

# the Magical History of Knox County

*“Animalie” theme plays*

**MORDECAI:** Listeners, this week’s episode is an unusual one. My reading in the station’s archives had alerted me to the proliferation of magical flora and fauna in Knox County. There are so many fascinating plants around here! You’ve got Pravum Fungus, Constat Herba, Contristatus Glande...I won’t bore you with the Latin, but really this stuff is fascinating. However, my precursory research gave me very little idea of how those plants related to the rest of the world. This seemed like a hole in our magical knowledge, so I decided to see if these unique species were affected by phenomena like global warming.

*NED snorts derisively.*

**MORDECAI:** It’s a legitimate question! My minor was environmental studies.

**NED:** And you came to work on a radio show about magic?

**MORDECAI:** It’s relevant in any context! Anyway, I quickly found that the reason for this lack of information might be due to a lack of scientific research. After I exhausted the station library, I called all of the local experts I could on the subject, and most of the calls went something like this:

*Phone rings twice. Sound of a landline being picked up.*

**PROFESSOR WRIGHT:** *(grumpily)* Hello?

**MORDECAI:** Hello, Professor Wright? This is Mordecai Dogwood from the Magical History of Knox County. I’m doing a story on the effect of global warming on magical flora, and I was hoping you could -

**WRIGHT:** (*cutting him off*) Where did you find this number?

**MORDECAI:** In your university's directory, you're listed as the chair of the plant biology department, and so you seemed like the kind of person who would know...

**WRIGHT:** (*cutting him off, again*) Young man, I went to Harvard. I wrote my dissertation on the *Guettarda retusa* tree, and was present when the last of the species died in Cuba when you were probably still in elementary school, and you have the *gall* to imply I would interest myself in such hokum?

**MORDECAI:** With all due respect, I would disagree that this is *hokum*...

*Phone slams. Dial tone continues under Mordecai's words.*

**MORDECAI:** Sir? Sir!

*Dial tone continues.*

**MORDECAI (VO):** The other calls were equally unproductive, if not a bit more pleasant, so I asked Ned if she had any idea where such information might be found.

**NED:** Which, I'll remind you, is *not my job*.

**MORDECAI:** So I went to the county library to see if it was any more useful than our own. I went through the entire plant biology section and came up with...nothing. So I asked the librarian, Marion Serino.

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Hi, uhh I'm looking for some information about magical plants.

**MARION:** Can you be more specific?

**MORDECAI:** Well I have a radio show, The Magical History of Knox County. Maybe you've heard of it.

**MARION:** Oh yeah, I haven't listened to it since Abigail...

**MORDECAI:** Oh. Well, I'm the new host. And I'm trying to do a story on the effect of global warming on magical plants.

**MARION:** ...oookay. Well, from what I know, magical plants are pretty much like regular plants other than the feature that designates them as "magic," so other than slightly increased resilience, they'd probably react the same way anything else would. *(beat)* But if you want, you could talk to Kip Cavendish. He's a park ranger over by Apple Valley Lake, and he knows quite a bit about this sort of thing.

**MORDECAI:** Well, uh, Ms. Serino, if you don't have any plans this evening, I'd love to get *your* opinion on this...

**MARION:** Oh, uh, wow, well...I've actually got plans with my boyfriend, so....

**MORDECAI:** Oh, uh...

**MARION:** But good luck with that tree thing.

**MORDECAI (VOICE OVER):** Marion gave me Kip's phone number and directions out to his ranger station.

*Phone rings twice and beeps as it's picked up.*

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Ned! I got a lead. Will you come out to Apple Valley with me?

**NED (ON PHONE):** No.

**MORDECAI:** Oh come on, I don't really know where I'm going, and you've been in the office all day...

**NED:** Mordecai, that's my job. Plus Snickers is sick.

**MORDECAI:** Snickers?

**NED:** Did you not notice the furry thing that was in the office today?

**MORDECAI:** You're picking your ferret over me?

**NED:** It's not a ferret. And yes.

*Phone beeps as Ned hangs up.*

**MORDECAI (VOICE OVER):** So I took my recorder and followed Marion's directions to the park, and from there to the ranger station: south down the path from the park entrance and you can't miss it. But the path disappeared 5 minutes in.

