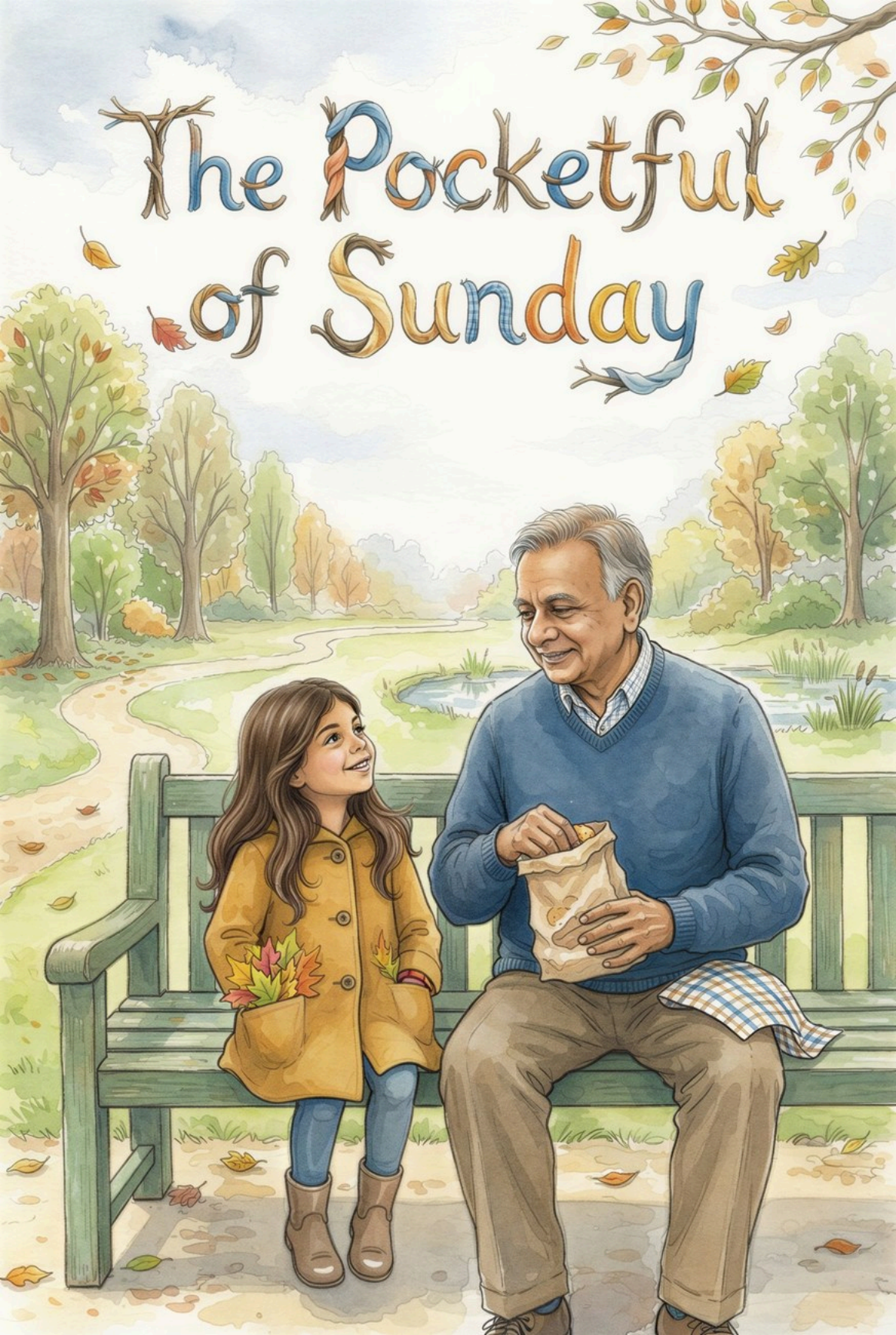

The Pocketful of Sunday

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For our dear Maya—may you always take slow steps, find small wonders, and remember how very loved you are.

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The Path That Knows Their Feet

On Sunday morning, Maya and Arun stepped through the garden gate and onto the path that curved out of sight beneath the tall shade trees.

