

## THE LITTLE FIR TREE

The Little Fir Tree snivels to herself. “Just look at me! I am so ugly. I have too few branches and my needles are ever so short. And just look at the green! How I hate that shade of pale green! All around me, the other trees have nice colours. I am the only one that is so hideous. Look at the deciduous trees over there. What a nice display of colour, especially in autumn! Red, orange, yellow, brown, even black and here and there, a spec of green. How nice it must be to be a leaf tree.” This complaining has been going on for days.

The bigger fir trees listen patiently and smile at the Little Fir Tree to cheer her up. But, as you can imagine, this did not cheer her up at all. Quite the opposite! She sobs: “Even my own fir tree family laughs at me! What a miserable life I lead!”

As she screams about angrily, it takes her a moment to realise that a little bird just landed on one of her uppermost twigs. The bird doesn't smile as he hears of the Little Fir Tree's misery, oh no, he looks aghast and concerned. “Dear Little Fir Tree, I am truly sorry to hear that you have such an awful life. I shall ask my friends in the forest to see if one of them knows what to do to help you.”

No sooner said than done the bird flew off, and, after a short while, he came back with a rabbit, a deer and a fox. When they saw how miserable the Little Fir Tree looked, they all agreed that she was probably the ugliest tree around. And together they pondered how to improve the fate of the Little Fir Tree. The rabbit said: “Dear Little Fir Tree, your back side is nicer than your front.” After a brief inspection, the deer agreed and the fox too nodded and suggested: “How about you try to twist a little bit while growing? Maybe, you just need to turn away from the sun for a bit, I have seen many a persistent tree who could indeed bend in a different direction.”

Well, the Little Fir Tree was somewhat relieved. Finally, someone recognised her suffering and earnestly tried to help. Immediately, she starts to follow the advice, forces herself away from the sun and instantly feels some pain in her trunk. But, beauty comes at a price, and with lots of willpower, after 3 weeks of persistent twisting and stretching, she had indeed managed to turn half a millimetre to one side. It would surely take a few more years until the beautiful back side would show properly, so she twists and turns bravely on. She stopped whining and always looks somewhat stressed, but courageous.

When, a year later, the deer happened to pass by, the Little Fir Tree calls out to him: “Hello, my friend! Do tell – How do I look? Am I pretty?”

The deer barely notices a difference to the previous year, but he doesn't want to disappoint the Little Fir Tree so he says: “Yes, indeed, if you keep this up, you will look even prettier next year!”

“Thank you!” answers the Little Fir Tree and beams. She immediately starts to twist with renewed force. Her face is brave, but stern. The deer says good-bye and goes on his way. As it happened, the little bird also comes by on the same day to see how the Little Fir Tree is doing.

“Little Bird, my friend, say, am I beautiful?”

The bird can barely discern a difference to the previous year, apart from the grim face. He is an honest bird and really wants to help the Little Fir Tree. “Dear Little Fir Tree, apart from your stern gaze, I can hardly detect a difference.”

Horrified, the Little Fir Tree drops his pose and yells at the little Bird: "You hypocrite! You lunatic! Can't you see how hard I am trying to be beautiful and how far I have managed to turn around?"

A little bit taken aback, but still honest, the bird replies: "No".

"Then go away you dumb, blind bird" I don't ever want to see you again!"

The bird bids her farewell and flies on.

Yet, somehow, the bird can't forget the Little Fir Tree's plight. He likes the little tree and still wants to help her. So he goes to see the Wise Owl who lives in the nearby forest. When the owl hears of the Little Fir Tree's predicament, she says: "Everyone in the forest knows that I have the gift of clairvoyance. I can assure you that the Little Fir Tree will be very beautiful very soon. As beautiful as she could ever have wished for."

"Yes, but, Wise Owl, what shall I tell the Little Fir Tree to make her feel better?"

"Well, tell her to stop twisting, because soon, very soon, a wonderful dress will fall from the skies and she shall be pretty, and no other tree, conifer or other, shall be more beautiful than she. Love from the Wise Owl. Tell her that!"

Quickly, as fast as his little wings would carry him, the bird flies back to the Little Fir Tree to tell her the good news. But, as soon as he tries to land on the uppermost twig, the Little Fir Tree screams at him: "Go away, you traitor! I don't want to see you anymore."

"But, Little Fir Tree, dear, sweet, sad, little fir tree, I have news from the Wise Owl in the forest. She says to stop twisting and turning, and to wait for a beautiful robe that will fall from the skies, and that no-one will be as beautiful as you."

"Ha!" laughs the Little Fir Tree bitterly, "I don't believe a word you say!" and she continues her stretching exercises.

"You will see" chirps the bird and was on his way.

A few months passed, and it is winter when the bird remembers the Little Fir Tree and can't resist dropping in on her. It is snowing, and the journey takes twice as long as usual. When the bird arrives, he can't see the Little Fir Tree. Everywhere he looks, all around him everything is covered in white and he sees nice white shapes of all sizes. Just as he is about to turn around and head back home, he hears a voice; a familiar, and yet unfamiliar voice: "Hello bird, my dear friend! Here I am! Look at me! I AM BEAUTIFUL!"