

The Little Pumpkin

by Emma Florence Bush *from The Topaz Story Book*

Once there was a little pumpkin that grew on a vine in a field. All day long the sun shone on him, and the wind blew gently around him. Sometimes the welcome rain fell softly upon him, and as the vine sent her roots deep down into the earth and drew the good sustenance from it, and it flowed through her veins, the little pumpkin drank greedily of the good juice, and grew bigger and bigger, and rounder and rounder, and firmer and firmer.

By and by he grew so big he understood all that the growing things around him were saying, and he listened eagerly.

"I came from the seed of a Jack-o'-lantern," said this vine to a neighbor, "therefore I must grow all Jack-o'-lanterns."

"So did I," said a neighbor, "but no Jack-o'-lanterns for me. It is too hard a life. I am going to grow just plain pumpkins."

When the little pumpkin heard he was supposed to be a Jack-o'-lantern, he grew very worried, for he could not see that he was in any way different from any ordinary pumpkin, and if Mother Vine expected him to be a Jack-o'-lantern, he did not want to disappoint her.

At last he grew so unhappy over it that the dancing little sunbeams noticed it. "What is the matter, little pumpkin?" they cried. "Why do you not hold up your head and look around as you used to do?"

"Because," answered the little pumpkin, sadly, "I have to be a Jack-o'-lantern, and I don't know how. All I know about is how to be a little yellow pumpkin."

Then the merry little breezes laughed and laughed until they shook the vine so that all the pumpkins had to tighten their hold not to be shaken off. "Oh, little pumpkin!" they cried, "why worry about what you will have to do later? Just try with all your might to be a little yellow pumpkin, and believe that if you do the best you can, everything will be all right. We know a secret, a beautiful secret, and some day we will tell it to you."

"Oh, tell me now!" cried the little pumpkin, but the sunbeams and breezes laughed together, and chuckled, "Oh no, oh no, oh no! Just grow and grow and grow, And some day you will know."

The little pumpkin felt comforted. "After all," he thought, "perhaps if I cannot be a Jack-o'-lantern I can be a good pumpkin, and I am so far down on the vine perhaps Mother Vine won't notice me." He looked around, and saw that all his brothers and sisters were only little pumpkins, too.

"Oh, dear," he cried, "are we going to disappoint Mother Vine? Aren't any of us going to be Jack-o'-lanterns?" Then all his little brothers and sisters laughed, and said, "What do we care about being Jack-o'-lanterns? All we care about is to eat the good juice, and grow and grow."

At last came the cold weather, and all the little pumpkins were now big ones, and a beautiful golden yellow. The biggest and yellowest of all was the little pumpkin who had tried so hard all summer to grow into a Jack-o'-lantern. He could not believe Mother Vine did not see him now, for he had grown so big that every one who saw him exclaimed about him, and Mother Vine did not seem at all disappointed, she just kept at work carrying the good food that kept her pumpkin children well fed.

At last one frosty morning, a crowd of children came to the field. "The pumpkins are ready," they cried. "The pumpkins are ready; and we are going to find the biggest and yellowest and nicest to make a Jack-o'-lantern for the Thanksgiving party. All the grandmothers and grandfathers and aunts and uncles will see it, and we are going to eat the pies made from it."

They looked here and there, all over the field, and pushed aside the vines to see better. All at once they saw the little pumpkin. "Oh!" they cried, "What a perfect Jack-o'-lantern! So big and firm and round and yellow! This shall be the Jack-o'-lantern for our Thanksgiving party, and it is so large there will be pie enough for every one."

Then they picked the pumpkin and carried him to the barn. Father cut a hole in the top around the stem, lifted it off carefully and scooped out the inside, and the children carried it to mother in the kitchen. Then father made eyes and a nose and mouth, and fitted a big candle inside. "Oh, see the beautiful Jack-o'-lantern!" they cried.

The little pumpkin waited in the barn. "At last I am a Jack-o'-lantern," he said. After a time it grew dark, and father came and carried him into the house, and lighted the candle, and put him right in the middle of the table, and all the grandmothers and grandfathers, and aunts and uncles, cried, "Oh, what a beautiful, big, round, yellow Jack-o'-lantern!"

Then the little pumpkin was happy, for he knew Mother Vine would have been proud of him, and he shone—shone—SHONE, until the candle was all burned out.

Questions

1. What do you think *sustenance* means here: "the vine sent her roots deep down into the earth and drew the good sustenance from it, and it flowed through her veins, the little pumpkin drank greedily of the good juice"?
2. What did the Mother Vine want her pumpkins to be?
3. Who became a Jack-o'-lantern for the Thanksgiving table?
4. What lesson do you think the little pumpkin learned?