



The Autumn We Met Again

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Leo stepped off the train, his suitcase rolling quietly against the platform as a crisp autumn breeze greeted him. It had been exactly ten years since he last stood in his quiet hometown, yet the scent of pine and fallen leaves felt instantly familiar.



Walking down Main Street, Leo noticed how much had changed, from the newly painted storefronts to the taller trees. Yet, looking at the old clock tower in the square, he remembered the countless afternoons spent chasing pigeons around its stone base.



He pulled a faded, handwritten map from his pocket, drawn in messy crayon by two eager children a decade ago. It traced a path from the schoolyard straight to the edge of the Whispering Woods, marking a secret spot they swore never to forget.



As Leo walked toward the woods, memories of Maya flooded his mind, from her bright laughter to the way she always wore mismatched socks. They had promised to meet at their old treehouse on this exact day, ten years into the future, but he wondered if she would even remember.



The forest path was overgrown with wild ferns and golden-brown leaves that crunched loudly beneath his boots. The deeper he walked, the more he felt the nervous flutter of anticipation warming his chest despite the chilly afternoon air.



Pushing through a thick thicket of branches, Leo finally saw it: the grand, ancient oak tree that had held their childhood dreams. The wooden ladder they built was missing a few rungs, but the structure still stood strong against the golden afternoon sky.



As he approached the base of the tree, he noticed a figure sitting on the old bench, a familiar woolen scarf wrapped around her neck. Maya looked up, her eyes widening in disbelief as a slow, radiant smile spread across her face.



For a moment, neither of them spoke, letting the ten years of distance melt away in the quiet spaces between them. Then, Maya stood up and threw her arms around Leo in a joyful hug, proving that time had changed nothing about their bond.



They sat together on the weathered wooden bench, sharing stories of where life had taken them over the past decade. Leo spoke of the bustling city and his art, while Maya shared tales of her travels and her work with local wildlife.



As the sun began to dip below the horizon, painting the sky in brilliant shades of orange and purple, they carved a new mark into the ancient oak tree. Ten years had passed, but looking at his best friend, Leo knew their story was simply beginning its next beautiful chapter.