Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Pumpkin-Glory

William Dean Howells

The papa had told the story so often that the children knew just exactly what to expect the moment he began. They all knew it as well as he knew it himself, and they could keep him from making mistakes, or forgetting. Sometimes he would go wrong on purpose, or would pretend to forget, and then they had a perfect right to pound him till he quit it. He usually quit pretty soon.

The children liked it because it was very exciting, and at the same time it had no moral, so that when it was all over, they could feel that they had not been excited just for the moral. The first time the little girl heard it she began to cry, when it came to the worst part; but the boy had heard it so much by that time that he did not mind it in the least, and just laughed.

The story was in season any time between Thanksgiving and New Years; but the papa usually began to tell it in the early part of October, when the farmers were getting in their pumpkins, and the children were asking when they were going to have any squash pies, and the boy had made his first jack-o'-lantern.

"Well," the papa said, "once there were two little pumpkin seeds, and one was a good little pumpkin seed, and the other was bad--very proud, and vain, and ambitious."

The papa had told them what ambitious was, and so the children did not stop him when he came to that word; but sometimes he would stop of his own accord, and then if they could not tell what it meant, he would pretend that he was not going on; but he always did go on.

"Well, the farmer took both the seeds out to plant them in the home-patch, because they were a very extra kind of seeds, and he was not going to risk them in the cornfield, among the corn. So before he put them in the ground, he asked each one of them what he wanted to be when he came up, and the good little pumpkin seed said he wanted to come up a pumpkin, and be made into a pie, and be eaten at Thanksgiving dinner; and the bad little pumpkin seed said he wanted to come up a morning-glory.

"'Morning-glory!' says the farmer. 'I guess you'll come up a pumpkin-glory, first thing you know,' and then he haw-hawed, and told his son, who was helping him to plant the garden, to keep watch of that particular hill of pumpkins, and see whether that little seed came up a morning-glory or not; and the boy stuck a

stick into the hill so he could tell it. But one night the cow got in, and the farmer was so mad, having to get up about one o'clock in the morning to drive the cow out, that he pulled up the stick, without noticing, to whack her over the back with it, and so they lost the place.

"But the two little pumpkin seeds, they knew where they were well enough, and they lay low, and let the rain and the sun soak in and swell them up; and then they both began to push, and by-and-by they got their heads out of the ground, with their shells down over their eyes like caps, and as soon as they could shake them off and look round, the bad little pumpkin vine said to his brother:

"'Well, what are you going to do now?'

"The good little pumpkin vine said, 'Oh, I'm just going to stay here, and grow and grow, and put out all the blossoms I can, and let them all drop off but one, and then grow that into the biggest and fattest and sweetest pumpkin that ever was for Thanksgiving pies.'

"'Well, that's what I am going to do, too,' said the bad little pumpkin vine, 'all but the pies; but I'm not going to stay here to do it. I'm going to that fence over there, where the morning-glories were last summer, and I'm going to show them what a pumpkin-glory is like. I'm just going to cover myself with blossoms; and blossoms that won't shut up, either, when the sun comes out, but 'll stay open, as if they hadn't anything to be ashamed of, and that won't drop off the first day, either. I noticed those morning-glories all last summer, when I was nothing but one of the blossoms myself, and I just made up my mind that as soon as ever I got to be a vine, I would show them a thing or two. Maybe I can't be a morning-glory, but I can be a pumpkin-glory, and I guess that's glory enough.'

"It made the cold chills run over the good little vine to hear its brother talk like that, and it begged him not to do it; and it began to cry--

"What's that?" The papa stopped short, and the boy stopped whispering in his sister's ear, and she answered:

"He said he bet it was a girl!" The tears stood in her eyes, and the boy said:

"Well, anyway, it was like a girl."

"Very well, sir!" said the papa. "And supposing it was? Which is better: to stay quietly at home, and do your duty, and grow up, and be eaten in a pie at Thanksgiving, or go gadding all over the garden, and climbing fences, and everything? The good little pumpkin vine was perfectly right, and the bad little pumpkin would have been saved a good deal if it had minded its little sister.