*Sound of footsteps on leaves, twigs snapping, bugs buzzing.*

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Uhhhhhhh...

*Rustling noise. Mordecai screams*

**MORDECAI:** Okay okay, just a racoon. Okay...

**MORDECAI (VO):** Anyway, I definitely needed a guide. Luckily, I'd saved the number for the parks service in my phone when Marion gave it to me.

*Bug and bird noises continue. Mordecai dials the number. Phone rings.*

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Hello? Hello! My name is Mordecai Dogwood, I seem to be lost in the woods off of Route 30, I can't find the trail... *(beat)* Oh, you'll send someone? Thank you, I really appreciate -

*Door opens nearby.*

**MORDECAI:** ...it

**KIP:** Are you the man who was lost in the woods?

**MORDECAI:** Yes...you got here really fast...

**KIP:** Well, if you'd just turned around, the ranger center is just over there... I could see you from the window.

**MORDECAI:** Oh. Well, maybe you can still help me? I'm looking for Kip Cavendish?

**KIP:** Well, you found him. What can I do for you?

**MORDECAI:** I'm Mordecai Dogwood, I'm investigating a story for my radio show. I was wondering if you could tell me about the effects of global warming on magical plants?

**KIP:** Nope.

**MORDECAI:** Why not?

**KIP:** I have way too many other things to worry about, Scoop. The kraken has taken to roosting down the river, which means I have to find a way to protect that roost, and there's a lot of littering now that it's getting warmer, and I keep catching kids over by the Romance Tree -

**MORDECAI:** Romance Tree?

**KIP:** Yea, you know, romantic magical binder of local legend, over in the woods about a mile thataway -

**MORDECAI:** I actually don't know, I'm kind of new around here

**KIP:** Oh, well like I said, it's a tree over there, and supposedly, if you and your sweetheart carve your names into its bark, you'll be together forever.

**MORDECAI:** Wow, uh, does it work? Could you tell me more about it?

**MORDECAI (VO):** Kip agreed to take me to see the tree. He had a lot to say about the tree, but, surprisingly, very little he said was positive.

*Footsteps along a trail: leaves crunching, twigs snapping, birds and insects calling.*

**KIP (ON SITE):** So, basically, this tree is in a part of the woods that's supposed to be enchanted, or the product of a sigil or something, but I don't know much about any of that.

**MORDECAI:** No?

**KIP:** Nope, I don't mess with magic. Try to give it as wide a berth as possible. But anyway, the tree is what they call a binder, and it's permanent.

**MORDECAI:** So it's kind of like magical wedding vows?

**KIP:** You could say that, but when I say forever, I mean *forever*. No matter what happens, there's no breaking up.

**MORDECAI:** So if a kid with their first boyfriend carves their name in the tree when they're 15...?

**KIP:** They'll still be together when they're 75.

**MORDECAI:** (*Distressed*) Oh. (*beat*) But they stay happy, right? I mean, why else would they stay together?

**KIP:** No, you don't get it. It's not a matter of choice. They're together *no matter what*.

**MORDECAI:** Oooh. (*beat*) So...like, can they be physically apart?

**KIP:** Yes

**MORDECAI:** But not permanently

**KIP:** Right

**MORDECAI:** So if one of them dies...

**KIP:** Not sure, really, but wouldn't want to find out myself.

**MORDECAI:** What if you carved in the name of a missing person?

**KIP:** (*quickly*) Then you'd be bound to that person. But there's a whole lot of consent issues there, and..

**MORDECAI:** But they'd have to come back eventually.

**KIP:** Or you'd have to go to them, yes, if they're alive. But, again, I can't stress enough that that kind of thing is *really not cool at all*, and...oh, thank god, here we are.

