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THE GROWING-UP OF A SEED NAMED BRUCE

The garden was really big, at least some thought it was. For the small bugs and tiny ants it was enormous. In fact, because they could only see a small part of it at any one time, they didn't know it was a garden at all. It was simply the place where they lived. Larger creatures like mice and rabbits were able to see much more, and squirrels even more than them; but the garden was still just somewhere they called home. The black cockatoo had a much better view as she flew over, and she knew this was not the only garden in the world. There were many, and she had visited some; and yet, the bird never once thought to ask: where do gardens come from? As far as she knew, they had always been there; and while she perched high in the branches of a tree chewing on a gum-nut, the cockatoo never imagined that inside the nut was a little seed that might one day become a mighty gum tree like the one she was sitting in.

The seed didn't know either, not about trees, or gardens; not about anything really. All he had ever known was the feeling of being somewhere dark. It was so dark that he wasn't sure if there were others the same as him, or even what he looked like. Seeing was something else he didn't know about. Then a miracle happened. There was a jerk that shook him around. Suddenly a bright light appeared through a small hole that hadn't been there before. Following more jerking and bouncing, the hole got bigger and bigger. Another thing the little seed didn't know about was the cockatoo which was chewing into his dark home, making the hole that brought him light. And when the cockatoo decided that the nut wasn't to her liking and threw it away, the little seed discovered flying.

Although it was a long way down from the top of the tree to the ground, the flight was over very quickly. The gum-nut hit the dirt and bounced a few times. As it did, the little seed was tossed out. Now it was really bright. Lying there, he could see up the trunk of the tree he had fallen from; but it meant nothing to him - he had never seen a tree before and didn't know what it was. Then something exceptionally strange happened.

He heard a sound coming from somewhere close to him. Until that moment he didn't know about speaking, so the voice startled him. It was saying: "Hi, there. I'm Matilda. What's your name?"

The little seed thought for a moment, then replied: "I don't think I have one."

"That's no good," said Matilda, "I have to call you something. You sound like a boy, so how do you fancy Bruce?"

"Bruce sounds okay," answered the little seed. Although he couldn't move he could look sideways. Almost next to him was a round lump. "Is that you, Matilda?"

"No, came the reply from his other side, "I'm over here. That's just a stone."

Bruce had another thought: "I didn't know that. How did you know what it was?"

"I just know, that's all," replied Matilda.

"Well," said Bruce, "If you know things, and you're not a stone, what am I?"

There was silence for a while as Matilda pondered the question. Finally, she said: "I'm pretty sure you're the same as me, and neither of us are stones."

"So, what are we?" asked Bruce.

"Hmm," murmured Matilda, "That's a hard one. To be truthful, I have no idea, but it's my guess we are something important, otherwise we wouldn't be able to see and talk."

"But stones could be important too," suggested Bruce.

"Oh, I doubt that very much," replied Matilda, "This one doesn't look important at all. Hey, stone," she called out, "What are you here for?" There was no answer. "See," she said to Bruce, "It's just a stone - dumb and stupid."

Night-time came and it was nearly the same as before when they were inside the gum-nut, but not quite. The two seeds were able to see above them, much higher than the tall tree which was now just a shadow. Beyond that, tiny lights twinkled in the dark. "Do you think they are more of us?" asked Bruce.

"I don't think so," replied Matilda. "As I remember, you looked sort-of brown and they are really white."

"What are brown and white?" asked Bruce.

"Colours, silly," said Matilda, "Don't you know anything?"

"Not really," answered Bruce. "Why would I - I'm just a little seed."

Matilda was amazed. "There, see - you do know things. If you're a seed and I look the same as you, I must be a seed too! Anyway, how did you know that?"

"Er...," Bruce started, then couldn't find a good answer, "It just sort-of came to me."

"Fair enough," said Matilda. "It doesn't matter anyway. Now we know what we are, we just have to figure out why we're here and what we're supposed to do."

Bruce yawned. "Can we talk about this later? I think I'm about to go to sleep."

The two agreed it was a good idea. At least it was to start with. During the night it had begun to rain. A few spots of water fell on them and this woke them up. As the rain became heavier, water soaked the ground and was soon running in streams over the dirt on which they lay. There was so much that it picked up Bruce and Matilda and swept them away. "Stay with me, Matilda," Bruce called out.

"I can't," Matilda called back, her voice getting fainter and fainter as they drifted apart.

"Matilda! Matilda!" Bruce shouted, then one more time; but there was no answer.

What happened next was peculiar. The moon was now out, and as Bruce was carried away on the water, he was still able to see things rushing past overhead. Then he was tumbling and falling. Finally, he stopped. Everything around was black. It was worse than being back in the gum-nut because this time he was quite alone.

The rainwater had washed Bruce and Matilda over the ground, then down into holes in the soil. There they lay, not far apart, but not knowing that they were still very close. Over time, each had a feeling that they were changing. Something seemed to be growing from inside them. They got bigger and bigger, downwards and sideways and upwards. Soon the tops of them pushed up through the soil and they were able to see light again. Unlike the way they were before, however, they didn't simply lay on the ground looking up: they could see all around; and as they started to grow upwards, it was plain that they were more than just sort-of brown: they were many colours, especially green. In a matter of days they were well above the ground in which their feet still sat; in weeks they were getting quite tall, much larger than the seeds that they used to be.

There was another thing too - it seemed they could no longer speak, either to each other, or to anyone else. Not that it worried them because they could see one another quite clearly. It was obvious to Bruce that Matilda was growing into a very pretty gum tree; and Matilda was thinking how strong, tall and proud Bruce would be when he eventually grew up to be as big as the older trees in the garden. So, speaking was no longer important when they could watch each other grow.

Even though they were now speechless, they could still see and hear what was going on around them. They were especially pleased to have a visit from two humans - a boy and girl. "Oh, look," said the girl, "Two new gum trees are growing in the garden. We should give them names."

"Okay," said the boy, "This one looks like a Bruce."

"And I'll call this one Matilda," added the girl.

If he could have, Bruce would have smiled. The girl had called HIM Matilda, thinking he was a girl; but he didn't mind. He could see the bright new shoots sprouting from his branches the same as was happening to Matilda; and it was easy to imagine how someone could mistake him for a girl as beautiful as Matilda. Anyway, it was enough to know he was going to become a mighty gum tree when he grew up; and if people wanted to call him Matilda, he supposed that was okay.