

The Little Flute

Once upon a time in a village near the edge of the forest lived an old man who was a wood carver. He was a widower and had no children so he lived alone. He carved all sorts of wonderful things. His house was filled with wood carvings of birds, animals, flowers, decorative furniture, and many other things, but he was very lonely.

One day he looked around at all the beautiful things in his house and said to himself, "All these things I have made are beautiful, but what can I do with them? They do not interact with me nor I with them. They just sit there and I look at them. They are little comfort or consolation to me. I will carve a wonderful flute that I may play beautiful music for my enjoyment. In the evenings as I sit by my fire, the melodies will soothe my soul and I will be lonely no more."

So the very next day he set to work to make his flute. He was very particular about the piece of wood he chose but finally, he found just the right one. First, he roughly shaped the outside. Then he very carefully drilled the hole down the middle and the holes on the side. Next, he fashioned a mouthpiece and finally, he meticulously carved the outside putting ridges and grooves as it pleased him. He sanded it very smooth and applied the finish.

It took him several days to accomplish all of this and it was late in an evening when he finally finished. He set it on his workbench and left the window open for ventilation so the finish would dry. He went to bed with anticipation and excitement for the morning when he could play his flute for the first time.

But very early the next morning, before the old man had risen from his sleep, a young lad, known for mischief in the village, happened to walk by the shop and noticed the open window. He was not above snooping so curiosity got the better of him and he peeked in to see what he could see. Of course, his eyes immediately rested on the little flute, so small and delicate, yet so intricately carved. It was irresistible to him. He looked around quickly to make sure no one was watching and quickly grabbed the flute, stuffing it in his pocket. He had no idea what it was or what it was good for (never having seen a flute before) but he did think it was a most interesting looking stick. The lad continued on his way which took him down by the creek. He sat down on a rock and bent over to look at his reflection in the water and as he did so, "plunk," out of his pocket fell the little flute and into the creek where it immediately started to float downstream. The lad was so absorbed in his reflection that he never even noticed.

But just around the bend downstream were two younger boys, brothers, who were fishing in the early summer morning. So far, they had not caught anything worth keeping and were feeling a little discouraged. But as the little flute came around the bend, the current carried it over to a small eddy right in front of the rock on which the younger boy was sitting. He thought it was just a stick at first and reached over to pick it up intending to see how far he could throw it across the creek.

His brother caught a glimpse of it and asked, "What is that? Let me see it."

"Oh, I don't know, just an old stick," replied the younger one.

"No, it's not just a stick," said his brother as they both bent over to look at it. "Look, it's got holes on one side and a hole down the middle and grooves around the outside. Someone must have made it for something. I wonder what it is, where it came from, and what it's good for."

"Those are good questions," the little flute thought to himself. He'd like to know, too. He had only woken up this morning and had a dim memory of being on a bench somewhere, then in a dark place, a wet place, and now here these boys were holding him. He thought maybe he could remember being made by someone, but his memory was so vague, he had no idea what he was made for if, indeed, he was made.

The older boy suggested, "Let's take it home and see if Dad knows what it is and where it came from."

"Yeah, good idea," said the other.

So the boys ran home to find their dad, who was in the barnyard fixing the pig trough.

"Dad, Dad, look at this stick. Isn't it something? Look how pretty and smooth it is and also how funny. See all these little holes. Dad, do you know what it is, where it came from, and what its purpose is?"

Their dad set down his hammer and stood up. He took the stick from their hands and turned it over and over inspecting it carefully. "Hmm, hmm," was all he said.

"What is it, Dad?" the boys asked excitedly.

"Well, boys, I'm not really sure. I've never seen anything exactly like this before. Where did you say you found it?"

"In the creek," the boys replied.

"In the creek, huh. Well, I suppose it could have fallen off a tree during a storm and as it laid in the grass, termites could have burrowed these holes and then the rains could have washed it into the creek where the water made it smooth and the rocks carved these grooves on the outside. That's probably where it came from. It just sort of happened. As to what it's good for, I don't know. I guess whatever you can figure out to do with it is what it's good for. Why don't you ask your mother? Maybe she can come up with some suggestions."

