

INSIDE AURORA: Stumped

By **Scott Johnston**

I'd heard a lot about the 20 foot tall carving that had recently been completed in the Holland River valley in Town, and wanted to take a look.

I found it in an open area near the Leisure Complex. It was pretty impressive.

Originally a 185 year old bur oak tree, much of it had been cut down due to rot, but the trunk was strong enough to keep standing. An artist had carved it into a sort of signpost, depicting on it various species of local plants and animals.

As I was standing admiring the craftsmanship, a small figure approached. I quickly recognized it as Annie, the Town's weather prognosticating groundhog. I often ran into her in the area, but rarely outside of the period around February 2.

Before I could offer a greeting, she went up to the tree and starting kicking it furiously with her little foot.

"Hey, hey," I exclaimed, rushing over and dragging her away from the tree. I lead her to a nearby bench.

"What're you doing?"

She looked over at the object of her anger, as she rubbed her foot, and muttered, "stupid tree."

"What's wrong with it," I asked. "It's beautiful. Look at the detail."

She stopped massaging her foot long enough to point at it. "Detail, eh? What do you see on it?"

Looking at the biodiversity depicted on it, I said, "Well, there's an owl, and a fox, and a salamander, some bees, a woodpecker, a goose, some plants... um... I think that's a beaver...."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, "but what don't you see?"

"Well, I suppose it doesn't have any ...?"

"Me! That's what's missing," she exclaimed.

"Do you know how long I've lived in this valley?" she continued. "And how long have I been predicting the weather for this Town?"

Before I had a chance to reply, she answered her own question, "Forever, that's how long."

"But when it comes time to immortalize the local residents of this area, who gets the top spot? Fred, that's who?"

"Fred?"

"That's him," she said, pointing to the heron with outstretched wings, perched on top. "And he actually eats half the animals carved on the log."

"As for me, I'm not on there anywhere."

"Have you taken a good look? There're carvings all around. Maybe you're on the back."

"Oh, I've looked, all right. They even have a butterfly," she continued her rant. "They're only around in the summer. I live here all year long," she exclaimed, waving a tiny hand at the surrounding area. "What kind of gratitude is that?"

"Maybe there wasn't room to add all the local residents," I suggested.

"There was certainly space to include lots of leaves."

"I'm sure it wasn't personal. Maybe the artist hasn't finished, yet. There's some uncarved space on the bottom. They could find a space for you there."

"On the bottom?!" she exclaimed, her face getting an alarming shade of red.

Hastily continuing, I added, "Or maybe they're planning a carving of just you."

She sat in silence for a moment. As my suggestion sunk in, her breathing returned to a more normal rate, and she nodded her head.

"Perhaps."

"Sure," I said. "They're probably just waiting for the next tree to become available for carving." I threw my arms wide for emphasis;

"A bigger tree."

"Yes, that must be it," she agreed, calming considerably.

I sighed, feeling like I had momentarily averted some sort of local disaster, but now the pressure was on the Town.

I just hope they remember to include Annie in the next carving.

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