

An Easter Tale from Canada

Away up north King Winter reigned in a palace of ice and snow. His beard was of icicles and his hair sprinkled with snow. In his head he wore a crown of frozen diamonds. Whatever he touched with his long frosty fingers turned into ice. Whenever he breathed, great gusts of cold winds blew over the earth, and everyone shivered. The ground froze hard and everything seemed lifeless.

One day King Winter felt sleepy, for the sun had ventured timidly, to come out and shine. He yawned and slowly started to melt. “Spring must be coming. I think I hear her footsteps,” he murmured drowsily. He got smaller and smaller till finally there was nothing left of him at all, except a pool of water.

Sure enough Spring had come! She was a beautiful young maiden with soft yellow hair and large violet eyes. Wherever she stepped flowers sprang up amidst grass, and a lovely fragrance filled the air. Soon the whole earth was covered with a glorious carpet of crocuses, daffodils, hyacinths, tulips and other flowers. Rivers and streams that had been locked by the frost for so long now started to run and sing. Yes, the whole world was full of joy and hope, and getting ready for Easter.

Down in the deep woods the animals were holding a meeting to decide a very important matter: who was to carry the brown braided basket of Easter eggs to the little children? The little speckled hen had grown tired and said someone else should have a turn. But who? Yes—who? The animals looked at each other and then up spoke the big shaggy bear. “I’ll carry the basket since I’ve just had such a long rest.”

“Oh no you won’t!” said the others. “You are too big and rough and would frighten the children. You would never do.” So the animals looked at each other again.

“I’ll carry the basket,” said the wily weasel.

“Oh no!” shouted the others. “We know how well you like eggs. There would be none left!” So they looked at each other again. Then someone noticed a shy little white rabbit standing behind a toadstool. “How about the rabbit? He is just the right size, and the children love him because he is so gentle.” So the rabbit consented to carry the basket of eggs to the children.

But the Earth was not quite ready for Easter.

Down in a beautiful garden the flowers were holding a meeting to decide which one of them was to be the Easter flower. Up spoke a red rose. “Let me be the Easter flower.”

“No,” said the rest. “You are queen of the flowers the whole year ‘round. Give someone else a chance.”

“How about the violet?” said another voice, seeing a dear wee purple flower hiding its head in the grass. But no, the violet was too shy and could not be coaxed.

Suddenly someone noticed a beautiful white lily standing straight and tall and said, “Why not the lily? She is as pure as the heart of the dear Lord who died. Let her be the Easter flower.” So the lily was chosen and consented.

But the world of Nature was not yet ready for Easter. The birds were having a meeting to decide which one of them was to sing a message on Easter morning.

“Caw, caw,” said the crow. “I am an early bird and have a strong voice. I am not afraid to sing out loud.”

“Your voice may be strong, but it is ugly, too,” said the others. “How dare you offer yourself!”

So the crow flew off in a huff.

Then up spoke a saucy sparrow. “How about me? ‘Tis true my voice is not the best, but you must admit no one is afraid of me, least of all the children.” But everyone just laughed at him.

“How about the robin then?” said another bird. “He has a fine voice and how splendid he would look sitting in the tree! His breast is red, like the blood of the Saviour who died on the cross. Let us choose him.” So the cheery robin accepted the honour, but said that the other birds must help choose the tree upon which he was to sit when he sang his message on Easter morning.

So all the birds flew over to a great grove nearby and told their problem to the trees. “Would you like to sit on my glossy green needles?” asked a tall pine tree of the robin. But the robin answered that the branches were too prickly and wouldn’t do.

Then up spoke a very old oak tree. “Since I am the oldest tree here, may I not claim the honour?” But before the robin could answer someone replied, “The cross on which our dear Lord suffered was made of oak. I don’t think you would do.” So the oak remained silent.

All at once the robin a willow tree bending over a little stream. “May I sit on your branches?” he asked. “’Tis said that when the Saviour was carrying his cross to Calvary hill the willow tree wept tears of sorrow to see Christ suffer. I should like to sing my message from you branches.”

So the weeping willow consented.

The next morning when the children woke up there were baskets of eggs for all, because the little white rabbit had not forgotten them. When they went to church, sure enough, there sat a red-breasted robin in the willow tree singing his message of good cheer and hope. And when the doors of the church were opened the children saw beautiful white lilies standing straight and

tall before the altar and heard singing—“Christ the Lord is risen today. Hallelujah!”—and the whole world of Nature sang because everyone had helped to make it a happy Easter.