Arun began to hum. It was not quite a song Maya knew. It wandered up for three notes, wandered down for two, and then started again as if it had forgotten where it was going.

The breeze stirred Maya's long brown hair and sent a dry leaf scratching across the path.

"Wait," she said.

Arun stopped at once. He did not ask whether it was a big wait or a little wait. He simply stood humming while Maya picked up the leaf.

It was no bigger than her thumb, with five sharp points and one tiny round hole. Maya peered through the hole at Arun. His short graying hair appeared in the middle of the leaf like a picture in a very small frame.

“Excellent portrait,” he said.

Maya slipped the leaf into her coat pocket. Several other leaves crackled inside. Some had curled edges. One was speckled like a bird’s egg. Another had a stem bent into a hook.

They walked on, but now Maya’s eyes were busy.

She noticed that the tips of one branch had turned yellow while the rest stayed green. She found two acorns tucked together beside a root, as if they were hiding. A silver thread of spiderweb stretched between two low bushes, holding three drops of water that flashed when the sun touched them.

A hurried walker went past without looking down.

“He missed the diamonds,” Maya whispered.

“Perhaps he is looking for something enormous,” Arun whispered back.

Maya considered this. Enormous things were much harder to put in a coat pocket.

Farther along, the path divided around a round flower bed. Maya started left, then paused beside a feather trembling on the ground. Arun waited with her. His humming softened so much that Maya could hear the feather brushing the gravel.

“Slow steps find small wonders,” she said.



“Slow steps find small wonders,” Arun agreed.

Together they followed the bend toward the pond. Through the trees, the water showed in bright, wobbly pieces. Maya pressed a hand over her crackling pocket. Already, this Sunday held things she did not want to forget.

The pond came into view all at once, smooth in the middle and wrinkled at the edges by the breeze. A few ducks made neat V-shapes across it. Beyond them waited the old glasshouse, its windows shining through the trees.

Choosing their Sunday leaves was important. Not the most perfect leaves, necessarily. The right ones.

Maya inspected a brown leaf with five sharp points, a tiny green one, and a red one with a bite-shaped piece missing. Then she saw a bright yellow leaf lying beside the path. It was almost the shape of a small hand.

“This one,” she said.

Arun took longer. He hummed as he looked, with his hands tucked behind him. At last he chose a copper-colored leaf that gleamed when he tilted it toward the light.

“A very grand leaf,” Maya said.

“It insisted,” said Arun.

They carried their choices to the weathered green bench beside the pond. Its paint had faded and flaked in places. Maya knew

exactly where the seat dipped and which end gave a tiny squeak when someone sat down.

She placed her yellow leaf between them. Arun laid his copper leaf beside it, their stems almost touching.

The bench squeaked.

Maya ran one finger over a pale scratch in the green paint. “Do you think it remembers us?”

Arun stopped humming. “The bench?”

“And the garden. When we’re gone.”



He looked along the seat. “Here is the scratch you always trace. And here”—he tapped a small worn patch—“is where my biscuit bag usually sits.”

“That could be anybody’s biscuit bag.”

“Not if it is properly squashed.”

Maya smiled, but she still waited.

Arun rubbed his thumb over the worn green paint. “Perhaps remembering can look like many things,” he said. Then he began humming again, softly, while the pond winked between the reeds.

Maya looked at the two leaves. Her pocket held plenty already, all rustles and curled edges, but these were different. Arun had chosen one, and she had chosen the other, here beside their pond on this particular Sunday.

She moved them closer together so the breeze could not slip between them.

Arun reached into his coat and brought out the biscuit bag. It had been pressed flat on one side and wrinkled on the other.

“Perfect condition,” he announced.

Maya was about to say that one biscuit now had a corner where no corner should be when she noticed a smooth green head among the reeds.

The bold duck had arrived.

It paddled straight toward the bench, leaving a neat V behind it. Maya remembered the Sunday when it had snatched Arun’s biscuit almost from his fingers. Arun remembered too. He clutched the bag against his chest with both hands.

“Remain calm,” he whispered. “The Biscuit Inspector is approaching.”

The duck climbed onto the bank and waddled closer. Its bright eyes stayed fixed on the bag.

