



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The First Puritan Christmas Tree

Unknown writer

Mrs. Olcott called her boys and told them to go into the pine woods and find the finest, tallest young hemlock tree they could.

"Find one that stands straight, with good branches all the way around," she said, "and leave it somewhere you can drag it under the woodshed after dark."

The boys went to Pine Hill and searched until they found the finest tree on all the hillside. They hewed it down with their hatchets and waited. When the night was full dark and quiet, they hauled it safely home. Roger was already asleep in the next room, so they drew the tree into the kitchen without a sound. It was too tall — they carried it back out, cut two or three feet from the base, and stood it up again. Then the curtains were let down over the windows, blankets were pinned over the curtains so that no light could escape, and the door was barred twice over. Only then did they go to bed.

Very early the next morning, while stars still shone on the snow-covered hills — the same stars that had shone sixteen hundred years before over the hills near Bethlehem — the little Puritan mother rose softly from her bed. She coaxed the kitchen fire back to life from the ash-covered embers. One by one she fixed upon the tree's branches the gifts she had brought back from Boston for her boys and her girl. Then she pressed twenty small candle-stubs into the twigs, all around the tree.



After that, she went quietly to wake Rupert, Robert and Lucy, and led them to the kitchen door.

Then she hurried back to begin lighting the candles. Just as the last flame caught, the three children came trooping in — and stopped.

Before any of them could make a sound, their mother hushed them with a look.

"I want to bring Roger in first," she said. "Wait here and not a word."

She lifted the little lad in his blanket, still sleeping, and carried him gently into the beautiful brightness.

"See, Roger," she said softly, rousing him. "It's Christmas morning. In England they have Christmas-boughs — but here in New England we have a whole Christmas tree."

"Oh, mother!" he cried. "Oh, Lucy! Is it real? It isn't a dream?" He looked and looked, his eyes wide in the candlelight. "Oh, mother, it's so beautiful. Were all the trees on all the hills lit up like this when Christ was born? And mother—" he clapped his small hands — "yes! The stars sang when Christ was born! They must be glad and keep Christmas too, up in heaven. I know they must, and there'll be good times there."

"Yes," said his mother quietly. "There will be good times there, Roger."

"Then," said the boy, "I sha'n't mind going, now that I've seen the Christmas tree. I — what is that, mother?"

What was it they heard? The little Olcott house had never seemed to tremble so. There were taps at the window, knocks at the door — and it was not yet fully light. There were voices, too, calling out to someone.

"Shall I put out the candles?" whispered Robert.

"What will they do to us for the tree? I wish we hadn't it," said Rupert miserably, while Lucy clutched her mother's skirt and cried out, "It's raiders!"

Mrs. Olcott stood pale and still, ready for whatever must come — until, out of the knocking and the calling, her heart caught a sound she knew.

"Rachel! Rachel! Rachel!"

"Unbar the door!" she called to her boys. "It's your father!"

Down came the blankets. Up went the curtain. Open flew the door — and in walked Captain Olcott, followed by half of Plymouth, who had all heard at first light the glorious news: the long-awaited ship had come in at Boston, and with it, their long-lost captain.

For a moment nothing existed but the joy of it, everyone pressing in, everyone talking at once, the captain home and real and warm.

Then, when the first wave of happiness had passed, they noticed the tree.

"What is this? What does this mean?" The question went around the room, again and again, as the tall young pine stood bright in the corner, its candles blazing, its gifts still hanging.

"It's — welcome home to Father," said Lucy quickly, trying to shield her mother.

"No, child." Mrs. Olcott's voice was firm. "Tell the truth."

"It's — a Christmas tree," Lucy said at last.

One by one, the Pilgrims and Puritans drew near, their faces set and solemn. They looked at the glowing tree in silence. And one by one, slowly, their expressions softened — as little Roger's clear voice piped up from his blanket:

"She made it for me, mother did. But you may have it now, and all the pretty things on it too, because you've brought my father back. If mother will let you," he added.

Not a Pilgrim frowned. Not a Puritan turned away.

The sternest man in the room reached out and broke off a small twig, and held it carefully in his hand.

"I'll take it," he said, "for the sake of the good old times at home."

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why riri.ro 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 riri.ro and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: [@riri_ro_reading](https://www.instagram.com/riri_ro_reading) · Pinterest: [pinterest.com/riri_rocom](https://www.pinterest.com/riri_rocom)