A Little Old Man

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"A LITTLE OLD MAN"
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Short Story
Honorable Mention

At least once upon a time there lived a little old man in a tree who liked to play with bees and skunks and porcupines and other things that little old men don't usually like to play with.

He dawdled. He dawdled a lot. He like dawdling. People would say that he dawdled too much but he'd reason, "Well, what do they know? They've never dawdled enough," which was true.

He was a garrulous sort, but only when he was alone, which was quite usually most of the time. But not really. "Hum diddy diddy, diddy dee diddy o," he'd chant, meaning whatever he meant it to mean. And he was happy.

One day—not any particular day, just an average, typical day—he climbed down out of his tree to be with the skunks and talk to the toads and play with the porcupines. He petted the deer and sang with the birds and played tag with the butterflies. He walked in the trees and he drank at a stream and he sat down and watched the sky. It was what he wanted to do.

He came upon a hurt raccoon and the raccoon said, "I am hurt." "Hum diddy diddy, diddy dee diddy o," said the little old man, meaning "I'm sorry that it isn't me," and he meant it. And the raccoon knew he meant it. And the little old man knew that the raccoon knew he meant it. He carried the raccoon back to his tree and repaired him and the raccoon stayed there a while, not out of any sense of obligation or any need to show appreciation, but because he felt comfortable. And sometime during the course of his stay he left, and the little old man wasn't sad. He was happy the raccoon was well enough to leave and he hoped that he would live a full, unhampered life.

But then, one day—and it wasn't an average day—the little old man went into town to get the things he needed to live happily in his tree. People said, "There goes the old man who dawdles too much," but nobody knew where he lived. And they thought they should. So one of them followed him and saw him go into the woods and saw him climb up in his tree.

And the one who followed the little old man went back to the people in town and said, "The little old man who dawdles too much lives up in a tree and he plays with bees and skunks and porcupines and other things that little old men shouldn't." And the people said, "That isn't good. We should go get the old man and bring him to town and make him be happy and normal!"

So they went to the tree in the woods where the little old man who dawdled lived. They said, "We've
come to take you to town and to help you be happy and normal. "I don't want to be happy and normal," said the little old man. "Please, can't I just stay where I am?" But the people said, "No," and they carried him back and they taught him to act like a little old man.

His dawdling dwindled and so did he. He didn't play with the porcupines or talk to the deer anymore. He acted proper and did not misbehave and he was soon called a "little old man." Just an average little old man. He wasn't a "little old man who lived in a tree who liked to play with bees and skunks and porcupines and other things that little old men don't usually like to play with" anymore. He was just a little old man. □