

THE BURNED TREE

Once upon a time there was a tree in the forest that didn't look green and alive like other trees. It looked as if it had been struck by lightning and had stopped growing - like someone had come and cut its branches back to stubs. Most of the trees in that part of the forest thought that it was dead, because some trees are able to stand long after the life has gone out of them. But they were wrong, because deep down inside, this tree was alive. It just didn't know how to grow and develop into a beautiful tree with leaves as the other trees had done, because it had been hit by lightning and badly burned. Sometimes after being burned a tree goes into shock and gives up the will to grow and to live and to be like other trees. And sometimes the shock of the lightning and the storms makes a tree believe that it can't grow and that it has to stay the same, looking burned and ugly and dead.

One day a beaver came along and, thinking that this tree was dead, began to chew on it.

"Hey! Ow!" yelled the tree.

Startled, the beaver looked around and exclaimed, "Who's there? Who's talking to me?"

"It's ME!" said the tree. "You're hurting me! Quit biting me!"

"I can't believe it!" said the beaver. "You didn't look alive. You looked deader than a doornail. You looked burned and pitiful. Why, your branches are broken and you don't even have any leaves. Now, I'm a pretty responsible beaver and I don't cut down live trees, because I'd feel bad about that. I just figured you were dead."

"I'm NOT dead," said the tree. "I'm not even sick."

The beaver gave her a puzzled look. "Well, if you're not dead and you're not sick, why do you look so awful?"

Sadly the little tree replied, "I don't know how to grow. I don't know how to get leaves. I don't know how to look alive again, because the lightning hit me so many times and there have been many storms in my life that I lost the knowledge about how to grow."

The beaver, which had much experience with trees, decided to help, and explained that she must first remove the burned ends of the limbs. Climbing in and out of the branches, she chewed away at the burned ends until all the dead parts were gone and new life could start growing. The tree was surprised that it hardly hurt at all. Next the beaver found some special fertilizer for trees and put it all around the trunk. She made sure that the tree got all the sunshine and water it needed. In a very short time the little tree discovered that it DID know how to grow, and it DID know how to develop, and it DID know how to look beautiful and full of green leaves just like the other trees. It began to sprout new leaves and to grow and to develop, and before long there was no sign that it had ever been hit by lightning or burned. The tree and the beaver became very close friends after that.

Because the beaver had helped the tree grow to be so beautiful and healthy, the tree decided to do something special for the beaver. She asked the beaver to carve a sign about their friendship. It was placed in front of the tree so that everyone who passed would realize just how much difference a trusted friend can make in the way your life goes.

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