

## LITTLE TREE

Once upon a time, in a big forest, there was a little pine tree who knew that she was special. Her name was Little Tree.

"I'm special!" she would say to the older trees.

Rabbit came by to visit her. She was Little Tree's best friend.

"Squirrel says you're nuts Little Tree! He says you're just like every other tree in the forest!"

"Nu-uh! I'm special!" She'd known it in her heart, ever since she was a pine cone!!

Now Little Tree grew in the shade of Old Grandfather Ponderosa, one of the tallest and wisest of trees.

"Everything on Mother Earth is special Little Tree! Every bear and every ant, every blade of grass has it's own special story, and your story,."

"I don't mean to be disrespectful Grandfather, but why are you telling me this?"

"A-hem! Because you are a tree, Little Tree, so your story will be like the story of other trees. You will grow in the Spring rain, and you will feel the Summer Breeze dance through your new needles. Your branches will hold nests for Jaybird and Wren. And in the Fall, when the frost is on your bark, your trunk will protect Beetle, and give Spider places to spin her webs. In the Winter, when the snow makes a blanket around you, your roots will be a home for Mole or Gopher. And after a long time, you will die and decay and turn back into the earth, to nourish other plants and trees. That's just the way it is."

"Nu-uh!" No one had ever talked to Grandfather like that!

"Nu-uh! I'm not sure how yet, but I know I'm special!"

"Ahem! Well Little Tree, you are special, but even your special story is connected to all the other stories of Mother Earth. Listen to the Earthsong. It will remind you."

"I don't hear any 'Earthsong' Grandfather!"

"Shhhhhh! Listen to the voice of the wind."

Little Tree listened as hard as she could, but she didn't hear anything.

"Eh, what are you doing Little Tree?" Rabbit asked.

"I'm listening to the wind! Now be quiet so I can listen better!"

"I can hear the wind! I have great ears. You don't even have ears, you're a tree! How do you expect to hear the wind!?"

"I can hear you, can't I? I listen like a tree listens! Now be quiet or go away."

"Okay!" Rabbit decided to nibble a sprout.

That's when Little Tree heard it. It was faint at first, then it got louder.

"Pine Tree, Jaybird, Wind, and Moose, Bear and Otter, Wolf and Goose"

"I heard it Rabbit!! In the voice of the wind. I heard the Earthsong! It sang my name!"

"I heard it too! What's it mean Little Tree?"

"It means I'm special Rabbit!"

"I hear Winter comin', that's all I hear!" Squirrel interrupted. He was digging a hole to bury an acorn. "Winter's comin'! Leaves are fallin'! Then it's chrismisseevie!"

"What's chrismisseevie?" Little Tree wanted to know.

"It's a people-word for 'cold outside'. I know about people." Squirrel explained. "They're nuts!"

"You think everyone is nuts, Squirrel."

"Well I'm right when it comes to people and their famileevies!" Squirrel dropped his acorn into the hole and covered it with dirt.

Jaybird squawked from up on a branch, "What's a famileevie?"

"It's a gang of people with a couple of big ones, and some noisy little ones who run around alot! When chrismisseevie comes, famileevies come to the forest with an axe, and they chop down a little pine tree just like Little Tree here!! Then they take you home and put you in their house and hang little colored sparkly, dangly light thingys all over you!"

"They pick out one special tree?" Little Tree felt a shiver.

"Yep! I've seen it! So be careful, or a famileevie might come and make a chrismisseevie tree out of you!!" Squirrel left without saying 'goodbye'.

"That was kinda scary!"

"I don't know Rabbit. I might like being a special chrismasseevie tree! It would prove to all these other trees that I was special wouldn't it! Well, if a famileevie comes into the forest, I'll get them to take me home!! Wow, maybe that's my story, to be a chrismisseevie tree someday! Maybe that's why I've always felt special!"

The days got shorter and the air became crispy. Leaves turned brilliant orange, red and gold, and the wind swirled them onto the chilly forest floor. Most of the birds flew away to warmer places in the south. Jaybird stayed.

One morning after the first snow had fallen, she flew up and landed in one of Little Tree's branches, flapping and squawking!

"Mmmugggh-lie! Mmmuuggghlie rrrr-cmmigg!"

"What's the matter Jay bird? I can't understand you!" Jaybird dropped the plastic bag she was holding in her beak!

"People! Little Tree, there's a famileevie in the forest looking for a chrismissevie tree, just like Squirrel said! They've got an axe and they're headed this way!"

"But, ... but I'm not ready!!"

"Look, I brought some sparkly plastic to decorate your branches, so they'll notice you!"

"Oh thank you Jaybird! Hang it on one of my twigs! Look! Here comes Rabbit!"

"They're coming up the hill!" Rabbit yelled! "I'd love to scare them away, but I'm too scared! I'll miss you Little Tree! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye Little Tree!! Bye! Bye!" And they left Little Tree alone, as the people came closer and closer.

"I'll stand up as tall as I can, and stretch out my branches, so they'll pick me to be their chrismissevie tree! Oh yeah, it's a famileevie alright, with two big people and two noisy little ones, just like Squirrel said!. And that big one's got a long stick with a metal piece at the end! That must be the axe they're gonna use to chop me down! I wonder what it will be like to leave the forest?"

