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"The Fir Tree" --- Hans Christian Anderson's Great Christmas Story

By Hans Christian Andersen.

OUT in the forest stood a pretty little Fir Tree. It had a good place; it could have sunlight, air there was in plenty, and all around grew many larger comrades—pines as tall as the Fir Tree, and the fresh air, it took no notice of the peasant children, who went about talking together, when they had come out to look for strawberries and raspberries. Often they came with a whole pot full, or had strung berries on a straw; then they would sit down by the little Fir Tree and say, "How pretty and small that one is!" and the Fir Tree did not like to hear that at all. Next year he had grown a great joint, and the following year he was longer still, for in fir trees one can always tell by the number of rings they have how many years they have been growing.

"Oh, if I were only as great a tree as the other!" sighed the little Fir, "then I would spread my branches far around, and look out from my crown into the wide world. The birds would then build nests in my boughs, and when the wind blew I could nod just as grandly as the others yonder."

It took no pleasure in the sunshine, in the birds and in the red clouds that went sailing over him morning and evening.

When it was winter, and the snow lay all around, white and sparkling, a hare would often come jumping along and spring right over the little Fir Tree. Oh! this made him so angry. But two winters went by, and when the third came the little Fir had grown so tall that the hare was obliged to run round it.

"Oh! to grow, to grow, and become old; that's the only fine thing in the world," thought the Tree. In the autumn wood-cutters always came and felled a few of the largest trees; that was done this year, too, and the little Fir Tree, that was now quite well grown, shuddered with fear, for the great stately trees fell to the ground with a crash, and their branches were cut off, so that the trees looked quite naked,

long and slender—they could hardly be recognized. But then they were laid upon wagons, and horses dragged them away out of the wood. Where were they going? What destiny awaited them? In the spring, when the swallows and the stork came, the Tree asked them, "Do you know where they were taken? Did you not meet them?" The swallows knew nothing about it, but the stork looked thoughtful, nodded his head, and said:

"Yes, I think so. I met many new ships when I flew out of Egypt; on the ships were stately maids; I fancy these were the trees. They smelled like fir. I can assure you they're stately—very stately."

"Oh, that I were only big enough to go over the sea! What kind of thing is this sea, and how does it look?"

"It would take too long to explain all that," said the stork, and he went away. "Rejoice in thy youth," said the sunbeams; "rejoice in thy fresh growth and in the young life that is within thee." And the wind kissed the tree, and the dew wept tears upon it; but the fir tree did not understand that. When Christmas time approached, quite young trees were felled, sometimes trees which were neither so old nor so large as this fir tree, that never rested, but always wanted to go away. These young trees, which were always the most beautiful, kept all their branches; they were put upon wagons and horses dragged them away out of the wood.

"Where are they all going?" asked the Fir Tree. "They are not greater than I—indeed, one of them was much smaller. Why do they keep all their branches? Whither are they taken?"

"We know that! We know that!" chirped the Sparrows. "Yonder in the town we looked in at the windows. We know where they go. Oh! they are dressed up in the greatest pomp and splendor that can be imagined. We have looked in at the windows and have perceived that they are planted in the middle of the warm room and adorned with the most beautiful things—gift apples, honey cakes, playthings and many hundreds of candles."

"And then?" asked the Fir Tree, and

trembled through all its branches. "And then? What happens then?"

"Why, we have not seen anything more. But it was incomparable." "Perhaps I may be destined to tread this glorious path one day!" cried the Fir Tree, rejoicingly. "That is even better than traveling across the sea. How painfully I long for it! If it were only Christmas now! Now I am great and grown up, like the rest, who were led away last year. Oh, if I were only on the carriage! If I were only in the warm room, among all the pomp and splendor! And then? Yes, then something even better will come, something far more charming, or else why should they adorn me so? There must be something grander, something greater still to come; but what? Oh! I'm suffering, I'm longing! I don't know myself what is the matter with me!"

"Rejoice in us," said Air and Sunshine. "Rejoice in thy fresh youth here in the woodland."

