

Leaves

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Rating: PG-13

Summary: Today's story is brought to you by the numbers 10 and 82, and the letter L. It is fluff, pure and simple. Covers a year in L&A's life starting mid-third season as seen thru Amanda's backyard. (Winter sometime after FFFT, Spring sometime b/t BWCBK and DMLNT, Summer well after ATWAS but before Stemwinder, and Fall some time just before NC).

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Winter

In a small backyard behind a little white house in Arlington, a lone maple tree stands sentry. It is winter. Snow coats its boughs like tufts of cotton; its leaves nothing more than a distant memory.

From behind the tree's thick trunk, a figure emerges. He rubs his hands briskly over his upper arms, staving off a chill. She sees him, sets down the plate she'd been drying, and slips out the back door.

"Hi!" She punctuates the sentence by rocking forward on the balls of her feet. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, I was just in the neighborhood so I thought I would drop off your Christmas present." He smiles and hands her a long, thin box precisely wrapped in store paper.

She grins and takes it in hand, her eyes twinkling like the colored bulbs on an evergreen. "Yours is inside. Do you want to wait for a minute?"

The answer is a given. He retreats back behind the maple's trunk while she retreats indoors.

She returns, a small, green foil-wrapped box in her hands. "Here, I hope you like it. I really didn't know what you needed, but I wanted to get you something, and, well, here . . ."

She thrusts it into his hands and turns to slip away. He catches her hand, compelling her to look back at him.

"Thank you." His words are given form in a cloud of condensation that hangs in the air, dancing momentarily before floating away.

"You're welcome." She squeezes his hand in response, wishing selfishly that it weren't sleeved in a leather glove.

The contact lasts a mere fraction of a second longer than necessary before they slip apart, returning to their separate lives.

Spring

The days grow longer, and the sap, the tree's lifeblood, begins to course more quickly through its veins. Tiny buds coat the boughs, a promise of birth and rebirth, life both beginning and beginning anew.

It is twilight. Light and darkness dance together like long parted lovers only recently reunited. The product of their union can be seen in the ever lengthening shadows that creep over the lawn toward the little white house.

Under the cover of those shadows, the Scarecrow also creeps. Inching lazily toward his destination, he finally reaches it and taps on the window.

She sees him, signals him to duck, and then slips out to meet him.

"Hi, stranger! Welcome home!" The light from the kitchen window filters through her hair and frames her face like a halo.

"Hello to you, too. I just got in, but I wanted to stop by to see if you're available tomorrow."

"Of course; what are we doing?" The moon continues to rise, and she inches closer to him, reaching out to smooth an imagined wrinkle from his lapel.

He walks toward the tree, lifting his hand to finger the buds there. "The Russian circus is in town . . ."

"So, who am I supposed to trail?"

"No one." He shifts his weight as he answers. "I got tickets; I hear the bear act is amazing. The show's at eight."

"I can't wait." She hesitates a moment before leaning closer to lightly brush her lips over his cheek, a fleeting contact as soft and sweet as the spring breeze. "I'll see you then."

He watches her enter the house and lingers in the tree's shadow until the kitchen light is extinguished.

Summer

In the heat and humidity of the mid-afternoon, the maple tree stands tall and proud as a peacock, stretching its lush, leafy limbs toward the sky. The boys who normally climb this tree and seek seclusion in its fort are away for the week.

In their place, two adults have spread a blanket at its base and are now reclined, soaking in the diffuse sun and the cicadas' chorus.

She rolls casually onto her side to brush an ant from his shoulder. Rather than taking her hand away, she lets it slowly slide the length of his arm. "This is nice."

"Yes," he agrees and then draws her toward him, capturing her lips.

She responds eagerly, her tongue slipping out to taste the powdered sugar left from their strawberry dessert. Her fingers slip behind his neck and weave their way through his hair. As they break away, he sighs, "Very nice."

She yawns and stretches, lifting her arms high above her head. The movement causes her breasts to strain against the thin fabric of her T-shirt. He watches appreciatively for a moment and then quickly looks away, feeling oddly as though he's crossed a line that, though not discussed, exists nevertheless. Swallowing hard, he asks, "Tired?"

"No, not really," she answers, though her eyes are heavy lidded. "It's just a nice day to be lazy, you know?"

"Yeah, I know exactly what you mean." He wraps his arm around her, and she rests her head against his shoulder. "There's something to be said for doing nothing."

Autumn

The days are growing shorter, and the tall maple's leaves glow red and orange against the crisp blue of the sky. The air seemed charged with energy, the season's first frost bringing a sense of urgency as the world prepares for the harshness of winter.

She is a part of this, standing in the midst of scattered leaves, frustrated in her attempts to tame them into a pile.

"Want some help?" She hears the voice and it warms her from the inside out.

Turning, she sees him and nods. "Love some. The boys were supposed to do it, but Joe showed up this morning, and they managed to talk their way into spending the day with him instead."

She hands him the rake and picks up a leaf bag. As she turns, the breeze kicks up again, and her tiny pile is scattered. She glares at it, finding Fall's poetic changeability little more than a nuisance.

"You know, Amanda." He drops the rake and moves to stand next to her, his face alive with mischief. "It wouldn't really be teaching your boys anything about responsibility if you do their work for them while they're gone, would it?"

She grins, enjoying the turn the conversation is taking. "No, I guess it wouldn't. I should probably leave this for them, shouldn't I?"

"That would be the responsible thing to do." He helps her gather the gardening implements. "And then, I think you should take the day off, too."

"Oh?" She reaches for the rake and hangs it on its hook in the garage. "And what would I do with this time off?"

"Well, I know of a perfectly wonderful agent that's been feeling a little left out, because his partner's been busy with classes and training. . . you could probably spend some time with him," he teases her.

"Ahh," she agrees and plants a soft kiss on his mouth. "I think that's a pretty good idea."

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