

TOMMY THE LEAF

“Hey, move over, stop tickling me!” Tommy said to a few other leaves that grew on the same branch.

“We’re not tickling you, Tommy” said one of them. “It’s just the warm wind blowing us around making us touch each other.”

It was a warm July afternoon and the leaves had been out on the trees since early April, just like they do every year. Tommy had been one of the very last buds to unfurl into a leaf, so he was a bit smaller than most. He knew he had an important job to do, providing shade for the park. There was a swing set under his tree, and all the hundreds of leaves shaded the children that came to swing. A little later in the day, when the sun moved westward, Tommy and the other leaves shaded a park bench. An elderly couple came every afternoon to sit and feed the birds.

The leaves looked forward to all the activity below each day, and soon September rolled around. They began to change into beautiful colors of red and gold, and all the people came to admire them and take pictures of their magnificent colors. By October many of the leaves were falling from the tree.

“Hey, where are they going?” asked Tommy.

Old Leaf explained to Tommy that it was time to leave the tree; they were no longer needed to shade the park. All the children were in school now, and the elderly couple would be staying home, sitting by the fireplace.

“Oh no, not me! I’m not letting go. I’m staying right here to wait for next summer!”

Old Leaf tried to explain that they had to drop off and next spring new buds would make new leaves to shade the park. He explained nothing stays the same, life moves along; we grow up and move on. But Tommy was stubborn and would not let go so he was the last and only leaf left on the tree. He became very lonely, but he was afraid to fall like the others had done. Tommy’s stem clung tightly to the branch with all its might. Finally, North Wind came blowing by and pushed Tommy loose. Tommy cried out in fear, but North Wind gave him a gentle glide down. Before Tommy even reached the ground he was laughing and enjoying the ride.

“Oh, that was so much fun! Can we do it again?”

But North Wind said, “No, Tommy, each leaf only gets to fall one time.”

He found lots of the other leaves on the ground where he landed, so he was happy to be surrounded with his friends. The next day, park maintenance men

came and raked up most of the fallen leaves and left them in a big pile. Several boys walking home from school made a game of jumping into them, sending leaves flying in all directions! Tommy and his friends were having as much fun as the boys, whooshing up each time a boy flopped down into the pile.

Later, the leaves snuggled around the base of the tree and fell sound asleep. Early the next morning, a leaf sweeper came and sucked them up and drove them to the landfill. They each got another thrilling ride when the big sweeper truck dumped them out and sent them scattering to the ground. North Wind came by again and picked up Tommy and carried him to the fence, letting him gently float to the ground. No sooner had he landed when a soft paw reached out and pulled him over to a broken fence post. It was a mother cat making a warm bed for her new litter of kittens. She had scooped leaves and grass into a little hole under the broken fence post and hid her kittens there.

Tommy was very happy being part of keeping the kittens warm and well cared for. He watched them grow and play and saw how mother cat taught them to hunt. He remembered what Old Leaf had told him about nothing staying the same and how frightened he had been leaving his branch. But this was even better than hanging on the tree! The kittens grew older and stronger and soon set off on their own. Poor Tommy was feeling lonely again and wondered what would become of him. Winter was setting in and snow began to fall, closing up the little hole that had been the kittens' home. Just as Tommy was beginning to feel sorry for himself, something fast and furry squeezed inside the tiny opening! It was a small field mouse that curled into a little ball, gave a big sigh and fell sound asleep for the winter. Tommy was delighted to have a companion, even one that would hibernate until spring.

Sure enough, spring came and the little mouse began to stir and stretch, waking Tommy too. The mouse was hungry and began scratching around, tossing grass and leaves out of the hole. Tommy got tossed out too and was surprised at what a warm spring day it was. A robin lit beside him, snatching up Tommy and a twig and flew into a tree on Farmer Smith's farm. She was finishing making her nest and already had laid three pretty eggs.

"Wow, this is great! I'm back in a tree again!" Tommy announced to the new spring leaves. They were happy to share their tree with him and listen to all of his adventures. When the baby birds hatched and got big enough to learn to fly, one of them accidentally knocked Tommy out of the nest. Only this time when he fell, he wasn't afraid. He floated down on the breeze, laughing as it tickled his edges. Just like before, he landed gently under the tree.

He wasn't on the ground long before Farmer Smith came with his pitch fork, gathering up straw and old leaves and grass to stuff his scarecrow. Tommy found himself peeking out of the scarecrow's plaid shirt. Farmer Smith put the scarecrow in his garden to keep crows and other birds from eating his seeds and plants. Tommy had a great summer watching the garden grow and helping keep the birds away. He could see all the trees and watch the leaves turn colors when fall came. He saw the leaves fall, too, and knew they were having fun floating down. Then one chilly afternoon Farmer Smith moved the scarecrow to his front porch. He placed carved pumpkins around its feet. Some had funny faces and some had scary faces. Tommy watched as kids came to the door that night calling "Trick or Treat." Farmer Smith gave each child some candy and they thanked him and went on their merry way.

"This is the best Halloween I have ever seen! What could be better than this?" thought Tommy.

A few days later, Farmer Smith carried the scarecrow to the barn and propped it up in a corner. This was to be Tommy's home for the winter, surrounded by loving farm animals like big horses and little mice and spiders.

Tommy looked around and said, "Big Leaf was right when he said nothing stays the same. I shouldn't have been afraid to let go and fall from my branch. Look at all the fun and adventures I would have missed!"

Wise Old Barn Owl replied, "That's right, Tommy. Just because things change and are different doesn't mean it won't be as good. Life is full of changes. Let's enjoy today and wait and see what new things come our way tomorrow."

Tommy snuggled into the scarecrow's plaid shirt, knowing he had lots of good company all winter long. The words that Wise Old Barn Owl had spoken made him happy, and he couldn't wait to find out what great new adventures were yet to come.

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