




THE OAK TREE

"Hello, Sunshine," said a little sapling as she broke through the soil. "I am going to be a big and beautiful oak tree one day. I will be great and big and tall, with birds nesting in my branches and squirrels running up and down my trunk. People will rest under me, and many creatures will hide in my leaves!"

The little sprout was young and felt full of strength. However, the sapling would soon find that growing up was not that simple.

When the little tree was only a foot tall, a family came to have a picnic in the meadow where she was growing. After the family had finished their picnic, their little girl went to pick some flowers and saw the stem with its budding leaves, but the girl's father suggested she leave the growing sapling alone.

A whimsical illustration featuring a bright yellow sun with a smiling face and closed eyes in the upper left. A grey cloud with a face is blowing a strong wind, represented by white swirling lines, towards a small tree on the right. The tree has a brown trunk with a face (one eye, a nose, and a small smile) and is being pushed over by the wind. Its few green leaves are being blown away. The background is a light blue sky and a green grassy field.

"You can be very thankful that you were saved just in time," the sun said, smiling. "By the way," the sun added, "soon you won't be enjoying as much of my warmth. The summer is over and winter will come. With winter, you will get to know my brother, the wind, and my sisters, the snow and frost. However, when spring comes, I will once again warm you through."

The little tree had no idea what winter was, but by and by she found out. Presently, a strong wind blew.

"Woo, woo, woo," howled the wind.

"Who are you?" asked the little tree fearfully. "And why are you trying to push me over and hurt me? You have blown off what few leaves I had!"

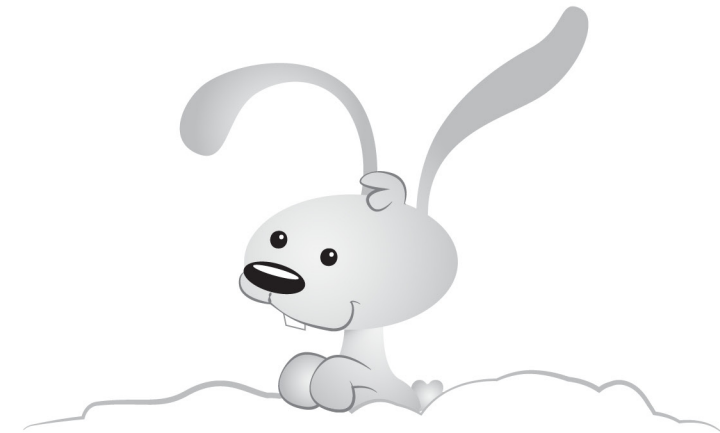


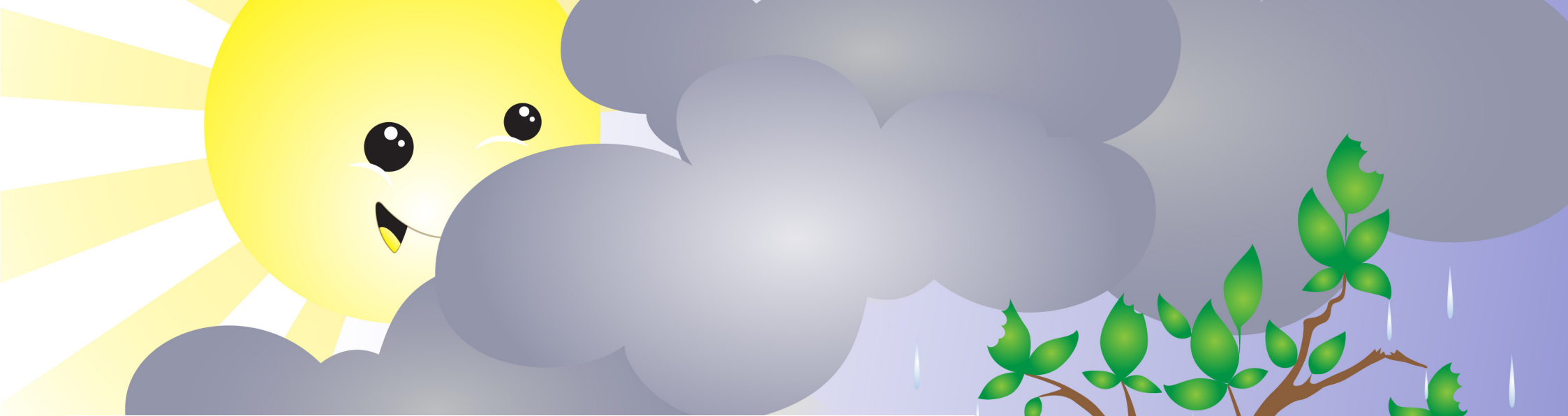
"I am the wind, a friend of the sun, and I'm not hurting you," the wind replied. "Losing your leaves is part of the cycle of life. If you didn't lose your leaves now, you would not survive when the snow and frost come around. No, little one," he added softly, "you have nothing to fear from me. Indeed, if you are full of life and determined to survive, I will only make you stronger."

"Well, then," the little tree replied with relief, "blow as hard as you like!" She desired to be a big and strong oak.

Just as the wind had said, winter came and frost and snow covered the ground and the little tree's branches.

"How will I ever survive the winter?" she worried. But before long, the little tree became tired and fell into a sound sleep.





After some months went by, the sun began to warm the earth and woke the little tree from her sleep. Spring had come, and though the tree had not grown much in height during the winter, she had grown much stronger. The tree stretched, basking in the warm sunshine. When it rained, she soaked up the drops of water as they fell to the ground.

One day, a hungry deer came wandering through the meadow, feasting on the delicious green plants. The tree could do nothing to stop the deer from starting to munch on her leaves and branches.

"Oh!" cried the tree, looking at her broken limbs.

The sun shone affectionately on the tree. "Don't give up," he said. "Your branches will heal and leaves will grow again. Give it time."

The rain came and lovingly watered the earth around the tree, and the sun shone its healing rays, and soon the tree was again strong and healthy.

Yes, I'm going to make it, the tree determined in her heart.



By the time winter came around again, the tree had grown quite a bit. This time she did not fear the wind, the snow, or the frost. Instead, she welcomed them as a rest from all the growing and stretching she had done during the summer. She had learned the benefit of the seasons. Year by year, the oak tree grew in height and experience.

A hundred years passed, and the oak tree had lived a long and beautiful life. She had been a joy to many children who had played in her branches. She had given shelter and food to the animals and given life and protection from the wind and rain to many younger trees and plants around her.

The oak tree had fulfilled
God's plan for her life.