

Scary Trees – A Bedtime Story

told by Samwise Gamgee to his children

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„Tell us another story!“, Hamfest cried and his siblings echoed his demand. They sat on their beds, clad in green pajamas, while the cold wind howled through the bare trees. Sam scratched his head: „Well, I'll tell you, but it'll be a short one.“ His children moaned. The old hobbit looked through the round window. The moon sent his pale light through the branches and twigs. „Trees!“

“Oh no“, Rosie said, “Ents aren't *scary*!”

“Let me tell you, there are also vile trees. You may have heard about the Old Forest?” The children gasped. “Fatty Bolger warned us, but we opened the heavy gate, we had to leave the Shire and meet Gandalf. The moment my feet touched the strange ground I felt that the forest loathed us. It's not like Mirkwood which was weird, but not rude as long as you stayed on the path. Merry told us, they trees would behave in broad daylight - he was wrong.

First we just felt somewhat uncomfortable, but then a huge branch fell in front of Frodo's pony. We were shocked, told ourselves, things like that just happened from time to time. Yet, looking ahead we could see only tree-trunks of innumerable sizes and shapes, all queer and slimy.

We dodged roots which rose from the ground every-time we didn't pay attention to the ground. When we started looking at our feet the trees would sting us with pointed twigs. Some would even lash out or wrap around our bags. As soon as we looked at them they stood still. “Pesky trees“, Pippin cried. The forest became deeper. The hedge was our only landmark. The air began to get hot and stuffy. And it was quiet, I tell you, we didn't hear any birds or bees. The forest swallowed our words and it was wearisome to sing or even talk.

We led our ponies up and saw a valley. Merry explained to us: 'We don't want to go *that way*! The Withywindle valley is said to be the queerest part of the whole wood.' The Old Forest played with us. The trees moved sneakily and made us go into circles, up and down, exhausting us, while making us believe that we did chose a good path. After hours of wandering we had lost all clear sense of direction, until we eventually had made their way down through a cleft. In the midst of it there wound lazily a dark river of of the blackes water I've ever seen, bordered with ancient, creaking willows, arched over with willows, blocked with fallen willows, and flecked with thousands of faded willow-leaves. The willows-leaves were golden, a soft breeze touched our sweaty skin and we felt good, although I said to Frodo: 'We should be careful, that's

an eerie valley. Could it be... that we are?'

'Yes', said Merry. 'We have come almost in the opposite direction to which we intended. This is the River Withywindle! Look out for hidden water! Don't fall into it!'

Merry found a strange path. It turned and twisted, picking out the sounder ground among the bogs and pools. It didn't lead us into a bog, but to something more cruel. We hadn't seen any nice creatures in the Old Forest and it was depressingly quiet, now we were tortured by armies of flies which buzzed so loud that I got a head-ache. The sun blinded us. We were sleepy and stumbled. Merry finally murmured: 'It's no good.' 'Can't go another step without rest. Must have nap.'

He and Pippin found a comfortable place under a willow: shadowy and serene, there were almost no flies. There they lay down and fell asleep. The water beneath its roots looked refreshing. I remember how Frodo said he wanted to cool his feet.

I thought I heard a nice lullaby, but I was alert-eyed. 'There's more behind this than sun and warm air. I don't like this great big tree. I don't trust it.'

It was a sinister willow. It talked to other willows which lured our ponies away.

I cried: 'Hey, come back!' I was already at my feet, when I heard a click and a splash!

Master Frodo had gone, too. First I didn't want to believe it, but that vicious willow had thrown him into the water and hold him down with its nasty root. Frodo didn't realize that he was drowning! So strong was the spell of that malicious willow! I gripped Frodo by the jacket, but he was heavy. That tree played a tug of war! Bubbles of air came out of Frodo's mouth, but finally I hauled Frodo on to the bank. He woke up in an instant. We looked around: 'Where are Merry and Pippin?'

I remembered the click! Could it be? We went round to the other side of the tree. The crack by which Pippin had laid himself had closed together. Another crack had closed about Merry's waist; his legs lay outside, but the rest of him was inside a dark opening, the edges of which gripped like a pair of pincers. In my anger I kicked the tree, but it just waved his twigs tauntingly.

What should we do? We hadn't got an axe among our luggage. We debated, if we should make a fire. Either the tree would eat Merry and Pippin alive or we would roast and suffocate them. We made a fire! Merry screamed and Pippin gave a muffled yell. The tree didn't become frightened like one would expect, but angry and violent. He even try to squeeze our friends to death, while his branches hurt us.

I stamped out the fire, the tree drowned us in a clamour of leaves. The black river began to rise, other trees where howling. It looked like they were moving, slowly encircling us. We were desperate. And then there was another voice: loud and deep. I tried to look through the swirling branches. Who came? Another pursuer sent from Mordor, did his song command the trees to kill us?!"

Sam paused dramatically. Then he sang Tom Bombabils song and described the strange figure who arrived in vivid colours.

"We stood still. And so did the trees. The wind puffed out. That man was a mighty singer and singing he fought the tree which turned to him and sang back, until the old willow gave our friends free with a loud cracking sound. There it stood, all innocent, like a decent tree – but maybe this was just another trap to catch us alive? Who knows?" Sam's eyes sparkled. "You will hear – tomorrow!"