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The Christmas Spruce Tree

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 around it grew so tall and had such sweeping branches that the poor little spruce could hardly grow at all. She loved to listen when the others were talking, but it often made her sad.

"I am king of the forest," said the oak. "Look at my great trunk and my branches — how they reach up toward heaven! I give planks to men, and they build their ships from me. Then I defy the storm on the ocean just as I defy 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 across the sea."

"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 listened to all of this and felt sadder than ever. *What work can I do?* she wondered. *What will become of me?*

She could think of no answer. So she decided to ask.

She asked the oak, the pine, and the fir — but they were so proud and stately they did not even hear her. Then she turned to the beautiful white birch that stood close 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 don't know exactly," said the birch. "Sometimes, when the days grow short and cold and the ground is covered with snow, people come out here into the forest. They look at all the little spruce trees and choose the prettiest one, 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, and the owls that slept in the pines, and the squirrels that came searching for nuts and acorns.

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

And so the little spruce wept — because she had no work to do and could not be of any use in the world. Her 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 over carefully. "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 he sold the tree, and it was carried into a large, warm room and dressed in all its finery — popcorn and gilded nuts and candles. Packages of every size and shape, and little bags filled with sweets, were tied along its branches.

The tree trembled with excitement but stood as still as she could. *What if I drop some of this?* she thought anxiously.

When evening came, everyone left the room, and the tree was alone. The darkness crept in, and she began to feel lonely, and sad, and afraid.

Then the door opened. A woman came in and lit all the candles.

How light and bright and glowing it was then! The little tree had never even dreamed of anything so beautiful.

Then the children came running in and danced around her, singing a Christmas song. Their father played his violin. The baby sat in her mother's arms, smiling and cooing at the lights.



Now I know what I was made for, thought the little spruce. *I was meant to bring joy to the little ones — because I, too, am small and humble.*

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