**MORDECAI (VO):** We were standing in front of a large tree, its leaves greener and fuller than those that surrounded it. It was still relatively short, as if it were young, but its

bark was gnarled and dark like a much older tree's. And it was covered in hundreds of names; initials, full names, first names, some encased in hearts, some pierced with arrows.

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** But what happens if they scratch out their names?

**KIP:** Look, I don't know how this whole thing works, I just know it does.

**MORDECAI:** How'd you figure it out?

**KIP:** *(sighs)* When I was about 16 I made a big show of carving mine and my girlfriend's names into it. It was kind of the "thing to do," ya know? Or at least that's what everyone *said*, turns out almost no one actually did. But I loved her.

**MORDECAI:** And how has that turned out?

**KIP:** Still love her. Still happy. I try not to question it.

**MORDECAI:** Fair. So...does anyone know how it works?

**KIP:** Abraham Young might. He knows a lot about this kind of thing. I can give you his number.

**MORDECAI:** Great! And if I want to find the people who have carved their name into the tree?

**KIP:** I know most of them.

**MORDECAI (VO):** Kip gave me the names of two couples before he left for the station. I followed him out of the woods and gave Abraham a call on the way back to the studio.  
*Phone ringing*

**ABRAHAM:** *(on the phone)* Hello?

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Hi, Abraham Young? This is Mordecai Dogwood. I'm doing a story on the Romance Tree for my radio show the Magical History of Knox County. I was wondering if you could help me out.

**ABRAHAM:** Oh, of course! That area of the woods is absolutely fascinating. What do you need to know?

**MORDECAI:** I was wondering if you could tell me how the tree works.

**ABRAHAM:** Sorry you sound kind of strange on my end, am I on speakerphone?

**MORDECAI:** Oh yea, sorry, we still use tapes and I'm in my car so reception might not be the best.

**ABRAHAM:** Oh you figured that out! Excellent!

**MORDECAI:** I'm sorry, what?

**ABRAHAM:** Oh, well, Abigail and I found that magic responds to more physical media. So if you want to record magical phenomena that's the way to do it.

**MORDECAI:** Oh. I just thought the station didn't have the money for new ones. *(beat)* Anyway, Kip wasn't able to tell me how the tree works except that he thought it was a sigil or an enchantment, and I was wondering if you could tell me about that.

**ABRAHAM:** That's not a sigil, anyone with a basic grasp of magic would know that.

**MORDECAI:** With all due respect to Kip, I think that's exactly the problem.

**ABRAHAM:** Well, either way. No, it's not a sigil, but it's close. The tree is a *conduit* for magic. It's roots grow straight into the Knox County soil, and it sucks up that power right along with water.

**MORDECAI:** Why is the soil so powerful if most soil's not?

**ABRAHAM:** There's a lot of theories about that, but the easiest explanation is that it just is. It's kind of like gravity.

**MORDECAI:** So why aren't the other trees around here magical?

**ABRAHAM:** Well they could be, but the soil's only half of it. Magic is all about taking the ambient power and bending it to the will of the person who interacts with it.

**MORDECAI:** So the people who carve their names in...

**ABRAHAM:** Exactly. The first people who carved their names in, those were probably just kids who picked up the idea from a movie, and their relationship might have got a little boost from it because they didn't take it very seriously. But as more and more people got the idea it might work and carved their names in, the tree's ability to influence their lives grew until it became what it is now - a binder of the highest order.

**MORDECAI:** That's interesting. So is there any way to counteract it?

**ABRAHAM:** Not really. It's too powerful at this point. Really shouldn't be messed with anymore, but that won't stop anyone.

**MORDECAI:** Wow.

**ABRAHAM:** Anything else you'd like to know?

**MORDECAI:** I think that's pretty much it. Thank you- you're about the only person who's had the information I needed all day

**ABRAHAM:** Happy to help.

*There's a beep as he ends the call*

**MORDECAI (VO):** Though interesting, Abraham's explanation was less than helpful when it came to understanding the effects this tree had on people, so I decided to visit the couples Kip mentioned.

