

Little Pine

Little Pine lived in a big forest with lots of other trees. There were big trees and little trees, pretty trees, and ugly trees. But Little Pine never noticed the other trees because he was very small and could see only himself. He was very proud.

One winter day, Little Pine woke up and stretched his scraggly little limbs as far as they would go, and shouted "I am a great, big pine – the most beautiful pine in the forest!"

Just then, he heard a voice say, "Oh, you are not a that big. You are just a little pine."

Little Pine looked around and looked up... and up... and up!

"Who are *you*?" asked Little Pine.

"I am your Great-uncle Scotch Pine," replied the tree.

"How did you ever get so big?" said Little Pine. "I never saw such a tall tree!"

"I am old," answered the old tree, "very, very old. I am almost two hundred, and I do some very important things."

"Oh, my!" cried Little Pine. "I will *never* get to be that big!"

"Oh, yes, you will," replied his uncle. "You will grow bigger and bigger every day. Someday, you may be even bigger than I am."

Little Pine could not imagine that. Then, Little Pine became curious. "What kinds of things do you do, Great-uncle?"

The old tree laughed, “Oh, I do many things. I give shade to the trees and animals below when it is hot. I protect the new saplings. I hold nests for birds and squirrels, I share the seeds in my pinecones with them.”

Little Pine’s eyes grew round. “Wow! You do a lot of things. I’ll never be able to do all that.”

“Oh, yes, you will, Little Pine”, he said. “You’ll find what you can do best. It just takes time.”

That night, before he went to sleep, Little Pine thought about growing tall and beautiful and helpful like his great-uncle.

The next morning, Little Pine woke up, stretched his tiny limbs to the sky, and cried, “*Today*, I am a big, beautiful, helpful pine!”

Uncle Scotch Pine smiled down, “Not yet, Little Pine. You are still small.”

Little Pine’s shoulders slumped. “Didn’t I grow *any*?” he asked.

“Oh, yes! But you are very small, and growing takes a lot of time.”

Little Pine sighed, “Isn’t there anything I can do to grow bigger?”

“Of course,” said Uncle Scotch Pine. “You can drink the rain and eat the good food the soil gives you, and you must always stand as straight and tall as you can.”

Little Pine remembered what he had been told and tried to do it. In a few days a big rain came.

Little Pine drank all he could hold and ate all the soil gave him. And every day, he stood up straight.

Every day, Little Pine would ask, “Am I big yet?”

And every day, Uncle Scotch Pine would say, “Not yet, Little Pine, but you are growing.”

One spring day, Little Pine saw a maple tree. Some boys were gathering its sweet sap to make syrup. Suddenly, for the first time Little Pine was not so proud of himself anymore. He tried and tried to make sweet sap, but it came out sticky resin. "I can't do anything! I am not a maple tree. I cannot make sweet sap. I'm just a sticky pine." He sighed and grew quiet.

One day in summer, Little Pine saw a magnolia tree covered in pretty, white flowers. Little Pine looked at his own skinny limbs and needles. He thought, "If only I could make pretty flowers, I would be happy." Little Pine tried hard to make flowers grow on his limbs, but they came out pine needles. That made him sad. He tried again, even harder, but it made no difference. "I can't do anything! I am not a magnolia tree. I cannot make beautiful flowers. I am only a pine – a sticky, ugly pine!" he said.

Early in the fall, Little Pine saw an apple tree covered with bright red apples, and he thought how much he would like to be able to do that. Little Pine tried with all his might to make apples, but they came out pinecones. He cried, "I can't do anything! I am not an apple tree. I cannot make apples. I am just an ugly, sticky, useless pine. I can't make flowers, I can't make sap, and I can't make apples. I can't do anything!" Little Pine was so upset, he slumped over, and cried, and cried, and cried. Big drops of resin ran down his bark and splashed on the ground by his roots.

Now, Great-uncle Scotch Pine was a very wise old tree. One day, when the trees were changing colors, he spoke kindly to Little Pine. "You are very quiet these days, Little Pine. You never ask me if you have grown. Why are you so sad?"

"Oh, Great-uncle Scotch Pine," Little Pine began, "I can't do anything. The maple tree can make sweet sap, the magnolia tree can make beautiful flowers, and the apple tree can make shiny red

apples. I tried to make sap, but it came out sticky resin. I tried to make flowers, but they came out pine needles. I tried to make red apples, but they came out pinecones. I can't do *anything!*"

Uncle Scotch Pine was quiet for a moment. "Little Pine," he said, "You are *not* a maple, or a magnolia, or an apple tree. You are a pine tree. You were made for something different. In time, you will find what you can do best." He smiled, "Until then, you must do what you can do right now. You can share the seeds in your pinecones for the little animals to eat. You can give the tired birds a place to rest on your branches. Be kind. Share what you have. As for anything else, you must just wait. Be patient. You will find your talents. I know you can do it."

That day, Little Pine was quiet all day. He was thinking very hard. Just after sunset, he turned to Great-uncle Scotch Pine. "Uncle, have I – have I grown any since spring?"

Great-uncle Scotch Pine smiled, and said, "Yes, Little Pine, you have grown a great deal."

For many days, Little Pine worked hard at growing. He let the birds sit on his branches, and when the squirrels came by, he dropped pinecones so they could eat the seeds. Every day, he stood up straight and tried to be kind. While he was busy helping others and growing, winter came.

One winter day, the snow covered the ground and hushed the world. A gentle breeze began blowing, and a strange and wonderful thing happened. Little Pine heard music! It was soft, and beautiful, and full of magic, like a whisper. But best of all, it was in his branches! He twisted around to see where the music came from, and the music grew louder. When he turned back, it became softer again.

At first, Little Pine was so excited, he could not say anything. Then, he cried, "Oh, Great-uncle Scotch Pine, listen! Do you hear the music? Where does it come from?"

Great-uncle Scotch Pine thought for a minute. “HMMMM... Stretch out your limbs. Does that change the music?”

Little Pine did as his great-uncle said, and the music grew deeper. “Yes, Uncle! It did!”

The old tree nodded, “Good. Now spread your needles. Does the music change?”

Again, Little Pine obeyed, and the music became higher. “Yes, Uncle, it did! Does the wind do that?” he responded.

“No, Little Pine,” said the old tree, “*you* do that. Some pine trees can make music, and it seems you are one of them. A maple tree cannot make music, and neither can a magnolia, or an apple tree. Only a pine tree can make music. I think that may be your gift, the thing you were *made* to do. That is why you must always stand tall and straight -- so you can sing!”

Little Pine did not know he could be so happy. He had found something special he could do. He thought, “At last, I *can* do something!”

That night, when all the trees were asleep, Little Pine stayed up late, and sang, and sang, and sang.