Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Who will I be when I grow up?

Viola V.

"For all those children who sometimes feel lost while growing up…”

It is a sunny day. While Leo is playing with the ball in his garden, his grandfather Tom, coming home, sees him and walks up to the child.

“Hi Leo!” he says, “I think your ball skills are great! Are you going to be a soccer or a basketball player when you grow up?"

Leo stands there, abashed. He does not know what to say. What will I be when I grow up? he wonders. The old man smiles and walks away.

“Don’t worry!” he calls. “You’ll work it out!”

Although this question has been on Leo’s mind lately, he has never imagined growing up like at that moment. Who will I be when I grow up? What would I like to do? he can't shake off these thoughts. Compared to other 11-year-old children, more confident about who they will be and what they will do in their future, Leo is a very shy and introverted boy, but he has a lot of imagination and curiosity. My best friend Henry likes building things, he thinks, yesterday, when we were by the sea, he drew a new structure in the sand.

"Hey! Look at this, look at my new work," he said, “this way, it won't fall down."

"Sure of that?" Leo asked him.

“Yeah! I’m going to be an engineer! How amazing are houses and… skyscrapers?! They go so high into the air and have lots of floors! I wonder how someone dreamt that up!”

“When did you first start to enjoy building things?” Leo asked Henry as he could speak for hours about houses and buildings. Henry frowned and chewed his lip – he always did that when he was thinking.

“Maybe when I was three?” he said, “I don’t remember.”

Then, while his friend was drawing his great work, Leo thought, Why does Henry know what he wants to do? Why don’t I know it yet? Another time, he felt the same way while watching a space documentary on TV with his father.

"Leo, if you became an astronaut, you could explore the universe by navigating in space, what about it?" his dad said.

"Wow!?!... Yes... perhaps... I don't know yet." Leo answered hesitantly. Sure, it would be great... but so far away from Earth... and what if I were afraid of empty and dark space? he thought. As an IT developer, his father George is keen on science documentaries. Leo has not understood his job yet, that strange pc language... a hard mix of numbers and code, and actually he does not know whether he will ever figure it out. George often travels for work, so when he is at home, Leo wants to spend a lot of time with him. The child wishes to become like his dad with no doubts, fear and sure of everything, but not feeling this way, sometimes he is overtaken by a terrible discomfort.

Instead, all is different with his mother Clare. Leo jokes, laughs and is not afraid to show his insecurity. She works in a city center shop, not far from the seaside town where they live, and in her free time, she enjoys jogging with him.

"Leo, what's your doubt today? Come on!" his mum always asks him. Clare takes things easier, she is able to turn his worries into a funny joke and, at the end, they laugh together.

At school, Leo often realises that his classmates all seem to know what they want to be when they grow up.

“Hey, did you get the latest Animal Crossing on your tablet? Tell me your score!” Joe says when he sees Leo, “Guess what! I've already won ‘cos I’m a gamer! I wanna be a video game designer.”

All these digital devices such as PCs, tablets, or phones have not caught Leo's attention yet. While his peers are into gaming, always glued to the screen just to have a better level, he prefers going outside, playing with the ball or riding his bicycle. Here, Jenny comes with her new pictures.

"Look at this! Which one do you like the most? They're great, right?” she says, “I'll study art to become a famous painter and my pictures will be shown in great art galleries!" and then, “Leo! How about you? What are you gonna do? -" Immediately, Sam jumps in, ”Oh, yeah! Leo always helps me when I need it, so I guess he’ll become a doctor!”

“Sounds good, I would work in a hospital!" the boy answers right away, but... If did the blood scare me? I need to see the doctor when I’m sick, and I don't like having to go there, he thinks. I am so confused! Why are my friends always sure to get what they want when they want? What makes that possible? Then he gets stuck, I wonder if I will ever be able to understand my wishes and who I’m going to be... but in the end, will this really happen? Whenever these thoughts come to Leo, he never finds answers, so he can’t wait to run to his friendly, big Oak tree and stay there for a while to clear up his confusion.

Every time Leo is overtaken by thoughts with no way out, and he feels like other

children are in such a hurry to grow up while he is always at a loss, his mind wanders to his Oak tree. How I wish I could be under the wide shadow of my friend Oak... Despite doubts and questions, that Oak tree near his house is the only place where he can be himself, and let all matters go. From spring onwards, on sunny days after school, Leo usually spends some time there reading books and imagining stories. In the middle of a vast green lawn that turns into bright colours when the flowers bloom, the old tree has deep roots under the ground, and its trunk is so large that Leo can't wrap his arms around it.

The child has always felt a special connection with the Oak, right from the start, although he still doesn’t know why and how this kind of bond with a tree is possible. Over those afternoons, Joe often comes to Leo’s mind. I just don't understand. Joe is so self-confident that he always knows to prefer dogs to cats… but why should I make a choice between my sweet cat Tiffany and my funny dog Buddy? I can’t choose, I love them both differently, he says to himself. Red is his favourite colour, he is video games mad, and the ice cream taste he likes the most is hazelnut. There’s no doubt, everything is clear and linear in Joe’s mind… and he keeps on, If I were a superhero, I could see what I would like to do, have the power to predict the future, and all would be easier! Or even better… how I wish I could be a powerful warrior, so brave that the certainty of others could never hurt me… and sighing… but unfortunately I'm neither one nor the other. Leo feels like his thoughts are tangled up in a strange mix of difficult and complicated questions, and he is not able to untie that knot.

