

# **The Christmas Spruce Tree**

by Anna von Rydingsvärd

Among the tall trees in the forest grew a little spruce tree. It was no taller than a man, and that is very short for a tree.

The other trees near it grew so tall and had such large branches that the poor little tree could not grow at all.

She liked to listen when the other trees were talking, but it often made her sad.

“I am king of the forest,” said the oak. “Look at my huge trunk and my branches. How they reach up toward heaven! I furnish planks for men from which they build their ships. Then I defy the storm on the ocean as I did the thunder in the forest.”

“And I go with you over the foaming waves,” said the tall straight pine. “I hold up the flapping sails when the ships fly over the ocean.”

“And we warm the houses when winter comes and the cold north wind drives the snow before him,” said the birches.

“We have the same work to do,” said a tall fir tree, and she bowed gracefully, drooping her branches toward the ground.

The little spruce tree heard the other trees talking about their work in the world. This made her sad, and she thought, “What work can I do? What will become of me?”

But she could not think of any way in which she could be useful. She decided to ask the other trees in the forest.

So she asked the oak, the pine and the fir, but they were so proud and stately they did not even hear her.

Then she asked the beautiful white birch that stood near by. “You have no work to do,” said the birch, “because you can never grow large enough. Perhaps you might be a Christmas tree, but that is all.”

“What is a Christmas tree?” asked the little spruce.

“I do not know exactly,” replied the birch. “Sometimes when the days are short and cold, and the ground is covered with snow, men come out here into the forest. They look at all the little spruce trees and choose the prettiest, saying, ‘This will do for a Christmas tree.’”

“Then they chop it down and carry it away. What they do with it I cannot tell.”

The little spruce asked the rabbit that hopped over the snow, the owls that slept in the pines, and the squirrels that came to find nuts and acorns.

But no one knew more than the birch tree. No one could tell what men did with the Christmas trees.

Then the little spruce tree wept because she had no work to do and could not be of any use in the world.

The tears hardened into clear, round drops, which we call gum.

At last a boy came into the forest with an axe in his hand. He looked the little tree all over. "Perhaps this will do for a Christmas tree," he said. So he chopped it down, laid it on a sled, and dragged it home.

The next day the boy sold the tree, and it was taken into a large room and dressed up with pop corn and gilded nuts and candles. Packages of all sizes and shapes, and tiny bags filled with candy, were tied on its branches.

The tree was trembling with the excitement, but she stood as still as she could. "What if I should drop some of this fruit," she thought.

When it began to grow dark, every one left the room and the tree was alone. It began to feel lonely and to think sad thoughts.

Soon the door opened and a lady came in. She lighted all the candles.

How light and glowing it was then!

The tree had never even dreamed of anything so beautiful!

Then the children came and danced about the tree, singing a Christmas song. The father played on his violin, and the baby sat in her mother's arms, smiling and cooing.

"Now I know what I was made for," thought the spruce tree; "I was intended to give joy to the little ones, because I, myself, am so small and humble."

# **The Eve of St. Nicholas**

by Unknown

It was the Eve of St. Nicholas. In Germany St. Nicholas's Day comes on the sixth of December.

The children were in the nursery. On the hearth before the fireplace, were five little sugar shoes.

Thekla was filling her shoe with oats. Max put rye in his shoe. Hans put an apple in his, and Gretchen filled hers with lumps of sugar.

Betty, the poor little girl who sometimes helped in the kitchen, had only a bit of brown bread to put in her shoe.

The children were expecting St. Nicholas, who always comes on a white horse, and the things in the shoes were for the horse to eat.

As the clock struck six there was a loud knock at the door.

Aunt Hilda opened the door, and in came St. Nicholas. He was very tall and had a long white beard. He wore a long black robe and a red and white cap, with a big red tassel.

"Dear little children," he said, "it will soon be Christmas. I have come to find the good children. I shall bring gifts to them on Christmas Eve. Has Thekla learned to knit?"

"Yes, indeed," said her mother. "See this pair of stockings she has knit for Hans."

"They are very well made," said St. Nicholas. "I shall surely bring a gift for Thekla. Has Hans learned to get up early?"

"We have not had to call him for six weeks," said his father.

"Good," said St. Nicholas. "Has Max learned his multiplication tables?"

"Max is trying very hard," said Aunt Hilda. "He knows all but the nines and twelves."

"And the dear little Gretchen?" said St. Nicholas, patting the baby's golden curls.

They all smiled, and the mother said, "The dear little Gretchen is always sweet and good."

"Well, well, I shall certainly bring many beautiful gifts to this house," said St. Nicholas.

"And don't forget little Betty," said Aunt Hilda.

So the good Saint took the oats, the rye and the apple, the lumps of sugar, and the bit of brown bread out of the sugar shoes and went out into the night. I suppose he gave them to his horse.

"St. Nicholas has eyes like Uncle Max," said Thekla.

“He smiled like Uncle Max, too,” said her brother.

St. Nicholas kept his word. On Christmas Eve there was a Christmas tree in the parlor. On it there were many beautiful gifts, and little Betty was not forgotten.

The next night the children hung gifts on the same tree for father, mother, Uncle Max, Aunt Hilda, and the dear Grandfather.

Each one of the children had something of his very own for Grandfather.

Thekla had knit a warm scarf for him. Max can carve in wood, so he had made a stout cane and had carved it very handsomely.

Hans drew a picture for him, and the dear little Gretchen gave him two of her very best kisses.

Oh, it was a very happy Christmas!

Source:

Unknown. “The Eve of St.Nicholas.” *The Wide Awake Third Reader*. Ed. Clara Murray. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912. 77 – 80. Electronic.

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