Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Lion Storyteller Christmas Book

Written by

Bob Hartman

Published by

Lion Children's Books an imprint of Lion Hudson Plc

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

The Little Fir Tree

"I wish I weren't so little," the little fir tree moaned. The baby bunnies hid under his branches. The children danced around him and sang. But he never enjoyed their company – not for one minute. For all he could do was stare up at the tall pine trees and long for the day when he would be tall too.

Time passed. The little fir tree grew. But still he moaned.

"I wish I was one of those really big trees," he complained to a sparrow one day.

"Why?" asked the sparrow. "The squirrels play in your branches. The children have picnics in your shade. Why not be happy with what you are?"

"Because those tall trees must be happier still!" the little fir tree sighed. "They are so close to the sky and to the sun. And more than that, a stork once told me that when they are chopped down, the tall trees are turned into masts for ships and that they spend their lives sailing across the seas! Oh, how wonderful to be a tall tree," the little fir tree sighed again.

"Well, I'm no stork," the sparrow twittered. "But I have seen wonderful things too! Why, just last winter, I perched on the window sill of a beautiful house in the town. And inside that house, I saw a

tree – not much bigger than you – decorated with candles and ribbons and apples and toys!"

"Not much bigger than me?" the fir tree repeated.

"Exactly!" chirped the sparrow. "So be happy with what you are!" And then the sparrow flew away.

From that moment on, the fir tree could think of nothing but the sparrow's story. He ignored the bright hot summer and the crisp autumn breeze. He forgot about the squirrels and the children too. For all he could do was dream about that beautiful tree, and wish for winter to come.

Come it did – with cold and snow and ice. And with it came the men, as well, with axes slung over their shoulders. When they saw the little fir tree, one of them shouted, "Here's the one!" and then with a few well-placed blows they chopped the fir tree down.

The axe hurt the little fir tree. But for once, he did not moan. All he could think of was how beautiful he soon would be.

The man with the axe carried the fir tree to a very smart house. And soon the little fir tree's dream came true. He was propped up in the corner of a huge room, and then covered with ribbons and candles and toys – just as the sparrow had said!

That evening, the candles were lit, and even though they singed the fir tree's branches, still he did not complain, for as soon as the children looked at him they clapped and cheered.

They were happy. And at long last, he was happy too. His happiness, however, lasted only for a minute. For as soon as the children had finished cheering, they gathered around the tree and stripped his branches of the ribbons and toys and fruit!

"Oh dear!" the fir tree sighed. And then he calmed himself with this thought. "Perhaps they will decorate me again tomorrow!"

The next day came. There were no more decorations. And none the day after, or the day after that. In fact, no one paid him any notice at all. And when a few more days had passed, an old servant picked him up and tossed him onto a pile of rubbish behind the house. The fir tree's branches were brittle now, his needles dropping off.

"I wish I was back in the forest," he moaned.

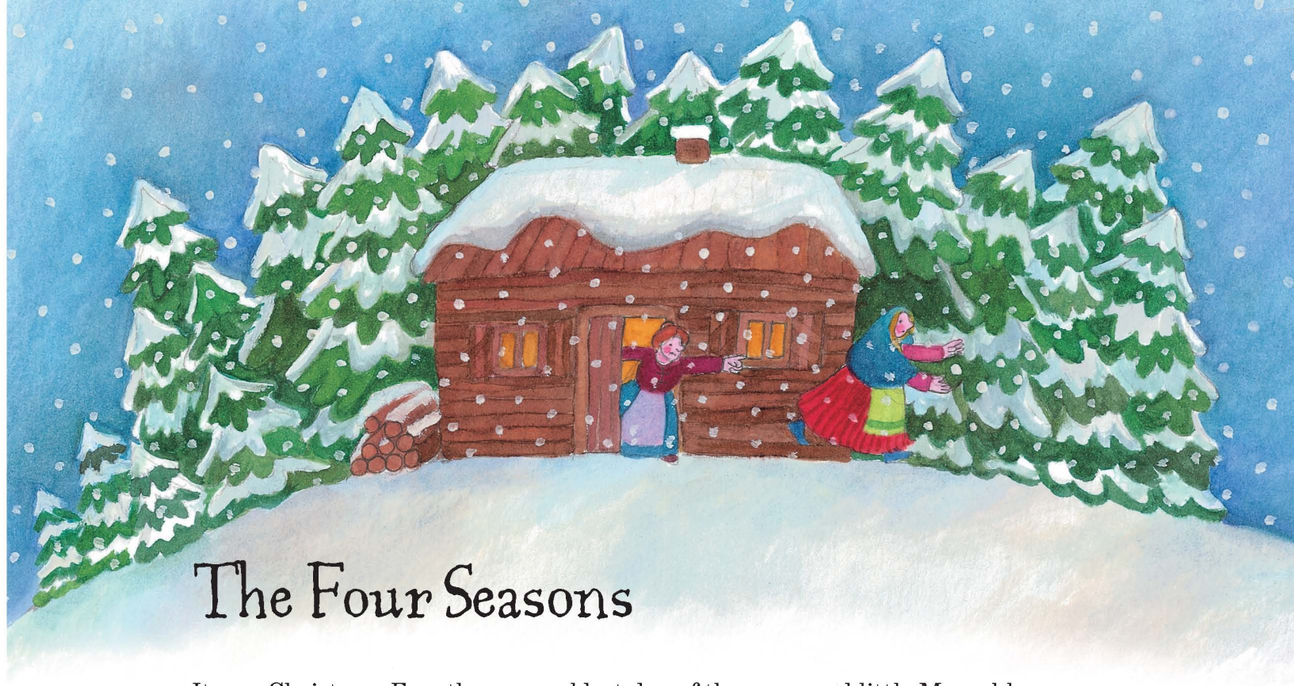
"Oh, it's not so bad here," said a little rat. "There's plenty of rubbish to eat! You should be happy with where you are!"

"I was happy once!" the little fir tree remembered (though he did not remember very well!). "I lived out in the woods with the squirrels in my branches and the children at my feet." But before he could remember another thing, the servant returned and set fire to the rubbish pile – and the little fir tree as well.

The rat scampered away. A sparrow flew overhead. And the tree's sap spluttered and fizzled a sad moaning sound.

"I wish I were…" the little tree whispered. And then the little tree said no more.





The Four Seasons

It was Christmas Eve, the very coldest day of the year, and little Marushka sat sobbing and shivering in the corner. Her stepsister, Holena, and her stepmother did not like her. They called her names and made her do all the hard housework. And why? Simply because Marushka was beautiful – and they were jealous of her.

"Marushka!" came the harsh voice of her stepmother. "Marushka, come here at once!"

Marushka dried her eyes on her apron and walked slowly into the next room.

"Hurry up, girl!" her stepmother snapped. "Your stepsister, Holena, would like some fresh violets for Christmas. Go into the woods, at once, and fetch them for her."

"But, stepmother," Marushka said quietly, "it is winter time. There are no violets in the woods."

"Then you must walk until you find some," Holena sneered, from her comfortable chair on the other side of the room.

"Now go!" the stepmother ordered. "Or I will give you a beating you will never forget!"

Marushka nodded and said nothing more. She wrapped herself up in the warmest clothes she could find and set off through the deep snow to look for a bunch of fresh violets.

She walked and she walked and she walked, weeping with every step.