*(knocking)*

**LYDIA (ON SITE) :** Hello?

**MORDECAI (VO):** That's Lydia Cartwright. She married Andrew Cartwright in 1976, and they recently celebrated their 40th anniversary. Andrew carved their names into the tree in 1974. Even so, neither of them seemed to understand why I'd want to do a story on them.

**ANDREW (ON SITE):** Oh, that's just an old legend.

**MORDECAI (VO):** That's Andrew.

**ANDREW (ON SITE):** I mean, I'm sure people will tell you that that tree binds you together forever. But then again, they also say that women who catch bouquets at weddings will get married, and no one calls it magic if they actually do.

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** So you don't think the tree has anything to do with the longevity of your marriage?

**LYDIA:** Nah. We've had our share of ups and downs, of course, but I never felt *compelled* to stay with Andrew. I just wanted to, and so I did. Same as any lasting marriage.

**MORDECAI:** Did you believe in the tree's ability to keep a couple together when you carved your names into it?

**ANDREW:** Well, you can't live here and not believe in magical things. I've never really fooled with it, though. Can get a person into trouble if they're not careful. But, uh... I was young, and frankly kind of stupid, and I thought carving my name into that supposedly-magical tree would prove to Lydia how serious I was about her, to risk messing with magic in order to be hers forever.

**LYDIA:** But neither of us took it seriously, no. We carved our names in, and nothing happened. We didn't feel any different, didn't feel like we had to move in together or anything. He just walked me home and we dated until we graduated high school. Then, we got married, and here we are.

**MORDECAI:** So you never felt like you had to be physically together?

**LYDIA:** No, not even like we had to be together in any sense. But we never *wanted* to break up, so I guess we haven't tested it really.

**ANDREW:** I mean, of course it's possible that the tree has had something to do with it, if it really is powerful. Can never totally discount that around here. But I wouldn't want to know if it had an influence. Prefer to think I have some free will.

**MORDECAI:** What about the free will of carving your names in the first place?

**ANDREW:** Is it really free will when you give up your right to make decisions?

**MORDECAI:** *(beat)* I guess not. Do you ever regret carving your names in, then?

**ANDREW:** Nah. I've heard that there are people that do, but as far as I know, I've not met anyone else whose name is on that tree. Never occurred to me that it might matter.

**MORDECAI (VO):** I met with one of those couples after I left Andrew and Lydia's, as it turned out.

*Knocking*

**MONICA (ON SITE):** THE REPORTER'S HERE YOU BLEEP SEAMONKEY

**MORDECAI (VO):** That's Monica Lewis.

**JASPER (ON SITE):** DON'T CALL ME A SEAMONKEY IN FRONT OF THE PRESS

**MORDECAI (VO):** And Jasper Lewis, her husband of 13 years.

**MONICA (ON SITE):** I'LL MAKE SURE HE KNOWS IT'S ON THE RECORD, YOU BLEEP!

**NED (VO):** Do you have any idea how long it took me to edit this tape, Mordecai?  
**MORDECAI VO** Sorry!

**MONICA (ON SITE):** HI there you must be Mordecai

**MORDECAI (VO):** Jasper carved his name into the tree three months before the couple got married. Unlike Lydia and Andrew, however, Monica and Jasper *definitely* believe that the tree has had an effect on the longevity of their relationship. When I asked them about it, Monica had this to say.

**MONICA (ON SITE):** Well, it has to be some outside force, because there's *NO WAY* I would have stayed with Jasper this long on my own.

**JASPER:** The feeling is mutual, believe me.

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Did you not feel that way when you carved your names into the tree's bark?

**JASPER:** Uh, well. At the time, our relationship was kind of on the rocks. We'd split for a little while, and Monica wasn't going to have me back for anything. But I was convinced I needed to win her over, so I carved our names into that tree and talked her into coming out to see it with me.

