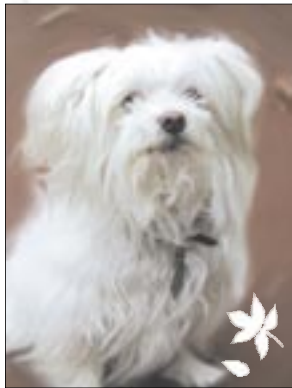


On Leaf Patrol



Tiger on leaves:
Let me know when Tiki
turns them into
love cushions.

I see from behind the glass wall. Safe and protected, I watch the world unfold on my deck.

Already the leaves are joining forces for a noonday performance. I see the leaves swirl as the wind lifts them, carries them a moment, and throws them to the ground. I am acting as sergeant today—chasing leaves, making sure they don't dally as they move into place. Any leaf that moves is mine, all mine. I wait and watch, eliminating any element of surprise. Let them try and sneak up on me. I am the Commander Tiki.

The glass wall protects me from touching the troops or they from touching me. If I get too close then I cannot send them into battle. They would have names, the rules would change. The glass wall secures my role as Commander Tiki of this battlefield, in control and in charge. I rule all from behind the glass wall.

For a moment all is still. I survey the deck. Then I see it. I squint, and for an instant it is not a leaf, but the enemy general who has played my foe in battle. Every morning

I have watched it on the branch, perfect in size and shape—shimmering in all its glory, holding its ground in summer storms, orchestrating our noonday battles. It commanded the troops that waved at me from high on the branches, taunting me to run and chase shadows. And it sent the occasional lone pawn to do battle with me. Now, it sits alone. But even with so many troops lying lifeless, strewn across the battlefield, it calls upon the sun to warm it, to showcase it.

I recall the day the leaf who led the invaders onto my deck, started to turn. It was a subtle change, but a change we all dread—when we know in our heart that something has already gone amiss and that it is too late to stop the process. I quietly watched each day as the color change slowly swept over its body, until it was only an aura, a shell of its original self.

It is only a matter of time now before the general will surrender the battle. I pause and say good bye to my old friend. And for a moment, there is no glass wall between us.