"The farmer was pretty busy that summer, and after the first two or three hoeings he had to leave the two pumpkin vines to the boy that had helped him

to plant the seed, and the boy had to go fishing so much, and then in swimming, that he perfectly neglected them, and let them run wild, if they wanted to; and if the good little pumpkin vine had not been the best little pumpkin vine that ever was, it would have run wild. But it just stayed where it was, and thickened up, and covered itself with blossoms, till it was like one mass of gold. It was very fond of all its blossoms, and it couldn't bear hardly to think of losing any of them; but it knew they couldn't every one grow up to be a very large pumpkin, and so it let them gradually drop off till it only had one left, and then it just gave all its attention to that one, and did everything it could to make it grow into the kind of pumpkin it said it would.

"All this time the bad little pumpkin vine was carrying out its plan of being a pumpkin-glory. In the first place it found out that if it expected to get through by fall it couldn't fool much putting out a lot of blossoms and waiting for them to drop off, before it began to devote itself to business. The fence was a good piece off, and it had to reach the fence in the first place, for there wouldn't be any fun in being a pumpkin-glory down where nobody could see you, or anything. So the bad little pumpkin vine began to pull and stretch towards the fence, and sometimes it thought it would surely snap in two, it pulled and stretched so hard. But besides the pulling and stretching, it had to hide, and go round, because if it had been seen it wouldn't have been allowed to go to the fence. It was a good thing there were so many weeds, that the boy was too lazy to pull up, and the bad little pumpkin vine could hide among. But then they were a good deal of a hinderance, too, because they were so thick it could hardly get through them. It had to pass some rows of pease that were perfectly awful; they tied themselves to it and tried to keep it back; and there was one hill of cucumbers that acted ridiculously; they said it was a cucumber vine running away from home, and they would have kept it from going any farther, if it hadn't tugged with all its might and main, and got away one night when the cucumbers were sleeping; it was pretty strong, anyway. When it got to the fence at last, it thought it was going to die. It was all pulled out so thin that it wasn't any thicker than a piece of twine in some places, and its leaves just hung in tatters. It hadn't had time to put out more than one blossom, and that was such a poor little sickly thing that it could hardly hang on. The question was, How can a pumpkin vine climb a fence, anyway?

"Its knees and elbows were all worn to strings getting there, or that's what the pumpkin thought, till it wound one of those tendrils round a splinter of the fence, without thinking, and happened to pull, and then it was perfectly surprised to find that it seemed to lift itself off the ground a little. It said to itself, 'Let's try a few more,' and it twisted some more of the tendrils round some more splinters, and this time it fairly lifted itself off the ground. It said, 'Ah, I see!' as if it had somehow expected to do something of the kind all along; but it had to be pretty

careful getting up the fence not to knock its blossom off, for that would have been the end of it; and when it did get up among the morning-glories it almost killed the poor thing, keeping it open night and day, and showing it off in the hottest sun, and not giving it a bit of shade, but just holding it out where it could be seen the whole time. It wasn't very much of a blossom compared with the blossoms on the good little pumpkin vine, but it was bigger than any of the morning-glories, and that was some satisfaction, and the bad little pumpkin vine was as proud as if it was the largest blossom in the world.

"When the blossom's leaves dropped off, and a little pumpkin began to grow on in its place, the vine did everything it could for it; just gave itself up to it, and put all its strength into it. After all, it was a pretty queer-looking pumpkin, though. It had to grow hanging down, and not resting on anything, and after it started with a round head, like other pumpkins, its neck began to pull out, and pull out, till it looked like a gourd or a big pear. That's the way it looked in the fall, hanging from the vine on the fence, when the first light frost came and killed the vine. It was the day when the farmer was gathering his pumpkins in the cornfield, and he just happened to remember the seeds he had planted in the home-patch, and he got out of his wagon to see what had become of them. He was perfectly astonished to see the size of the good little pumpkin; you could hardly get it into a bushel basket, and he gathered it, and sent it to the county fair, and took the first premium with it."

"How much was the premium?" asked the boy. He yawned; he had heard all these facts so often before.