Arun patted his pockets, found his checked handkerchief, and unfolded it. Holding the biscuits safely in one hand, he waved the handkerchief like a tiny warning flag with the other.



“Restricted area,” he told the duck solemnly. “No beaks beyond this point.”

The duck stopped.

Then it took one step sideways.

Arun shifted the bag sideways too.

The duck stepped the other way.

Arun matched it again.

Maya laughed so hard that the leaves in her pocket crackled. “It knows your tricks!”

“I have no tricks,” said Arun. “I have advanced biscuit-security methods.”

Just then, the pond wrinkled from one side to the other. Reeds bowed. The checked handkerchief snapped in Arun’s hand, and a brisk gust rushed over the bench.

Maya slapped her palm down—but a moment too late.

Her bright yellow leaf flipped over her fingers and sailed toward the pond path. Arun’s copper leaf spun in a shining circle, struck the bench leg, and went skittering beneath the tall trees.

“My leaf!” Maya cried.

The duck forgot the biscuits and turned its head to watch the yellow leaf dance away.

Maya stared from one fleeing leaf to the other. The biscuit bag was safe.

Their Sunday leaves were not.



The Runaway Sunday

The yellow leaf twirled along the pond path, showing its bright face, then its brown back, then its bright face again. Arun's copper leaf cartwheeled the other way beneath the tall trees.

Maya sprang from the bench.

Her pocket gave a dry, papery crunch as she hurried forward. She had taken three quick steps when Arun called, not loudly, "Slow steps find small wonders."

Maya stopped.

A damp patch darkened the path just ahead of her. Beside it, a thin twig lay exactly where a rushing foot might catch it. The yellow leaf was still moving, but not very fast. It circled once near the path's edge, as if it had forgotten where it meant to go.

Behind Maya, Arun folded his checked handkerchief and tucked it away. Then he placed the slightly squashed biscuit bag in the middle of the green bench.

The duck watched him.

Arun pointed two fingers at his own eyes, then at the duck. “I shall know,” he said.

The duck blinked.

Even now, Maya almost laughed. But beyond the bench, a flash of copper vanished into the shade.

“We have to get both,” she said. Her yellow leaf mattered, but Arun had chosen the copper one. They belonged to the same Sunday.

Arun came to stand beside her. He did not say that they could choose new leaves. He only looked along the two paths the wind had taken.



“Both,” he agreed. “Carefully.”

Maya drew one slow breath. The breeze brushed her coat and rattled the leaves in her pocket, but it no longer felt as if the whole garden were running away.

“We’ll follow the yellow one first,” she decided. “Then we’ll look under the trees.”

Together they set off along the pond path, watching the ground as

well as the dancing leaf. Behind them, the biscuits waited under the duck's most serious inspection.

The yellow leaf vanished behind a clump of grass.

Maya stopped instead of rushing around it. The pond wrinkled silver beside the path, and little waves tapped the stones. She looked for a yellow point, a twitch, anything—but saw only grass, pebbles, and one white feather stuck to the damp ground.

Then came a soft slap-slap of webbed feet.

The bold duck had left its biscuit inspection and was following them. It waddled along the path's edge, tilting its head as though it had been invited to join the search. Maya hoped the bag on the bench was truly safe.

"Perhaps we have hired an inspector," Arun said.

The duck stepped off the path and stopped beside a dark, damp stone.

There, pressed against it, was Maya's bright yellow leaf.



“I see it!” Maya whispered. She moved closer, one careful step at a time. The leaf’s pointed edges trembled. She bent and reached out.

The breeze reached first.

Up popped the leaf. It skimmed over the stone, sailed past the duck’s beak, and spun away from Maya’s fingers. The duck gave an offended quack, as if runaway leaves were against garden rules.

Maya watched rather than grabbing. The yellow leaf twirled across

the path toward the tall shade trees. As it turned, something farther ahead winked between the dark trunks—copper, then brown, then copper again.

“Arun!” She pointed. “Your leaf!”

His humming paused. “So it is.”

For one moment both leaves were visible: Maya’s yellow one dancing low near the ground, and Arun’s copper one skipping deeper beneath the trees. The same breeze was carrying them in the same direction.

Maya stayed on the winding path, even when the yellow leaf cut across a patch of grass. She knew where it was going now. That mattered more than being directly behind it.