It is a new day. There is a blue sky with just a few clouds on the horizon. Like every morning, his mum drives Leo to school and she drops him off at 8 o'clock. Right away, the teacher Sarah asks the class, “My dear students, today we are going to talk about your future. The question is: what do you want to do when you grow up? Are you ready?”

"Oh yeah, teacher!" all the children call so excited by the question, while Leo is afraid of it not knowing what to say. One by one, they start to answer explaining the reason for their choice.

“I’ll become an engineer!” says Henry, “Teacher, my drawings of buildings are great, don't you think?” and Sarah answers, “Yes, good job Henry, keep it on!”

Then Jenny “You do love my pictures, right? I’ll be a famous painter! How amazing are my pieces of art!” and so on. While the teacher is listening to all the dreams of her students, Leo wonders how his classmates can be so certain about their future. When his turn comes, not having an answer, he glances at the window and sees a mechanic while fixing a car, so he says, “I’d like to become a mechanic, this way…-” Suddenly, most of the class starts laughing. Getting stuck and frozen for that unexpected reaction, Leo is like, How come? Right away, the teacher scolds the pupils, "Why this bad behavior? What’s the reason for

laughing?! The mechanic’s job is important! If the car of your parents breaks down and no one is able to fix it, how can we solve the problem?”

After hearing those words, children stop laughing and quietly apologise to him, but despite the help of Sarah, always kind and loving towards him, Leo is overtaken by sadness and discomfort.

In the afternoon, as soon as he gets home from school, he runs to his friend Oak, and tells the tree about the terrible event that happened at school. Shaking and overcome by emotion, he bursts into tears, “Why did my classmates tease me? What’s wrong with becoming a mechanic? When the teacher asks me what I like the most, I’m often confused and without an answer. I love playing with the ball, reading, and running outdoors in the spring sunshine, but making a choice gets me stuck. On sunny days, I usually prefer going to the beach, but if I come across a new comic book, I could stay at home instead of having fun with my friends. Why should I choose one or the other? Many of my classmates have high aspirations, and they already know that their dreams will come true… but I don’t feel that way. This hurts me so much ‘cause it makes me feel sad and alone.”



Suddenly, a strong wind starts blowing and pushes Leo onto the sturdy trunk of the tree. Just then, the Oak soul begins talking to him.

“My dear Leo, your time here means a lot to me. You are only 11 years old, why are you struggling with questions that can't find answers now? You'll cross that bridge when you get to it, so don’t be hurt by what your friends think or daunted by their ambition. Play, run, sing, draw, explore, and do what children of your age should do without worrying about tomorrow.”

"It’s easy to say… Trees are never affected by the certainty of others, and so rooted in the ground, no fear can shake you! I know my age, but the thing is, I wanna feel like… not so confused!” Leo expresses his discomfort.

The Oak again, "You're right, I don’t see human fear, but I know what it means to be hurt when a lightning strikes my branches. So I can imagine how it feels. This is my way of cheering you up every time the wind blows against your direction. Even though your classmates seem too confident about their future, you just live day after day. Slowly but surely, things will take their shape in your life, and if you try to replace fear of the unknown with your curiosity, real possibilities could open up in front of you. Now you are still a rough diamond, but step by step, you are going to discover your potential to be wonderful. Whatever work you will do, it will be fine. And if you make your actions speak louder than words, you will be

able to become an honest man with a strong will to build your life brick by brick. Now the power to shape the future is out of your control, but over time, maybe even things that happen by chance could help you not to lose track, clear up your confusion or... your tomorrow may come to light on its own. So, do not give up when you can't see a way! Hanging in there, everything should go smoother. Whether your friends are too sure, you always try to be yourself as much as possible, not pretending to be someone else just to satisfy others. Enjoy being the child you are without any hurry to grow up, and let doubts and fear of getting older go away since it is the natural course of things. It is known that only time will tell you what is to come, even if you are able to figure out who you will be and your dreams along the way.”

After hearing these words, Leo slowly stops crying and at last the wind drops. It seems like a heavy weight has been lifted off his chest, and now there is some peace. "My friend, thanks a lot for your support and comfort!” he says, while a bit of hope gets into his mind.

Right now, Leo decides to trust the Oak tree and follow its advice. Reassured by its wisdom and freed from that burden, he is no longer afraid of his mates, their confidence in the future and their great ambitions. Becoming aware of his age, he wants to explore life bit by bit, without the rush to grow up and be part of the adult world. In the evening, Leo goes to bed and he falls asleep peacefully with no weight of tomorrow on his shoulders. Now he feels that, sooner or later, he will understand the best track for him, where all the confusion in his mind will turn into a new order of his thoughts. And this way, night after night, even his dreams could help Leo see the right path that is taking shape, from the child who is towards the man who will become, through the still unknown waves of his life.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.
Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom