

THE LEAF

EXT. PARK - DAY

The sun is bright and warm.

It's one of those rare days for Maine - not a cloud in the sky.

There is a big old Maple in the middle of the park, that the CHILDREN, who are already out of school, have ignored so far.

On one particular branch, not very high above the ground, a classic battle was taking shape.

A big juicy caterpillar, named SAM, lights a cigar. He is distinctly segmented and plump, with an Italian accent, he no doubt inherited from his parents, who were long since deceased.

SAM

Whatchya doing there sweetheart?

LAUREN, a ladybug, heard him very plainly, because he was quite loud, but did her best to ignore him, by crawling along the branch in the opposite direction, towards the leaves, as fast as her tiny legs would take her.

SAM (CONT'D)

Ahem...

She had a big lead on him now, at least in ladybug terms. More than half a foot.

LAUREN

Leave me alone please. I'm much too busy to be bothered by the likes of you.

This remark stopped Sam in his slimy tracks. He took the cigar out of his mouth, so he could enunciate more clearly.

SAM

The likes of me, eh? What do you mean? Ain't I not good enough for you? Are you prejudiced against Italians or something?

LAUREN

No, not at all.

SAM

You think I'm a grease ball, right?

LAUREN

No. Why that's a terrible thing to say.

SAM

I know. But, don't be fooled. There are plenty of snobs what live in this neighborhood.

LAUREN

Well, not me. I'm nothing like that. Although you are completely not my type.

SAM

Why did you have to go and say that for? You were being so nice. You just gotta be mean, huh?

LAUREN

No, I'm not mean. Just honest, that's all. I don't believe in getting anyone's hopes up.

SAM

Oh. Do you expect me to believe that?

LAUREN

You can believe anything like. It's just the truth, that's all.

SAM

Big believer in the truth, are you?

LAUREN

As a matter of fact I am.

SAM

Yeah? Well, so am I. But I don't rub it in nobodies face when it will hurt their feelings.

LAUREN

That is a matter of judgment, sir.

SAM

Please, call me Sam.

LAUREN

Alright. Sam.

SAM

That's more like it. And what might your name be?

LAUREN

Lauren.

SAM

Did you know that means flower in Italian? Well Latin.

LAUREN

No.

SAM

And that makes sense too, 'cause ladybugs eat flowers, right?

LAUREN

As a matter of fact, we do not. We protect flowers.

SAM

How do you do that? You got little swords and shields and stuff like that? Little guns maybe?

LAUREN

Of course not. We eat aphids, which eat flowers.

SAM

Oh, you're a carnivore. Remind me to watch out for you.

LAUREN

That's right. You better watch out. Or before you know it, I'll have that giant, greasy carcass of yours down my maw, and out the other end.

SAM

Ewe. Gross. Why the violent imagery?

LAUREN

I just want to warn you to keep your distance, fatty, that's all.

SAM

Jeez. You just called me fat.

LAUREN

The truth hurts sometimes, doesn't it.

SAM

I don't know what your major malfunction is lady, but you either got a screw loose, or a very big mean streak.

LAUREN

Huh.

SAM

I'll have you know, that when the time comes, I will metamorphosis into a beautiful butterfly.

LAUREN

Yeah, right.

SAM

That's right. I'll build a cocoon, and when I emerge, I will have the biggest, most beautiful color wings you ever seen. Even nicer than your tiny orange ones with the black polka dots.

LAUREN

Now who's being mean?

SAM

Just the truth mam.

LAUREN

Huh! I'll believe that when I see it.

SAM

Stick around.

Just then, the children run over to the big Maple and see who

can climb it the farthest and fastest.

Lauren and Sam have to dodge a barrage of little shoes as they climb on their branch.

LAUREN

Every man for himself. I'm getting out of here.

With that, she took to the wind.

SAM

Hey! What about me? A fair weather friend. That's what you are.

She hovered several feet from the branch.

LAUREN

I can't help it. I'm a female. Got to ensure the continuation of the species. Sorry.

SAM

We males have something to do with that too.

She flies away.

Sam goes into overdrive, pulling his fat body along in an undulating manner, and kicking his feet as fast as he can, until he finally reaches a strong, healthy leaf at the end of the branch.

He hunkers down and spins a cocoon, as if he were doing so in fast motion.

A lot of activity can be seen within its thin, translucent walls.

LAUREN

(to herself)

I can't just leave him there, to get trampled to death.

She flies by and sees the cocoon, and how the children's little feet barely miss it on their way up and down the tree.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Sam. Are you in there? Is that you?

SAM

Of course. Did I tell you so, or what?

With all the strength she can muster, Lauren ignores her carnivorous nature and gnaws a perfect circle around the cocoon, spitting out tiny fragments of leaves as she goes, and the cocoon floats gently to the ground.

She hangs around for several days to see what happens, feasting on aphids all the while.

CARD: SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Lauren experiences a rebirth, as Sam, splits open the cocoon, and emerges as a beautiful butterfly.

LAUREN

You're spectacular.

SAM

Thank you my lady.

LAUREN

And, you told me the truth.

SAM

Of course I did. What did you think? I was just feeding you a line to get you to like me?

LAUREN

That's usually how it works. Right?

SAM

Not where I come from, sister. By the way, thank you for protecting me from the almost certain doom of being crushed by them size 5 loafers coming down all around me.

LAUREN

Sure, Sam. (beat) Listen, I've got something serious to tell you.

SAM

Ut oh. What is it now? Something else you gotta be honest about?

LAUREN

Yes.

SAM

How did I guess?

LAUREN

I was once in a cocoon too.

SAM

Hey that's awesome. Something else we got in common, right? And I thought you was gonna tell me something bad. I feel so silly.

LAUREN

Ah, I hate to disappoint you Sam, but, you see, Ladybugs don't live that long.

SAM

Oh, no? Only a few decades, or what?

LAUREN

Sam, I'm going to die soon.

SAM

Oh no, Lauren. No. We just became great friends.

LAUREN

Tell me about it. And, I never thought I could become friends with a grease ball like you.

SAM

See, I knew it. What did I tell you?

LAUREN

But now that you are a beautiful butterfly, it's OK.

SAM

A lot of good that does. Oh, Lauren, how much time do you have?

LAUREN

I don't know exactly, but not long.
(beat) And, I have something else to tell

you.

SAM

Do you, Lauren? Oh, great. Well, I hope it's better new than what you just told me. At least it couldn't be any worse, right?

LAUREN

Ahem. Butterflies don't live that long either, Sam.

SAM

Oh Lauren. When will you stop telling me truth? All it ever does is cause heartache and misery.

LAUREN

But that's what life is, Sam. Pain. Haven't you learned that by now?

SAM

No I haven't. And it doesn't look like there is much time left for me to learn it, either. So, I guess I never will. And I guess it's just one of those things that I never want to learn either. It's just too painful, Lauren.

LAUREN

But the truth is something you can't hide from, Sam. And remember what a wise man once said - the truth will set you free.

SAM

Yeah. Where'd that come from? The Bible or something? That guy didn't know what he was talking about.