

The first Snowdrops

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There was a tree. It lived in a forest where the leaves sprouted in springtime and fell in fall. In winter the snow covered the ground. It lay deep and white, a carpet over the living land.

One winter an old man hobbled through the forest. His clothes were worn and brown. His hair was white, his beard was white and his hands gnarled and wrinkled. He sought out the tree. He'd climbed its branches when he was young. He'd sat in its shade when he was in love. He'd left and never came back. Now he returned. He found the tree easily. It still had the mark he'd made when he was nine. Besides, it was the tallest tree back then and it was still the highest and most magnificent.

The old man knelt beneath the tree. He fell to his knees in the deep snow and prayed. He prayed in peace, he prayed in humility. He stayed a long time, his white head hanging, his old white hands touching. At last he left. Why he went deeper into the forest I don't know. There's nothing out there but the wild.

The snow was still deep when the green leaves sprang. They grew in the pockets where the old man had knelt. They pushed through the icy crust, slim and slender like a child's fingers. Then came flowers of tender white, like drops of snow. These were snowdrops, the first of their kind. They were small and three petalled and hung their white heads beneath the tree in humility and peace.