"It was fifty cents; but you see the farmer had to pay two dollars to get a chance to try for the premium at the fair; and so it was some satisfaction. Anyway, he took the premium, and he tried to sell the pumpkin, and when he couldn't, he brought it home and told his wife they must have it for Thanksgiving. The boy had gathered the bad little pumpkin, and kept it from being fed to the cow, it was so funny-looking; and the day before Thanksgiving the farmer found it in the barn, and he said,

"'Hollo! Here's that little fool pumpkin. Wonder if it thinks it's a morning-glory yet?'

"And the boy said, 'Oh, father, mayn't I have it?'

"And the father said, 'Guess so. What are you going to do with it?'

"But the boy didn't tell, because he was going to keep it for a surprise; but as soon as his father went out of the barn, he picked up the bad little pumpkin by its long neck, and he kind of balanced it before him, and he said, 'Well, now, I'm going to make a pumpkin-glory out of you!'

"And when the bad little pumpkin heard that, all its seeds fairly rattled in it for joy. The boy took out his knife, and the first thing the pumpkin knew he was cutting a kind of lid off the top of it; it was like getting scalped, but the pumpkin didn't mind it, because it was just the same as war. And when the boy got the top off he poured the seeds out, and began to scrape the inside as thin as he could without breaking through. It hurt awfully, and nothing but the hope of being a pumpkin-glory could have kept the little pumpkin quiet; but it didn't say a word, even after the boy had made a mouth for it, with two rows of splendid teeth, and it didn't cry with either of the eyes he made for it; just winked at him with one of them, and twisted its mouth to one side, so as to let him know it was in the joke; and the first thing it did when it got one was to turn up its nose at the good little pumpkin, which the boy's mother came into the barn to get."

"Show how it looked," said the boy.

And the papa twisted his mouth, and winked with one eye, and wrinkled his nose till the little girl begged him to stop. Then he went on:

"The boy hid the bad pumpkin behind him till his mother was gone, because he didn't want her in the secret; and then he slipped into the house, and put it under his bed. It was pretty lonesome up there in the boy's room--he slept in the garret, and there was nothing but broken furniture besides his bed; but all day long it could smell the good little pumpkin, boiling and boiling for pies; and late at night, after the boy had gone to sleep, it could smell the hot pies when they came out of the oven. They smelt splendid, but the bad little pumpkin didn't envy them a bit; it just said, 'Pooh! What's twenty pumpkin pies to one pumpkin-glory?'"

"It ought to have said 'what are,' oughtn't it, papa?" asked the little girl.

"It certainly ought," said the papa. "But if nothing but it's grammar had been bad, there wouldn't have been much to complain of about it."

"I don't suppose it had ever heard much good grammar from the farmer's family," suggested the boy. "Farmers always say cowcumbers instead of cucumbers."

"Oh, do tell us about the Cowcumber, and the Bullcumber, and the little Calfcumbers, papa!" the little girl entreated, and she clasped her hands, to show how anxious she was.

"What! And leave off at the most exciting part of the pumpkin-glory?"

The little girl saw what a mistake she had made; the boy just gave her one look, and she cowered down into the papa's lap, and the papa went on.

"Well, they had an extra big Thanksgiving at the farmer's that day. Lots of the

relations came from out West; the grandmother, who was living with the farmer, was getting pretty old, and every year or two she thought she wasn't going to live very much longer, and she wrote to the relations in Wisconsin, and everywhere, that if they expected to see her alive again, they had better come this time, and bring all their families. She kept doing it till she was about ninety, and then she just concluded to live along and not mind how old she was. But this was just before her eighty-ninth birthday, and she had drummed up so many sons and sons-in-law, and daughters and daughters-in-law, and grandsons and great-grandsons, and granddaughters and great-granddaughters, that the house was perfectly packed with them. They had to sleep on the floor, a good many of them, and you could hardly step for them; the boys slept in the barn, and they laughed and cut up so the whole night that the roosters thought it was morning, and kept crowing till they made their throats sore, and had to wear wet compresses round them every night for a week afterwards."

When the papa said anything like this the children had a right to pound him, but they were so anxious not to have him stop, that this time they did not do it. They said, "Go on, go on!" and the little girl said, "And then the tables!"



