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Mother Maple Tree

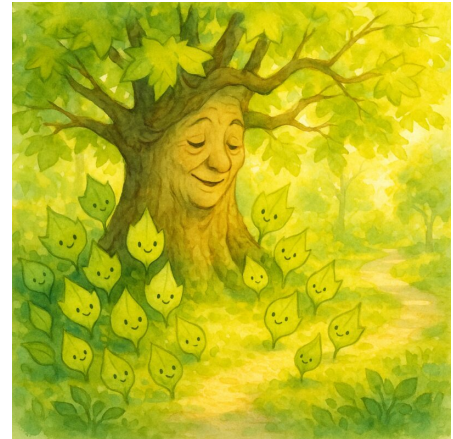
Mary Graham Bonner

"I want to tell you a little family history," said the old maple tree to her leaves on a bright spring morning.

"We belong to the Sugar Maple family. Our sap, when spring comes, is tapped and boiled down into the maple sugar that everyone loves. Our wood is used for fine furniture. And in autumn — though that's a long way off yet — we dress ourselves in the most spectacular reds and golds and oranges you can imagine. But that's autumn's business. Today, your business is to grow.

"We are shade trees. In summer, when Mr. Sun gets enthusiastic and rather hot, people are grateful for the cool shadows we make on streets and avenues and garden paths. He means well, Mr. Sun — he's a perfectly splendid old fellow — but he does get carried away in summer. So your job, leaves, is to grow large and beautiful and shade the path below."

The leaves rustled their agreement.



"Now," said Mother Maple, "let me tell you about the cousins. There is Cousin Sycamore Maple, whose family came from far away and whose flowers are always a little late. Cousin Norway Maple is sturdier — a fine city tree, not bothered by soot or dust or insects, which is why you'll find so many planted along busy streets.

"Cousin Box Elder is related to us because it carries the same little winged seeds — 'keys,' we call them — that hang on all through winter. Cousin Striped Maple has the most beautiful pale-striped bark, and its branches make fine whistles. Cousin Mountain Maple grows on every hillside. Cousin Vine Maple leans on other trees for support, which is not our family's style.

"Cousin Silver Maple is graceful but delicate — best suited to parks and gardens, not city streets. Cousin Red Maple loves swampy ground and turns the most extraordinary scarlet in autumn. And Cousin Black Maple is nearly identical to us, though its keys spread a little wider and its branches tend toward orange.

"But I am very glad," said Mother Maple, "that we belong to the Sugar Maple

family."

"So are we," said the leaves — and they got to work.

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