

# *The Lime-Tree*

A. H. Wratislaw

Russian

---

*Easy*  
*6 min read*

One evening Vanyusha (Johnny) was sitting with his grand- father, and asked his grandfather: ‘Whence comes it that bears’ paws are like our hands and feet?’ His grandfather replied: ‘Listen, Johnny. I will tell you what I have myself heard from ancient people. Ancient people said bears were like human beings, like us orthodox Christians. In a certain village there lived a poor cottager. His cottage was wretched; he had no pony; a cow he never even thought of; he had no firewood. Winter came, and it was cold in his unwarmed room. The cottager took his axe, and went with it into the wood. An enchanted tree—a lime-tree—presented itself to his sight. He struck it with his axe, and now to cut it down; but the lime-tree addressed him in human speech: “I will give you all that you want. If you have no riches, if you have no wife, I will give you all.” The peasant said: “Very good, mother, if you make me richer than any of the peasants. But I have no pony, no cow, and my cottage is wretched.” The lime-tree said: “Go home; all shall be yours.” The peasant went. A new house was his: fences of stout boards, horses that were ready to fly, and storerooms full of corn. The cottager was not satisfied, because his wife was not handsomer. What was to be done? “I’ll go off quick to Mother Lime-tree.” He took his axe, and went off into the wood.

‘He went into the wood to the lime-tree, and struck it with his axe. “What do you want?” “Mother Lime-tree, among mankind there are wives and wives, but mine is such a disagreeable one. Do me a service: give me a handsome wife.” The lime-tree said: “Go home.” The peasant went. His wife came to meet him—such a beauty—blood and milk, and storerooms full of everything good. Well, the cottager began to live comfortably

with his young wife, and thought: "It is a fine thing for us to live possessed of riches, but we're under a superior authority. Is it impossible for me to be the superior authority myself?" He thought it over with his wife. He went again to the enchanted lime-tree.

'He went into the wood, he struck it with his axe. "What do you want, peasant?" "What, indeed, Mother Lime-tree! It's a fine thing for us to live in possession of riches; but we're under a superior authority. Is it impossible for me to be head-borough myself?" "Very well: go home; all shall be yours." No sooner had the cottager got home, when a letter came for him—"The cottager was to be head-borough." The cottager got used to living as head-borough, and thought to himself: "It's a fine thing to be head-borough, but all is under the control of the lord of the manor. Is it impossible for me to be the lord myself?" He considered the matter with his wife, they consulted together, and he went off again to the lime-tree.

'He went up to it, and struck it with his axe. The tree asked him: "What do you want?" "Thanks to you, mother, for all; but how not to doff my cap before the lord, to become the lord myself?" "What is to be done with you? Go home; it shall all be yours." Scarcely had he got home, when up drove the lord-lieutenant, and brought him a letter from the king, that "he was to be a gentleman." It was advantageous to be a gentleman. He began to give entertainments and banquets. "It's a fine thing to be a gentleman, but without an official position! Was it impossible for him to become an official?" They thought and talked it over. He went off to the lime-tree and struck it with his axe. "What do you want, peasant?" "I thank you, mother, for all; but is it impossible for me to be an official?" "Well, then, go home!" No sooner had he got home, when a royal letter arrived—he was invested with orders. "It's a fine thing to be decorated, but all is under the control of the lord-lieutenant. Is it impossible for me to be lord-lieutenant myself?" He thought it over with his wife, went off into the wood to the enchanted tree, the lime-tree.

'He came to the lime-tree and struck it with his axe. It said: "What do you want, peasant? With what are you discontented?" "I thank you, mother, for everything; but is it impossible for me to be lord-lieutenant myself, and to have a rich patrimony?" "It is difficult to effect this. But what is to be done with you? Go home!" The cottager had scarcely got home, when a letter arrived the cottager was to be lord-lieutenant, and was presented with an estate of inheritance. The cottager became used to living as lord-lieutenant—indeed, by descent, he was not a peasant. "It's a fine thing for me to live as lord-lieutenant, but all is under the control of the king." He considered; he went off into the wood to the enchanted tree, the lime-tree.

'He came to it, and struck it with his axe. The tree inquired: "What do you want?" "All is excellent; I thank you

for all; but is it impossible for me to be king myself?' The lime-tree began to try to persuade him. "Foolish man, for what are you asking? Consider what you were, and what you have become. From a cottager you have become a man of high rank and everything; but an emperor is chosen by God." The lime-tree endeavoured to persuade him with all manner of arguments that he had better not make the request, but all in vain. The cottager would not budge, but insisted that it should make him emperor. The lime-tree said to him: "It is impossible to effect this, and it will not be done; you will lose, too, what you have already obtained!" But the cottager still insisted. The lime-tree said: "Become a bear, and your wife a she-bear!" And he became a bear, and she a she-bear. They went off bears.'

The grandson inquired: 'Grandfather, can this be a true story?' 'In reality 'tis a fable. Do not desire what is impossible; be content with a little. If you desire much, you will lose what you have obtained.'

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)