

The Tree That Wanted to See the World

An oak sapling stood in a meadow by a small, winding river. Near him, two elegant, majestic oak trees towered high. The little sapling—Sprigs, as they called him—respected and honored the majestic oaks, for those two oaks had been around for many years, and they had learned much through what they had seen and experienced.

Sprigs would often ask the oaks to tell him stories of the things they had seen. He never tired of hearing their tales. They would tell him stories of the children who had played under their branches, of the fierce storms they withstood, of the time that a rainstorm continued for many days and the little stream overflowed and flooded its banks, and of the many other things that had happened in the meadow.

The spot in the meadow where the three trees stood was beautiful and peaceful. Grass covered the ground in a soft, green carpet, sprinkled with a multitude of colorful flowers. Little white snowdrops, yellow daffodils, and red poppies swayed in the gentle spring breeze. Bees were busy about their work, while bright butterflies flew around in a graceful dance. Despite all this, the little sapling couldn't help but feel that something was missing.

One sunny day, Sprigs was feeling particularly glum. "I wish I lived in a different place," he said. "It's beautiful here, but nothing happens. It's too peaceful."

The two older oaks listened, silently pondering the little sapling's request.

"You must remember, Sprigs," the taller oak began, "that this is where the Creator has placed us."

"Yes, I know. But I still wish I could see the world. The swallows have told me about places they have seen and heard of. They've told me about mountains, deserts, jungles, and more. I wish I could see them all!"

"It's true," the other oak said. "The Creator has made a beautiful world, with many diverse wonders. But we were all given a place in His creation, and this is ours."

"I'm bored of this river, and the butterflies, and the busy buzz of the bees. I want adventure!"



"Sprigs," the larger oak rumbled, "remember that the Creator placed each of us in a blessed place where we find nourishment and what we need for life. We should not complain."

Fresh water from the river bubbled near them, generously watering the oaks' roots. Warm rays from the sun helped their leaves produce the food they needed, and their tough bark protected them from insect attacks.

Once in a while a storm raged and thunder rumbled and lightning would flash across the sky, but no harm ever touched them. The Creator's supply and protection never failed.

The sapling hung his head and nodded, but he was none the happier. Around him there was so much beauty, but he no longer noticed it.



Autumn and spring were the hardest times of year for the sapling. Autumn was difficult because all the birds were preparing for their migratory flight to warmer climates. The birds would gather together in the branches of the oaks and

the sapling's, and they would chatter about the journey ahead of them. Then Sprigs would feel sad that he was not able to go along. When spring arrived, the birds would return with tales of their flight and their time in the warmer south.

So Sprigs would dream. In his dreams he would see the marvelous lands of places unknown. He dreamed of beaches with golden sand, of mountains covered with a thick blanket of snow, of jungles with dense vegetation, and of majestic blue whales splashing in the ocean.

Dreams of adventures, of better worlds, Sprigs thought. Not bees and butterflies and a river that puts me to sleep.

And so the young tree went on dreaming of travels, and bemoaning that he found himself in such a serene and unadventurous place.

One morning, however, something happened. The sun that rose was hotter and brighter than normal. Sprigs had never felt such strong rays from the sun. He could no longer hear the splash of the river; it was nowhere to be seen. *What is happening?* he wondered. Everything around him had changed.

The sapling was wondrously surprised when he looked around to see that rather than the green grass of his familiar meadow, he was now surrounded on all sides by golden sand. There was almost no vegetation, just a few small bushes here and there. As far as little Sprigs could see, there was only sand, sand, and more sand.

How very unusual, he thought. Everything is so different all of a sudden. And oh, how terribly hot the sun is!

Off in the distance the sapling saw a very strange plant. It looked like a tree with a few sparse branches, but there were no leaves on it; instead, its body was covered entirely by thorns.

Strange! Very strange! Where are its leaves?

He remembered in the autumn when he would lose his leaves, and all winter long only his branches would show; sometimes it seemed that he had died. Then spring would come and his leaves would grow again. But this was different. Wherever he was suddenly relocated, it wasn't cold; in fact, it was quite the opposite. This was by far hotter than even the hottest days of summer in the meadow.

"Excuse me," Sprigs said, calling out to the strange plant, his curiosity finally getting the better of him. "I've never seen a tree like you before. Are you even a tree at all?"

"A tree?" the plant responded with a laugh. "No, I'm not a tree. I'm a cactus."

"Oh, how interesting! I've never heard of a cactus before," said Sprigs.

"Well, we've been around for as long as deserts have been," the cactus explained. "We live in the desert—this place is our home."

"Where are your leaves?" the sapling asked.

"Leaves? We cacti don't have leaves like trees do. You see, here in the desert it's so hot, and there is so little water, that the Creator made us this way so that we could survive with only a small amount of water."

"That's pretty neat," said Sprigs. "And you're right, it's very hot here!"

