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Boy in the Tree

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Trumpeter

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Jimmie Mann was sitting under the big sycamore tree in the field next to his house. His head was bent down against his knees. He was crying. He had been trying to climb up into the tree, but he could not reach the first limb despite how hard he tried. So, he just slumped down against the trunk of the tree and cried. He felt terribly alone and scared.

He had not been sitting there very long when old Mr. Fellows discovered him. The old man was just passing by, out taking his daily walk, when he saw Jimmie. He stopped and just kept looking at him. He had never seen Jimmie cry. The only times he ever saw Jimmie was when he was playing...having fun. He could always tell when Jimmie was having a real good time, because when that was happening he would get to giggling to himself. But he remembered mostly seeing the fun in Jimmie playing soccer, or mostly just kicking the ball with some of his buddies, like it could be fun enough just kicking, not because he was mad at it, but just for how good it was to feel his whole body swinging at it all together.

The field between the street and where the big tall sycamore tree stood was good for kicking the ball. And Mr. Fellows always 'got a big bang' from watching the boys, especially Jimmie, having so much fun there playing with the ball. So, there were many days when he was quite happy to stop his walking and just stand there on the sidewalk for a while to watch how much fun Jimmie and his friends were having playing and laughing with kicking the soccer ball all over the field. He knew the reason was that Jimmie always reminded him of his son Teddy. Teddy loved doing everything in athletics, especially football. But the biggest part for Teddy...just like with Jimmie...was the fun he could have playing with the other boys, or sometimes having fun just playing by himself. "That's what games are for", Teddy would say, "it's not for who can beat who, but how much fun it can be." Old Mr. Fellows remembered Teddy saying it especially clear one time after a game his team had lost. "That was so much the heart...the wonder of him," the old man, the father, would say, "playing hard, yes, but always for the fun of it...just for the enjoying."

And old Mr. Fellows would recall a very special time when Teddy showed how he felt about playing games. It happened while he was playing in a very important football game his senior year at Westbrook High, the game that was to decide which school was to be the district champion. Everybody was very excited, especially at the big bonfire pep rally the night before the game when the coach announced that Teddy Fellows had been chosen to be captain for the team. When everyone heard it they all jumped up and yelled 'yea! yea!' for Teddy. That made Teddy more excited than ever about playing...especially after all four years looking forward to this time without even knowing that he was going

to be made captain of the team. And for this last game...the game of all games!

And old Mr. Fellows remembered how hard he tried to keep the tears from running down his face when he heard coach Farnsworth announcing that Teddy had been made captain. But he could not hold them back at all when, just before the championship game the next day, the coach went out on the field and in front of everybody, signalled Teddy to come out to the field to stand next to him, to receive the honorary golden helmet. "That was already enough for me, Teddy's father, without anything more being added!"

But more was added. As soon as Teddy took his place alongside the coach, and before the presentation was made, he called to his father to come from his honorary seat at the fifty yard line to stand with him for the presentation ceremony. "Yes, I was crying, but they were tears I could smile through," old Mr. Fellows remembered saying. "It felt like the golden helmet was being presented to me...as much as to Teddy...to both of us. Like we had done it together! A silly idea! But I knew, silly or not, that was exactly the way Teddy felt about it."

But, something happened the next day that showed more deeply than ever the beauty and manhood of his son, old Mr. Fellows would often gratefully recall. The next day, when the game was over and his team had won, and everybody was shouting happy about it, Teddy was not happy about it. As soon as the referee had blown the final whistle ending the game and declaring his team the district champions, Teddy Jerked off the golden helmet, threw it down, and ran off the field and into the locker room, without staying to acknowledge the cheers coming from everybody. Quickly he undressed, showered, and put on his street clothes without saying a word to his team mates when they tried to congratulate him for the way he had led them to the great victory: Westbrook Hi-28, Deerfield-6.

