

The Crooked Fir Tree

IN THE DEEP FOREST, high up in the mountains of California, a group of small fir trees grew closely together in one of the open spaces where, years before, a lumber company had cut away the large trees. Mother Nature had caused the small fir trees to grow around the disfiguring stumps that remained, in an attempt to heal the scars left by man.

Every year, early in December, the Christmas Tree Folks entered the forest to cut down and ship away trees for the Christmas trade. They selected only the most perfect and beautiful of the trees and, in time, the birds brought from the towns and cities the most wonderful stories about the trees that were sent away. They told of trees that were dressed in the most beautiful and shining garments, with a gleaming star set in the topmost branch and of brilliant lights glistening from all of their branches as they shed their brilliance from the windows of homes where little children lived.

The stories told by the birds caused the other trees to wish that they, too, would some day be selected for Christmas trees, and, after a while, a rivalry grew among them. In previous years they had clung closely together, with their arms spread lovingly above the smaller and more delicate trees as a protection against the snow and wind. Now they pushed and shoved, complaining that the nearest ones were huddling so close against them that they did not have room to spread their branches evenly.

“How,” they asked, “could one ever get a chance to be a Christmas Tree when one did not have room in which to grow properly?”



Planet Art

“I can’t see why those little runts cling to life so strongly,” said a tall graceful tree one day, as she rippled her branches in the brisk autumn breeze. “Of what use are, they! They should die and give us more room. Look at that little fellow there! He is so short and crooked that he is bent almost to the ground. He will never be chosen for a Christmas Tree anyway, and even if he lives to be a hundred he will be of no use for lumber. Bent over double, he is taking up twice as much room as he should. Of what use is he, I say?”

“Shame on you!” cried another fir. If you and some of the other trees had not crowded him when he was small, he might have had a better chance. Have you forgotten the time a few years ago when Silver Tip was trying so hard to grow straight and beautiful so she would be selected for a Christmas

Tree? It was that winter the snow bore her branches down so heavily because she was taller than the rest of us. Well, I heard the little fellow tell her to let the snow slide down on him because he was so small and not very pretty, that it would be a long time before he was selected, anyway. It was that year his back was bent by the weight of the snow.”

“Just the same,” replied the taller tree, shaking her branches with an angry toss, “we can’t all be Christmas Trees and if he is as generous as you say, he might give us more room.”

The poor little tree bent himself even closer to the ground. He was so humiliated that he wanted to hide.

“Of what use am I?” he whispered softly, “I can never be a beautiful Christmas Tree and wear the Star of Bethlehem in my top branch to light the weary men on their way at the Holy Christmas season. Some are chosen to stand in the churches where the people gather to honor the Birth of the Saviour, others gladden the hearts of children in hospitals and orphan homes. I had hoped that some day some humble family would find me and let me make their children happy, but each year I grow more crooked. I am afraid that if the snow piles in on me this winter it will break my back.”

“Don’t grieve,” said a musical bird voice from under a thick branch. “I have had my nest here this year and I have felt so safe and happy. I wouldn’t want you to go away and be a Christmas Tree. I want to raise my little family under your safe branches next year. You do not complain, like that vain fir near you, because we live in your branches. She does not even want me to fly to her topmost branches to sing my songs.”

“Thank you, little bird,” replied the bent little fir. “I like to have you and your family snuggling close to my heart. I love your songs, too, but I feel that if I cannot be a Christmas Tree, I should grow straight and tall so that I may be built into some

home to shelter man.”

“Why shelter man?” chirped the bird, “Aren’t we of some importance to our Maker? I heard the good preacher over at the little church say that God takes care of all of us, and that even a sparrow could not fall without God knowing about it.”

Just then they heard a disturbance in the forest. The barking of a dog and the excited voices of men could be heard. Then the snap, snap of breaking twigs, the sound of pebbles being rolled against stones and, with a bound, a big gray jack rabbit sprang under the bent tree and huddled close. The tree bent himself even closer to the ground so as to shelter the trembling little animal. The men and the dog, having lost the scent of the rabbit in the dense brambles, were soon out of sight.

“Thank you, Fir Tree, for hiding me,” said the jack rabbit when he had recovered from his fright. “I was nearly spent from running. Had it not been for a thorny bramble between the men and this thicket, I would not have gotten away from them. It is so much safer over here that, if you do not mind, I will move my family under your protecting branches.”

“That will be nice,” answered the bent tree. “The birds and I will enjoy your company.”

“See!” chirped the little bird. “Another good deed done! It is not necessary that you become a Christmas Tree or that you be cut up into lumber in order to bring happiness. We forest folk want you to stay right here where you can help shelter us from storm and strife. I will be glad, though, if the Christmas Tree Folks take that vain fir away. She will find that her glory is short lived.”

“You make me very happy,” said the bent little tree, straightening himself as far as his crooked trunk would permit. “I won’t let the complaints of the other trees bother me any more. I am just glad that I am being useful.” □

—Elizabeth Alma McCarton



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