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IMP AND FAIRY GET A TREE

SAMUEL WOOD

For Grandma

“I can’t believe Santa is having us do this,” Imp said. “Helping humans? Where’s the fun in that? They won’t even know it was us! Humans are meant for entertainment, not charity cases.” He glared at a worn man chop down a tree. A series of loud hacks preceded the tree groaning and falling over. Imp’s nose twitched at the invading scent of pitch. His glare darkened as the man wiped his brow.

“You make it sound like we’re doing something bad,” Fairy said. Imp’s glare moved to Fairy. She rolled her eyes and continued, a light smirk on her face. “Santa visits that poor, tiny house yearly and for the past three Christmases there’s been no tree. Even as much as you enjoy playing tricks on humans, you have to admit it’s heartbreaking.”

“Yes. Heartbreaking,” Imp said, not trying to sound sincere. “Why is the tree so important?” He stopped, holding his hands out as wood chips flew from the woodsman’s axe.

“Oh come on,” Fairy said. “The tree is meant to invite Santa to deliver the gifts in a place where they’ll be easy to find. Plus, they look so nice, dressed up!” Imp huffed, watching the man continue to chop down another tree.

“I’m not convinced.” He looked at Fairy with pleading eyes. “Are you sure we have to do this?”

Fairy nodded. “We’ve watched him for days now. If you were him, could you find the time and energy to get a Christmas tree for your own family? He’s out here from dawn to dusk and they won’t even let him keep one.” Imp looked away, arms crossed. His lips fidgeted before he sighed.

“Fine. I wouldn’t either, but it’s not like I’d need a tree for such a trivial matter.” Imp ig-

nored Fairy's chiding sigh. "Why can't one of his sons get it?"

"He has no sons."

Imp looked over a shoulder at Fairy. "So you're telling me he has nobody who can go and get a tree? This might just turn out good for me. I'll just prepare some classic tricks..."

Fairy coughed. "You can go back to your tricks when we're done. All he has is a five year old daughter."

Imp bounded away, pausing after a second with a sagging sigh. "Let's just get this over with."

Fairy laughed. "Let's go find a tree. Santa's stop on Christmas Eve is never predictable." Imp opened his mouth to protest, but closed it.

'Lets go find a tree'? Ha. I'll be the one finding the tree.

"Where's the tree?" Fairy asked Imp. The sky was a hazy gold to the west and Imp had given up on flying an hour ago. His sullen gaze looked up.

"Uh...I think we're close," Imp said, hoping to fool Fairy. She glowed.

"I hope you, I mean we, find a gorgeous tree that's nice and symmetrical, and..." Imp rolled his eyes, tossed a snowball, and floated off. He was sure the tree she wanted didn't exist; tree sellers would've gotten to them weeks ago.

That's too tall. That one is too wide. That's too bushy and that one doesn't have enough branches. That one's perfect and that one is lopsided. Imp stopped, his eyes narrow, and looked at the tree he had called perfect. As he stared at the tree, his shoulders relaxed and his eyes widened. Smirking, he snapped his fingers and waited for Fairy to appear.

"It's perfect!" she said, surprising him. "You knew this tree was here, didn't you? That's why I had to wait so long to see it. You're playing another one of your games."

"I just found it," Imp said, rolling his eyes. "You know *nothing* about my games."

With a swish of a finger and a little fairy magic, the tree came down. She caught the top, lowering it slow enough for Imp to grab the other end without it hitting the ground. Snow and ice shrunk as steam was released.

More fairy magic.

It was dark when they reached the house. The tiny home's fireplace was unlit, making their job easier. Imp released his end, letting Fairy lean the treetop against the small house as he considered ways to get the tree inside. It was unremarkable, looking like every little cabin he had ever

seen. They hoped they still had a few hours before Santa would arrive.

Imp didn't know how long had passed when Fairy shouted at him. "You have an idea yet?"

Imp was about to yell back when he snapped his fingers and smiled. "We go through the chimney, just like Santa."

"What if the tree gets messy? We won't have time to clean and dress it up," Fairy said, looking at the tree. "The tree will be all black and disgusting. And *black!* I was going to make it all colorful." Imp wanted to laugh at her pouting.

"How colorful?"

"Don't worry about it, you silly imp." Fairy buzzed in circles, scratching her head. "I think I could actually do something with the soot that'll get on the tree. I could harden it into silver strips. That would look really nice with my design." Imp nodded, lifting the tree. He set the tip at the chimney's crown. Tilting the tree, he lowered it in.

"I don't know if this was the best idea," Fairy called up from the hearth, her voice echoing a little. "I don't think the tree will make it through, unless you want to break it."

"Don't worry! I have it under control," Imp said. He tapped the trunk twice and the tree became fluid. He curved it through the flue and into the room, tapping it twice once more. Fairy then put it in a corner close to the fireplace.

"Thanks for the help," Fairy said. "I'll finish up here." Imp nodded, and started out the near window when an idea came to mind. With a snap of his fingers, the tree appeared to die and he rushed off, leaving behind a fuming Fairy. He was exhausted and needed a long winter's nap.

Imp woke Christmas morning with a knot in his stomach. He didn't know why it was there, but he had a bad feeling about it. As he prepared materials for a new prank, he thought about the small hut that he had helped Fairy deliver a tree too. Imp had wanted to pull something while there, but for some reason hadn't even thought up a single thing. Looking towards the hut, he sighed. Against his better judgment, he headed towards it.

Arriving after dawn, Imp hoped the humans weren't awake. Watching through the window he had used to leave the night before, a little girl walked into the room, her eyes following a spinning assortment of colorful lights. She looked up and saw the tree, her mouth opening as she took a step towards it. Imp smiled a little at the delight on her face.

"Daddy!" she squealed, turning around. "Daddy! Daddy! There's a tree! We have a tree! Daddy!" Imp started to smile, but suppressed it. The best he could do was a proud smirk.

“Tree? What are you talking about darli...” her father said, looking at the tree. Imp finally looked at the tree and saw that it was beautiful. There were a thousand tiny lights spinning around it, changing color. The bits of silver Fairy had talked about now looked like fresh snow, reflecting the light across the tiny living room.

Maybe Fairy was right about a couple things.

“It was magic, wasn’t it daddy,” the girl said.

The father smiled, picking her up. “Yes it was,” he said. He ignored her glance at the window.

Imp marched away, giving into the grin.