**MORDECAI:** Did you believe the stories about the tree when you did that?

**JASPER:** Nah, there were a few names in there that belonged to happy old couples. I thought of it more as a grand symbolic gesture than anything else.

**MONICA:** At first I was really freaked out - I used to keep records at the Beastiarium for the lady who owned it before Lumily and Divodett, so I knew not to take anything to do with magic lightly. But I was still young and stupid and so I was immediately swept off my feet.

**MORDECAI:** So how long was it before you realized that the tree was affecting your relationship?

**MONICA:** Well, about a month after that I was starting to get tired of his crap again, and I was just about to break up with him when I realized I was pregnant. I didn't want my baby to grow up without a father, so I asked him to marry me. He felt the same way, and we agreed to try and work things out.

**JASPER:** And we tried, but right after the baby was born it was clear it wasn't going to work. So we agreed that I would move out but come back several days a week to help with the kid. We didn't hate each other, we just couldn't live with each other.

**MORDECAI:** What happened?

**JASPER:** Well, my apartment burned down.

**MORDECAI:** But that could easily be a coincidence.

**JASPER:** It was *just* my apartment.

**MONICA:** We didn't make the connection at the time either. But he went out looking for a new apartment and got in a bad car accident. Not bad enough to kill him, but bad enough that he couldn't live on his own. So, of course he had to stay here for a while.

**JASPER:** And...believe it or not, that really helped us. She took care of me, I helped her take care of the baby. And things got better. For a little bit.

**MORDECAI:** So what happened?

**JASPER:** The second kid happened.

**MONICA:** DON'T BLAME THIS ON THE KID, YOU -

**MORDECAI:** (*quickly*) So then things were back on the rocks?

**MONICA:** You could say that. He tried to leave again, but I got the flu and had to stay away from the kids, so he stayed to look after them till I got better.

**JASPER:** I called a lawyer to file the divorce papers.

**MONICA:** He BLEEPing disappeared. Completely. Still hasn't been found.

**MORDECAI:** Good lord.And then?

**MONICA:** It's been been that way off on and on our whole marriage. Even after Jasper tried to cut our names out of the bark.

**MORDECAI:** Tried?

**JASPER:** It grabbed onto the blade of my knife. I couldn't get it loose. In five seconds the blade was totally covered in bark, like it had been there for years.

**MORDECAI:** According to Abraham Young, the tree has to do with the will of those who carve their names in. So if you wanted freedom, why couldn't you do it?

**MONICA:** Beats me.

**JASPER:** I even took an axe to the thing. It ate that too. A whole axe!

**MONICA:** Probably made it mad.

**MORDECAI:** So what's next for you two, if you can't get away from each other?

**JASPER:** Well, we try to keep the peace. Avoid fighting in front of the kids as much as possible. She sleeps on the couch. Sometimes.

**MONICA:** I hide his underwear. It helps.

**MORDECAI:** Do you think there are other couples as unhappy with their decision as you?

**MONICA:** I like to think we're not the only ones. That also helps. But if anyone listening is thinking about doing the same thing, I'd definitely advise them not to. Magic doesn't limit itself to the cute little fire lemurs and snow wassets. People need to be careful.

**MORDECAI (VO):** I left Monica and Jasper as quickly as I possibly could to followed up on a lead they gave me.

**MARION (ON SITE):** Oh..oh my.

**MORDECAI (VO):** Turns out the last couple was Kip and Marion. As in Marion from the library earlier, and Kip, the forest ranger.

**MORDECAI (ON SITE):** Oh, hi...

**MARION:** Are you here to interview me?

**MORDECAI:** This is the address Monica and Jasper Lewis gave me. I'm supposed to interview a couple who put their names in the tree but haven't gotten married yet.

**MARION:** Then you're in the right place.

**KIP:** Hi there, Scoop. Didn't expect to see you again so soon.

**MARION:** He's the reporter Monica called to tell us about

**KIP:** Should've guessed.

**MORDECAI:** So...you aren't married yet, but how long have you been together?

**KIP:** Well, like I told you earlier, I carved mine and Marion's names into the tree when we were 16, so...So I guess that makes it about 10 years today.