Then followed the thing that showed more clearly than ever how serious Teddy believed about the way team games must be played. Old Mr. Fellows remembered how, during the last quarter of the game that day, he had had a hunch that there would be a dramatic scene of some kind in the team room right after the game, because he had been watching Teddy, especially during the fourth quarter, long after it was certain that Westbrook Hi had already won. He could tell by something he saw in Teddy...the way he had played the last quarter...that showed he had lost interest in the game. So, before the last play was done, Mr. Fellows left his honored seat at the fifty yard line and went into the team room...just to be there when Teddy came in from the field, even if it was only for a few seconds...just to be there with him...just in case....

Because of so many wanting to take pictures of the coach and the team and to do the congratulating, etc., the coach was the last to get back to the team room. When he finally came into the team room, old Mr. Fellows remembered, the coach had gone straight to Teddy, catching him just in time before he had

gone out the door. Taking Teddy by the arm, he started to congratulate him.

“What’s the big hurry, Ted,” the coach said, “you’re the champion of the champion team today!”

But Teddy just stood there, half way out the door, shaking his head and mumbling to himself, ‘No, no. no!’, without looking up. When the coach asked him what that meant, saying ‘No’ to his bragging about him and the victory of that day and Teddy’s part in it, Teddy answered without even looking up, “It wasn’t fun.” The coach was shocked and asked Teddy to explain. To which Teddy replied, this time turning to look straight into the coach’s eyes, “Eight penalties against our team! And what’s worse, most of them for unnecessary roughing! That’s not playing...that’s fighting! The scoreboard says we won...but we really lost it!” Then, turning to his father, he said, “Come on, Dad, let’s get out of here!” And all the coach could do after hearing that was to walk away without saying a word.

And that’s the kind of thing that always made Teddy special, the father remembered. The father had walked into the team room just in time to see his son acting more like a man than the coach was. And there were times, recalling that championship day, when old Mr. Fellows secretly would wonder how his boy had got ‘the hang of it’ so early...his knowing so well how important fun is for the most serious things in life. And what ‘fun’ meant for him was playing for the game and not for the scoreboard. It was the game for the game that counted. And there was never any doubt about it...his always knowing the difference. Like it was bone of his bone...every time.

And Teddy was special for something else, old Mr. Fellows would remember with a chuckle, and that was because of his red, red hair, and his red freckles, too...all over his face. It was another way he had fun being alive. Being redheaded and freckle-faced...even being made fun of about it...and using it for having good laughs, instead of getting mad when he would get teased about it and being called ‘Freckle Freddy’. It didn’t take long before his buddies discovered that teasing couldn’t work because the teasing only got him to giggling...having good laughs with it, and at them, for even trying something so silly, trying to get him mad by making fun of him. “What a great spirit in the boy!” old Mr. Fellows would proudly exclaim.

Then the war came and took Teddy away and never brought him back. War was no fun for Teddy. He couldn’t understand how killing people could do any good. So, he told the recruiting officer that day that he would join up providing he could serve in the medical corps. And that’s what he did. He was working in a field unit in France close to the lines of battle along the Meuse, only a short time after his assignment, when a shell exploded close to where he was tending the wounded, and that was the end of him. So, old Mr. Fellows would always remember his son Teddy with a mix of tears and a smile whenever he happened to see a boy with a freckled face. And especially when he would come walking

past where Jimmie might be having fun playing in the field of the big sycamore.

Jimmie didn't have freckles, but he did have red hair just like Mr. Fellows' son Teddy. And old Mr. Fellows was thinking of Jimmie again with his red hair when he came walking past the field this particular day, expecting to see him having fun with some of his buddies. But he was disappointed. Jimmie wasn't having any fun at all. Instead, he was all alone, upset and crying. Sitting against the sycamore tree, his head bent down against his knees. Crying. Seeing Jimmie like that made Mr. Fellows feel very sad, too. He always wished for Jimmie, and every boy, the chance to discover how good life can be...having fun just for being a boy. 'Fun in the boy makes good feelings in the man', the old man would say.

So, old Mr. Fellows turned aside from his usual path for walking and went to where Jimmie was sitting under the sycamore tree. He didn't go clear up to where Jimmie was at first. He just stood quietly a short distance away, not saying anything, and trying not to make any kind of sound, wanting to figure out...imagine...what could have happened to the boy that could be so bad...causing him such painful hurt. Then, after a short time of waiting...not being able to figure out what hurtful thing might have happened to make Jimmie so sad...he walked up close to him and spoke to him gently.

