

The Tree House

PETER THE PILEATED WOODPECKER was very happy except for one thing. He was considered by the other birds to be too loud. He would hammer at the trees all day long looking for carpenter ants and his pecking would echo through the forest. Because of this he didn't have any friends. No one wanted to be near a big loud woodpecker. tr=-

One day he was sitting on the branch of an old dead pine tree feeling lonely. It barely resembled a pine anymore aside from its polished silver whorls of empty branches, and it stood like a spiky phantom in the middle of the forest. It was Old Phantom Pine, who called herself this because she was only half alive in this world and partly gone on to the next.

Suddenly the tree began to talk to Peter.

"You look unhappy, friend," she said in a deep comforting voice.

"That's the problem. I have no friends."

"Show up where you are needed and I bet you will find some friends" said Old Phantom Pine.

"What do you mean?" asked Peter.

Old Phantom Pine was quiet and wouldn't say another word so Peter decided to search for breakfast in her trunk. He was so hungry he couldn't wait to eat some crunchy juicy carpenter ants. He stuck out his long strong tongue and chipped away at the soft woody trunk with his chiseled beak. *(make woodpecker rapping sound)*

"Yum Yum!" he said as he gobbled down ants and other small boring insects. He went deeper and deeper into the tree.

"Hey!" shouted a tiny voice in front of him. It was Archie the Ant talking to Peter. "This old tree is our home. Please leave us some space." he said.

Peter was very surprised that his breakfast was talking to him.

"I guess I can peck at another spot in the tree then," said Peter, and he flew up to a higher spot on the trunk. He finished his breakfast and left, leaving a large rectangle-shaped hole in the trunk high up.

That night under the starry sky, Fiona Flying Squirrel came gliding through the forest looking for a new place to store food. She saw the Old Phantom Pine and noticed the cavity that Peter had made high up. "What luck!" said Fiona. "This is a perfect place to keep my food dry during the spring rains." She spent the rest of the night filling the hole with her favorite foods: fungi and lichens, woodland seeds, and wild cranberries from the bog.

The next day when Peter returned for breakfast he found that his hole in the tree was filled up with someone's else's breakfast! "Ewww! I don't like lichen. Not enough protein for me!" He decided to make another hole in the tree this time, even higher up.

That afternoon when Peter was taking a nap on a limb, young Bella Blue Bird came flying over to inspect the hole that Peter had made. It was just the right size for her nest and a great place to lay eggs out of the spring rain. She could feel the seasons changing and knew her babies would be coming soon. She set about building a nest out of thin blades of dried grass, pine needles from the forest floor, and a special downy turkey feather that she had been saving for the occasion.

The next day when Peter returned to his hole to keep digging for breakfast, he found Bella Bluebird sitting on her nest. "Gosh! This is a popular tree," he exclaimed and moved further down the trunk to make yet another hole.

That night, the rain came down again in sheets and torrents. (*make rain sounds together*) The birds and animals and insects hid under whatever they could find in the forest to try and stay dry. The next day it rained again and the poor creatures of the forest were miserably wet and cold.

Peter sat on a branch feeling very sad, but then he had an idea! He flew to Old Phantom Pine and started to peck with all his might, even as rain slid down his feathers and dropped off the tips of his wings. Peter pecked and pecked and ate and ate until the whole tree was covered in rectangular windows and doors and he was so full that his feathered belly stuck out in front of him and caught the raindrops falling down.

Then Peter went flying through the forest telling all of the creatures that a cozy room in an old pine awaited anyone who needed a dry home.

Out came raccoon and owl, beetle and chickadee and soon every room that Peter had made in the Old Phantom Pine was occupied by someone from the forest. Even after the spring rain had passed, the creatures went about their days and nights, foraging, borrowing, nesting, caring for young, and sleeping in the old tree, all very grateful to Peter.

It was a very full tree house. From then on Peter had as many friends as he could want and when they heard his loud hammering in the trees, they found it to be a welcoming sound now, and a signal that a new home or nursery or pantry was being built for one of them. They thanked him everyday for his contribution to life in the forest and he was very happy indeed. And this is also why we leave dead trees standing. They are a very important part of the forest ecosystem as they often become a cozy and very full Tree House.

By Landere Naisbitt, BHHT Outreach Coordinator

