

The Willow Tree

It was a crisp fall day when Maryanne scooped away the dirt to make room for the silky mass that carried the seed of a willow tree. She let the seed slowly down in the hole, being careful not to get any dirt on her dress. If she watched and waited long enough, she knew that a tree would grow. Willow trees were tall with long winding branches that created a little hidden spot, a perfect place for a little girl like her to play. There was a willow tree at her grandfather's house that she had always loved to visit. Maryanne could have spent hours sitting in the branches of that tree, just listening to the sounds of the world around her. This new tree wouldn't be big enough to climb until she was all grown up, which made her sad. But maybe someday someone else would be able to enjoy the willow tree. She left the little spot in the backyard, marking it with a smooth stone.

David needed something to do. He had no school, no work, and no one to play with. So he was doing the only thing he could do, which was drawing in his sketchbook. His room was stuffy and humid, so he opened the window. He caught a glimpse of the willow sapling in the next yard over. Without thinking, he began sketching the lines that the tree trunk followed. He traced with his pencil the thin branches that drooped down towards the ground. He rounded the tiny leaves that clung to the branches. Satisfied with his sketch, he pulled out an ink pen from his art page, and went over his lines. The ink sunk into the page forming the shapes that made up the larger picture. He finished it off with a splash of green watercolor paint across the leaves. He took the picture and hung it on his wall. It stayed there until he grew up.

Madison only had a few seconds to hide before Ryan was going to come seeking. He and Riley always found the best hiding spots, and she was always found first. She was the smallest of the three siblings, so she should be able to hide the best. After frantically looking around the yard

for some place Ryan wouldn't think to look, she fixed her eyes on the neighbor's willow tree. Surely no one would be able to see her within that thick tangle of branches. The only person who lived in the house next door was a middle aged woman who always smiled at her and had once given her a popsicle. Surely she wouldn't mind. She slipped through the hanging branches, and found herself in a tiny world all her own. She heard movement, and knew that Ryan had finished counting. She reached up to the nearest branch and grabbed hold of it. She pulled herself up with all her strength, bracing her foot against the trunk to help herself up. Her body was now slung over the branch, and she could pull herself into a seated position on the limb. Her legs dangled almost five feet off the ground. Ryan would never find her now. She wished that Ryan would never find her, so she could stay here forever. Her fingers traced the patterns of the bark. She imagined how it would feel to live here all the time. On the ground, she could have a table and chairs for meals. But her bed could be up here in the tangle of branches. She would never have to leave. Her daydreaming was broken by shouts and laughter in the distance. Ryan must have found Riley. The two boys came crashing through the branches of the willow tree, breaking the peaceful silence that had filled her sanctuary. They called up to her that they had found her, and that next time she shouldn't go out of bounds. She slid down to the ground, and felt disappointed to leave her little room under the willow tree. On the way down, she stumbled on a smooth gray rock. She caught herself, and quickly followed her brothers back into their own yard.

From the window, Maryanne watched as the group of kids ran back into their yard. It had been nearly 40 years since she had planted that willow tree. It had been too small to climb when she was the same age as the little girl who climbed in it that day. She smiled to see that another little girl had found a peaceful place in the willow tree. And it all came from that silky tree seed she had planted as a child, not much older than this one.