Nora and the Heart Spruce



Grandma Inga

This book belongs to

_____

Welcome to this sample book! It is made just like your own will be, using the photos and choices shown alongside it, 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 story.

It smelled of wet leaves and chilly morning when Nora fastened her little backpack. Inside were her sketchbook, three colored pencils, and an apple with a dent that looked like a tiny mouth. Grandma 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 beside the road. “But you have your secret mushroom spot.” Grandma Inga smiled until her cheeks turned round. “I’ve been going there since I was little.” Nora pulled her zipper all the way 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 by the roadside. That was where the narrow path was supposed to lead in, Grandma Inga said. But little birch trees stood right in the middle of it, and ferns had laid their green feathers across the ground.

Grandma 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 moved?” she asked. Grandma Inga laughed a little, but not very much. “Paths don’t move very often. They can disappear.” Nora looked between the trees. In there, the moss lay like a green cushion.

Nora did not want to turn back home with an empty basket and a pie pan waiting. She pointed to the moss between the pines. “You said you go across the moss first. I remember.”

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





After the moss, an anthill rose beside a pine root, brown and round like a prickly cushion. Ants hurried up and down, up and down, with 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!” Grandma Inga nodded. “You listened to my story better than I did.” Nora took a winding way around the hill. “They’re busy enough already.” On the other side, there was a thin gurgling sound, almost like someone whispering into a watering can. Nora stopped so suddenly that Grandma Inga’s basket swung. “Do you hear that?”

The creek glittered between rocks darkened by water. In a calm pool, yellow leaves spun round and round and round. Grandma Inga pointed to an old branch over the water. “That used to be my bridge.”

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





“Up the mountain with a view,” said Nora. Grandma 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 Grandma Inga, right behind her. Nora wanted to hurry, but she took a breath and moved one hand at a time. At the very 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 big sky. The basket still hung empty at Grandma Inga’s side.

From the mountain, Nora could see the creek shining like a crooked ribbon between the trees. The birches were yellow, the spruces almost black. Somewhere down there was Grandma Inga's spot, though it was hiding very well.

"Which spruce was it?" Nora asked. Grandma Inga shaded her eyes with her hand 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 creek, a mountain. She made a spruce with lots of quick strokes, but her finger stopped in the middle of the trunk. "Wait," she said. "You told me something else about that spruce."



