



1991

# Why Trees Lose Their Leaves

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## Recommended Citation

Soledad, Valerie (1991) "Why Trees Lose Their Leaves," *Calliope*: Vol. 1991 : Iss. 1 , Article 25.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol1991/iss1/25>

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# *Why Trees Lose Their Leaves*

by Valerie Soledad

Yellow-orange tongues of flame licked at the logs. The blue-black night of Winter peeked through the smoke hole. Everyone sat close to the fire, huddled together in big buffalo robes. The littlest one, Eyes of a Rabbit, began crawling under the blankets to get closer to Grandmother. When she emerged, tangled into her shiny black hair was a dry cottonwood leaf. The elders laughed when the tiny girl began to yank viciously at the leaf to loosen it, only to get it more entangled. Only Grandmother did not laugh.

Grandmother's gnarled brown fingers deftly combed through the tangles, but the ordeal was still painful, for the little one's eyes filled with tears. She did not cry out though, she knew better than that. She was able to smile bravely when Grandmother showed her the crumbling leaf. Grandmother patted Eyes of a Rabbit comfortingly. Gently she smoothed the little one's ruffled tresses. In the summer when food was plentiful, Grandmother would have rewarded her bravery with a bit of jerky to suck on. It was winter now, and there was nothing to spare for the child's courage. Then the tepee became silent, for Grandmother had a story to tell.

"A long, long time ago, when the earth was still very new, Man had a special relationship with nature and the world around him. Man loved all of nature, especially his friend, the tree.

"Trees were very generous to man. They gave him shade, they gave him shelter, they gave him food. They were kind to man because trees are very vain. They enjoyed the time man spent with them admiring their beauty and strength.

"The trees kept the leaves on their branches all the year. Even in the winter the trees were green, taking pride in their lushness, when the rest of the world, including man, was shivering in the cold.

"One year, Winter was very brutal. Man stayed in his little shelter, away from the Wind. He did not come out to admire the trees' beauty or to gather fruit. The trees were listless without anyone to worship them, so when Winter's wind rattled their green leaves, they sighed and let the wind take them.

"At last, Spring came. Man came out of his shelter, glad to be in the Sun again. The trees, heartened by his presence, allowed their leaves to grow back.

"Every winter after that, when Man retreats inside, away from the cold, the trees release their leaves to the Wind.

"But Little Rabbit, you are not like a tree, even if you did have leaves on your head. It probably hurts a little more to release your leaves, hey little one?"

Grandmother held the child close and smiled at the youth in her lap.