"Tables? Well, I should think so! They got all the tables there were in the house, up stairs and down, for dinner Thanksgiving Day, and they took the grandmother's work-stand and put it at the head, and she sat down there; only she was so used to knitting by that table that she kept looking for her knitting-needles all through dinner, and couldn't seem to remember what it was she was missing. The other end of the table was the carpenter's bench that they brought in out of the barn, and they put the youngest and funniest papa at that. The tables stretched from the kitchen into the dining-room, and clear through that out into the hall, and across into the parlor. They hadn't table-cloths enough to go the whole length, and the end of the carpenter's bench, where the funniest papa sat, was bare, and all through dinner-time he kept making fun. The vise was right at the corner, and when he got his help of turkey, he pretended that it was so tough he had to fasten the bone in the vise, and cut the meat off with his knife like a draw-shave."

"It was the drumstick, I suppose, papa?" said the boy. "A turkey's drumstick is all full of little wooden splinters, anyway."

"And what did the mamma say?" asked the little girl.

"Oh, she kept saying, 'Now you behave!' and, 'Well, I should think you'd be ashamed!' but the funniest papa didn't mind her a bit; and everybody laughed till they could hardly stand it. All this time the boys were out in the barn, waiting

for the second table, and playing round. The farmer's boy went up to his room over the wood-shed, and got in at the garret window, and brought out the pumpkin-glory. Only he began to slip when he was coming down the roof, and he'd have slipped clear off if he hadn't caught his trousers on a shingle-nail, and stuck. It made a pretty bad tear, but the other boys pinned it up so that it wouldn't show, and the pumpkin-glory wasn't hurt a bit. They all said that it was about the best jack-o'-lantern they almost ever saw, on account of the long neck there was to it; and they made a plan to stick the end of the neck into the top of the pump, and have fun hearing what the folks would say when they came out after dark and saw it all lit up; and then they noticed the pigpen at the corner of the barn, and began to plague the pig, and so many of them got up on the pen that they broke the middle board off; and they didn't like to nail it on again because it was Thanksgiving Day, and you mustn't hammer or anything; so they just stuck it up in its place with a piece of wood against it, and the boy said he would fix it in the morning

"The grown folks stayed so long at the table that it was nearly dark when the boys got to it, and they would have been almost starved if the farm-boy hadn't brought out apples and doughnuts every little while. As it was, they were pretty hungry, and they began on the pumpkin pie at once, so as to keep eating till the mother and the other mothers that were helping could get some of the things out of the oven that they had been keeping hot for the boys. The pie was so nice that they kept eating at it all along, and the mother told them about the good little pumpkin that it was made of, and how the good little pumpkin had never had any wish from the time it was nothing but a seed, except to grow up and be made into pies and eaten at Thanksgiving; and they must all try to be good, too, and grow up and do likewise. The boys didn't say anything, because their mouths were so full, but they looked at each other and winked their left eyes. There were about forty or fifty of them, and when they all winked their left eyes it made it so dark you could hardly see; and the mother got the lamp; but the other mothers saw what the boys were doing, and they just shook them till they opened their eyes and stopped their mischief."

"Show how they looked!" said the boy.

"I can't show how fifty boys looked," said the papa. "But they looked a good deal like the pumpkin-glory that was waiting quietly in the barn for them to get through, and come out and have some fun with it. When they had all eaten so much that they could hardly stand up, they got down from the table, and grabbed their hats, and started for the door. But they had to go out the back way, because the table took up the front entry, and that gave the farmer's boy a chance to find a piece of candle out in the kitchen and some matches; and then they rushed to the barn. It was so dark there already that they thought they had better light up the pumpkin-glory and try it. They lit it up, and it worked

splendidly; but they forgot to put out the match, and it caught some straw on the barn floor, and a little more and it would have burnt the barn down. The boys stamped the fire out in about half a second; and after that they waited till it was dark outside before they lit up the pumpkin-glory again. Then they all bent down over it to keep the wind from blowing the match anywhere, and pretty soon it was lit up, and the farmer's boy took the pumpkin-glory by its long neck, and stuck the point in the hole in the top of the pump; and just then the funniest papa came round the corner of the wood-house, and said:

"'What have you got there, boys? Jack-o'-lantern? Well, well. That's a good one!'