The people stopped right in front of Little Tree. Then one of the little ones spoke.

"This one would make a good Christmas Tree Dad!"

"That's a good one alright." The big person reached up and removed Jaybird's plastic bag from Little Tree's branch and put it in his pocket. "Ahh, it amazes me how people can leave trash around in a beautiful place like this."

One of Little Tree's branches began to twitch nervously. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Maybe they ought to pick a different tree!"

"Yes, this is a nice one" the big one said, "but let's hike up a litte further and look around." And they left.

Little Tree couldn't believe it! "What happened?!! They were all ready to take me home and they just left me here!!. They even took my plastic decoration, so now I'm not special at all!!"

She was so sad she started to cry. Sap ran down her trunk. She was miserable!! And then she heard it again.

"Raven, Spider, Crab and Snail, Catfish, Heron, Pond and Whale"

"The wind isn't even blowing and I can hear the Earthsong. Maybe the Great Spirit is trying to tell me something. But what? What is it?"

Rabbit ran up to her! "You didn't go Little Tree! You're still here! I'm glad you're not special!"

"She is special Rabbit!" Grandfather Ponderosa's voice boomed through the forest.

"You needed more decorations!" Jaybird squawked.

"She doesn't need decorations Jaybird, she needs organization!" Squirrel offered. "If you're not organized, you never get anything done, right Grandfather?!"

"Those who are always busy organizing their lives, Squirrel, cannot hear the Earthsong. When you believe that The Great Spirit takes care of you, then you find your own story."

"In all deference, your majes-tree Sir, we need to get organized to survive! Where would I be if I didn't gather nuts for the winter, huh?!"

"A-hem! Do you not see Squirrel that gathering nuts is part of a squirrel's story. What good would it do for a dragonfly to gather nuts? The bears do not get organized before they hibernate for the winter, and everyone gets a cave. And seeds have no one to tell them how many branches to grow, yet they grow to fullness without being organized, because they know their own story."

"I know I'm special Grandfather, but maybe if I wait for the Great Spirit to help me find my story, then I won't have to try so hard to be special."

"No one knows what surprises The Great Spirit has for us, Little Tree! That's the wonder of life!"

"The famileevie! They're coming back!" Rabbit was always the first to hear things.

"I'm outta here!!!" said Squirrel bolting up a tree. "I don't want to end up as no chrismissevie tree!"

"I'm all out of decorations! Sorry!" Jaybird flew to one of Grandfather's highest branches.

As the people came over the ridge, Little Tree heard the small one say, "There she is Dad! The best tree in the whole forest!"

"Okay! If this is the one you want."

They stopped quietly right in front of her.

"I can't believe this! Are they going to make me their chrismisseevie tree after all? And here comes the big one with his axe! At least I think it's an axe. I've never seen one before, but I know an axe has a long handle and a metal piece on one end to do the chopping! This is it! I'm not afraid! I'm not afraid! Goodbye Rabbit! Goodbye Squirrel and Jaybird! Goodbye Grandfather!"

One of the little ones shouted, "C'mon Dad just do it!"

"Okay, here goes!" the big one said.

"Be careful with that shovel dear!" the other big one said. "We don't want to hurt her roots! If we're going to dig up this little tree and replant her in our front yard and decorate her this Christmas, she's gonna need all her roots!"

"I'm being careful! Don't worry, she'll live for a long time and grow to be part of our family."

"What's this?!! That thing is a shovel, not an axe!! They're going to dig me up and take me home with them!! They're not going to chop me down! ALLLL - RIIGHT!!" Little Tree was so excited, she thought she might explode into little toothpicks!

One of the little ones pointed to Grandfather Ponderosa and asked, "Will our little tree get to be as tall as this one?"

"She will if we take good care of her!"

"And when we grow up and have our own kids, we'll come home for visits, and we'll decorate her every year, and she'll be our very own special family Christmas tree forever!"

Little Tree felt the earth around her roots being loosened carefully, then she was gently lifted up as the family of people wrapped her roots in a blanket. She heard her friends off in the woods.

"Goodbye Little Tree! Bye"

"Hey, you're not nuts!! Good luck"

"We'll miss you! You were right! You are special!"

"A-hem! Fare well Little Tree! Have a wonderful story, and remember that we love you too!"

As Little Tree was carried slowly out of the forest, the family sang to her:

"Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree, much pleasure doth thou bring me!  
For ev'ry year the Christmas Tree, brings to us all both joy and glee,  
Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree, much pleasure doth thou bring me!"

Little Tree knew that now she was part of the people's story. And she knew that she would grow tall and strong and old with them. "I will give this famileevie shade in the Summer, and they can decorate me with shiny lights to celebrate their holy days in the Winter!" And she heard the Earthsong in the voice of the wind again.

"Rabbit, Clover, Owl and Bee, Redtail Hawk and Great Salt Sea  
Pine Tree, Jaybird, Wind, and Moose, Bear and Otter, Wolf and Goose"

And she knew that her own story was still unfolding, and that it was part of the Great Story of Mother Earth, for we are all connected to each other!