

Six Wishes for Willow
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The willow tree played with her friend Wind in the shadows of the larger trees. Every once in a while, she felt the warm sun on her bark, as it broke through the thick bush above her. It didn't matter how much she tried to be happy—the truth was, she was very sad.

"Even in the middle of this great forest, sometimes I feel so alone." Willow stood bent, looking at her roots. "And my back hurts too. I don't know how much more of this I can take."

Willow was planted as a little sprig, so filled with the hope of stretching tall. Now, she hung her head under the weight of the old Birch tree.

"Instead of growing tall to meet the sunshine, I keep growing sideways and missing it. Oh, how I want to stretch."

Her friend Wind gently blew against the young tree. "I would lift you up if I could," he said softly.

"I know you would Wind, you are a good friend, but because I've been this way so long, I would probably break inside if you did."

"I hope you don't think I am holding you down on purpose," the White Birch uttered, as she waved her branches over Willow's head. "I can't help the way I am."

"It's really not your fault Birch," Willow replied. "It's just that it's so crowded in here. I have no place to grow. Look, my leaves are all tangled—some of them are even growing crooked."

"I feel sorry for you, Willow, but you're doing all right down there, aren't you?" asked Birch, "I know it's not the way you'd like to grow. You and I can't change this, because of that old dead tree trunk that leans against us."

Willow's thoughts took her back to the time she was a seedling. She was bright green with moist leaves waiting to grow. She had stretched and grown until she'd reached the bottom branch of Birch. But, that was as far as she could go. She couldn't push her way past Birch and she couldn't push her way around her. Willow continued to grow—but not up—but sideways and that was how she remained.

Willow knew what Birch said was true. There was nothing either of them could do about the tree trunk. Still, Willow bent sadly in her bowed position and dew dropped from her leaves on to the moss below. She knew from the tips of her leaves to the bottom of her roots that she was strong enough to stand tall if only she had a chance. But the way I am being pushed. . .

I will never stretch toward the blue sky.
I will never see the valleys and rivers around me.
I will never wave my branches in the wind.
I will never feel the sun on my bark.
I will never have birds nest in my branches.
I will never have someone sit in my shade."

Willow became aware of Wind as he wrapped himself around her; he was good company when she was feeling like this. Surely there must be something good about growing the way I do.

"Maybe someday I'll be a seat for someone to sit on. No! I'm not straight enough. I know, maybe I'll be a swing for someone to swing on. No! I'm not high enough. Well, I can do something special—I can see the ground better than any of my tree friends."

Willow gave a long sigh as if she was trying to convince herself of this truth and then slowly she said, "But that's not what a seedling is to do - watch the ground. A seedling should grow up. I will never be satisfied until I do what I am supposed to do."

She stretched her trunk this way and then that way. Wind saw her stretching and he swept under her coaxing her upward, but no, that didn't help either.

She relaxed. "Surely, there must be a way, but what is the right way for me."

She turned her leaves up to look around. "It is nice tucked in here in the shade," she had to admit to herself as Wind gently brushed her bark.

She noticed a fallen tree trunk beside her that no longer stood tall. "He accepts himself as being something different." Willow noticed the beautiful moss that the tree trunk had collected over the years. He seems satisfied.

Several small caterpillars crawled across the mossy stones, nodding at Willow. "Well, maybe there is something good about being bent over," she said, as she waved back to the caterpillars.

"No." She didn't want to think that way—she would not give in. "I was once a seedling who was to grow tall—I want to stretch up like the other trees in the forest. I want to be what I'm meant to be."

The wind brushed her bark. WHISH! Back again he came WHISH! He was always playing games with her, but today she didn't want to play. She was very serious. How could she possibly change what was happening to her? WHISH! Again the wind blew through her leaves. WHISH! WHISH! WHISH!

All at once Willow listened with new ears to what Wind was saying to her. Excitedly, she said aloud, "Of course, that's it—I'll wish—I'll wish. Thank you, friend Wind."

Willow did not waste any time declaring her wishes; in fact she almost sang them . . .

"I wish to stretch upward toward the blue sky,
I wish to see the valleys and rivers around me,
I wish to wave my branches in the wind,
I wish to feel the sun on my bark,
I wish to have birds nest in my branches,
I wish for someone to sit in my shade."

Quickly, she looked around and wondered if anyone had heard her. Well, it was only six little wishes, surely, that's not too much to ask.

Slowly Willow calmed herself. She wondered at what she had just done. Was it foolish to make such bold wishes? After all even Willow knew things couldn't always be changed just because she *wished* them to be. Willow knew down deep in her roots this was how she was and this was how she might have to stay.

She smiled mischievously inside her bark. "At least until my wishes come true."

Over the years, Willow often had to draw on her sense of humor. It always helped her through the difficult times. Sometimes she would tease herself, laugh at herself and play games, pretending and dreaming of being a great tall tree.

She thought about her wishes and rested in the gentle breeze of her friend Wind. She became strangely quieted.

