

A Simple Brown Leaf
by L.J. Davis

The wind picked up and tenderly plucked the simple brown leaf from the tree which it called home. It was unsuspecting. Moving gingerly back and forth in the gentle breeze, fluttering casually as the wind tickled its papery form, the leaf did not expect to be taken away so soon. It did not seem that long ago when it first unfolded from sprout to maturity. How could time move so quickly, it thought. But...it did feel old.

The leaf had been the color of a leathery brown for some time now. Once, when newly born, it was affected by the purest green. A green so sharp that it looked like polished emerald. As the days went by and the sky got bluer and the days warmer, the tint began to mellow into a rich grass green. As more days stretched by, the deep dark hues started to fade into an ugly-ish yellow-green. The leaf remained this way, looking like rot, for a quite some time. Then, just as if being reborn, it succumbed to a transformation of color. As the days shortened and the nights chilled, the simple leaf turned brown. It remained that color for all of Autumn.

Now, as the cold of night lengthened into the chilliness of day, the leaf was adrift on a confused current of air – jerking this way and that way, floating higher then plunging downward, until at last it landed on Earth. Its landing was soft and almost unheard...almost. The leaf thought it was the end but it wasn't. Someone was watching the simple brown leaf. Someone had been watching the leaf for a long time.

As the leaf floated gently to the ground, a young squirrel looked up in anticipation. She had been watching the leaf all summer, tucked between the other leaves in the tree. She liked how broad and sturdy the leaf seemed while it danced among its brothers and sisters. When the mighty winds shook the tree hard, the leaf remained strong. When all of the other leaves frayed and crumbled with each gust of wind, the brown leaf stood its place.

This leaf stood out amongst the others. It was unique and for her, it had a purpose. The squirrel knew that winter was coming and that she had to prepare. Throughout the summer, on into Autumn, she watched for that one special leaf to fall because she was going to use it for her nest.

For animals who don't have to make nests for winter, for those who spend their cold days tucked under a warm blanket or snuggled by a cozy fire, it is hard to understand why a squirrel would be so keen about a simple brown leaf. But, the squirrel was not one of those animals.

If she didn't make a proper nest, she would freeze during the icy chill that was winter. Her nest had to be warm. It had to block out the cold. Her nest had to keep her insulated

from the elements around her. If it didn't, she would not make it to the spring.

As soon as the leaf touched down, the squirrel sprung up and quickly grabbed it in her hands before any of the other squirrels could claim it. She treated it gently and with great care for, although it was old and fragile, it still had purpose.

She entered her tree den and approached her nest. She had been building it for some time. She had gathered twigs and bits of straw in addition to other brown leaves, packing it firmly into a comfortable little bed.

As it was, her nest would do nicely but she knew that she needed the special warmth that only the simple brown leaf could give. She approached her nest holding the leaf in her outstretched hands. With careful determination, she placed the leaf on the top of the nest. She would worry about winter no more.

For the leaf, it was a curious thing. It didn't quite know what to make of this peculiar situation. When the wind snatched it from its tree and it began floating downward, the

leaf thought it would die. But it didn't feel dead. In fact, it felt very much alive.

When it was tethered, it helped the tree survive by gathering light and rain. Although the leaf was a graceful thing that swayed gently in the breeze, its direction was clear. In order for the tree to grow and prosper, the leaf had to do its job. For the tree to live, the leaf must perform. This was a grand and noble purpose.

Now, as the gentle body of the squirrel lay snuggled against it, the leaf came to a sudden realization. On the tree, it knew its function. It believed that it was there to help the tree grow and then it would die. The brown leaf never realized that it could have another purpose – a purpose unknown to only one other creature, the squirrel.

With this understanding, the leaf again felt transformed. It could almost feel the green of youth course through its veins. It was young, it was vibrant and it continued to have purpose.

Outside the chilly wind flung itself furiously against the trees. No leaves lingered on the ground. Creatures scurried

to and fro, gathering one last nut, one last meal before making their great escape into their dens. Inside the squirrel lay comfortable in body and the leaf lay comfortable in mind. The squirrel was no longer concerned about her safety. She knew that she would survive the winter. The leaf was no longer worried about its fate. It had a new sense of purpose. As winter raged and the forest fell quiet, the squirrel and the simple brown leaf drifted off to sleep.