

THE TREE-CHILD

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He started as a young two-winged green creature of the air, whirling and spinning, up and down; freed from his parents' grip the child danced in his freedom for a few hours. Then he settled slowly to the ground, in a place among dry, crunchy leaves, violet roots, and soft, brown earth. The weather turned cold; white powder from the skies covered the leaves and the roots and the tree-child, and incubated them all in silvery splendor. The snow went away, and in its place came water and ooze; and then dry winds and sunshine. And the tree-child discovered he was changing: his wings were gone, his body had tiny arms and legs, that grew longer every day, his shell-skin was splitting, and his body was swelled with moisture and energy.

As the days passed the tree-child got bigger. His many limbs got longer, his body fatter. He grew and grew, every day finding new things about the area he lived in. He discovered the violet roots had purple children; there were lots of little yellow cup-children; one day he saw another tree-child, with whom he had contests to see who could reach the farthest, or who could stretch his neck the farthest, or who could see the most. The roses and violets and buttercups passed, and the leaves fell, and more green creatures were freed to fall to the ground all around the tree-child. He felt the cold winds and knew that the second winter of his life was coming.

The first years passed in a pattern of sleeping under the snow; waking and growing under the rain and sun; and succumbing to autumn's partial death. Eventually the tree-child became aware of other trees much like himself, only some were bigger, some were smaller. The nearest one was a young tree-lady of beautiful proportions. She was a mother to the younger trees: she showed them where to put their roots and how to drink the water that was in the ground and how to make leaves green, and all the other things a young tree needs to know. She was very fond of the young trees, but her favorite was the tree-child. He was closest to her; in fact sometimes she would reach down with her long arms and hide him, or protect him from thunderstorms and snowstorms. Her roots and his intertwined under the ground, soaking up water with its

