

Tree Dream

In a mountain top town very close to the sky, a boy named Jake, who loved a good night's sleep, but hated combing his messy hair afterwards, got out of bed and looked in the mirror. He wondered was he still dreaming, because the face in the mirror, although it looked much like his, was talking to him very actively, as if the boy in the glass had been awake a long time, waiting for Jake.

“Go outside,” he said, “right away. Don't change your clothes. Don't take off your pajamas. Use your slippers, not your shoes. And whatever you do, don't touch your hair. It's a terrible mess. Keep it that way!” The face in the mirror put its hands on its head and messed up its hair to demonstrate. Jake watched the hair get messier and messier and as he smiled so did the face in the mirror.

Jake followed the instructions and stepped into his slippers. He remained in his pajamas and walked across the room. He opened the door, went into the hallway, walked down the stairs, turned the front door knob quietly, and slipped out into the brand new day, a few minutes after sunrise. The sky was clear and the morning air was crisp and fresh. Jake took a deep breath and enjoyed exhaling it.

“I'm outside,” he said, talking to the face in the mirror, which he no longer saw, except in his memory. “What do I do now?”

“Go into the front yard and pretend you are a tree.”

“How do I do that?” Jake asked. But the face in the mirror didn't answer. Neither Jake nor the face said anything else.

Birds were singing, and that's all Jake could hear. He wondered if his hair might be so messy that it was blocking his ears, but there was no way to change things. The voice in the mirror had been very clear when it told Jake not to touch his hair, whatever he did. Jake remembered the words “whatever you do”. They echoed in his mind like the clapper inside a bell.

They also seemed to apply to how to be a tree, so he decided to do whatever he did, and maybe that would be right. He walked into the front yard, up a gradual slope with mountain peaks in the distance, and turned in circles a few times. He had never seen a tree turn in circles, however, so he changed his mind, and stood perfectly still, holding his arms out like a scarecrow.

After a while, Jake began to wonder if maybe he had imagined the face in the mirror, if maybe it never told him to come outside. “Maybe I was dreaming,” Jake said, thinking back about the possibility. “Or maybe I'm dreaming now,” he considered, “and I'm still in my bed. Maybe my whole life is a dream.” He was chasing this funny thought along when he realized it was how trees probably think.

Jake tried to move his feet, but they were stuck to the ground. He tried to lower his arms, but they stayed in the air. He tried to turn his head, but he couldn't. His eyes gazed forward and watched a tiny creature flying in Jake's direction, getting bigger against a backdrop of mountaintops. The creature moved through the blue sky like a fish in the sea, swimming this way and that, hardly trying. But the creature was not a fish. It was a bird, with blue and yellow feathers, and a hooked orange beak.

When Jake could see the bird clearly, he realized it had only one eye, which took up the space of two. It was a friendly eye that blinked cheerfully whenever the bird passed before Jake's face, carving effortless circles of flight around Jake's branches, which were actually Jake's arms. At those times the bird tilted its wings so Jake could see the sleek feathers underneath them, and appeared to be waving hello.

"I'm Buford," the bird said, landing on Jake's shoulder and speaking directly into his ear.

"I'm Jake," said Jake, unable to move, or turn his head. He could not see Buford in that position, but heard clicking sounds near his ear as Buford pecked his hooked orange beak against Jake's messy hair.

"It's perfect," Buford said, continuing to peck. "I'm sure it will work." Then he hopped from Jake's shoulder to the top of Jake's head and stood on Jake's hair without sinking down to Jake's scalp.

Jake heard Buford pecking at the hair and felt an occasional tug on his scalp, but overall he enjoyed the bird's attentions. They reminded him of his favorite times when his mother read him stories before bed and stroked the hair around his ears with her finger. Jake remembered those times now and fell asleep like a tree. He never moved, but let himself rest exactly how he was.

While Jake was sleeping, Buford built a fine nest atop Jake's head, using only Jake's hair instead of twigs and dry grass. When he finished, he broke into song, which echoed into the faraway mountaintops. Tiny creatures stirred and came forward, moving through the blue sky like fish in the sea, swimming this way and that, hardly trying. They followed a bigger fish, who turned out to be their mother.

All these fish were not fish, of course, but a family of birds, some yellow, some blue, one both, like Buford. In fact, that bird was named Buford too, which confused the family so much that they started calling him Junior instead. But Junior never liked the name Junior and landing in the new nest built by his father, he announced he wanted to be called Jake, although he couldn't say why.

"I'm dreaming," Jake thought, standing in the front lawn with the family of birds in his hair. "I'm dreaming I'm a boy named Jake who turned into a tree and met a bird named Buford who built a nest in my hair and called his family to join him. It's a nice dream," Jake decided, letting it continue. He was happy as a tree, and he hoped the little bird in his messy hair was happy to be Jake.