

The Christmas Tree  
by Robert A. Spalletta

*A young woman and her father sit together looking at a bare Christmas tree.*

Abe: It's a tree.

Mary: I thought you weren't going to do this.

Abe: I couldn't. It just didn't seem right. We always got a tree. We always decorated it.

Mary: Neither of us have the time or the energy to decorate an extra tree this year. And you're not even going to be here for the holiday. It's just a waste of money. How much did you pay for it?

Abe: Not much. Not much at all. It was the last one on the lot. The guy wanted to go home.

Mary: Remember when we used to go and cut one down?

Abe: Yes. Every year. I seem to remember you were the one who always picked it out.

Mary: Well, the boys always wanted to cut down the biggest one they could find. You were always looking for the perfect shape. I just picked the one closest to the exit. It took a while, but everyone finally came around to my way of thinking.

Abe: The place closed. They cut down all the trees. Twenty years we went to that same place, and then one year – they were gone. As if they were never there.

Mary: Yea, I remember that year. We drove all the way up and the place was empty and abandoned. It must have taken forever to cut all the trees down. I wonder why they did that.

Abe: Insurance.

Mary: Insurance? You think they collected insurance on the trees?

Abe: No. Insurance on the property. They were worried about people falling into holes and getting hurt. If they left the trees it would have been an "attractive nuisance." Some kid at night would sneak up there to get a tree and fall in a hole and they would be liable. This way, who would want to go up to a bald mountain?

Mary: Oh. Remember when Johnny fell in a hole when we were there?

Abe: Johnny was always falling in holes. Do you want something to eat? Or drink?

Mary: No, we really should be going. I still can't believe you got a tree.

Abe: It was the last one on the lot. I couldn't just leave it there. Alone.

Mary: But it's just going to stand here in your living room alone.

Abe: That's not the point. It was chosen. It was taken home.

Mary: Come on Dad. Don't get that way. We're going to have a great Christmas. You and me, in my new apartment. Hey, what was your first Christmas in your first apartment like?

Abe: Well, lets see. Your mother was there. We lived over a jewelry store. Two long rooms. One a kitchen and living room, the other bedroom and bathroom. But I don't remember Christmas. We must have done something. But I don't remember.

Mary: That's ok.

Abe: No, I can't remember. You should ask your mother. She was always so much better at remembering stuff like that.

Mary: Now Dad, you know I can't ask her about it. Right?

Abe: Of course, you're right. I'm sorry. I can't remember if we were fighting then. I don't think so. I think we were still happy. We must have done something for Christmas. I know your mother was always talking about nest building.

Mary: Dad, do you have to get some things together? Are you ready to go?

Abe: She talked about a house with a white picket fence. The kids playing in the yard and her making dinner for me when I came home from work with all the other husbands. She would talk about the cooking smells from the houses when we would go for walks. I guess we used to go for walks.

Mary: So, what would you like for dinner?

Abe: Oh yes, I forgot. You're quite the cook now.

Mary: Yes. Three years cooking for me, two years cooking for someone else, and now a year cooking when I want.

Abe: Are you ok?

Mary: Of course.

Abe: Well, sweetie, I always used to say cooking was the one thing in life that if you paid attention and followed directions it would always turn out ok.

Mary: Yes, daddy, you always did say that. I guess I never understood it.

Abe: Are you ok?

Mary: Of course. I have you, don't I?

Abe: Look what I have. (*HE reaches under HIS chair and pulls out a small box*) It couldn't be Christmas without this. (*HE takes out a paper cone, about eight inches long, covered in crayon and with pieces of yarn glued to the open end*).

Mary: You still have it! After all these years.

Abe: Of course. We used it every year since you were six.

Mary: My work holds up pretty good.

Abe: An angel made by an angel. Do you want the honors?

Mary: Sure. (*SHE takes the cone and puts it on top of the tree*) The boys were sorry they couldn't come home this Christmas.

Abe: They always hated putting the lights on the tree.

Mary: And you always hated taking them off. Remember our Easter trees. It's a wonder our house never burned down.

Abe: You talked to your brothers?

Mary: Yes. They wanted to come home, but you know how it is. They also want to build some memories for your grandchildren of their own house.

Abe: Of course. Building memories. That is what we're left with.

Mary: Well, this Christmas lets make some new ones – you and me. Come on. The best part of life is making new memories.

Abe: If you say so.

Mary: Dad! Come on. We should be going. Are you ready? I fixed up a great place for you in my apartment. You are going to love it.

Abe: We could stay here for the holiday.

Mary: We've been through this already. This year Christmas is at my place.

Abe: Yes. Are the boys going to be there?

Mary: No, dad, they couldn't make it this year.

Abe: Oh yes, you told me that. I'm sorry. I was just thinking about another Christmas.

Mary: I understand. So, did you wrap my present?

Abe: Of course I did. Well, actually, I had it wrapped at the store. But it's wrapped.

Mary: And so is yours. It's waiting at my apartment. Are you ready to go?

Abe: I have these other ornaments.

Mary: Which ones?

Abe: I found the paper ones. The ones you and your brothers made in grade school.

Mary: Can I see?

Abe: (*HE hands her the box*) There are more, somewhere.

Mary: I remember this. (*SHE pulls out a cutout in the shape of a child's hand decorated with crayon and glitter*) Oh, this one is Johnny's. Mine should be in here somewhere.

Abe: (*HE gets up, takes Johnny's ornament from HER and places it on the tree*) There.

Mary: Come on, Dad. I have a tree at my apartment waiting for us to decorate. And I have all shiny new ornaments. Did you get the special one this year?

Abe: I forgot. It just didn't seem that important now.

Mary: Dad, you got one every year. Remember, we put it on last. I wanted one to start my collection. Come on, we can stop at the store on the way and pick one up. I hope there are still some good ones left.

Abe: There are always good ones left. The point is, the one that's there is the right one.

Mary: Daddy, I love you. (*SHE gives him a hug, then pulls another paper hand out of the box and puts it on the tree*) Now, that one is mine. (*SHE pulls a third one out and puts it on the tree*) And now we're all there.

Abe: I guess its time to go. (*HE stands and starts to exit*)

Mary: Yes daddy. You'll never guess what I made for dinner tonight. (*SHE walks with HIM to exit together*)