The little flute was listening to this explanation of his origin. It didn't quite seem to fit his rather fuzzy memory, but it did sound so reasonable. He decided he would just accept it as the truth. And as to what he was good for - well, it sounded like there were a lot of possibilities and he was excited to see which ones he would enjoy the most.

The boys ran with the stick to their mother, "Mom, Mom, see this cool stick we found? We wonder what it could be used for. Do you have any ideas?"

Their mother took the little flute in her hands and looked it over. "Well, I'm not sure, but with all these holes, maybe you could run water through this end and use it to water several plants at once as the water comes out the holes. Why don't you let me try it?"

The boys said, "Ok," and ran off to put their fishing gear away.

Later that afternoon their mom decided she would water some of her plants on the back porch. She held the stick up to the watering can and sure enough water came out the side holes. She could water several plants at once. At first, she said, "This is great," but after awhile, she got tired of having to hold the watering can with one hand and the stick with the other. She couldn't put much water in the can because it was too heavy for one hand, so she kept having to refill it and then it leaked so badly she was getting as much water on herself as on the plants.

The little flute at first was happy to have found his purpose, but he did not enjoy being wet. His sojourn in the creek had been quite enough for him. It felt strange and somehow not right having all his holes filled with water. He felt he would drown.

It was becoming a most unpleasant experience so he was very glad when he heard the boys' mom say, "I don't think this is the best use for this stick. It's more bother than it's worth to use it."

So that evening the boys' mom gave them their stick back. "Sorry, boys, but that stick just doesn't work very well to water plants. You'll have to find some other use for it."

They didn't know what else to do with it, so there it sat on their top shelf for days and days, gathering dust and being completely ignored.

The little flute was lonely and dejected. "I guess I'm just not good for anything. I may as well roll into the fire and get burned up. That's all most sticks are good for anyway. Nobody wants me or cares about me."

Then one day, the boys were visiting their grandmother in the village who was potting plants. She had one tall one that she just couldn't get to stand up straight. It kept falling over to one side.

"You know boys," she said to her grandchildren, "what I need is a nice stick to help prop this plant up until its roots get strong enough to support it. Do you think you could run outside and find me

a stick?"

The boys remembered their unusual stick at home and said, "We'll do better than that. We've got a stick at home that's just perfect. It's nice and smooth and even has hole in it for decorations. We'll be right back."

So they ran home and returned with their stick. "Here, Grandma. We found this and it's so unusual we just knew it had to be useful for something. You can have it for your plant."

"Oh, thank you, boys," Grandma said as she took it in her hands examining it. "Yes, this is a most unusual and peculiar stick. I've never seen anything quite like it. It will look very decorative with my plant."

The boys smiled at each other, glad to be helping their grandmother.

The little flute was excited again. Maybe this is what I can do, be a plant support.

Grandma took the stick and shoved one end into the dirt. Dirt came up and filled the middle of the stick. He thought he was being suffocated. He tried to cough and spit it out, but he couldn't. "This is even worse than water," he said to himself.

Next, Grandma tied string around the stick and the plant, then put them on the ledge by the sink; there they sat, for weeks.

"Here I am again," thought the little flute, "being ignored, but this time filled with dirt and all bound up. This is even more unpleasant. Oh, what am I really good for? Is this all? I guess I'll just have to accept this as my fate, my destiny, and try to stand tall and try to do a good job holding up this stupid plant who never even shows me any appreciation."

Several weeks later while doing her dishes, Grandma looked up at the plant in the window and remarked, "My, how sturdy you've gotten in the last few weeks. I do believe you could stand on your own now. You don't need that old stick anymore." So she untied the plant and pulled the stick out. Putting the plant back in the window, she started to throw the stick in the trash, but a thought stopped her. "This is a pretty unusual stick and it may come in handy for something else some day," so she decided to keep it.

That morning she had to go to the grocery store for some milk and eggs. As she entered the little store, she noticed the grocer fiddling with a window. "What's the matter?" she asked him.

"Oh, I can't seem to get this window to stay open and I know it's going to be a hot day and I'll need it open. I need a stick or something to prop it up," he replied.

