

WHY THE EVERGREEN TREES KEEP THEIR LEAVES IN WINTER

ADAPTED FROM FLORENCE HOLBROOK'S A BOOK OF NATURE MYTHS

One day, a long, long time ago, it was very cold; winter was coming. And all the birds flew away to the warm south, to wait for the spring. But one little bird had a broken wing and could not fly. He did not know what to do. He looked all round, to see if there was any place where he could keep warm. And he saw the trees of the great forest.

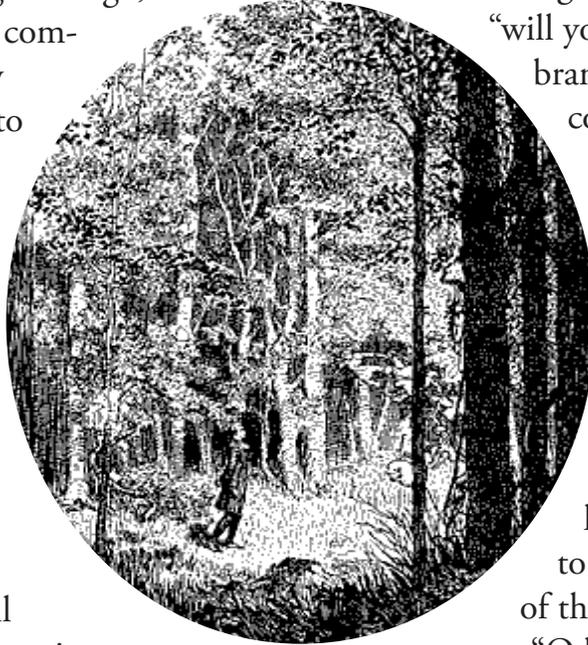
"Perhaps the trees will keep me warm through the winter," he said.

So he went to the edge of the forest, hopping and fluttering with his broken wing. The first tree he came to was a slim silver birch.

"Beautiful birch-tree," he said, "will you let me live in your warm branches until the springtime comes?"

"Dear me!" said the birch-tree, "what a thing to ask! I have to take care of my own leaves through the winter; that is enough for me. Go away."

The little bird hopped and fluttered with his broken wing until he came to the next tree. It was a great, big oak-tree.



"O big oak-tree," said the little bird, "will you let me live in your warm branches until the springtime comes?"

"Dear me," said the oak-tree, "what a thing to ask! If you stay in my branches all winter you will be eating my acorns. Go away."

So the little bird hopped and fluttered with his broken wing till he came to the willow-tree by the edge of the brook.

"O beautiful willow-tree," said the little bird, "will you let me live in your warm branches until the springtime comes?"

"No, indeed," said the willow-tree; "I never speak to strangers. Go away."

The poor little bird did not know where to go; but he hopped and fluttered along with his broken wing. Presently the spruce-tree saw him, and said, "Where are you going, little bird?"

"I do not know," said the bird; "the trees will not let me live with them, and my wing is broken so that I cannot fly."

"You may live on one of my branches," said the spruce; "here is the warmest one of all."

"But may I stay all winter?"

“Yes,” said the spruce; “I shall like to have you.”

The pine-tree stood beside the spruce, and when he saw the little bird hopping and fluttering with his broken wing, he said, “My branches are not very warm, but I can keep the wind off because I am big and strong.”

So the little bird fluttered up into the warm branch of the spruce, and the pine-tree kept the wind off his house; then the juniper-tree saw what was going on, and said that she would give the little bird his dinner all the winter, from her branches. Juniper berries are very good for little birds.

The little bird was very comfortable in his warm nest sheltered from the wind, with juniper berries to eat.

The trees at the edge of the forest remarked upon it to each other:

“I wouldn’t take care of a strange bird,” said the birch.

“I wouldn’t risk my acorns,” said the oak.

“I would not speak to strangers,” said the willow. And the three trees stood up very tall and proud.

That night the North Wind came to the woods to play. He puffed at the leaves with his icy breath, and every leaf he touched fell to the ground. He wanted to touch every leaf in the forest, for he loved to see the trees bare.

“May I touch every leaf?” he said to his father, the Frost King.

“No,” said the Frost King, “the trees which were kind to the bird with the broken wing may keep their leaves.”

So North Wind had to leave them alone, and the spruce, the pine, and the juniper-tree kept their leaves through all the winter. And they have done so ever since.