Soon Willow began to day-dream. She saw herself stretching upward, reaching for Wind. Together they played and danced. She could feel her leaves moving back and forth and her branches dipping in the breeze.

"Oh, this feels so good."

She saw the sun greeting her with a wide smile and warming her bark. She turned a little and surprised herself. "Look! I can see rivers and valleys."

Everything other trees had told her about—now she could see for herself. Birds flew in and out of her branches. Excited, Willow realized she was still a very young tree. She knew she would be able to see even more as she grew taller.

"The world is so different from up here"

In her dream, Willow saw a Woodswoman leaning against her trunk. Willow opened her branches to give the woman shade. It felt so good.

Suddenly, something new and unexpected happened! SWISH! BRORR! "Oh, what a strong wind that was." Willow startled herself — she opened her eyes. Her daydream became real.

Instantly, she saw the familiar moss covered stones. The young seedlings and the caterpillars filled her sight. Confused, she said, "I thought I had grown up—I thought I had changed—I thought I could at last stretch."

Willow looked over the muddy earth and said sadly, "I guess I was dreaming." The dew dropped slowly from her leaves on to the moss beneath.

Much to her surprise, her trunk and leaves shook again. SWISH! BRORR! My goodness, what was that? Wind?

"I've never felt such a strong wind down here. I've only felt my friend's gentle breeze, this is so strange."

She was being swished back and forth; she was out of control. What was happening to her? She felt something strong around her trunk. Something—someone was tugging her this way and that way.

"Oh Wind, help me, I'm being lifted."

All at once Willow's leaves shook loose from the tangled bushes around her. Her trunk ached. This was not going to be easy. She wanted to stand straight—she wanted to stretch—now she felt it would happen.

"Keep pulling! Oh please, keep pulling," Willow called out.

She began to move upward. Slowly and steadily she struggled up through the branches of her sister and brother trees. She had only seen the base of their trunks before, now she felt their bark and their leaves against her. All at once Willow realized that someone was lifting her—up-up—up!

"Bye old tree trunk, bye moss and covered stones, bye little caterpillars," she called out as she looked down on them. "We still share the same earth but we have a different view now."

Willow stood as tall as her trunk could hold her. She looked into the face of the Woodswoman she had seen in her dream—the one who had found shade from Willow's branches.

The woman smiled up at her. "There you are, Willow. You just needed a little help. After all, it was a little crowded in there for one to grow tall, wasn't it? Now, you can stand tall beside Birch."

The leaves of the two trees moved together as Wind played between their branches'.

"Thank you for freeing me, Woodswoman. My wishes are coming true. I will never again be too bent to see."

"I can stretch upward to the blue sky.

I can see the valleys and rivers around me.

I can wave my branches in the wind.

I can feel the sun on my bark. My wishes are coming true. Ah! How I would like birds to nest in my branches, and to have someone sit in my shade."

Willow looked this way and that way as she floated in the soft wind. "I feel so free. It's just like my dream. Now, I believe that wishes can come true. I knew all along what I could really do. With a little help—here I am."

"I'm very happy for you, Willow," Wind blew and together they danced.

"You feel different to me up here, Wind. I'm so glad you're here with me."

A new voice interrupted their play and captured Willow's attention. "Chirp, Chirp, let's try this one."

That sound was familiar. Of course, it was a bird!

"How pretty this little one is." Willow said as she watched a bird land on a branch.

Whrrr! Another one landed. "Chirp. Chirp. This will do just fine." Back and forth they flew, bringing string, feathers and twigs to her branches.

"Why, they're building a nest, I'm going to have a nest in my branches! Willow was excited!

"I can stretch upward to the blue sky,

I can see the valleys and rivers around me,
I can wave my branches in the wind,
I can feel the sun on my bark,
. . . and now, I get a nest right here in my branches. Nearly all my wishes have come true. Just one left!

The determined little Willow stood proudly as she looked over her new view. Down the path, she saw the Woodswoman walking away. She rustled her happy leaves at her.

"I hope you'll come back and sit in the shade of my branches," Willow called, "and then all my wishes will have come true. I have received so much; it is good to give something to someone else."

The Woodswoman called out "Thank you, I will come and sit in the shade of your leaves. Always remember Willow, every year as you grow, you'll have more to give to others.

Willow sighed. She was pleased. She looked at herself and liked what she saw. "Finally, I am becoming what I am supposed to be a tree growing straight and tall.



"I can stretch upward to the blue sky.
I can look at the valleys and rivers around me.
I can wave my branches in the wind.
I can feel the sun on my bark.
I can see birds nesting in my branches.
I can offer my branches for shade."

Willow knew she was now complete—she had something to give to others.

Food for Thought:

I'm so glad you've listened to this story. Do you believe in wishes? What are some of your wishes? We know that all wishes can't come true. Why? Well, life just doesn't happen that way. But, never lose sight of your wishes. They give you hope and help you to dream. Dreams give you power.

Why don't you choose six wishes of your own, write them down on a piece of paper, and put the paper in a safe place? Someday, a long time from now, look at your list. You might be surprised what has come to be.