"What happened, Jimmie? You seem to be feeling bad."

At first Jimmie didn't say anything. He just stayed folded into his sadness, still crying, but not as much now after hearing the sound of old Mr. Fellows speaking to him.

"Do you want to tell me what the bad thing is, Jimmie, that happened to you? I don't like seeing you so unhappy."

"I wanted to climb the tree. But I can't," Jimmie said, rubbing the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand.

"This old sycamore is a wonderful tree to climb up into, I am sure," old Mr. Fellows said as he leaned over Jimmie to look up into the tree. "Yes sir, that's a beautiful tree...and enough limbs to make a ladder for climbing all right. So, what is it you want? I can see that the first limb could really be a little too high for a boy your size. Is that maybe the problem?"

"Yes, it's too high up for me," Jimmie complained sadly.

"Well, I think we...the two of us working together...could solve that problem. I can give you a boost. I'll bend over right up against the tree, and then you can climb up my back to the first limb. Then you'll be all set for the climb to the next limbs...to go as high as you want to go. You want to try it?"

"No," said Jimmie, starting to cry again.

“I don’t understand,” old Mr. Fellows said, his voice showing he was surprised by Jimmie’s response. “Will you tell me?”

“That’s not the way the big boys do it.”

“What’s that mean?” old Mr. Fellows asked. “If you really want to climb the tree, I am sure it can be managed somehow...without the help of the other boys. I may be old, but I think I am still strong enough to help you do that. And I would like to do it.”

“It’s not that,” Jimmie said. “It’s when the big boys, when school is out, come running across the field to climb the tree...to see who can get up into the tree the fastest...and can be the first to get to the top...”.

“...so, what’s so good about that?”

“...the one who gets to the top first is the strongest and best...proves he is a real boy,” Jimmie said, beginning to cry again. “So, I want to practice...getting up into the tree... real fast...so I can be ready to climb...up ahead of the big boys when they come running to climb up.”

“So, that’s the reason you want to climb the tree,” Mr. Fellows said with a note of sadness in his voice. “That’s too bad.”

“Why?” Jimmie asked, wondering what Mr. Fellows was telling him.

“You want to show you are a real boy...like the big boys,” old Mr. Fellows said, “believing you have to prove...”.

“I just want to climb the tree like I see the other boys do,” Jimmie said, interrupting the old man. “That’s all.”

“...and prove you are a real boy like them,” Mr. Fellows added, “as good as them...”.

No response from Jimmie, still sitting folded up at the trunk of the sycamore tree. But not crying now.

“...and not made fun of...by Hank Brown...who ’most always get’s up there first...”, Jimmie finally confessed in a whisper.

“Oh, so it’s not only how fast you can climb...but how to keep from being made fun of...by Big Shot Hank...eh?”, the old man suggested. “...that right?”

“I guess,” Jimmie answered, without looking up.”

“I never heard anyone talk about using a tree like that before...especially you...believing all those strange ideas...about having to prove you are a real boy...by climbing a tree! I think you are a real boy already...and bigger than Hank Brown!”

Both the old man and the boy were silent for awhile. Then the old man hit upon an idea. He asked Jimmie to get up and stand straight against the tree.

“I want to see how much bigger you are since the last time we measured you. So, lean back against the tree, hold your chin up, take a deep breath and hold it.” Without hesitating to question Mr. Fellows’ reason, Jimmie stood up and did what the old man was suggesting. Then Mr. Fellows took his cane and made a mark in the bark of the tree where the top of Jimmie’s head was.

“There you are! Another whole inch! Step back, Jimmie, and look! But before Jimmie could stand back to look at the new mark in the tree, old Mr. Fellows had wheeled around and was pointing excitedly with his cane at something happening up in the tree.

“Look, Jimmie, look quick! There goes a squirrel up the tree carrying something. And there goes a bird carrying a worm in her mouth into the tree! Where could they be going? Quick, Jimmie! up on my back you go...to the first limb! Up and away to see what’s happening up there! Quick! quick!, Jimmie, up we go!”

