

Little Moss, Big Tree

M. Yap-Stewart

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Little Moss, Big Tree is a timeless and profound picture book that rewards introspection.

M. Yap-Stewart's lyrical picture book *Little Moss, Big Tree* is about a faithful friendship that weathers all seasons.

On Storm King Mountain, Little Moss and Little Tree are best friends. They bask in each other's company and in their surroundings. But without noticing it, Little Tree grows into Big Tree and beyond Little Moss's reach. Clever squirrels work as messengers between the two. As Big Tree becomes a mature oak, the friends write letters and postcards to each other that birds deliver.

When a winter storm fells Big Tree, who remarks that he feels cold, Little Moss reassures his friend by growing over his trunk. This all-encompassing protectiveness is genuine, having sprung from the longstanding love that's conveyed with care throughout. It's a wonderful reference back to Big Tree's earlier promise to shelter Little Moss from the storm.

Poetic language—about listening to the “scold of the squirrels in the trees” and watching “the glowing Morse code of the fireflies”—combines with the book's thoughtful cadences to build quiet anticipation. A subtle message about friendship's changing stages is emotional and deep.

Mariya Prytula's watercolors use a soft palette, focusing on landscapes that bring out Storm King Mountain's secluded beauty. Their inventive elements include vintage-styled postcards that feature butterflies, a red biplane, animal drawings, and Ursa constellations. The text doesn't say what the two friends write to each other, but suggests that they find everyday instances worthy of notice. Theirs is an intimate and wondrous world.

Wordless two-page spreads convey the passing time through seasonal changes. In one composition, half of Big Tree is ablaze in orange, while the other half is denuded of leaves. Without the story needing to state that Big Tree died, one final, wordless spread features a new green shoot on the forest floor, evoking rebirth.

Uplifting and emotionally forceful, the book's example of a friendship that endures is fresh because of its unlikely, very different central characters. It's a beautiful allegory about enduring separation and working through loss.

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KAREN RIGBY (November 21, 2019)

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