**MORDECAI:** Well, uh...Congratulations. Now, Kip, you said you prefer not to think about these things, but Marion, do you feel that your relationship has been affected by the tree carving at all?

**MARION:** I mean, maybe, a little. Teenage relationships fall apart pretty easily, and so I imagine that we got a bit of a longevity boost. But...you've met Monica and Jasper.

**MORDECAI:** Ooooh yes

**MARION:** So you know it doesn't always help in the happiness department. But we've never hit much of a rough patch, so I'd like to think at least a majority of it was our own doing.

**MORDECAI:** Are you worried that will change at all as you get older?

**KIP:** I mean, I hope not, Scoop. But who knows?

**MORDECAI:** Do you have any plan for what will happen if things go south?

**KIP:** Well, to reiterate, I don't like to think about it, but I suppose I could go live in the tool shed or something like that

**MARION:** Oh *stop*. You will have to do no such thing.

**MORDECAI (VO):** I left Kip and Marion's house with a feeling of dread in my stomach. They knew what they had gotten themselves into, but seeing two people who clearly loved one another that could just as easily become happy like Lydia and Andrew but just as easily become miserable like Monica and Jasper with no option to change their situation made me incredibly uncomfortable. All this leaves me wondering, is dealing with magic really worth it? I've seen some crazy and wonderful things over the past two weeks, but now this place, this whole county...it seems kind of terrifying. Do something as innocent as write your name on a tree and you can end up like Monica and Jasper. I've started looking everywhere I step in this place. For all I know there could be some cursed piece of pavement around here. I guess what I'm saying is magic is uncertain and seemingly unpredictable. Watch yourselves out there, listeners.

**NED:** Really? That's it? *That's* how you're going to end the show?

**MORDECAI:** Well, yeah. What's wrong with that?

**NED:** Abigail would never have ended a show like that.

**MORDECAI:** Well what *would* Abigail do?

**NED:** Solve the problem, or offer some kind of solution! She would have figured out how to get rid of the tree or something.

**MORDECAI:** I'm a reporter. I report on the problems, solving them isn't in my job description. Actually it's beyond that, it's exactly what I'm *not* supposed to do. Ethically, reporters aren't supposed to get involved. I'm *supposed* to be an impartial bystander. *(beat)* Also, if she could get rid of the tree, why didn't she do it before?

**NED:** *(flustered)* I...I don't know, she was probably dealing with more dangerous things and didn't have time.

**MORDECAI:** I'm not Abigail. This is my show, and this is how I'm ending it.

**NED:** Yeah, you're definitely not Abigail

*Phone ringing*

**MORDECAI:** Do we usually take calls on this show?

**NED:** No.

**MORDECAI:** Hello?

**ABIGAIL:** *(on phone, strangely distorted)* Ned! Hello?

**NED:** Abigail!

**ABIGAIL:** I'm okay. Don't worry about me!

**NED:** Where are you?!

**ABIGAIL:** I'm investigating something re-re-rea--

*The line goes dead.*

**NED:** Abigail!

**MORDECAI:** Listeners, I'm not entirely sure what just happened, but Abigail's out there.

**NED:** She's alive... She said she was okay!

**MORDECAI:** Yea, that's fantastic, we should try and trace that call...

**NED:** She's been gone a month and she's just *now* calling?

**MORDECAI:** I mean, I guess it depends what she got int-

**NED:** And then she just *hangs up* and doesn't even say where she is or when she's gonna be back?

**MORDECAI:** Maybe she's in the middle of something secretive?

**NED:** She wouldn't DO that without telling me, she never did anything without...telling...me...

**MORDECAI:** Ned?

**NED:** It's fine. Let's just make sure we answer all the calls we get.

**MORDECAI:** Yea. Of course. (*Beat*) Uh... so this has been the Magical History of Knox County, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.

*Animalie theme plays.*

END