And before Jimmie could stop to think what he was doing, he was scrambling up old Mr. Fellow’s back to the first limb of the tree. He was so excited that he kept climbing up to the next limb. Then to the next. And he kept climbing higher and higher with his excitement increasing with it all, and without stopping to realize how much was happening to him so suddenly.

He was getting up real high in the tree, close to where the ‘real boys’ go, when he stopped climbing. He was about to reach for the next limb when something made him look down. He had been counting how many limbs he had climbed up past, including the one he was standing on. When he finally counted down to the bottom one, the one he had started with, he saw old Mr. Fellows’ happy face smiling up at him.

“Hi, Jimmie,” old Mr. Fellows said greetingly, “How you doin’?”

“I’m standing on number eight! I been counting how many limbs I’ve climbed,” Jimmie called down to his old friend. “I must be almost over half way from the top!”

“Oh, that is mighty fine, Jimmie. It must be fun...climbing up so high...”.

“Yeah, I’ve never before been this high...in a tree,” Jimmie said, mostly to himself, but just loud enough for his old friend to hear.

“Oh, that must be exciting...so many things to see already...up so high,” his old friend suggested. “So many things in the world around you!”

Jimmie didn’t answer his old friend. He was already looking up at the next limb he would be pulling himself up to...‘the number nine’. Then he heard old Mr. Fellows calling to him again.

“Jimmie, did you see where the squirrel went? Or the mother bird with the worm for her baby chicks?”

“Naw, it keeps me too busy reaching for the next limb...and pulling myself up to it. Takes concentration...”.

“Yes, a body’s got to think what they’re doing...I know. I just thought there might be more fun seeing where those other creatures could be...and how they might be doing...”.

“Well, I better keep climbing,” Jimmie said without acknowledging he had heard old Mr. Fellow’s suggestion for increasing his enjoying. But he didn’t start climbing right away...like he was waiting for something. So, he just stayed there where he was...standing on ‘number eight’, hugging the body of the tree. For some reason now he had become quite content to stay right where he was instead of struggling to pull himself up over the other branches of the ‘ladder’. He knew he was beginning to feel a little tired. But he sensed there was something else that was holding him back.

He started looking around. He didn’t know what he might be looking for..if there really was something. Then he saw a squirrel half way out on the limb above. He kept watching it. It was busy nibbling on a nut or something. “Maybe it was the squirrel old Mr. Fellows was pointing at with his cane just before I started climbing up the tree,” he said to himself. He watched it more closely for a while. Then he thought to himself, “Sure. That really looks like the one old Mr. Fellows had pointed to.” So, he decided to keep watching the squirrel. He watched it more closely for a while. Then something about it reminded him of some words Mr. Fellows had said to him...something about having fun. “Was that what the squirrel was doing? Having fun...just sitting there nibbling on a nut...not going anywhere...just nibbling...doing nothing except what’s for fun...nothing but nibbling on a nut.”

Jimmie looked down through the limbs he had climbed to see where old Mr. Fellows was. He saw him still standing in the same place where he was when he had boosted him to start climbing up the tree. He was smiling up at him now.

“What’s happening up there, Jimmie?” the old man asked.

Jimmie didn’t answer at first. Then finally he reported that he was watching the squirrel...”the one you saw with your cane...sitting ‘way out there now on a limb nibbling on a nut.”

“Nibbling a nut? I wonder where he got it. Surely not from a sycamore tree!”

“Oh, there’s a hickory nut tree in our yard over there,” Jimmie announced excitedly. “He could have got it from there. I’ve got nuts from it lots of times...hickory nuts. And they’re real good!”

“So, Mr. Squirrel would have to be a traveler to do that,” old Mr. Fellows said, turning away to look at the hickory tree and taking a measure of the distance to be traveled from there to here.

“He’d have to be a serious traveler to do all that. He’d have to travel to the hickory, climb up, pick a nut, climb down from there, then go about two hundred feet through the grass to the sycamore here, then climb the sycamore to limb number nine, and then walk half way out on the limb before he could finally sit down to do the nibbling of the well-earned hickory nut! Wow! what a traveler he must be! A real happy traveler seeing and knowing the world’s many parts!”

