

The Tree

A NOVEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG TEENAGERS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP WITH AN ETHICAL AND ECOLOGICAL MESSAGE.

Combining humour and suspense, the author tells an allegorical tale showing how greed can ruin humanity and the world around us. In the middle of a barren wilderness, a terrible monster called Blöeglöek lives under the roots of the very last tree, which he guards with his life. In the wilderness, there is also a palace where the Princess lives. Although she has everything, she dreams one night about a miraculous tree and the most dazzling star in the universe. In her pursuit of the dream, she goes out into the wilderness where she meets various weird creatures. When the Princess meets Blöeglöek, two opposing worlds and viewpoints clash. There follows an irreconcilable struggle in which hope, the will to change and unexpected friendship are all born.

ALEXANDRA SALMELA
Martina Matlovičová



DREAMING BENEATH A MAGIC CANOPY

In the glorious starlight, the mean little stump had grown into the most majestic tree in the universe. It was exquisite. Blöeglök said nothing, just stared at it open-mouthed, his eyes like saucers. Some kind of liquid was running down his pock-marked face. Blöeglök licked it from his cheek. It was as salty as the sea, though Blöeglök knew nothing about the sea.

Blöeglök, the grouchy big-eared monster from the dusty hole was not the only one to be enchanted by the tree. Even the bipeds had stopped their scheming and turned their faces to the heavens.

"Gorgeous!" gasped one of them, his voice somehow softer than usual.

"Diamonds in the sky. A sky without light," marvelled another. Such darkness was quite new to them.

The night sky amazed them all. They had never seen anything like it before. When the sun was shining, the sky was as thin as paper but now it was deeper than the deepest tunnel any cluckster had ever dug into the earth. The maned bipeds lay down on their backs one after the other one and feasted their eyes on the hypnotic depths of the darkness and the patterns which the twinkling stars were making. Fat birds forgot about their fear as well as about worms and contentedly nestled up alongside the bipeds, letting the big beasts tenderly rub them under their dirty beaks. The hunters and the cluckster lay down companionably in the dust cooled down by the unexpected night. Everyone watched the heavenly performance being played out upon a stage woven from all the greens the world could offer.

They were all breathing hard, their chests rising and falling in waves. Everything was suddenly wonderful leaving them happy and contented... Blöeglök could feel the blood flowing through him and the air tickling his coarse hide. He felt alive and at one with the world around him.



"The tree is mine!" The Princess' sharp voice cruelly snapped the magical thread.

"You didn't want me to know it was miraculous, did you?" she said to Blöeglöek accusingly.

"I had no idea..." blurted Blöeglöek. He was coming round from his lovely green dream. It troubled him that the tree had never shown itself to him in all its magical beauty before. Of course the Princess didn't believe a word he said.

"What nonsense. You're a rotten liar. You envy me so much you just wanted to trick me."

But Blöeglöek had had enough of the bad-tempered little minx.

"What would I envy you for? Your diamond slippers?"

The Princess put her hands on her side and replied scornfully.

"For everything. You envy me everything because ALL THIS IS MINE! ONLY MINE! And that star which /that is sitting on the top of the highest branch of the tree is all mine. The most brilliant star in the whole universe and you will never have such a star / star like that because everything is mine! Which means this tree is mine and your den is mine and there is nothing left for you. What do you say to that?!" / So there!"

Blöeglöek said nothing but the Princess went 'hah-hah', stamped her foot on the ground and made a noose at the end of a flashing length of cable/hose. She then swung it around her head like a lasso and flung it high up into the crown of the tree. The cable wrapped round a branch and she then secured it with a fisherman's knot before tying the other end around her waist.

"What are you doing?!" growled Blöeglöek angrily. Again he was his old suspicious and permanently grouchy self.

"I'm going for /going to get my star," retorted the Princess, pointing up at it with her thumb / giving it a thumbs up. And the star glistened / blinked back so brightly that the Princess had to put on some extra dark sunglasses as well as a welding mask on top. She then attached some crampons to her shoes, picked up two ice axes and rammed them into the tree.



Selected Awards – Alexandra Salmela:

- 2010 Helsingin Sanomat Prize
- 2010 Kaihari Culture Prize
- 2010 Finlandia Prize – shortlisted
- 2012 Anasoft Litera Prize – shortlisted
- 2018 Anasoft Litera Prize – shortlisted

Selected Awards – Martina Matlovičová:

- 2009 Bratislava Biennial of Illustration –
- The Golden Apple

Selected Translations:

Mimi a Liza 1 & 2 (*Mimi and Liza 1 & 2*)

CZECH, DANISH, FINISH,
HUNGARIAN

27 čiže smrť robí umelca
(*27-Death Makes the Artist*)

DANISH, HUNGARIAN, ITALIAN,
POLISH

Žirafia mama a iné príšery
(*The Giraffe's Mother and Other Monsters*)

HUNGARIAN



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ALEXANDRA SALMELA 1980

An author who became famous abroad before gaining renown in her native Slovakia, she debuted in 2010 with her novel *27 čiže smrť robí umelca* (*27 – Death Makes the Artist*), which came out in Finland where she lives. She was the first person without Finnish citizenship to win the most prestigious literary award in Finland – the *Helsingin Sanomat* daily newspaper prize for the best debut. She wrote the popular book for children, *Žirafia mama a iné príšery* (*The Giraffe's Mother and Other Monsters*) (2013) and is co-author of the successful collection of books *Mimi a Liza* (*Mimi and Liza*) (2013, 2015, 2018) based on the children's cartoon serial of the same name.



MARTINA MATLOVIČOVÁ KRÁLOVÁ 1975

She studied animation but concentrates mostly on book illustrations. The colours in her work are always bright, deep and dominant and reflect the artist's humour, emotion, intelligence and creative inventiveness as well as her courage to break certain strict conventions. In 2009 she won the Golden Apple award at the Bratislava Biennial of Illustration for her illustrations of the Slovak translation of *Tracy's Tiger* (2009), and for *Drevený tata* (*Wooden Daddy*) (2007). She is the winner of the 2015 Ľudovít Fulla award for Creative Work for Children and Teenagers. Many of the books which she has worked on have been among the 'Most Beautiful Books in Slovakia' in recent years.