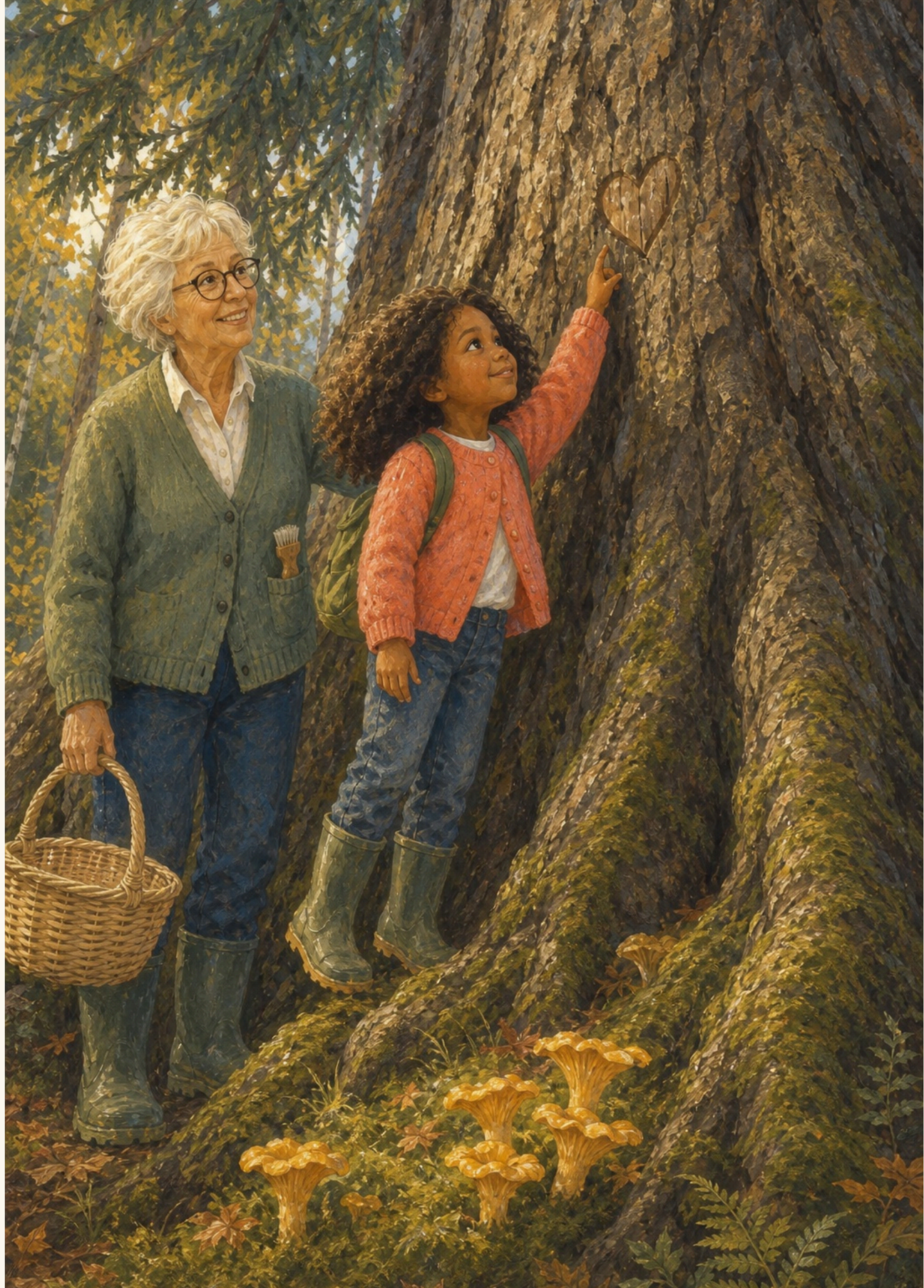


Grandma Inga looked at Nora’s drawing in the gravel. “I told you about…” She squeezed her eyes shut. Nora drew a heart in the middle of the spruce’s trunk.

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

Below the mountain, the forest grew darker and quieter. Nora walked first, but waited for Grandma Inga at roots and rocks. The big spruce stood there, with 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 sap. Then she saw two curved lines and a little point. “The heart!” she shouted. Grandma Inga came close and held her fingertip beside the mark without touching the bark. “There it is.” Nora looked down between the roots. Something glowed yellow in the moss, like tiny sun hats beneath the spruce.





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

“The teeny-tiny ones get to stay,” said Nora, pointing to a few that had barely unfolded their caps. She chose big, beautiful chanterelles, and Grandma Inga brushed away needles and dirt. One thing at a time: look, ask, pick, brush. Soon there was a small golden pile in the basket. “Is that enough for pie?” Nora asked.

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

Nora counted the clues on her fingers. “The moss. The anthill. The creek. The mountain. The heart spruce.” Grandma 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 the backpack holding her sketchbook. “We’ll draw it, of course.” At home, flour, eggs, and the pie pan were waiting.





At home, Grandma Inga set out flour, butter, eggs, cheese, and a round pie pan. Nora washed her hands until the water turned cold. Then she pressed the dough into the pan with both thumbs. At first, the edge was thin on one side and super thick on the other.

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

While the pie cooled, Nora opened her sketchbook. The moss became a big green cushion. The anthill became a dotted hill. The creek got a blue curve, the mountain a gray peak, and the spruce grew so big it almost went off the paper.

“Don’t forget the heart,” said Grandma Inga. Nora made a red heart on the trunk and a little yellow dot by the roots. Then she drew the last blue line for the creek. The kitchen smelled of butter, cheese, and autumn forest. Grandma 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 Grandma Inga go to the autumn forest to pick chanterelles for Grandma's mushroom pie. When the secret path has grown over, Nora leads the way, one thing at a time, toward a spruce tree with a heart in its bark.

en-us.sagatilldig.se