“Yes! Wow! what a traveler!” Jimmie echoed, savoring the old man’s words with growing excitement. “But you forgot the nut! The nut is a traveler, too! ...squirrel couldn’t have done it without the nut! Ha! ha! that makes me laugh!”

“Ha, ha!”, old Mr. Fellows laughed. And laughed so heartily that he got Jimmie laughing more. “That’s a good one, Jimmie! You remind me of my son, Teddy...with that kind of being funny. Yes, Jimmie, the squirrel needs the nut, and the nut can’t travel without the squirrel! You’ve got it, boy. Team work! Ha, ha...ha!...they both need each other! Ha!”

“I didn’t realize it was that funny,” Jimmie reflected loud enough for old Mr. Fellows to hear.

“That makes it even better,” the old man added gleefully.

The two of them were silent for a spell. Old Mr. Fellows took a turn around the tree to rest his neck from looking up so long to where Jimmie was, and for enjoying another chuckle or two; and Jimmie staring off into space wondering...trying to absorb all that had been happening with him that he had not expected.

“Is Mr. Squirrel still nibbling?” the old man asked, finally breaking the silence.

“Yes, still nibbling...but, oh! he suddenly stopped what he was doing. He spit out the nut pieces, and ran ’way out on the limb!...then jumped!...made a long, long jump through the air onto the limb of the other tree!...and then disappeared behind it’s leaves...! Wow! was that fast.”

“Yes, how exciting!” old Mr. Fellows joined in happily.

“Ugh, I could never do that,” Jimmie remarked rather wonderingly.

“...and Mr. Squirrel could never kick a soccer ball...the way you and your buddies do,” the old man countered admiringly.

Both were silent for a brief spell, old Mr. Fellows scratching the soil with his cane in a meditative kind of way. And Jimmie shifting his feet to a more comfortable place on the limb he was standing on...’limb number eight’. Finally the old man

spoke.

“...you seeing anything more up there, Jimmie, that’s interesting?”

“Naw,” Jimmie replied. “Not yet anyway.” But, as soon as he had said that, he heard the sound of a bird’s wing fluttering just below him.

And when he turned to look he saw a nest. Then he heard the sound of little birds cheep-cheeping hungrily.

“...you hear that sound, Mr. Fellows?...the cheep-cheeping of little birds? They’re almost right below me...down on the next limb...just a little ways out.”

“I had begun to wonder where they might be...because we had seen the mother bird carrying the worm...remember, Jimmie?...about the same time we saw the squirrel running up the tree.”

“Oh, here comes the mother bird with another worm! She feeds it to the birdies. Boy! they gobble it down like they were starving! Then off she goes again! Wow! that was fast! Ha! she’s already almost out of sight...gone again! Flying, flying...far, far away to...to...”.

“...to where, Jimmie?”

No response. Distracted by so much wonder...a-growing.

“Jimmie...”.

“What?” Jimmie asked with a far away voice.

Old Mr. Fellows knew Jimmie had now gone somewhere beyond the tree...following the mother bird. He waited, wanting Jimmie to be free to enter the new scene for himself. He heard Jimmie making sounds of ‘oh, oh’ breathlessly as he went with the bird to some unexpected place of wonder. Suddenly he heard Jimmie speaking from the far beyond...and pointing with an outstretched arm and finger...at something.

“...she disappeared out that way...way out there...far, far, far away from here.”

Old Mr. Fellows looked up into the tree to see where Jimmie might be looking and pointing.

“That’s toward the ocean bay you’re pointing...so far away!”

“Oh, but now I can see clear into the deep waters of the bay! And I can see a ship a-sailing in the bay!...with cotton-white sails a-sailing!...with cotton-white sails...pushing against the wind...pushing the ship over the blue, blue sea...under the blue, blue sky! Oh!...and there goes a whole flock of birds flying...sailing along...following each other. And then they turn suddenly...and go another way!...still keeping together in the same way...like they’re playing follow-the-

leader! Wow!...and there they go again, making another turn! First the one out in front changes direction, and then all the others follow, like they all had radios for knowing when the leader is going to make a turn...to which way next! Wow!"

