Nora and the Heart Spruce



Grandma Inga

This book belongs to

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Welcome to this sample book! It has been made just as your own will be, using the photos and choices shown alongside, and it shows what a story from Saga to you can look like. Turn the pages, read, and imagine your child as the hero of their very own tale.

It smelled of wet leaves and a cold morning as Nora fastened her little backpack. Inside were her sketchpad, three colouring pencils and an apple with a dent that looked like a little mouth. Granny Inga held a woven basket in her hand. “Today we’re looking for chanterelles for my mushroom pie,” she said. “If the forest is in the mood.”

Nora squinted at the trees by the road. “But you have your secret mushroom spot.” Granny Inga smiled until her cheeks went round. “I’ve been going there since I was little.” Nora pulled her zip right up to her chin. “Then we’ll take one thing at a time,” she said. “First, we find the forest.”





The forest began behind an old stone at the roadside. That was where the narrow path was meant to lead in, Granny Inga said. But little birch trees stood right in the middle of it, and ferns had laid their green feathers across the ground.

Granny Inga took a few steps to the left, then a few to the right. She looked at a mossy stump and wrinkled her nose. “No. It didn’t look like this when I was six.” Nora looked at the basket. It was empty, empty, empty. “Maybe the path has moved?” she asked. Granny Inga gave a little laugh, but not very much of one. “Paths rarely move. They can disappear.” Nora looked in between the trees. In there, the moss lay like a green cushion.

Nora didn’t want to go home with an empty basket and a pie dish waiting. She pointed at the moss between the pines. “You said you go over the moss first. I remember.”

“I suppose I did,” said Granny Inga. Nora put one boot onto a clear patch, then the other. She walked around tiny plants that had just poked up from the earth. “One thing at a time,” she said. “First the moss.” Granny Inga stayed right behind her, close enough to help if a stone was slippery. “You can be the path finder,” she said. Nora lifted her chin. It sounded like a job with very important pockets.





After the moss, an anthill rose up beside a pine root, brown and round as a prickly cushion. Ants scurried up and down, up and down, carrying pine needles and teeny-tiny things in their mouths. Nora bent closer, but kept her hands behind her back.

“Past the anthill,” she said. “That was the next thing!” Granny Inga nodded. “You listened to my story better than I did.” Nora took a winding way around the mound. “They’re busy enough already.” On the other side, there came a faint gurgling sound, almost as if somebody were whispering into a watering can. Nora stopped so suddenly that Granny Inga’s basket swung. “Can you hear that?”

The stream sparkled between stones darkened by the water. In a still pool, yellow leaves spun round and round and round. Granny Inga pointed at an old branch over the water. “That used to be my bridge.”

Nora looked at the slippery branch, then at Granny Inga. “We don’t need a bridge. We’re going along the stream, not across it.” She followed the bank and stepped over a root. Granny Inga came after her, so close that their boots almost touched. “One thing at a time,” said Nora. “Now the stream.” But where the water curved behind a thicket, the hill rose up in front of them. It looked much bigger close up.





“Up the hill with the view,” said Nora. Granny Inga had told her about it once, when she was drawing little mushrooms on Nora’s napkin at the kitchen table. Nora found a wide, dry rock. She planted her boot firmly, grabbed a rough root and climbed.

“Slowly,” said Granny Inga, right behind her. Nora wanted to hurry, but she took a breath and moved one hand at a time. At the top, she brushed pine needles from her knee. “One thing at a time,” she murmured. There wasn’t a single chanterelle there. Only rock, heather and a huge sky. The basket still hung empty at Granny Inga’s side.

From the hill, Nora saw the stream gleaming like a crooked ribbon between the trees. The birches were yellow, the spruces nearly black. Somewhere down there was Granny Inga's spot, though it was hiding very well.

"Which spruce was it?" asked Nora. Granny Inga put a hand over her eyes and searched. "A big spruce. But a forest has quite a lot of spruces." Nora crouched down and drew in the gravel: an anthill, a stream, a hill. She made a spruce with lots of quick strokes, but her finger stopped halfway up the trunk. "Wait," she said. "You told me something else about that spruce."



