Unheard

by Kim Conklin

“If a tree falls...”

He didn't want to have this conversation, not tonight, not for the hundredth time since this morning. He stamped his freezing feet against the sidewalk.

The muzak played Hark, the Herald Angels Sing. For some reason, it pissed him off.

“...does it make a sound?”

Once his brother got onto something—a question, a catchphrase, a snatch of song lyric—he clung to it, repeating it again and again and again until it rung in your head like a bomb had gone off between your ears.

“Spare change?” he asked the couple heading into the cineplex. They glanced at his brother, saw something was *wrong with him,* then at him, noting his dirty and disheveled state. They passed without a word, not even a head-shake.

“So does it?”

“No, it doesn't.” He sighed and lit a butt he'd found under a park bench. “It makes sound waves. Someone has to hear it for it to become a sound.”

A man with a black bar in his ear walked by, talking to someone somewhere else, maybe across the world.

“Spare change?”

The man didn't hear him.

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