“This way,” she said, leading Arun around the bend.

The duck followed for three determined waddles, then turned back toward the unguarded biscuits.

Ahead, the open pond-light faded into cool green shade. Once more, a copper flash shone between the roots, and Maya did not lose sight of it.



Under the Tall Trees

Under the trees, the breeze weakened to a whisper. Maya's yellow leaf dropped, scraped along the path, and lodged beneath the knobbly root of a tall tree.

This time, it stayed.

Maya crouched without taking her eyes off it. She slid two fingers under its stem and lifted it free. One point was damp with soil, but the leaf was still bright and hand-shaped—the very one she had chosen beside the pond.

"Found you," she murmured.

Arun's humming began again, soft and pleased.

Maya opened her coat pocket. It was already stuffed with

treasures: a red leaf no bigger than her thumb, a brown one with neat little teeth, and a curled leaf that looked like a tiny boat. She eased the yellow leaf into the middle, where it would not be crushed.

But when she pulled her hand out, the tiny boat came too.

Then the red leaf slipped over the pocket’s edge. Two brown leaves followed, fluttering around her shoes.

“Oh!” Maya clapped both hands over the pocket, which was too late and not very useful.

“I believe your collection is making an escape,” Arun said.

They knelt on the path and gathered each piece. Arun caught the little red leaf just before it sailed beneath a bush. Maya rescued the boat, then tucked everything back more carefully.



A dry skitter sounded behind her.

She turned. Arun’s copper leaf hopped over one root, bounced across a stripe of sunlight, and hurried away as if it had remembered an appointment.

“There!” Maya sprang up, still holding her pocket shut.

The copper leaf was already farther off. It spun past a wooden sign and onto the path that curved toward the old glasshouse. Its glass

panes gleamed between the trees.

Maya touched the safe yellow leaf through her coat. Finding it should have felt like finishing half the search. Instead, with Arun's leaf running away alone, the two Sunday leaves seemed farther apart than ever.

"Come on," she said. "We still need yours."

They followed the copper flashes around the bend. Maya did not run, though her feet wanted to. Each time the leaf stopped, she took one careful step. Each time she came close, it scraped onward with a papery whisper.

The old glasshouse rose ahead, its many panes holding pale pieces of sky. One of its doors stood open. Warm air breathed through the doorway, carrying a smell of wet earth and green growing things.

The copper leaf paused on the stone step.

"Wait," Maya whispered, as if it might listen.

It tipped onto one edge. For a moment, it seemed undecided. Then the warm air drew it across the step and inside.



Maya reached the doorway and peered in. The glasshouse was not part of their usual Sunday path. Beyond the door, great leaves overlapped like green umbrellas. Ferns curled beside the path, and tiny drops shone along their edges. The copper leaf lay only a few steps away.

“We can still get it,” she said.

Arun looked at the marked path, then at Maya. “Slow steps?”

“Small wonders,” she finished, and went in.

Warmth wrapped around her at once. Her coat pocket rustled as she walked, and she pressed it closed to keep her own leaf safe. Behind her, Arun began humming again. Under the high glass roof, the tune returned in a faint, wobbly echo, as though the glasshouse were trying to learn it.

Maya smiled—but then a hanging frond stirred.

The copper leaf shivered. It lifted without warning, sailed above the path, and spun once in a bright shaft of light. Maya followed, watching its shadow flicker over the stones.

Before she could reach it, another invisible puff carried it sideways. The leaf slipped behind a screen of broad green plants and vanished.

Maya stopped. Nothing outside had prepared her for breezes hiding indoors.

“All right,” she murmured. “Now we find where the air is going.”



A Green World Under Glass

For a moment, every leaf in the glasshouse seemed to be the one.

A copper gleam winked beneath a broad green leaf. Maya leaned closer—but it was only a drop of water reflecting the roof. Something brown trembled beside a fern curl. That was only an old frond, rolled tight as a sleeping caterpillar.

Then sunlight slipped through the glass above. A small, pointed shadow sailed across the path.

“There!” Maya cried.