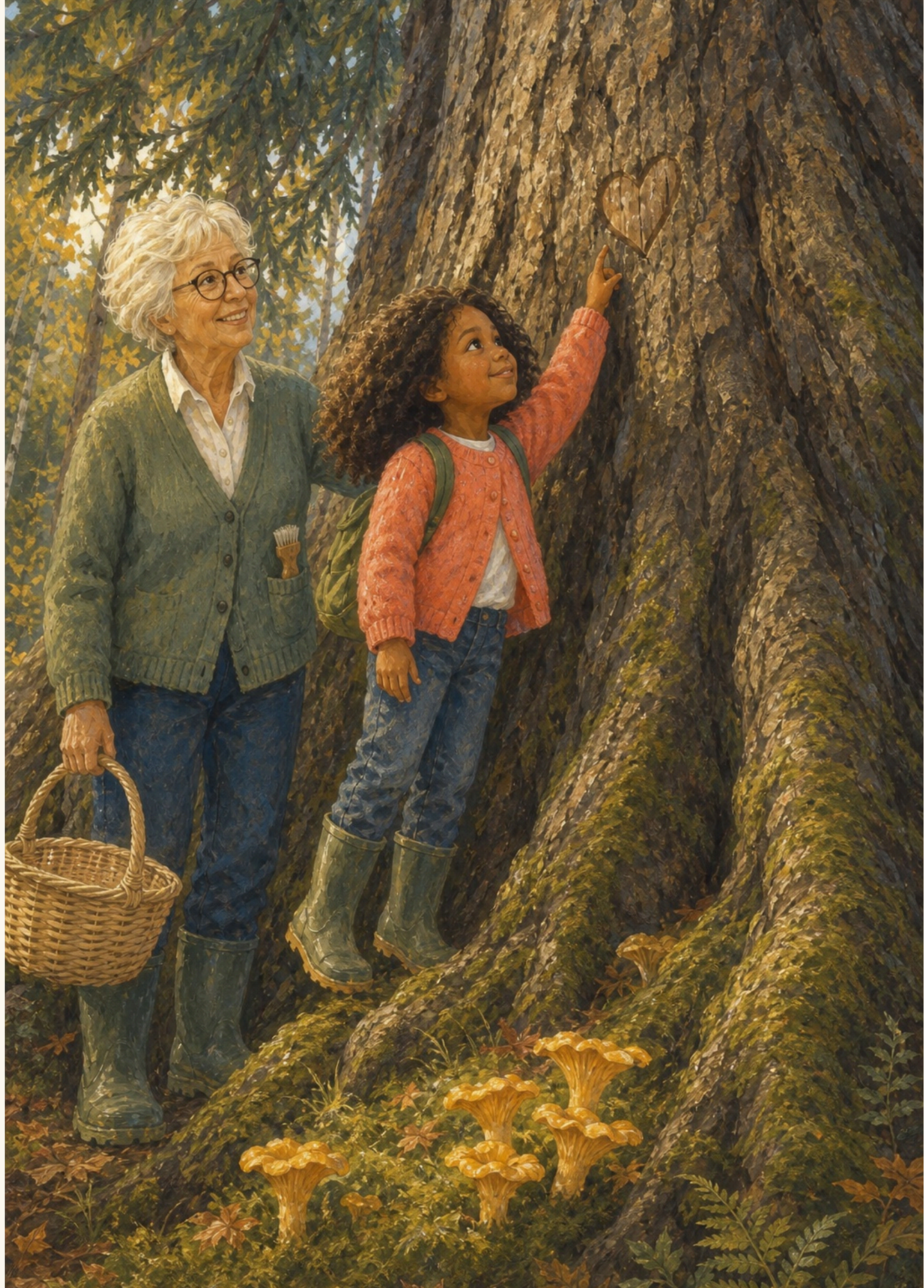


Granny Inga looked at Nora's drawing in the gravel. "I told you about..." She squeezed her eyes shut. Nora drew a heart in the middle of the spruce trunk.

"The heart!" she said. "There's a heart carved into the big spruce." Granny Inga put her hand to her forehead. "That's right. My big brother carved it when he was little, and I thought it was very lovely." Nora pointed towards a spruce that stood tall with a wide, dark crown. "That one is the biggest." Granny Inga squinted down at the trees. "It could be that one." Nora stood up and dusted off her hands. "Then we'll have a look. One thing at a time."

Below the hill, the forest grew darker and quieter. Nora went first, but waited for Granny Inga at roots and stones. The big spruce stood there, its roots like thick fingers across the ground.

Nora walked once around the trunk. At first she saw only cracked bark and a lump of old resin. Then she saw two curved lines and a little point. “The heart!” she cried. Granny Inga came close and held her fingertip beside the mark without touching the bark. “There it is.” Nora looked down between the roots. Something shone yellow in the moss, like little sun hats beneath the spruce.





Around the spruce roots, chanterelles grew in little yellow groups. Nora found one, then three, then so many that she had to count again. Granny Inga took out her little mushroom brush. “We only pick the ones we both recognise,” she said, and Nora showed her every mushroom before it was allowed into the basket.

“The teeny-tiny ones can stay,” said Nora, pointing to a few that had barely opened their caps. She chose big, lovely chanterelles, and Granny Inga brushed away pine needles and soil. One thing at a time: look, ask, pick, brush. Soon there was a little golden heap in the basket. “Is that enough for the pie?” asked Nora.

Granny Inga leaned over the basket and smiled. “For a very tasty pie.” On the way home, the anthill was still beside the pine, and the ants were still hurrying. The moss sprang beneath their boots. The stream gurgled, and the leaves spun round and round and round.

Nora counted the clues on her fingers. “The moss. The anthill. The stream. The hill. The heart spruce.” Granny Inga glanced at her. “And what will we do next year, when the ferns try to hide the way again?” Nora pressed her lips together, as if it were a very difficult question. Then she patted her backpack, where her sketchpad lay. “We’ll draw it, of course.” At home, flour, eggs and the pie dish were waiting.





At home, Granny Inga set out flour, butter, eggs, cheese and a round pie dish. Nora washed her hands for so long that the water turned cold. Then she pressed the pastry into the dish with both thumbs. At first, the edge was thin on one side and very thick on the other.

“It looks like a hill,” said Nora. “A very hungry hill,” said Granny Inga. Together, they evened out the edge. Nora sprinkled the chanterelles over the base while Granny Inga whisked the egg mixture. “One thing at a time,” said Nora. “First pastry. Then mushrooms. Then cheese.” When the pie went into the oven, the kitchen window steamed up again.

While the pie cooled, Nora opened her sketchpad. The moss became a big green cushion. The anthill became a spotty mound. The stream got a blue bend, the hill a grey peak, and the spruce grew so big that it nearly went off the page.

“Don’t forget the heart,” said Granny Inga. Nora made a red heart on the trunk and a small yellow dot by the roots. Then she drew the last blue line for the stream. The kitchen smelled of butter, cheese and autumn forest. Granny Inga set out two plates. Nora laid the red pencil across the map. “Next year,” she said, “we’ll take one thing at a time.”



Nora and the Heart Spruce

Nora and Granny Inga go to the autumn forest to pick chanterelles for Granny's mushroom pie. When the secret path has grown over, Nora leads the way, one thing at a time, towards a spruce with a heart in its bark.

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