"Wow!' is right, Jimmie! I can see them now from where I am...a wonderful sight...flying in formation!," old Mr. Fellows sang to the boy on the limb.

"Yes...flying in a V-formation...all over the sky!"

For a brief spell Jimmie said nothing. And the old friend said nothing, like the wonder of the heavenly sight was too much to know what to do with. Old Mr. Fellows looked away into the distance, saying not a word. And Jimmie just kept standing where he was on the same limb, hugging the body of the sycamore tree, saying nothing. Then Jimmie, while continuing to look away into the blue of the sky...reflecting...spoke quiet words...loud enough for his old friend to hear.

"I wish I was a bird...to be high up...in the whole wide world".

Old Mr. Fellows was so moved, hearing such words from the boy, he could not look up at him. Instead he looked away toward the bay and the blue sky beyond. Then, finally, he turned and looked up at Jimmie and spoke to him gently.

"Jimmie, you are a bird..."

"I mean a bird for real...a real bird."

"You are a bird for real, Jimmie," old Mr. Fellows said, "and you are the wind blowing the sails of the boat in the bay...and you are the sun and the moon and the night stars...and the arms of the sycamore tree hold-ing you now so close. All of everything that makes the creation every- where is in you, and you in them, Jimmie...and in the good times as well as the bad...and 'specially' when it's fun...just being you, Jimmie."

The old man was almost in tears before he finished singing the everlasting joys of earth and sky and sea...as the smiling, happy face of his son, Teddy, came rushing up into his all-remembering eyes.

"I don't understand all that," Jimmie said rather fearfully. "All those things are so...so big. And I am so small...not even half as big as my dad...or my mother."

Old Mr. Fellows didn't say anything more for a while. He wanted to wait for Jimmie to have his own time to be a part of all he had just been saying to him...maybe for the first time by anyone. Who could tell?

Jimmie did not speak. He stood there on the arm of the tree and looked with wonder into the world around him. There was something in what old Mr. Fellows was saying to him that was too big for him to understand right away...or maybe even ever. But there was something of it that stirred more and more the

wondering feeling in him.

“I am the sky...and the stars...and the birds...the flying, sailing birds...having the fun of it...”, he chanted to himself.

Then he felt himself reaching out to touch the bark of the tree in a way that surprised him...like he was discovering it for the first time...even though he had been touching, pulling and pushing against it without any let up 'til now...touching the bark of the tree as though he were searching for something hidden in it. He rubbed the palm of his hand against its soft-like toughness. Then he reached for a twig of the tree's leaves just above his head. He stroked his face with the velvety skin of the leaves. “My face touching her face...face of the bird...face of...of everything...everything everywhere...”, he whispered to himself as he continued the enjoying.

For what seemed a long time Jimmie did not speak. He seemed to be content just to be standing in the tree, waiting for something that would tell what was happening. And Mr. Fellows began to wonder what might have happened to Jimmie. Did he scare him with his too long of a speech about how he, Jimmie, this particular human being, is a member with all other creatures in Creation? He hoped not. He knew very well, as he would often remind himself, that the most enduring things are known only in the silences...not by logic or making speeches. And he remembered real clear the time he and Marie...may she rest in peace!...first climbed a big part of Pike's Peek with Teddy, backpacks and all for camping! It was slow going, not only because it was steep climbing, but because of the silences...the times they had to stop, without anyone consciously deciding it...to rest and get their breath...and to enter more the silences...the stillness deep in all...a strange presence of something as real as the stones of the mountain and the soaring hawks in the sky high above...a strange stillness that took command. 'Very strange...hospitable...like an irresistible invitation for us to stay for a while...to unpack and make camp to stay close to the discovered peace within ourselves.'