She hurried three steps, remembered their rule, and slowed before the path curved. The shadow climbed over a stone border and skimmed across glossy leaves. Above it, Arun’s copper leaf floated like a tiny boat on a stream Maya could not see.

Arun followed, his humming soft behind her. “It appears to know the way.”

“It doesn’t know the way,” Maya said. “It’s lost.”

The leaf twirled once, as if it disagreed.

Maya tracked its shadow because the leaf itself kept vanishing among reflections. The high glass panes held upside-down scraps of green. Drops flashed silver. A red-brown patch appeared behind a curtain of fern tips, and Maya pointed—only for it to break into three shining spots when a frond moved.

The real leaf dipped so low that she opened her hand. It brushed the air above her fingers, rose suddenly, and sailed across the path.

“Oh!” Maya spun after it, making the leaves in her pocket crackle.

A drop plopped onto her sleeve. Another struck a broad leaf with a sound like a tiny drum. All around her, the glasshouse dripped, gleamed, curled, and breathed. There were wonders enough to fill every pocket she had, but Maya kept her eyes on that one copper flicker.

At last the leaf bumped against a windowpane. It slid downward, rocking from point to stem, and came to rest on a narrow ledge.

“I found you,” Maya whispered.



She stood directly below it and stretched. Her fingertips reached only warm, empty air. Arun tried from the other side, but the ledge was far above them both.

The copper leaf sat in the sunlight, perfectly still at last.

Maya could see it clearly now. That was better than losing it among all the green—but seeing it was not the same as getting it down.

Beside the path stood a low display filled with autumn leaves. They lay across dark soil in coppery heaps and golden fans, though no tree grew above them. A small sign explained that they had been gathered from different parts of the garden.

Maya crouched to look. One leaf shone like a polished coin. Another had a gold edge and a red middle. There were round leaves, pointed leaves, and one so neatly shaped that it looked as if someone had cut it from paper.

Any of them would fit easily in Arun's hand.

Maya glanced up at the high ledge. His leaf looked plain beside the display. It had one bent point and a brown speck near its stem. The sunlight did not make it brighter. It only made its little flaws easier to see.

Arun came to stand beside her. He did not look at the display first. He looked at Maya.

"There are some fine fallen leaves here," he said. "If you wished, we could choose another."

He said it gently, as though the choice belonged to her and he would not tug it in either direction.

Maya touched the crackling shapes inside her pocket. She already had her bright yellow Sunday leaf, plus all the others gathered along the winding paths. One more beautiful leaf would hardly make the pocket notice.

She pointed to the ledge. “But you didn’t choose one of these.”

“No,” Arun agreed.

“You chose that one. Today.”

Arun studied the copper leaf, solemnly enough that Maya knew he understood. “Then that is the one we are looking for.”



They left the glowing display where it was.

Maya walked beneath the ledge, peering at it from every part of the path. The glass wall was too smooth to climb, and the nearby plants were not for pulling or poking. Arun patted the pocket where he kept his checked handkerchief. Maya watched the dangling fern tips. They quivered, stopped, then quivered again.

The leaf was too high for hands.

But perhaps hands were not what they needed.

Arun drew out his checked handkerchief and unfolded it. “A very powerful piece of equipment,” he said.

Maya eyed its soft corners. “It usually wipes biscuit crumbs off your coat.”

“Exactly. Highly trained.”

Their plan was simple. Arun would stand on the path beneath the ledge and fan upward. The moving air would nudge the copper leaf down. Maya would catch it before it touched the damp floor.

She emptied both hands and planted her sturdy shoes apart. “Ready.”

Arun gave the handkerchief one careful flap.

Nothing happened.

He tried again. The checked cloth puffed the warm air upward. A fern tip bobbed. On the ledge, the copper leaf shivered but stayed where it was.

“One more,” Maya whispered.



This time Arun swept the handkerchief in a broad, grand wave. The leaf tipped onto one edge. For a moment it balanced there, its brown-speckled stem pointing at Maya.

Then it floated down.

“I’ve got it!” Maya cupped her hands.

The leaf dipped toward them—and the next flap caught it underneath. Up it sprang, sailing over Maya’s head. She spun

around. Arun turned too, still holding the handkerchief in the air like a flag.

The leaf sailed over his head as well.

“I may have trained it too well,” he said.

