

Young Beech: Messenger of the Forest

EVERYONE KNOWS that a forest is a community of many different living beings. Everyone in this community belongs and has a role to play. The more species the more biodiversity, the more biodiversity the more resilient and strong the forest is and everyone else in it.

One of the reasons that the forest can be such a peaceful place is because everyone there has known since ancient times that they each have a gift to bring to the world and they are confident that each gift is important. They spend their lives offering these gifts and are happy to see what joy and comfort they bring. White Pine, Bayberry, Sweet Fern, Shadbush, Maple, Oak, and Huckleberry went about their days growing and giving, as happy as can be. But one young tree in the forest didn't know what her gift was. It was Young Beech Tree.

While White Pine knew that she offered medicine in her needles that were so full of vitamin C that creatures came from far and wide to seek her out, especially during the winter months, Young Beech wondered, what can I offer the world?

While Bayberry knew that her cloudy pungent berries were highly prized for their wax and scent in candles and helped light up the darkness when the sun went down, Young Beech wondered, what is my gift to the world?

While Sweet Fern swayed on the fringes of the forest providing small tasty nutlets to hikers and squirrels, and tinging the breeze with a sweet musty aroma in the hot sun of summer, Young Beech wondered, was I born with anything special?

While Shadbush bloomed white on a bare spring landscape and told the coming of the shad fish in the streams and later on, fed the cedar waxwings purple fruit, Young Beech still wondered, what is my gift to the world?

While Maple Tree dripped its sweet sap into buckets and onto porcupine tongues, Young Beech wondered, what do I have that could cheer life after a long cold winter?

While Oak Tree dropped thousands of acorns to be ground into flour and eaten by bears and turkeys to fatten up for the winter, Young Beech wondered, do I have anything that the world needs?

Even the Huckleberry Bush made plump juicy berries to eat with whip cream or as a trailside nibble, and Young Beech continued to wonder, will there come a time when I know what my gift is to the world?

One day, Young Beech asked her friend Sweet Fern, “what do beech trees do for the forest? Why do we even live here?”

“You make beautiful nuts that are a staple food for many wild animals and nut caps that children love to use for fairy hats. And you are super cool because you don’t lose your leaves in the fall like all of the other deciduous trees.”

“My older siblings and parents and grandparents make nuts, ” said Young Beech “but I am not yet old enough. And still wearing dried up old leaves late into the year makes me weird, not cool. Is there nothing that young trees have to offer the forest?” Sweet Fern did not know.

Winter came and went like any other year and finally spring arrived in a warm rain falling from the brightening sky. It rained and it rained for two weeks until the ground was mushy and loose. And then it started to happen like it did every year. One tree fell, then another and another. As rain turned the compacted forest floor to mud and the wind pulled at the branches of the tallest trees, it was hard for the trunks to stay upright and many fell to the ground with a loud, whoosh! No one in the forest knew what to do about this tragedy that happened every spring. At a time of year when the forest should have been looking forward to a fresh season and new growth, it had a little nagging of dread. The forest didn’t know how to protect itself from the power of the rain and the wind.

One day, Grandmother Pine, the tallest tree in the forest with branches that looked out over the rest of the forest called everyone together. “We need to talk,” She said, “there is something out of balance in our forest. Every spring we lose so many lives to the rain and the winds. I have noticed that most of you here in the forest are happy and busy at work. But one of you is not. We must all share our gifts in order for the forest to be healthy and strong.”

That night as the sunset and the woodcock came out to dance and *peent, peent* in the field at the forest’s edge Young Beech sulked and fretted. I know Grandmother Pine was talking about me, but the problem is I don’t know what my gift is. How can I share if I don’t know how? All I know is that I stand out as the weird tree since we don’t shed our leaves in the fall. By spring I look like a ghost. How is this special?

As Young Beech was mulling this over in her mind, a strong night wind came rushing along and streamed through Young Beech’s branches, catching on last year’s golden leaves still clinging fast. Her leaves instinctively rattled and sang, almost whirring like a magical pinwheel.

The Huckleberry Bushes had already gone to bed and when they heard the rustling of Young Beeches leaves they woke up annoyed at all the noise. But Maple Tree said, “thank you Young Beech, it is good for me to know when the wind is coming so that I can anchor my roots in the ground and hold my trunk strong so that I don’t fall over. Oak had overheard this conversation and nodded in agreement. “We don’t mind the noise if it wakes us up to prepare for the wind

coming!” Young Beech smiled at this and went to sleep much happier than she had been in days, forgetting all about what Grandmother Pine had said.

The next morning, Grandmother Pine looked out over the forest expecting to see many more trees fallen after a windy night. But to her surprise all of the trees were still standing! “How did this happen? She asked Shadbush. Oak told me to listen for young Beeches leaves rattling and to anchor my roots if I heard them. “That’s it!” said Grandmother Pine. “Young Beech is a messenger of the forest and it was this gift of hers that we have been missing since the beginning.”

And from then on, Young Beech gave her gift to the forest every time the wind came by, alerting the other trees to sink their roots in deep and hold on tight to weather the gusts and the storms, as they heard the song in her dried golden leaves. And all of Young Beeche’s ancestors follow in her example and know exactly what their gift is to the forest from the time they are very young indeed.

THE END

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