But the Fir Tree did not rejoice at all, but it grew and grew; winter and summer it stood there, green, dark green. The people who saw it said, "That's a handsome tree!" and at Christmas time it was felled before any one of the others. This axe cut deep into its marrow, and the tree fell to the ground with a sigh; it felt a pain, a sensation of faintness, and could not think at all of happiness, for it was sad at parting from its home, from the place where it had grown up; it knew that it should never again see the dear old companions, the little bushes and flowers all around—perhaps not even the birds. The parting was not at all agreeable.

"The Tree only came to itself when it was unloaded in a yard, with other trees, and heard a man say:

"This one is famous; we only want this one!" Now two servants came in gay liveries and carried the Fir Tree into a large, beautiful saloon. All around the walls hung pictures, and by the great stove stood large Chinese vases with lions on the covers; there were rocking chairs, silken sofas, great tables covered with picture books, and toys worth a hundred times a hundred dollars, at least the children said so. And the fir tree was put into a great tub filled with sand; but no one could see that it was a tub, for it was hung round with green cloth, and stood on a large, many-colored carpet. Oh, how the tree trembled! What was to happen now? The servants, and the young ladies also, decked it out. On one branch they hung little red, cut out of colored paper; every net was filled with sweetmeats; golden apples and walnuts hung down as if they grew there, and more than a hundred little candles, red, white and blue, were fastened to the different boughs. Dolls that looked exactly like real people—the tree had never seen such before—swung among the foliage, and high on the summit of the tree was fixed a tinsel star. It was splendid, particularly splendid. "This evening," said all, "this evening it will shine." "Oh," thought the tree, "that it were evening already! Oh, that the lights may be soon lit up! When may that be done? I wonder if trees will come out of the forest to look at me! Will the sparrows fly against the pane? Shall I grow fast here, and stand adorned in summer and winter?"

Yes, he did not guess badly. But he had a complete backache from mere longing, and the backache he just as bad for a tree as the headache for a person.

At last the candles were lighted. What a brilliance, what splendor! The tree trembled so in all its branches that one of the candles set fire to a green twig, and it was scorched. "Heaven preserve us!" cried the young ladies; and they hastily

put the fire out. Now the tree might not even tremble. Oh, that was terrible! It was so afraid of setting fire to some of its ornaments, and it was quite bewildered with all the brilliance. And now the folding doors were thrown open, and a number of children rushed in as if they would have overturned the whole tree; the older people followed more deliberately. The little ones stood quite silent, but only for a minute; then they shouted till the room rang; they danced gleefully round the tree, and one present after another was plucked from it. "What are they about?" thought the tree. "What's going to be done?" And the candles burned down to the twigs, and as they burned down they were extinguished, and then the children received permission to plunder the tree. Oh! they rushed in upon it, so that every branch cracked again; if it had not been fastened by the top and by the golden star to the ceiling, it would have fallen down.

"The children danced about with their pretty toys. No one looked at the Tree except one old man, who came up and peeped among the branches, but only to see if a fig or an apple had not been forgotten. "A story! a story!" shouted the children, and they drew a little fat man toward the Tree, and he sat down just beneath it—"for then we shall be in the green wood," said he; "and the Tree may have the advantage of listening to my tale. But I can only tell one. Will you hear the story of Ivede-Avede or of Klumpey-Dumpey, who fell downstairs and still was raised up to honor and married the princess?"

"Ivede-Avede!" cried some; "Klumpey-Dumpey!" cried others, and there was a great crying to be in the green wood," said he; and the tree was silent and thought, "Shall I not be in it; shall I have nothing to do in it?" But he had been in the evening's amusement and had done what was required of him.

And the fat man told about Klumpey-Dumpey, who fell downstairs and yet was raised to honor and married the princess. And the children clapped their hands and cried, "Tell another; tell another!" For they wanted to hear about Ivede-Avede; but they only got the story of Klumpey-Dumpey. The Fir Tree stood quite silent and thoughtful. Never had the birds in the wood told such a story as that. Klumpey-Dumpey fell downstairs and yet came to honor and married the princess!

"Yes, so it happens in the world!" thought the Fir Tree, and believed it must be true, because that was such a nice man who told it. "Well, who can know? Perhaps I shall fall downstairs, too, and marry a princess!" And it looked forward with pleasure to being adorned again the next evening with candles and toys, gold and silver. "Tomorrow I shall not tremble," it thought. "I will rejoice in all my splendor. Tomorrow I shall hear the story of Klumpey-Dumpey again and perhaps that of Ivede-Avede, too."