Maya tried not to laugh because the leaf was escaping again. She managed for almost half a second.

The copper shape twirled past glossy leaves, crossed the edge of the path, and sank toward a low planted bed. Maya hurried after it, stopping where the path stopped.

There it was, resting on the tip of a thin green stem.

It looked close. If Maya leaned very far, she might almost touch it. But beneath it stood dozens of tiny new shoots, some no taller than her thumb. Their curled tips trembled in the fading air from Arun’s handkerchief.

Arun folded the checked cloth once, then waited beside her.

The leaf was no longer too high for hands.

Now it was somewhere hands could not safely go.



Where the New Ferns Uncurl

Maya stretched one arm over the bed. Her fingers opened and closed in the warm air.

Still too far.

She could reach it if she put one shoe over the path's low stone edge. Perhaps only the toe. Perhaps only for a moment.

Arun did not tell her no. He tucked the folded handkerchief into his pocket, then pointed with one finger—not at the copper leaf, but at the line where the path ended.

Maya looked down.

Between the stones and the leaf, the soil was dark and soft. Tiny shoots pushed through it in every direction. Some were straight as

green pins. Others had tips curled like sleeping caterpillars. One wore a drop of water that was much too large for it and bent beneath the weight.

There was nowhere safe to put a shoe.

Maya drew her arm back. “But it’s right there.”

“I know,” Arun said.

That was all. He did not suggest another leaf. He did not say the search had taken long enough. He stood beside her, humming so softly that the sound seemed to hide among the fern fronds.

Maya crouched at the path edge. From there, Arun’s leaf looked even nearer. Its speckled stem rested across the thin green shoot, and one pointed tip hung over empty air. If the shoot bent a little more, the leaf might slide off. If Maya could make her arm longer, or her fingers stretch like roots—

Her pocket rustled as she shifted. She already had many leaves, including her bright yellow one. But none of them was the copper leaf Arun had chosen this Sunday.

“It isn’t fair to be nearly reachable,” she muttered.

“No,” Arun agreed. “Nearly can be troublesome.”

Maya stayed on the path. She did not like it, but she stayed.



After a while, she stopped measuring the distance with her hand and began watching the leaf instead. There had to be another way to bring it closer—one that did not ask the smallest shoots to move at all.

At first, nothing moved except a drop sliding down a broad green leaf.

Maya waited. The glasshouse was not truly still. Water whispered somewhere behind the plants. Arun’s humming came back from

the glass in a soft, wobbly echo. High above, one roof vent stood open a crack.

A puff of mist drifted from a nearby sprayer. It floated straight for a moment, then curled over the planted bed like a pale ribbon. The dangling tips of a fern nodded—but not at once. The nearest frond moved first. Then another stirred farther along.

Maya narrowed her eyes.

“Grandpa, may I borrow your handkerchief?”

Arun patted his pocket and unfolded the checked square. “It has already proved rather too powerful.”

“I won’t wave it.”

She held one corner while he kept hold of the other. The loose edge hung between them. For several seconds it remained still. Then the glasshouse door opened behind them with a gentle squeak.

The handkerchief’s corner lifted.

A moment later, the mist bent. Then the fern fronds trembled, one after another, all the way across the bed. Above them, the copper leaf gave a tiny shiver on its stem.

Maya’s heart gave one too.

“The air is going that way,” she whispered.

Arun looked from the cloth to the mist and up toward the roof. “So it is.”



Maya watched the door ease shut. The moving line faded. The handkerchief drooped, the mist rose straight again, and the ferns became still. But now she had seen it: when the door opened, outside air slipped in low, travelled over the shoots, and climbed

toward the high vent.

“If it comes under the copper leaf,” she said, pointing along the path instead of across the soil, “it might lift it. And if we stand there—”

“On the path,” Arun said.

“On the path,” Maya agreed, “we might catch it when it comes past.”

They moved to the bend where the stones ran closest to the far side of the bed. Arun tucked away his handkerchief. Maya planted both sturdy shoes well inside the path edge and took her hands from her leaf-filled pocket.

Nothing happened.

Then the door latch clicked behind them.

Maya held her breath and watched the mist. There would be no grabbing, no trampling, and no trying to boss the leaf about. This time, the glasshouse would carry it.

