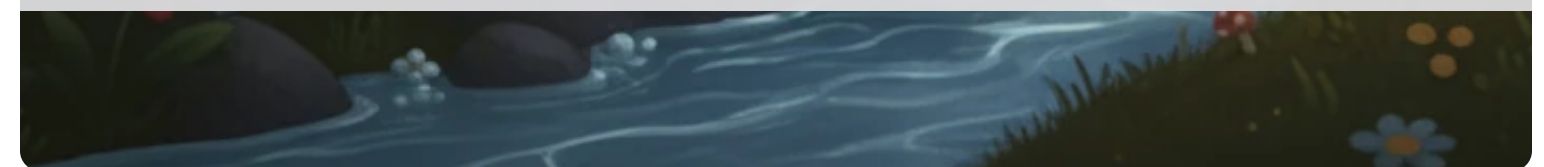




# The Patient Little Sapling

Mu Ryan





In the heart of a sun-drenched meadow, a tiny sapling named Sammy wiggled his two small leaves. He was surrounded by giants whose branches touched the clouds, making him feel very small and impatient to grow.



Every morning, Sammy stretched his stem as high as he could, hoping to reach the golden sunlight that danced on the upper canopy. He sighed, wishing he could skip the years and become a mighty tower of wood and bark overnight.



Beside Sammy stood Oliver, a majestic oak tree with a trunk as wide as a cottage and a crown of deep green. Oliver watched the little sapling's frantic stretching with a gentle, knowing rustle of his ancient leaves.



A sudden summer storm rolled in, bringing heavy gray clouds and whistling winds that bent Sammy nearly to the ground. He shivered in the cold rain, feeling fragile and afraid of the power of the sky.



Oliver spread his massive branches like a great umbrella, shielding Sammy from the harshest gusts and the heaviest raindrops. The old tree whispered through the wind, telling Sammy to hold tight and breathe with the rhythm of the earth.



When the sun returned, Sammy complained that his trunk was still thin and his branches were weak compared to the others. Oliver explained that a tree's true strength isn't just in its height, but in the secret roots growing deep and wide beneath the soil.



A bright blue butterfly landed on Sammy's tiny leaf, resting its wings in the gentle breeze. Sammy realized that if he were a giant tree already, he might have missed this tiny, colorful friend visiting him so close to the ground.



Autumn arrived, painting the forest in shades of amber and gold, and Sammy watched his few leaves flutter away. Oliver taught him that resting during the cold winter is just as important as growing during the warm summer.



Seasons passed in a slow, beautiful cycle, and Sammy stopped measuring himself against the giants every day. He began to enjoy the feel of the cool dew and the song of the crickets hiding in the grass at his feet.



Now a little taller and much sturdier, Sammy stood proudly in the meadow with deep roots and a happy heart. He finally understood that growing up is a long, wonderful journey, and there is magic in every small step along the way.