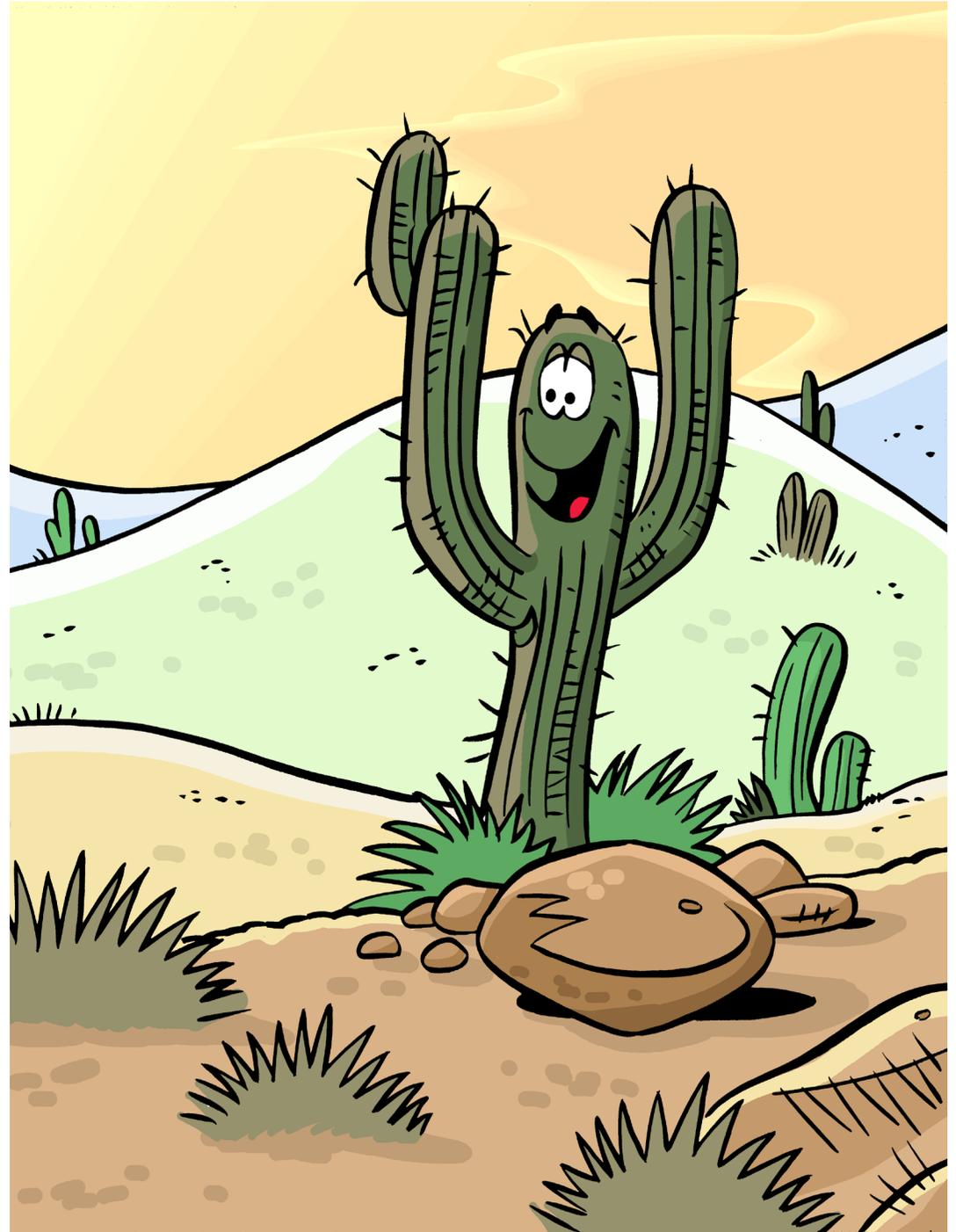
"What are you doing here?" the cactus asked. "I haven't seen you here before."

"I'm not exactly sure—I just appeared here. That's all I remember." With that Sprigs sighed and continued to study his new surroundings.

Hours passed, and at first the sapling was excited to be in a new place. There were so many different things to observe! He saw little desert rats scurrying to their burrows, digging for whatever sparse food they could find. Off in the distance a meerkat stood upright keeping a lookout against the vultures. He even saw a snake slithering quietly in front of him. Only once before had Sprigs seen a snake—it had been a water snake. Suddenly the thought of the water brought a worry to him.

There is no water here, Sprigs thought, at least none that I can see. And even when I try to reach deep down into the ground with my roots, I still cannot feel any moisture. What am I going to do?

After many hours, the young sapling started to feel weak. His leaves started to wilt and turn brown, and began falling onto the desert sand. In his wish to see the world, he now stood alone in a strange place with no water—only sand and the scorching sun. How he missed the river and the grass, and even the butterflies.



The sun sank into the horizon, leaving behind a cold night. Everything was so quiet, so still, and so terribly cold.

"Why is it so cold now?" Sprigs asked himself aloud. "Moments ago it was so hot that my leaves were falling, but now it is near freezing. What a very strange place! I wish I were back in the meadow. I'm not so sure I like it here very much."