All they had to do was listen to the air—and wait.

The door swung inward. Cool air slipped around Maya’s ankles and hurried along the stones.

First the mist leaned. Then the fern tips nodded, each one passing the message to the next. The tiny shoots trembled without

bending. At the far end of the bed, the copper leaf quivered.

“Come on,” Maya whispered.

One edge lifted. The leaf tipped sideways, clung to its thin stem for one more second, and came free.

It did not dart or tumble. It floated.



Maya followed it with her whole body, leaning left, then right, while keeping both shoes planted on the path. The leaf sailed above the new shoots, turning slowly enough to flash copper, brown, copper. Arun's humming had stopped. Even the little echo seemed to be waiting.

The current carried the leaf toward the bend exactly as Maya had hoped.

"Here it comes," Arun murmured.

Maya raised both hands. Her crowded pocket crackled as she stretched. The copper leaf drifted closer—past a fern curl, past one sparkling thread of mist, past the final row of shoots. Soon it was over the path.

Close enough.

Maya cupped her hands beneath it. She could already imagine putting it beside her yellow leaf, the two Sunday leaves safe together at last.

But the glasshouse door had not closed. A stronger breeze pushed through it, cool and sudden. The mist swept upward. Arun's coat stirred, and a loose corner of Maya's pocket flapped.

The leaf bounced once in the air, just beyond her fingertips.

"Oh!" Maya sprang onto her toes, but it climbed faster than she could reach. It spun above Arun's head, passed the ledge where it had rested before, and rose toward the glass roof.

High overhead, a metal arm creaked. The roof vent began to tilt open, letting in a bright slice of sky.

The copper leaf sailed straight toward it.

For one hopeful moment, it caught against the vent's lower edge. Maya stared up, hands still raised. The leaf shivered there while the opening widened and the breeze whispered through.

It was not gone yet.

But below it lay the bed of delicate shoots, and above it waited the open air.



The Leaf She Lets Fly

The vent opened another finger-width. The copper leaf peeled away from its edge.

Instead of flying out, it fluttered downward.

“Maya,” Arun said softly.

“I see it.”

She stepped to the very rim of the path. The leaf rocked from side to side, falling through the warm green air. Once. Twice. It was coming close—closer than before. If she leaned far enough, she might catch its stem.

Maya stretched out her hand.

Below her fingers, the tiny shoots trembled in the breeze. Some were no taller than her thumb. One had two pale leaves folded together like little hands. Another held a round drop of water at its tip.

To reach the copper leaf, Maya would have to put one shoe into the bed. Or lean across so far that her knee and coat might squash the shoots at the edge.

Her yellow leaf crackled inside her crowded pocket. Arun stood near enough to steady her, but he did not pull her back. He waited.

The copper leaf dipped. Its pointed tip brushed Maya's fingertip.

This was the last chance.

Maya looked at the leaf Arun had chosen. Then she looked at the smallest shoot, with its two folded leaves.

Slow steps find small wonders.

She drew her hand back. She planted both sturdy shoes firmly on the path and watched the copper leaf float beyond her reach.



A fresh current curled beneath it. The leaf rose, spinning faster now, up through the bright opening in the roof. For an instant it showed dark against the sky. Then the wind carried it away.

Maya's throat felt tight. She had wanted those two Sunday leaves together very much.

Arun's hand rested gently on her shoulder. After a moment, his familiar humming began again—not cheerful enough to hurry her, only warm and quiet in the glasshouse.

Maya crouched at the path's edge. The tiny shoots had stopped trembling. The drop of water still balanced on its tip.

"At least this one stayed safe," she said.

Arun unfolded his checked handkerchief and gave the smallest shoot a solemn little salute.

Maya smiled. Then they turned toward the glasshouse door together.

Outside, the breeze felt cool after the warm glasshouse. Maya searched the ground at once.

Leaves hurried over the path in scratchy little crowds. Copper ones spun beneath the tall trees. Copper ones hid beside the wall. One even sailed across the pond, though Maya could not be sure it was the same one.

"How will we know?" she asked.

Arun looked over the scattered leaves. "I don't think we will."