And the Tree stood all night quiet and thoughtful.

In the morning the servants and the chambermaid came in.

"Now my splendor will begin afresh," thought the Tree. But they dragged him out of the room and upstairs to the garret, and here they put him in a dark corner where no daylight shone.

"What's the meaning of this?" thought the Tree. "What am I to do here? What is to happen?"

And he leaned against the wall and thought and thought. And he had no eyes enough for day and nights went by, and nobody came up; and when at length someone came it was only to put some great horse in a corner. Now the Tree stood

quite hidden away and the supposition is that it was quite forgotten. "Now it's winter outside!" thought the Tree. "The earth is hard and covered with snow, and people cannot plant me; therefore I suppose I'm to be sheltered here until spring comes. How considerate that is! How good people are! If it were only not so dark here, and so terribly solitary—not even a little hare! That was pretty out there in the wood, when the snow lay thick and the hare sprang past; yes, even when he jumped over me; but, then, I did not like it, it is terribly lonely up here!"

"Peep! peep!" said a little Mouse, and crept forward, and then came another little one and came sniffing at the Fir Tree, and then slipped among the branches.

"It's horribly cold," said the two little Mice, "or else it would be comfortable here. Don't you think so, you old Fir Tree?"

"I'm not old at all," said the Fir Tree. "There are many much older than I."

"Where do you come from?" asked the Mice. "An' who do you know?" They were dreadfully inquisitive. "Tell us about the most beautiful spot on earth. Have you been there? Have you been in the storeroom, where cheeses lie on the shelves and hams hang from the ceiling, where one dances on tallow candles and goes in this and comes out that?"

"I don't know that," replied the Tree; "but I know the wood, where the sun shines and the birds sing."

And then it told all about its youth. And the little Mice had never heard anything of the kind; and they listened and said: "What a number of things you have seen! How happy you must have been!"

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and seated themselves at the fire, looked into it and cried, "Puff! puff!" But at each explosion, which was a deep sigh, the Tree thought of a summer day in the woods or of a winter night when the stars beamed. He thought of Christmas eve and of Klumpey-Dumpey, the only story he had ever heard or knew how to tell. And then the Tree was bored.

The boys played in the garden and the youngest had on his breast a golden star, which the Tree had worn on its highest evening. Now that was past, and the Tree's life was past, and the story in past, too—past!—and there's the way with all stories.

The Christmas Doll.
Her eyes were very, very blue,
Her brows were very black,
And curls of sunny golden hair
Went rippling down her back.
Her crown of pink brocade was made
With many a fold-de-roi.
A hat all plumes and lace crowned
The dainty Christmas doll.
Two children at her beauty gazed,
Looking the shining glass.
One clad in velvet, silk and fur,
And one in ragged, old
The prettiest to a million boys
The lovely toy away.
But weary in a day,
The child of cold and poverty
Crept up the crumpled chair,
Where alone she sat and wept
And cupboards shelves were bare;
But through the attic window
Shone in upon her real,
And in her dreams the Christmas doll
Was folded to her breast.
Before the Christmas wreaths were dry
She found, one bitter morn,
The Christmas doll among the drift
Of all its glory shorn.
"Look what is sticking to the ugly old
Fir Tree," said the child, and he trod upon
the branches till they cracked again under
his boots.
And the Tree looked at all the blooming
flowers and the splendor of the garden
and then looked at itself and wished it had
remained in the dark corner of the garret.
It thought of its fresh youth in the wood,
of the merry Christmas eve and of the
little Mice which had listened so pleasantly
to the story of Klumpey-Dumpey.
"Past! past!" said the old Tree. "Had I
but rejoiced when I could have done so!
Past! past!"
And the servant came and chopped the
Tree into little pieces; a whole bundle lay
there; it blazed brightly under the great
brewing copper and it sizzled deeply, and
each sigh was like a little shriek, and the
children who were at play there ran up
and saw the Christmas doll.
—Harvey Fiske, in the Bostonian.

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