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The Little Pumpkin

Emma Florence Bush

Once upon a time, there was a little pumpkin growing on a vine in a field. The sun shone on him all day long, and sometimes the rain gently fell on him. The vine sent her roots deep into the ground in search of good food. The Little Pumpkin eagerly drank from the good sap and grew bigger and bigger, rounder and rounder, and firmer and firmer.

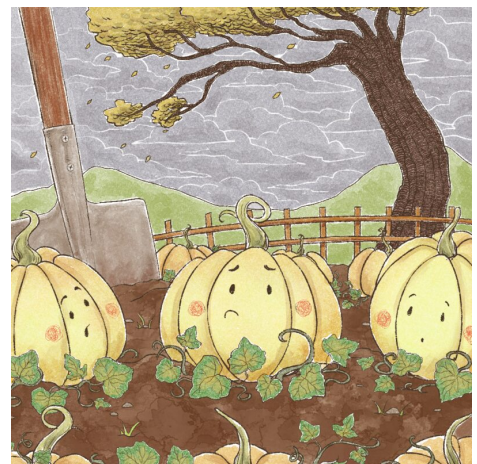


Gradually, he became so big that he understood everything the growing things around him said because he listened eagerly.

"I came from the seed of a Jack-o'-lantern," Mother Vine said to a neighbor, "that's why I have to grow Jack-o'-lanterns now."

"Me too," said a neighbor, "but no Jack-o'-lanterns for me. It's too much work. I'm just going to grow pumpkins."

When the Little Pumpkin heard that he was supposed to be a Jack-o'-lantern, he became very worried because he didn't see that he was any different from a regular pumpkin. He thought that Mother Vine really expected him to become a Jack-o'-lantern, and he didn't want to disappoint her. Eventually, he became so unhappy that the sun and wind noticed it. "What's wrong, Little Pumpkin, why are you crying? Why don't you hold your head up and look around like you always did?"



"Because," the Little Pumpkin answered sadly, "I'm supposed to be a Jack-o'-lantern, and I don't know how. I only know how to be a Little Pumpkin."

Then the wind and the sun laughed until the vine shook, so all the pumpkins had to hold on tight not to be shaken off. "Oh, Little Pumpkin!" they cried, "why worry about what you have to do later? Just try with all your might to be a Little Pumpkin, and believe us, if you do your best, everything will be all right. We

know a secret, a beautiful secret, and one day we will tell you."

"Oh, tell me now!" the Little Pumpkin exclaimed, but the sun and wind chuckled:

"Oh no, oh no, oh no! Just grow, grow, grow And one day you'll know."

The Little Pumpkin felt comforted. He thought, "Maybe I can't be a Jack-o'-lantern, but I can be a good Little Pumpkin, and I'm so well hidden that Mother Vine might not see me." He looked around and saw that all his brothers and sisters were just little pumpkins too.

"Oh brothers and sisters," he cried, "are we all going to disappoint Mother Vine? Will none of us become a Jack-o'-lantern?" Then all his little brothers and sisters laughed and said, "What do we care about being a Jack-o'-lantern? The only thing we care about is good sap and growing and growing."

Finally, the cold weather came, and all the little pumpkins were now big and beautiful and golden yellow. The biggest and yellowest of all was the Little Pumpkin who had tried so hard all summer to grow into a Jack-o'-lantern. He couldn't believe that Mother Vine still didn't see him, because he had grown so big that everyone who saw him was amazed. But Mother Vine didn't seem disappointed at all, she just kept feeding her pumpkin children well.

Finally, on a frosty morning, a crowd of children came to the field. "The pumpkins are ready," they cried. "The pumpkins are ready, and we're going to find the biggest and yellowest and nicest pumpkin to make a Jack-o'-lantern for the feast. All the grandmas and grandpas and aunts and uncles will see it, and we'll eat the pies made from it."



They looked around, pushing the plants aside to search better. Suddenly, they saw the Little Pumpkin. "Oh!" they exclaimed. "What a great Jack-o'-lantern. So big and sturdy and round and yellow! This will be the Jack-o'-lantern for our feast. It's so big that there's enough pie for everyone."

Then they picked the pumpkin and carried it to the barn. Father cut off the top of the pumpkin, lifted it carefully, and scooped out the inside. The children carried the pumpkin to mother in the kitchen. Then father made eyes and a nose and a mouth and placed a big candle inside. "Oh, look at what a beautiful Jack-o'-lantern," they exclaimed.

The Little Pumpkin was put in the barn. "Finally, I'm a Jack-o'-lantern," he said. After a while, it became dark, and father came and carried the pumpkin into the house, lit the candle, and placed it right in the middle of the table. All the

grandmothers and grandfathers and aunts and uncles shouted, "Oh, what a beautiful, big, round, yellow Jack-o'-lantern!"

Then the Little Pumpkin was happy because he knew that Mother Vine would be proud of him, and he shone and shone until the candle burned out completely.



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