Maya could have examined every copper point and stem. But the runaway leaf had twisted through the roof, and the garden was full of places for a leaf to go. Searching them all would take until next Sunday—or perhaps until she was eight.



“All right,” she said at last. “It can have its adventure.”

They started toward the pond. Arun hummed as he walked, the same tune that had echoed under the glass roof. Maya slipped a hand into her coat pocket. The leaves inside rustled around her fingers: long ones, round ones, a speckled one, and her bright yellow Sunday leaf.

Then she found two small brown leaves. Neither was shiny. One had a bent corner, and the other had three neat spots. She

remembered picking them up on the winding path, before the bench and the biscuit inspector and the dancing chase through the glasshouse.

Maya held out the three-spotted leaf. “This one is yours.”

Arun stopped humming. He accepted it carefully, as if she had offered him the finest leaf in the whole garden.

“But you didn’t choose it,” he said.

“I’m choosing it for you now. And I’ll keep this one.” She showed him the leaf with the bent corner. “They’re both from today.”

“That seems important,” Arun said.

“It is.”

Near the pond, the bold duck spotted them and waddled closer with great purpose. Arun patted his coat as though checking for treasure. Maya laughed. The duck remembered the biscuit bag. Arun still hummed. Her yellow leaf was safe in her pocket, and the glasshouse still held the tiny shoots they had protected.

The copper leaf was gone, but their Sunday was not.

Maya tucked her bent little leaf beside the yellow one. Arun carried its spotted partner in his hand, and together they followed the duck back toward the green bench.



A Pocketful of Sunday

The weathered green bench waited where they had left it, with the slightly squashed biscuit bag tucked safely beneath one end. The bold duck reached it first and stood watching as Arun picked up the bag.

“Remain calm,” Arun told Maya. “The biscuits have survived, but the inspector appears suspicious.”

He sat beside her and spread his checked handkerchief across his knee. Maya placed her bent-corner leaf on it. Arun added the three-spotted one, then folded the cloth gently over them and pressed it with his palm.

The duck stretched its neck toward the bag.

At once, Arun tucked the folded handkerchief safely into his coat

and held the biscuits in both hands. “No closer,” he warned, as solemn as a guard at a palace gate. “These are the most carefully protected oat biscuits in the entire garden.”

The duck took one hopeful step.

Arun raised the bag high. It gave a tired little crinkle. Inside, the biscuits had become lopsided, but Arun pretended not to notice.

Maya took hers. Arun took his. The duck stared at his fingers, then at his mouth, as if waiting for an old mistake to happen again.



It did not.

Arun ate his biscuit without losing so much as a crumb. The duck blinked, surprised. Maya laughed so hard that she nearly dropped hers, but Arun caught her wrist gently until she had it under control.

“An historic victory,” he said.

They ate together while the pond wrinkled in the breeze. The

bench was cool beneath Maya, Arun was warm beside her, and their two little leaves rested flat inside the checked cloth, ready for whatever came next.

When the last crumbs were gone, Arun opened the checked handkerchief. The two brown leaves had flattened nicely together.

He tucked the three-spotted one into a fold of the cloth. “For safekeeping,” he said.

Maya slipped her bent-corner leaf into her coat pocket. It settled with a dry whisper among all the other leaves. She patted the pocket once. She could feel their crisp edges through the cloth, like a bundle of small Sundays.

The green bench waited behind them as they followed the winding path. The pond flashed between the trees. Farther away, the old glasshouse shone in the pale autumn sun. Maya wondered again whether the garden remembered them after they left.



Perhaps it remembered Arun’s careful biscuit guarding. Perhaps it remembered her shoes stopping beside tiny shoots. Perhaps the paths remembered the sound of his humming.

And when she and Arun were not in the same place, he could unfold his handkerchief and find three spots. She could reach into her pocket and find one bent corner. Neither leaf was the copper one they had chased, but both had travelled through the same morning.

Arun began humming as the exit came into view. Maya matched her steps to the tune—not hurrying, not dragging behind.

A tiny yellow leaf spun across the path. They both paused to watch it land.

Maya smiled up at Arun. “Slow steps find small wonders.”

“They do,” he said.

Then they walked on, each carrying one leaf, and both carrying Sunday.