

Forest In The Closet

Jerry wanted to be a grown-up. One morning, while his parents were making breakfast, Jerry went into their bedroom and opened the big closet containing his father's work clothes. The little room smelled like pine trees and Jerry thought about finding a magical forest inside.

Jerry stepped into the closet and the door closed behind him. He turned around to see who closed it, but there wasn't a door anymore. In its place an unending forest spread out where Jerry's house used to be. From far in the distance came the faint smell of bacon and eggs.

Jerry's tummy growled from hunger. "I want to be a grown-up," Jerry thought, "but a good day starts with breakfast." Those words reminded Jerry of his mother and how she patted Jerry on the head every morning while he was eating his cereal. Now his head felt lonely.

"That's why grown ups wear hats," Jerry decided, and reached for one of his father's. But the shelf was too high and Jerry couldn't reach the hat. He gave up and the shelf turned into a tree branch and the tree branch lowered the hat to Jerry and placed it on his head like a crown.

"Thank you," Jerry said. He did not see the tree branch rise into the air again because the hat was so big that it covered Jerry's eyes and ears. He did not hear himself say thank you either. But he believed he had said it, and he knew it was very grown up to think so.

"Now I need a suit," Jerry said, and once the words left his mouth, a beautiful blue suit crossed its arms and spread apart its own shoulders and slid free of its elegant wooden hanger. Jerry lifted the brim of his new hat and watched the suit un-hang its legs and climb down.

The suit stood in front of Jerry and rubbed its invisible chin with an invisible hand, thinking about something. It walked in circles around Jerry, examining him from head to toe, often exclaiming, "Aha!" When it finished, it dropped to its knees on the forest floor and looked Jerry in the eyes.

"If you want to be a grown-up," the suit said, "you will have to make a few changes. You can't carry that slingshot," said the suit, reaching behind Jerry and confiscating the toy. "In fact," the suit continued, while testing the elastic, "you can't think about playing games very much."

"Oh?" Jerry asked, watching the suit play with the slingshot. He was about to ask, "Why not?" but the suit shot a ball of damp leaves at him as the words were

coming out and the leaves covered his mouth. “No,” said the suit, “as a grown up you can’t ask ‘Why not?’ very much either.”

Jerry was still holding his new hat up so he could see. Now he took the hat off and spit the ball of damp leaves into it. He bounced the ball of damp leaves in the hat a few times and thought about how to use the hat and the ball of damp leaves as a slingshot to replace the real one.

“Now you’re thinking like a grown-up,” the suit said, watching him. “Very good! I guess we can proceed after all.” The suit began undoing its buttons and opened itself, but there was no one inside. Jerry guessed he’d see a heart in the suit or a motor or a bird, but it was totally empty.

“What are you waiting for?” the suit asked, taking off its jacket. “I don’t know,” Jerry said. But the suit explained to him that a grown up can figure out what to do next without being told, and usually has to. Then the suit waited for Jerry to put down the hat and take off his shoes.

Jerry stood on the forest floor in his thick white socks and thought about the floor of the gym at his school. “No daydreaming,” the suit warned, catching Jerry on his way to a game of tag. “Adults don’t play tag like you do. They pretend not to play and that way the game never ends.”

Jerry didn’t understand that remark, but the suit didn’t mind. It was already busy covering Jerry, spinning around him in a blur that replaced Jerry’s clothing with his father’s. When the suit stopped spinning, it was on Jerry’s body, atop a tidy white dress shirt with a starched collar and tie.

This new outfit was much too big for Jerry. His hands and feet were lost in the long sleeves and the long legs of his father’s trousers. His chin and nose were hidden inside the big starched collar. The hat fell from the sky and covered the rest of his face so his whole body was gone.

“Perfect,” the suit said, “now you look exactly like me! You don’t have hands or feet or a face or a slingshot or too many questions or a lot of silly daydreams or anything you don’t need anymore. You’re a perfect grown-up,” the suit said, “and my voice has becomes yours.”

Jerry spoke a few words from inside the suit and realized he sounded exactly like the suit used to. His eyes peered out between the high starched collar and the low hat and he looked at the magical forest spreading out all around him as the sun set and long shadows appeared.

Jerry felt cold and scared and he wished he had better clothing for the outdoors than one of his father’s business suits, but the closet was disappearing and all

the other clothing gave way to thick trees and branches. The ceiling opened and faraway stars shone like shirt buttons overhead.

“I don’t want to be a grown-up,” Jerry said with the voice of the suit. He began to undress and a bird flew out the front of his father’s dress shirt, where Jerry’s heart was. It said, “Jerry, follow me,” and its voice sounded like Jerry’s. Jerry chased it through the woods, undressing as he ran.

No one ever knew how Jerry’s father’s blue suit ended up in the woods in the backyard or why there was a bird on the window sill outside the kitchen that morning, watching Jerry eat. Jerry explained everything to his parents, who pretended to believe him, applauding his imagination.