

LIFE AS A LEAF

By Jaeden Cole

In the small town of Madison is an ordinary community with many hotspots and distinct locations. Madison's got the town hall, used for discussing any issues without any repercussions and for discussing any upcoming events; Madison Public Library, a library with many books, computers, and research materials on the town, which the town residents (those interested at least) use to learn more about their history; and Henry Park, a public park where people can be seen interacting, walking their dogs, climbing trees (only kids and teenagers), and doing any physical activity. Henry Park is where I come in, as it's where I live. My name is Twig, and I'm a leaf. I'm literally stuck to a tree like all my other brothers and sisters. I was born not too long ago; I don't remember a lot, but I'll do my best to explain. In the spring, I remember opening my eyes and seeing a beautiful place with sunlight shining in my eyes very bright, people chattering and having conversations I could barely hear, birds singing a rather rhythmic tune, small ponds with ducks swimming around and flying away, trails with people walking and others riding their bikes very fast, and a playground full of children playing and having a good time. I was in a park. I was very much aware of the fact that I was attached to a tree. How did it feel, though? Not gonna lie, it was a pain in the ass, but after a month or so I got used to it. Something I noticed from the beginning is that I was the only thing on that tree, alive. None of my leaf brothers and sisters could speak or move a muscle, which got me thinking: am I unique? Am I the only one of my kind? For weeks, I thought of possibly what I could be, but nothing ever seemed to come. At night when I was asleep, I'd have the weirdest of dreams. One night, I dreamed of a boy. He was tall and slim, wore a basketball jersey with Nikes, had a rather serious but fun personality, and had a scar over his right eye. In my dream, I'd see him come to the park a lot with his friends, always laughing, having fun, and just being at peace. This one time, he competed against one of his friends to see who was the better fighter. His friend threw the first punch and overconfidently thought he'd strike him, but the boy simply smiled and, with his quick reflexes, dodged the punch and watched his friend fall to the ground, humiliating himself in front of their friend group. The boy obviously laughed but just stood there looking cool. His friend, now embarrassed, gets up quickly and charges at the boy, just attempting to punch, punch, punch, and punch him with no success as he dodges all the shots. Now exhausted from all the energy he put into trying to harm him, the boy takes advantage of this and drops down and drop kicks his friend, officially winning the fight. As his friends cheer, he tells them to stop for a minute as he goes over and sees his friend sitting on the ground, arms crossed in shame. The boy reaches out to help him up. His friend smiles and accepts the offer; the two then hug shortly afterwards. That dream made me feel a certain way, and it often makes me wonder what life would be like if I were a human and I got to experience human emotions and experiences, but since I'm a leaf, that'll never happen, and I'll just have to stick to my imagination. Summer is my last season where I'll be alive, as in the fall all the leaves fall down and usually get crumpled up depending on the condition they're in. I'm really not as afraid of death as I probably should be,

but I don't think about it as much, and I just see it as the Circle of Life, where, you know, I'll die in fall, but I'll be reborn as good as new in springtime. I dream about the boy again, but this time it is different. I see him coming in the park, but it's weird as he's not his usual self. While usually he's more upbeat, happy, and relaxed, this time he comes across as more distant, nonchalant, and honestly just sad, but what's weirder is that I somehow feel how he's feeling in the moment. He walks past almost all the people and walks towards my tree, where he drops down and lies against the tree. He sighs as if he had a long day and doesn't want to listen or talk to anyone. To his surprise, though, he's met by someone around his age. I assume they are friends since they know his name. Oh yeah, I also learned his name is Jax. They talk for about 2 hours, and I don't get much of it, but from what I do get, he's going through some things. What exactly? Like I said before, I'm not sure, but it must be something because I caught him holding back tears. I think he's trying to act tough and man up or something, but I just feel bad for the guy. Summer ends and fall arrives, and it's getting cold outside; people are even starting to wear jackets. I start seeing my fellow leaves fall off from mother tree onto the hard ground in small piles just waiting to be raked and then blown away by the wind or jumped in by a buncha kids. Me, though, I'm prepared for my fate. I'm waiting day by day for when it'll happen, but for right now, I'm just waiting patiently. I dream about Jax again, and this time I think it's my last dream for a while until I'm reborn in the spring. I see Jax lying against mother tree, but this time almost everything is different. He appears tired, so tired as if he's almost out of breath; he's skinny, well, skinnier than usual, as if he hadn't eaten in a while; he appears as if he's drained and can't do anything but rest. Jax doesn't say anything; he just lies there slowly breathing, his eyes nearly shut as if he wants to sleep. Jax's eyes then close slowly, and they shut for good. A bright purple light comes out of Jax's body and goes into mother tree. A leaf then starts growing from a branch on mother tree. Twig wakes up from the dream, confused by what he just saw. It makes him wonder if he wasn't having dreams at all but rather glimpses at his past life.