"I know just the thing," said Grandma remembering her stick at home. "I'll be right back," she said as she hurriedly left the store.

Soon she returned and handed the stick to the grocer asking, "Will this help?"

"Why yes," he replied, "it's perfect. Just what I need. It's sort of fancy, too. It's made for this job."

The flute brightened, "Made for the job." His purpose in life at last. He was so happy.

The grocer pushed up the window and jammed the stick under it and let the window come down on it with a thud.

"Ouch," cried the little flute, but of course, no one could hear him. "That window is heavy and it hurts." But he had no choice and had to stay there; he could not help himself. Soon flies come by and started crawling in and out of his holes and leaving fly specks. "Oh, no" the little flute moaned. "Each situation is worse than the one before. I'm still ignored. I'm still filled with dirt, I ache so, the weight is so heavy. Now there are flies and the hot afternoon sun is beating down on me. If I ever get a chance, I will jump into the fire. At least then my suffering will be over and I'll make some heat for somebody and so be good for something at last."

And there the little flute sat in the window day after hot day, holding the window up.

But while the little flute was going through all his trials and troubles someone else was also hurting, the wood carver who had made the little flute. He had put so much time and effort into making it. At first, he thought maybe it had fallen off the bench, but he looked all over in his shop and still

couldn't find it. Maybe it had fallen outside, but none of his neighbors or other people in the village had seen it or even had any idea what he was talking about. "Stick with holes? - How peculiar!" was their reaction.

He had just about given up when he paid a visit to the grocery store for some much needed items. He entered the store and started to tell the grocer what he needed when some children playing outside raised their voices and attracted his attention. He looked out the window to see them and as he did, something in the corner of the window caught his eye. At first glance, it looked like just a stick. But there was something very familiar about it as well.

He went closer to have a better look. He had only taken a step or two closer when he recognized it and exclaimed, "My flute, my lost little flute!" He pushed up the window, pulled out the flute and clutched it to his chest.

The grocer came over to see what was causing the excitement. "What's so special about that stick?"

The old wood carver held his precious flute out gently, "This, my friend, is my creation. I have spent many hours making it to be very special. See these holes and these grooves? I drilled the holes and carved the grooves. I sanded and smoothed the outside and applied many layers of finish."

"Well, if you made it, of what use is it other than to hold up a window (which it does quite nicely I may add)?" questioned the grocer.

The little flute had been listening and he was more excited than ever now. Yes, he did remember the old wood carver. It felt so good to be held safely in his hands again. He knew he was a flute! - whatever that was, so there must be a purpose for him. He was made, made for something.

The old wood carver replied to the grocer's question. "I will show you what can be done with this flute." He turned it over and over to inspect it. "But before I can do that I'm going to have to clean it up and get all the dirt out of these holes. Do you have some water and rags and some pipe cleaners?"

The old man dipped the flute in the water and then poured water through it. He scrubbed out the dirt on the inside and scrubbed off the dust and fly specks on the outside. He reworked the surface and polished and polished. It was uncomfortable to the little flute at first and the water made him afraid, but when it was almost finished, he started to feel much better. It felt so good to be clean and dry again.

When he was finished, the old wood carver picked up the little flute and announced, "Now this is what a flute is made for." He put it to his lips and blew, playing such a lively, happy tune that the grocer couldn't help but smile. People in the street turned to listen to the sound of this joyful music.

The old wood carver was well content with his little flute and the little flute was overjoyed. He had found his purpose and it was so much higher and more exciting and enjoyable than he ever could have imagined. Not only did it not hurt, it felt so right and natural. It felt wonderful to have his creator's breath blowing through him. And the music that came out - he couldn't believe it came from him. He could never do that by himself.

And so the little flute is home at last, secure in his creator's hands. The old wood carver is no longer lonely. Wherever he goes his little flute goes with him tucked in his top shirt pocket. Every day as they walk through the village, the cheery note of the flute can be heard from time to time brightening many people's lives. Every evening as the old wood carver sits by the fire, he has his flute for company. He takes it out and plays to cheer himself. The little flute also enjoys these times and as he looks at the fire knows, "If my creator hadn't found me, I would have ended up in there."

You and I are the little flute.