Old Mr. Fellows was startled from his reflecting by the sounds being made now by Jimmie. Jimmie had started to climb down. He had already descended to 'limb number six'. He stopped there and looked below for old Mr. Fellows. Then he looked away to the sea and the ship with the cotton white sails. Then he looked up to the bird nest and listened to the cheep-cheeping of the birdies. He was wondering how he had got started doing all this climbing in a tree. “I didn't think it would be like this...I guess,” he said to himself. Then he turned to look down to see old Mr. Fellows. And that reminded him of something. He climbed back quickly up to 'limb number eight', where he was when he thought of himself wanting to be a bird and first felt the twig of soft leaves touching his face. He took hold of the twig of soft sycamore leaves, separated it from the tree, put the stem between his teeth, and went climbing down, and without stopping until he heard the voice of old Mr. Fellows calling to him. It was limb number two where the old man's voice had stopped him...like it was coming

from far, far away...and, at the same time, coming from somewhere deep inside of himself...

“Jimmie, what’s happening? I’ve been wondering.”

“I don’t know. Maybe everything.”

“Everything?”

“Like it’s the whole wide world...all at once...to be with...kinda scary.”

“Scary?”

“Not in a bad way. Like something that’s so much I can’t do it all. Too much for talking about...”.

For a long time Jimmie did not speak. Mr. Fellows began to wonder what might have happened to him. The old man finally looked up into the tree and called to him.

“Jimmie, what’s happening now?”

“What?” Jimmie answered in a far away voice, surprised.

“What’s happening up there, Jimmie, with you being so quiet?”

“I’m watching and seeing things. I’m hugging the tree and watching everything...watching how quiet everything is.”

“Oh, that’s mighty fine, Jimmie!”

Jimmie was quiet again for a little while longer, and then he called down to old Mr. Fellows.

“...’way down there is our house. And our dog Fritsy playing in the back yard... And I can see everywhere from here...the whole wide world...everything and everywhere!”

“...’the whole wide world’...yes, Jimmie...the whole wide world...and you, Jimmie...a fun-loving red head like you, Jimmie,” old Mr. Fellows chuckled.

“...the whole wide world...and me,” Jimmie repeated the good sound of the words old Mr. Fellows had just spoken.

Then Jimmie finally climbed down the tree and dropped from the last branch without any help. In his teeth he was holding the same twig of leaves he had felt against his face while looking at...discovering the ‘whole wide world’ of him.

“What’s that you have there?” the old man asked about the twig of leaves in Jimmie’s mouth.

“It’s for you,” Jimmie replied happily as he presented the twig to old Mr. Fellows. Then he turned quickly, gave old Mr. Fellows a big hug, and went running across the field to his house as fast as his legs could carry him.

And old Mr. Fellows stood watching after Jimmie with a big smile on his face, and poked the twig of sycamore leaves into his hat. Then he looked up into the tree and said quietly to it, “Thanks to you, dear sycamore tree, for your many gifts to us this day.” And then, from a more personal gratitude, he prayed, “Thanks again, Teddy, for the precious gift of the ever-present fun heart of you...my son. And thanks, too, now for the real boy in you, Jimmie. And for you, again, dear sycamore of the trees, for the hospitality you have offered to all of us creatures this wondrous day.

Then, after speaking these words of gratitude, old Mr. Fellows remained standing close to the tree. He looked up among the branches as though expecting Jimmie to appear again as before. Then, after a short spell of silent waiting, he decided to take his leave. He checked to make sure the sprig of sycamore leaves was secure in the band of his hat. After that he strode back across the field to the road to resume his daily walk.

From the porch of his house Jimmie stopped to look back to see old Mr. Fellows walking along, the sycamore leaves dancing merrily on his hat. Then he waved to his old friend and called, “Thank you, very much, Mr. Fellows!” And old Mr. Fellows waved back to Jimmie with a happy smile on his face. Then Jimmie turned to go in the house to tell his mother all about the tree...” and the whole wide world of it...and what it’s like to be a-wondering in it all...”.

But, before he got the door closed, Jimmie was hearing again the sound of the after-school rush of the school boys for the Sycamore tree. And the voice of Hank Brown yelling again, “me first up!” Without even turning his head to look back, Jimmie went in the house, pushed the door tight behind him, and joined his mother in her sewing room.

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