

THE FAIRY TALE ABOUT THE BURGOMASTER AND THE OLD TREE

There was an old tree growing on the slope just outside the town so that everybody could see it. This tree was to be felled. The Burgomaster of the town had decided so, and he was used to decisions. Now everybody in town talked about this--each citizen in his way.

The paper dealer said, "It is a good idea to fell that tree. It will bring a lot of paper, and paper is my living."

The fruit grower said, "That's good, because all the stars are sitting in that tree, waiting for my cherries."

The flower decorator said, "Just fell it. It will bring a lot of branches and twigs and leaves for decoration."

The carpenter said, "I'm so happy, for it will bring a lot of boards and planks. It has a huge trunk."

The furniture maker said, "And I can continue the work and make beautiful kitchen tables and chairs. For I have a wife and four children to look after."

The baker said, "Fell that tree. I can strew my floors and powder my plates with the sawdust, and I have a whole family to look after. That is my responsibility." So there were many on the burgomaster's side--but he was used to it. Therefore he went around the in town in his best clothes talking to the people who agreed with him. That was the way he liked to do things.

In a little tumble-down house outside the town there lived a man called Niels. He was an old man, and he had tried a lot of things in his lifetime. He had worked for the paper dealer and fruit grower. He had helped the flower decorator, binding garlands. He had helped the carpenter and the furniture maker, too. He had even been working for the baker, but it was a long time ago.

Niels was a man who was good at learning. He remembered everything his masters had told him. And now he went around in his house thinking these things over.

When he heard that the tree was to be felled, Niels felt sorry and went out to sit for a while under the tree. "Why are you to be felled?" he said to the tree. "They have bees in their bonnets--all of them!"

"I have heard about it, too," the tree said. "So now I can make myself useful--finally."

"Nonsense," Niels said. "You have been useful your whole lifetime--and you don't even know it!"

"I think it would be sensible ending one's days as paper or as a table--even sawdust would do."

"You don't have much feeling in your life," Niels said. "Everything has not to be reasonable. You don't have to be used in this world."

"But the burgomaster decided--that's something," the tree said.

"Do you think he has more cleverness than you and I? He is thinking more about his golden chains and his purple waistcoat."

The next day the burgomaster had to leave the town in an official capacity. He liked that very much, although he was used to it.

That very day the town had no burgomaster. The tree was allowed to live one more day, and Niels got time to go to town to talk to his old masters.

To the paper dealer he said, "If all trees were made into paper--we would drown in paper."

To the fruit grower he said, "If the stars are not sitting in the old tree, they would sit elsewhere."

To the flower decorator he said, "If people had nothing beautiful to look at, they sure

wouldn't buy your decorations."

To the carpenter he said, "You have boards and planks in piles--have you ever thought about the fact that the old tree every year spreads its seeds so that new trees can grow up?"

To the furniture maker he said, "You have to learn from the carpenter, for he knows that the old tree has to live so that new trees can grow in this world."

To the baker he said, "You can strew your floors with sand--we cannot make the whole world a sawdust-world!"

When the burgomaster returned, the town was at sixes and sevens. All the citizens were on their way in their finest clothes to the old tree. They were singing and dancing, and below the tree the children were gathered. They were singing beautifully about trees and birds and flowers which had to be left alone because they were part of Beauty. "Beauty has more power than the burgomaster," the children sang. The burgomaster had but one thing to do: drive to the old tree. He went out of his coach with his best smile. Then he said, "The old tree will not be felled!" Everybody got happy and asked him to repeat the marvelous words.

"The old tree will not be felled," the burgomaster proclaimed--because he had a family to look after, too.

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