

THE LEAF PAINTER

DAGMAR FRAHME

JACKIE rubbed his eyes and looked again. There *was* somebody sitting on the lowest branch of the maple tree painting a leaf. He was painting it a bright red very carefully and didn't seem to be spilling any paint at all. (That was certainly better than Jackie could do. When he painted at school the floor was always a mess and Miss Martin wasn't too happy.)

"Hi," called Jackie. "What are you doing that for?"

The person in the tree looked down and smiled such a big smile that his cheeks — which were very rosy indeed — puffed out like two red apples. He wiped his brush, laid it across the top of the paint bucket which was carefully balanced on the branch, and jumped down.

"Hello there, Jackie," he said. "I was wondering when you'd come visit me."

"How did you know my name?" asked Jackie. "And who are you?"

"My name is Bimbo, and we know all the children in the village."

"Oh," said Jackie, very much surprised. In fact, he was so surprised that he forgot his good manners and stared hard at Bimbo, who didn't seem to mind at all.

Bimbo was not much bigger than Jackie (and

that wasn't very big). He had on a brown suit which seemed to be all in one piece, red shoes with long toes that turned up, and a long green hat with a little bell at the end.

"Where do you live?" asked Jackie suddenly. "And how come you know all the children? And who is 'we'?"

"Whoa," laughed Bimbo. "One question at a time, please. 'We' are my brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and cousins. We live right here in the woods and we know all the children because we've been watching you all growing up ever since you were born."

"Oh," said Jackie again, still staring at Bimbo. "But how come you're painting the leaf?"

Bimbo smiled and sat down on a big brown log. "What time of year is it, Jackie?" he asked.

"Well," said Jackie thoughtfully, sitting down too. "It's the time when apples get ripe and nuts fall down and we make Jack-o-Lanterns and — and — it's *fall*, that's what it is!"

"Right," agreed Bimbo. "And what else happens in fall?"

"We have to go to school," said Jackie with a long face.

"And a good thing you do, too," said Bimbo. "But can't you think of something else that happens?"

"Well —" said Jackie, pulling his right ear. Suddenly his eyes grew big and round as saucers and he stared even harder at Bimbo. "Oh," he said, and then "Oh" again. "The leaves change color."

“Uh-huh,” said Bimbo, picking up a twig and starting to make a design on the ground with it.

“You mean — you mean you *paint* them?” asked Jackie, who was now more surprised than ever.

“Certainly,” said Bimbo, going on with his design. “I do, and so do my brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins.”

“But I thought that just happened by itself,” said Jackie. “I didn’t know anybody painted them.”

“Humph,” snorted Bimbo, stopping his design. His usually cheerful face looked just a bit disgusted. “Things like that don’t ‘just happen.’ Somebody has to make them happen.”

“Oh,” said Jackie for the fifth time, and then sat still looking out into the woods. He saw that the leaves on many trees had changed color, and that there were really many, many trees indeed.

“Do you have many brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and cousins?” he asked after a while.

“Oh, yes,” said Bimbo, who had gone on with his design again. “Lots and lots and lots of them. Wherever there is just one garden with just one tree, one of us has to be there to take care of it.”

Bimbo drew a few more lines in his design, then tossed aside the twig and jumped up.

“And now you’ll have to excuse me, Jackie,” he said. “I have a lot of work to do, and if we don’t stick to our schedule the leaves will still be green when snow starts falling and then everything will be all mixed up!”

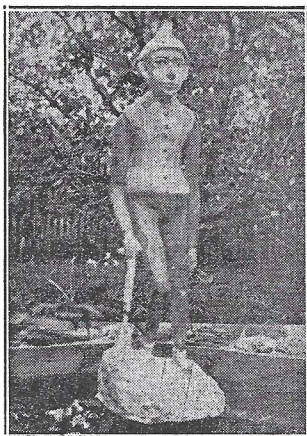
“Can I watch you work?” asked Jackie.

“Sure,” smiled Bimbo. “Talk to me, too. I like

company when I'm painting."

Then Bimbo reached his arms up and with one quite remarkable bound he jumped, caught the low branch of the maple tree, swung himself up and over and sat down on the branch. He dipped his brush into the paint and started working.

"That was pretty good," said Jackie, who was



a pretty good jumper himself. He reached his arms up too, bent his knees, and jumped as high as he could. But it wasn't nearly high enough. Jackie tried again and again, but he just couldn't reach that branch of the maple tree.

He looked up sadly at Bimbo, who smiled. "Practice, Jackie, practice. Everything takes practice."

"Even painting without spilling paint?" asked Jackie.

"Even painting without spilling paint," said

Bimbo, who had started work on the next leaf. "You like to paint, don't you, Jackie?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Jackie, "but Miss Martin doesn't like me to because I make such a mess."

He sat down on the log again and thought. Suddenly he had an idea. "I know what I'll do. I'll pretend I'm Bimbo painting leaves and paint so carefully that maybe I won't spill any either."

"Good idea, Jackie," said Bimbo. "And I think that if you try very hard, that will work quite well."

For a little while Jackie sat on the log and told Bimbo about school and his baby sister and his big dog Mike. Bimbo didn't say too much because he was very busy, but Jackie knew that he was listening.

Suddenly the bell in the village rang six times.

"Oh, oh," said Jackie jumping up. "I'd better not be late for supper. I'm glad I met you, Bimbo," he said politely. "And I won't forget about how leaves change their colors."

"Here, Jackie, take this." Bimbo broke off the red leaf he had just finished painting and let it float down to Jackie.

"Thank you, Bimbo," said Jackie, catching the leaf. "I'll keep it in my new book and maybe let Miss Martin see it tomorrow. It sure is pretty."

Jackie looked at the leaf a minute, then waved his hand at Bimbo. "Bye," he shouted, and ran off toward the village.

Bimbo smiled. "Good by, Jackie," he called. Then he stood up very carefully, lifted his paint bucket to the next branch, swung himself up too, and soon was hard at work again.

R A I N

ROBERT LOVEMAN

It is not raining rain for me,
It's raining daffodils;
In every dimpled drop I see
Wild flowers on the hills.

The clouds of gray engulf the day
And overwhelm the town;
It is not raining rain to me,
It's raining roses down.

It is not raining rain to me,
But fields of clover bloom,
Where any buccaneering bee
Can find a bed and room.

A health unto the happy,
A fig for him who frets!
It is not raining rain to me,
It's raining violets.