Without any warning, a violent wind suddenly rose. It was neither like the breeze the young oak had felt in the meadow nor even the storms he had known. It was a harsh, furious wind, carrying millions of grains of sand, whirling and raging across the desert. Each grain of sand felt like a sharp needle piercing his soft trunk, tearing away what few leaves were left, and breaking his young branches. It was so painful! Then, as unexpectedly as the wind rose, it died down, leaving behind a miserable, dying sapling.

"That was a desert sandstorm," the cactus whispered softly, wishing there was something that could be done for his obviously misplaced neighbor.

The young oak couldn't even reply. With no strength left in him, he closed his eyes and fell asleep.



When Sprigs awoke, a new surprise awaited him. He felt well again! New leaves had grown, and he could feel moisture around his roots.

When he looked around, a strange surrounding met his surprised gaze.

"Hey, look at this!" called a large tree that was standing nearby. "A tiny, microscopic tree." The tree burst into a loud guffaw.

"Never seen such a small thing before," a winding vine laughed.

"He'll never make it here!" boomed another tree.

The sapling looked around trying to take in the strange new place he now stood in. Tall, gigantic trees—bigger than he had ever seen in his life—surrounded him on all sides. They were so big that he couldn't even see to the top of their branches. Around him there was a confusion of leaves, strange plants, and long roots hanging from the tall trees. All the plants, it seemed, were fighting to conquer a little bit of earth to grow in.

Colorful birds flew all around, chattering, singing, and squawking. Monkeys were swinging from one branch to another. The other plants seemed to thrive in this environment; they were happy, but not Sprigs. He felt very lonely and very out of place.



"What an unusual place," Sprigs said, troubled and scared. "It is so terribly dark here! I wonder when it will be morning."

"It's already noon," said a nearby liana vine, taking pity on the foreign tree. "The sun's rays rarely reach us here, deep in the rain forest, because of all the tall trees surrounding us."

"But I need the rays of the sun to give me my nourishment," replied Sprigs anxiously. "I will start dying otherwise."

Sprigs thought back sadly to his life in the meadow. *At home I never had to worry about getting enough water, and the sun always shone perfectly for me. But here it's so dark and gloomy, and it's terribly humid. All the other plants are suited for this rain forest. They don't need lots of sunlight or much earth to dig their roots into like I do. What am I going to do?*

Now Sprigs wished he hadn't complained and envied all the trees that grew in other places. He remembered something one of the tall oaks in the meadow told him: "You never appreciate things around you as much as when you don't have them." Only now did Sprigs realize how wise that oak was. In the meadow, he had been surrounded by beauty and by his friends. There were the bees, the butterflies, and the sparrows and robins that would sing their tunes. There were the little animals that would scuttle across the meadow. It was all so different here.

The thought of not being able to see the sun anymore was more than the little oak could endure. Slowly he closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep.



He was soon awakened by an unpleasant, cold wind.

"Where am I now?" Sprigs cried. "This is certainly not the meadow. It's freezing here!"

"You are on the slope of a very high mountain," replied the deep voice of a pine, who was growing just a few paces above him. "I am the last tree in the tree line before the summit."

Past the tree, Sprigs could see the barren, rocky slope leading up to the snow-covered peak of the mountain. There were only rocks and snow above. The ground was frosty and white.

Well, at least we are closer to the sun here, and no one will grow to overshadow me, thought Sprigs.

"Is it always so cold and snowy here?" he asked the pine.

"Not always," the pine answered. "For a short period of time at the end of spring and beginning of summer the snow melts and the weather is warmer. But most of the time it is very cold here."

"Oh!" sighed Sprigs. "I'm not so sure I would like to stay in a place where it's nearly always winter."



Looking closely at the pine, the sapling asked, "How can you still look so green when it's so cold? Don't you lose your leaves in winter?"

"No, I'm an evergreen tree," replied the pine. "The Creator made me this way so I would be able to live here and endure the cold, wind, and snow."

"Oh, but I'm not a pine tree! I'm just a little oak, and I'm starting to feel numb and weak, and my sap is starting to freeze. I don't think I should be here. I belong in the meadow!"

Sprigs felt like he was dying once again. His leaves were frozen and brittle.

Poor little tree, thought the pine. "Dear Creator," he prayed, "help this poor tree, and take him back to his meadow."



"Sprigs, it's morning!" a familiar voice called.

"Where am I? Is this the meadow?" Sprigs asked, afraid to open his eyes.

"Of course this is the meadow! Where do you think you are?" replied the elder oak.

"It's so nice to be back in the meadow again!" exclaimed Sprigs, breaking into a huge smile.

"Back in the meadow?" the other oak asked. "Where have you been? We had a bit of a storm last night, but you certainly didn't go anywhere. In fact, you seemed to sleep through the entire storm."

"But I traveled all over! First I went to a very hot place with a cactus and all kinds of desert animals. And then I was in the rain forest with all these strange creatures. I could hardly see the sun. And finally, I was on top of a mountain with a great pine tree, where it was so bitterly cold!

"I will never complain about being in the meadow again," Sprigs said. "This meadow is so beautiful and has everything I need. The Creator put me in just the perfect place, didn't He?"

"He surely did," the two other oaks chorused.

The End

