest, before he ever knocked on Dell's door. What does that detail teach? What does it take to go to someone carrying reconciliation before you know if they'll receive it?

## Walk It Out - Live It

9. Is there a name that comes to mind when you read this story? What needs to be done?

10. The grove didn't die all at once. It died slowly, one tree at a time, starting at the edge nearest the offense. What in your life might be yellowing at the edges because of something unresolved in your heart?

11. Lena asked, "Is it too late?" Cade didn't know — but he went anyway. What would it look like for you to go anyway, even without knowing the outcome?

12. The two men planted their seeds on the surveyor's line, one on each side. Reconciliation didn't erase the boundary, but it changed what grew there. What boundary in your life could become a place where something new is planted? What new growth is The LORD wanting to see in your life and those around you?

**Grace & Peace!**