

The Life of a Leaf

Reg Down

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Once upon a time there lived a leaf. It was a green leaf, as green as a green leaf can be. It loved the sun, and the leaf lay itself out flat so the sun could shine down upon it with its golden rays. And the leaf had rays too, five big ones, just like the sun, for it grew upon a maple tree.

This leaf had been born in spring, growing quickly, and very, very quietly, on the end of a branch high above the ground. Then it waved in the wind and fluttered in the breeze. How the leaf loved to tremble when it was stroked by the breeze!

All summer long the leaf stayed on the tree, listening to the birds and letting the rain wash it clean and make it glisten. Then autumn came. The days grew shorter, and the nights much longer and cooler. One night, when the moon was waxing, Jack Frost flew down from the mountains and covered the leaf with frost.

“That makes me feel chilly,” said the leaf to itself. “I shall put on my frost coat,” and he put on a yellow jacket.

“This shall keep me warm,” he said to himself.

But Jack Frost came again that very night and covered the leaf with frost.

“I shall put on a warmer coat,” said the leaf, and turned himself bright orange.

“Oh, how pretty I look in my orange jacket!” he declared, very proud of himself.

But, two nights later, when the moon was full, Jack Frost came again, glistening and crackling in the moonlight. He breathed white frost over the ground, on the trees, and on all the leaves. He made pools of water stand as still as ice, and people had to blow on their fingers and nails.

So the leaf put on his last, and warmest, coat—a bright red one. Now he really looked festive.

“Oh, how festive I am!” exclaimed the leaf to himself. “I have the warmest, reddest jacket of all the leaves in the forest! I burn with fire and I shall chase Jack Frost away!”

But Jack Frost did not stay away, and all that night the tree’s roots called out, “Oh, leaf! Beautiful leaf! Cover me up and keep me warm or I shall freeze!”

The next morning, just as the sun was rising, the leaf let go of his branch. For a little while he fluttered here and there in the air like a red bird; then he lay upon the ground. Hundreds and thousands of his brothers and sisters let go of their branches too. Whole flocks of them flew down to the earth to keep the roots warm. And they did keep the roots warm—all winter long. Then Jack Frost could not freeze the roots and the tree felt safe and protected.

In the spring, when the sun chased Jack Frost away, the leaf was brown—just like the earth. Soon he broke into little pieces and the red worms carried his body down to the hungry tree roots. Then the tree felt strong, and put forth new green leaves, as green as green leaves can be—and, when the breeze came blowing by, all the leaves fluttered and trembled to her touch.