

Evergreen

By

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EXT. FOREST - SPRING.

Springtime is evident all around. The grass is abloom with colorful flowers. Songbirds flitter through the air, singing as they go. All manner of forest animals make their way through the grass.

MAMA TREE, a tall apple tree, stands alone in the middle of a small clearing. Her arms are branches and the leaves make up her hair and face. The sunlight wakes her and she yawns, stretching for a moment.

A DOE and her newborn FAWN wander into the clearing. Doe and Mama Tree give each other a familiar greeting. Fawn is initially shy, compounded by the wobbliness of her legs. She approaches Mama Tree with hesitation, and when her legs suddenly buckle beneath her, Mama Tree quickly reaches out with a branch to steady her. Fawn, grateful, regains her footing and sidles up to Mama Tree to be petted. Mama Tree laughs, delighted.

Doe and Fawn leave. Mama Tree looks around the forest at all the other creatures starting families: a bird in a nest, a raccoon with its babies. She nods to herself. It's time for children of her own.

Mama Tree stretches as if preparing for a workout. She bends to the left, reaches into the ground, and plucks MATCHSTICK, a young apple tree, out of the soil. He's a bit on the thin side, hence his name, and he takes a moment to shake himself out and get rid of any residual dirt on his branches.

Mama Tree nods and reaches once again into the ground next to Matchstick. With great effort, she hauls CHUBBY, another young apple tree, up into the sunlight. His trunk is thick and his leaves overly plump, like he went a little overboard on the photosynthesis. Chubby takes a moment to get his bearings, swinging his branches up and down to dislodge a few stray leaves.

Finally, Mama Tree reaches into the ground on the opposite side of herself, and pulls up PINE. He comes up barren of leaves at first, but happy to be here.

Mama Tree, a little confused, checks him over for defects. At some point, as if she pushed a button of some sort, Pine sprouts a bunch of needles like an angry porcupine, with appropriate sword-unsheathing sound effects. Mama Tree, startled (and pricked), springs back with a gasp. She quickly forgives Pine, as all mothers do, even as Matchstick and Chubby look on in vague apprehension.

EXT. FOREST - SUMMER.

As time wears on, four RABBITS bound up to the tree family, one at the base of each tree, looking hopefully up at them for food. Mama Tree holds out her branch to call the kids' attention. When they are looking at her, she pinches her nose and blows a breath backwards. Several red apples pop out of her leaves.

The kids are delighted. Mama Tree's rabbit is equally happy as one of the apples drops and it dines.

Matchstick tries the trick first. He produces a perfect red apple, which drops to his rabbit.

Then it's Chubby's turn. His apple is smaller and green, but his rabbit loves it anyway.

Now Pine. He takes a deep breath and does the same trick, but instead of an apple, he pops out a large pine cone. The cone drops, barely missing his rabbit, who jumps back, startled.

Chubby and Matchstick point and laugh at him. Mama Tree shushes them, and instructs Pine to try again. He does: another pine cone. The pine cone drops - right onto the rabbit's head. The rabbit, concussed, wobbles and lurches away from Pine.

More laughter from Chubby and Matchstick. Pine looks ashamed. Mama Tree comforts him with a smile; he's her son, no matter what.

EXT. FOREST - AUTUMN.

To cheer up Pine, Mama Tree decides it's time to have some fun.

Autumn is upon them, so Mama Tree gives a full-body shudder and her leaves change color, from green to bright golds, reds, oranges, and browns.

Matchstick and Chubby, delighted, do the same.

Pine tries, but his needles don't change color.

Mama Tree shakes her branches up and down, sending leaves down in a colorful shower. Matchstick and Chubby follow her example, laughing at the game.

Pine shakes his branches so hard he nearly tips over. His needles stay dark green, and none of them dislodge.

Mama Tree, frowning, turns to Pine and shakes her branch as an example. He does the same: still no result. Pine looks like he is ready to cry; his eyes grow big and wet, and his lower lip trembles.

EXT. FOREST - WINTER.

Mama Tree tries to comfort Pine. As she pets him, the temperature drops and clouds obscure the sun.

Chubby and Matchstick's leaves turn brown, dry up, and fall off. Barren, they bow down and their anthropomorphic faces are absorbed back into their trunks as they go to sleep.

Mama Tree starts to do the same, her leaves dying and dropping off.

Pine does not change. Startled and scared, he reaches out for Mama Tree, crying for her to stay with him, to not leave him alone.

Mama Tree gives him one last reassuring smile before receding into barren sleep.

Pine is left alone in the empty clearing. Snow starts to fall, gathering atop his branches. He shivers, cold and dejected, and starts to cry viscous sap tears.

A soft chirping catches his attention and he looks up. A LOST BIRD, probably knocked off its migratory route somewhere, flutters out of the sky. It looks exhausted and on its last legs.

Pine, compassionate and distracted from his own plight, reaches out with a branch to catch Lost Bird before it can hit the ground and hurt itself. Lost Bird, grateful, settles in Pine's branches to rest.

LATER

A cold, shivering SQUIRREL wanders up to Pine. Pine, smiling, lowers a branch so Squirrel can scramble up. Once Squirrel is situated on a branch, Pine reaches to the side of his trunk and unzips a small living hole, which Squirrel settles happily in.

Both Squirrel and Lost Bird chat amiably with Pine, keeping each other company as winter wears on.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOREST - SPRING.

The tree family stands in the middle of the clearing. The forest is alive all around them once again. Mama Tree, Matchstick, and Chubby are all still barren and asleep. Pine is still green and full of needles, but also asleep.

As a ray of sunlight passes over the family, Mama Tree wakes up first. She blinks, yawns, and when she stretches, fresh green leaves simultaneously spring up on all her branches.

Mama Tree, smiling, shakes her children awake: Matchstick and Chubby first, sprouting leaves in the same way, and Pine last. Pine immediately hugs Mama Tree, thrilled to have her back.

Matchstick, ever the suck-up, waves to get Mama Tree's attention and pops out another apple. Chubby does the same.

Mama Tree laughs, delighted. When she looks over at Pine, who stands quiet beside her, she gives him a soft smile as if to say, "It's okay, I love you no matter what."

Pine is having none of it, though. With a proud flourish, he loosens up his branches: out explodes a flurry of birds, Lost Bird's family. Squirrel and its family dart happily in and out of Pine's leaves in a burst of playful activity. It's better than any silly apple.

Matchstick and Chubby gape. Matchstick's single apple snaps off its branch and thuds to the earth in shock.

Mama Tree laughs, proud beyond measure. Pine grins, and they all look up as Lost Bird takes to the sky, fluttering up and into the freedom of endless blue.

FADE OUT.