

A Different Kind of Christmas Tree.



The sides of the path were covered with rugs of white snow. It was the day before Christmas. People rushed up and down the path carrying arm loads of bundles. They laughed and called to each other as they pushed their way through the crowds.

Above the path, the long arms of an ancient tree

reached upward to the sky. It swayed and moaned as strong winds grasped its branches and bent them toward the earth. Down below a haughty laugh sounded, and a lovely fir tree stretched and preened its thick green branches, sending a fine spray of snow shimmering downward to the ground.

"I should think," said the fir in a high smug voice, "That you'd try a little harder to stand still. Goodness knows you're ugly enough with the leaves you've already lost. If you move around anymore, you'll soon be quite bare."

"I know," answered the old tree. "Everything has put on its most beautiful clothes for the celebration of the birth of Christ. Even from here I can see the decorations shining from each street corner. And yesterday some men came and put the brightest, loveliest lights on every tree along the path--except me of course." He sighed softly, and a flake of snow melted in the form of a teardrop and ran down his gnarled trunk.

"You might try to hang onto those three small leaves you still have. At least you wouldn't be completely bare."

"Oh, I've tried so hard," cried the old tree "Each fall I say to myself, 'this year I won't give up a single leaf, no matter what the cause,' but someone always comes along who seems to need them more than I," And he sighed once again.

"Oh, they all had good causes," mocked the fir, that young girl, for instance, colored leaves for her party indeed! They were your leaves!" "She took a lot, didn't she?" said the old tree, and he seemed to smile.

Just then a cold wind blew down the path and a tiny brown bird fell to the ground at the foot of the old tree and lay there shivering, too cold to lift its wings. The old tree looked down in pity and then he quickly let go of his last three leaves. The golden

leaves fluttered down and settled softly over the shivering little bird, and it lay there quietly under the warmth of them.

"Now you've done it!" shrieked the fir. You've given away every single leaf! Christmas morning you'll make your path the ugliest sight in the whole city!"

The old tree said nothing. Instead he stretched out his branches to gather what snowflakes he could that they might not fall on the tiny bird. The young fir turned away in anger, and it was then he noticed a painter sitting quietly a few feet from the path, intent upon his long brushes and his canvas. His clothes were old and tattered, and his face wore a sad expression. He was thinking of his loved ones and the empty, cheerless Christmas morning they would face, for he had sold not a single painting in the last months.

But the little tree didn't see this. Instead he turned back to the old tree and said in a haughty voice, "At least keep those bare branches as far away from me as possible. I'm being painted and hideousness will mar the background."

"I'll try," replied the old tree. And he raised his branches as high as possible. It was almost dark when the painter picked up his easel and left. And the little fir was tired and cross from all his preening and posing.

Christmas morning he awoke late, and as he proudly shook away the snow from his lovely branches, he was amazed to see a huge crowd of people surrounding the old tree, ah-ing and oh-ing as they stood back and gazed upward. And even those hurrying along the path had to stop for a moment to sigh before they went on.

"Whatever could it be?" thought the haughty fir, and he too looked up to see if perhaps the top of the old tree had been broken off during the night.

Just then a paper blew away from the hands of an enraptured newsboy and sailed straight into the young fir. The fir gasped in amazement, for there on the front page was a picture of the painter holding his painting of a great white tree whose leafless branches, laden with snow, stretched upward into the sky. While down below lay a tiny brown bird almost covered by three golden leaves. And beneath the picture were the words, "The Most Beautiful Thing Is That Which Hath Given All."

The young fir quietly bowed its head beneath the great beauty of the humble old tree.