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The Pine Tree

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Abstract

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Keywords

Fiction; The Pine Tree; Abigail M. Walsh

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HEAVEN. IF THOU HADST NOT DIED SO, MY VALKYRIES WOULD NOT HAVE CARRIED THEE HERE. "

Roland blinked as if stupefied by a blow.

"WHY DOST THOU TARRY HERE?" inquired the voice. "I HATH REGENERATED THEE. GO, SEEK, AND SLAY!" Each syllable of the command shock the earth like artillery.

Roland began to sob. He was as a child shriveling beneath the demands of a cruel father.

"No!" he screamed, casting away the Uzi. "I don't like it here!"

"YOU WILL IN TIME," assured the god.

"Not in a thousand years!" cried Roland.

"THEN MAYHAPS IN TWO THOUSAND," laughed Odin. "OR A MILLION. "

Sinking to his knees, Roland wept.

"THOU ART WISE TO RID THYSELF OF THINE WEAPON. IT WILL BE OF LITTLE USE HERE--NONE ONCE THY AMMUNITION IS GONE."

Roland sucked in mucus and wiped away his tears.

"PURLOIN A GOOD SWORD, OR FASHION ONE FROM THE MANNA I SEND. "

Immediately the sky blackened. Meteors streaked down and bounced, smoking, or buried themselves in the sand.

"I -- don't know -- how --to --use a sword," sobbed Roland.

"THOU HAST ALL ETERNITY TO LEARN," spake the voice. "ARISE AND GO. THY TEARS PROFANE THIS HOLY PLACE. TAKE UP THY WEAPON. THOSE ASSASSINS WHOM I SENT TO GREET THEE--KING MACBETH AND CASSIUS OF ROME--ARE RUSHING HENCE TO AVENGE THEMSELVES UPON THEE FOR SLAYING THEM. "

On hands and knees, Roland felt about blindly for his gun.

"I don't belong here!" he protested. "There's been a mistake! I'm a wimp! a pussy! I can't fight! Help me!"

Miraculously his palm struck the butt of the Uzi, which juttet out of the sand like relic of a long decayed, violent culture. Pulling the weapon free, the youth rose and ran shrieking across the freezing nightscape. Two grim assassins followed his cries purposefully.



THE PINE TREE

By Abigail M. Walsh

Bang! The bat hit the ball and Walter raced to first base. The outfielder picked up the ball and threw it to Richie who was pitching. Walter waited on first base. Jimmy picked up the bat and set himself in the batter's box.

Walter was supremely happy. School had ended the day before. He was free for the whole summer. The sun was shining in a blue sky and here he was on first base with a single. The ball field was only a vacant lot, but life was good here.

Jimmy missed the first pitch. Strike one! Richie began his windup. Walter noticed a huge mass of gray clouds looming over the house next to them. Drops began to fall on the lot. Richie abandoned his windup. The boys, moving as one, ran from the rain.

They hurried toward the street. As they ran past an old pine tree, stubbornly clinging to life in its cement environment, Walter said, "I hate rain. It shouldn't rain in the summer. I wish it would never rain again. "

The pine tree shuddered. A branch dipped, and some needles fell to the ground. The huge mass of dark clouds swirled and were swallowed up by a blue sky. The sun broke through.

The boys had taken shelter under a store awning. They peered at the sky. "I guess it was only a spring shower," Jimmy said. "Come on, let's finish the game. "

The glorious weather continued. The boys played baseball in their lot or wandered to the playground where they outdid each other on the monkey bars and ate their lunch under a tree. They had no cares. Life was good.

But the sun continued to bake the earth, and the earth became hotter and hotter. The lot became dusty. Whenever the boys ran bases they kicked up dry dirt. The slightest breeze became a dust cloud. The old pine tree at the side of the lot became even more tired looking. When Walter climbed its branches, he noticed more yellow needles. Dust covered its branches. The tree had always led a precarious existence, now its life was in danger.

The police no longer turned on the hydrants for the children. They said they had to save water for the firemen, because there was a water shortage.

"Your wish came true," Richie said to Walter one day when they were sitting on the front stoop of Walter's apartment house.

"What wish?" asked Walter.

"Can't you remember? When we were running from the rain in the lot you wished there would be no more rain. Well, your wish came true. "

"Wishes don't come true," said Walter.

"Yours did. My dad said the weatherman is

going crazy. He says the conditions are perfect for rain, but it doesn't rain."

"Yeah," answered Walter. "My Mom says we have been asked to use water only when necessary. She has filled bottles and jars in case they start turning off the water." He paused and added in a guilty voice, "Could my wish have done this?"

"I don't know," said Richie. "All I know is you wished for no more rain, and it stopped raining."

"Do you think I could wish it back again?" asked Walter.

"You could try, I guess."

Walter closed his eyes and wished as hard as he could. Nothing happened.

"I guess it won't work," he said sadly.

"Maybe you have to say it out loud," Richie suggested.

"I wish it would rain," said Walter in a loud voice.

The sky remained clear. No clouds appeared. The sun shone in relentless brilliance.

"Maybe you have to say it in the lot," suggested Richie.

"Let's go," said Walter. "If I'm responsible for this drought, I'd better do something about it."

They walked to the lot and paused at the fence. The weed around the edge had withered, leaving yellowed stalks as a reminder of their existence. The old pine tree seemed to have shrunk. It was a sorry sight.

"Where were you when the rain started?" Richie asked.

"On first base, I think."

"Well, go to first base and wish," Richie said.

Walter trotted to first base, stood there and said, "I wish it would rain."

Nothing happened.

"I guess it won't work," he said.

"What happened when it started to rain?" Richie asked.

"We all ran for the street."

"Well then, walk to the street and, every few feet, stop and wish. Maybe you have to be in a certain spot."

Walter walked carefully toward the entrance, stopping every two steps and wishing. The sky remained clear.

After several wishes, he stopped. "This isn't going to work," he said.

"Just do it all the way to the sidewalk," said Richie. "Then you can say you tried."

Walter sighed, but continued his stepping and wishing. The next two steps brought him beside the old pine tree. He stopped, looked at the tree and said, "I don't hate rain. I wish it would rain."

The old tree shuddered. A branch dipped and some needles fell to the ground. The boys watched in amazement. Dark clouds appeared on the horizon, blown by wind which whipped the old tree and blew dust into the boys' faces. They ran to the shelter of an awning. Rain pelted the ground, turning the dust to mud, then washing it away. The streets became glistening avenues

again. The downpour continued, washing the buildings, filling the reservoirs, watering the grass, and giving new life to the flowers.

"Wow!" said Richie. "It was your wish that stopped the rain and brought it back. How did you do it?"

"I don't know," answered Walter.

"Wait a minute. I know. Was I near the pine tree when I wished it would never rain again?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure."

"I was standing next to the pine tree when I wished it would rain. Do you think the tree had anything to do with it?"

"Remember how it moved when you wished?" said Richie. "Maybe it's a magic tree. We should make another wish beside it and see if it comes true."

"Let's go," said Walter. "What will we wish for?"

"Let's try for a hundred dollars," said Richie.

"We'll split it if we get anything."

They turned the corner of the lot and stopped short in the drenching rain. The old pine tree was lying on its side. The trunk had split near the ground and jagged edges showed where the top had torn away. The inside had been eaten almost hollow by termites and ants.

"It didn't have much longer to live," said Richie.

"I guess the wind blew it down."

Walter stood silently beside the old tree. The rain poured over both of them, splashing from the boy to the trunk lying in the mud. He looked long and hard, then sighed and patted the old trunk.

"Come on," he said to Richie who was standing beside him. "We're getting soaked."