"He came up and looked at the pumpkin-glory, and he bent back and he bent forward, and he doubled down and he straightened up, and laughed till the boys thought he was going to kill himself.

"They had all intended to burst into an Indian yell, and dance round the pumpkin-glory; but the funniest papa said, 'Now all you fellows keep still half a minute,' and the next thing they knew he ran into the house, and came out, walking his wife before him with both his hands over her eyes. Then the boys saw he was going to have some fun with her, and they kept as still as mice, and waited till he walked her up to the pumpkin-glory; and she was saying all the time, 'Now, John, if this is some of your fooling, I'll give it to you.' When he got her close up he took away his hands, and she gave a kind of a whoop, and then she began to laugh, the pumpkin-glory was so funny, and to chase the funniest papa all round the yard to box his ears, and as soon as she had boxed them she said, 'Now let's go in and send the rest out,' and in about a quarter of a second all the other papas came out, holding their hands over the other mothers' eyes till they got them up to the pumpkin-glory; and then there was such a yelling and laughing and chasing and ear-boxing that you never heard anything like it; and all at once the funniest papa hallooed out: 'Where's gramma? Gramma's got to see it! Grandma'll enjoy it. It's just gramma's kind of joke,' and then the mothers all got round him and said he shouldn't fool the grandmother, anyway; and he said he wasn't going to: he was just going to bring her out and let her see it; and his wife went along with him to watch that he didn't begin acting up.

"The grandmother had been sitting all alone in her room ever since dinner; because she was always afraid somehow that if you enjoyed yourself it was a sign you were going to suffer for it, and she had enjoyed herself a good deal that day, and she was feeling awfully about it. When the funniest papa and his wife came in she said, 'What is it? What is it? Is the world a-burnin' up? Well, you got to wrap up warm, then, or you'll ketch your death o' cold runnin' and then stoppin' to rest with your pores all open!'

"The funniest papa's wife she went up and kissed her, and said, 'No, grandmother, the world's all right,' and then she told her just how it was, and

how they wanted her to come out and see the jack-o'-lantern, just to please the children; and she must come, anyway; because it was the funniest jack-o'-lantern there ever was, and then she told how the funniest papa had fooled her, and then how they had got the other papas to fool the other mothers, and they had all had the greatest fun then you ever saw. All the time she kept putting on her things for her, and the grandmother seemed to get quite in the notion, and she laughed a little, and they thought she was going to enjoy it as much as anybody; they really did, because they were all very tender of her, and they wouldn't have scared her for anything, and everybody kept cheering her up and telling her how much they knew she would like it, till they got her to the pump. The little pumpkin-glory was feeling awfully proud and self-satisfied; for it had never seen any flower or any vegetable treated with half so much honor by human beings. It wasn't sure at first that it was very nice to be laughed at so much, but after a while it began to conclude that the papas and the mammas were just laughing at the joke of the whole thing. When the old grandmother got up close, it thought it would do something extra to please her; or else the heat of the candle had dried it up so that it cracked without intending to. Anyway, it tried to give a very broad grin, and all of a sudden it split its mouth from ear to ear."

"You didn't say it had any ears before," said the boy.

"No; it had them behind," said the papa; and the boy felt like giving him just one pound; but he thought it might stop the story, and so he let the papa go on.

"As soon as the grandmother saw it open its mouth that way she just gave one scream, 'My sakes! It's comin' to life!' And she threw up her arms, and she threw up her feet, and if the funniest papa hadn't been there to catch her, and if there hadn't been forty or fifty other sons and daughters, and grandsons and daughters, and great-grandsons and great-granddaughters, very likely she might have fallen. As it was, they piled round her, and kept her up; but there were so many of them they jostled the pump, and the first thing the pumpkin-glory knew, it fell down and burst open; and the pig that the boys had plagued, and that had kept squealing all the time because it thought that the people had come out to feed it, knocked the loose board off its pen, and flew out and gobbled the pumpkin-glory up, candle and all, and that was the end of the proud little pumpkin-glory."

"And when the pig ate the candle it looked like the magician when he puts burning tow in his mouth," said the boy.

"Exactly," said the papa.

The children were both silent for a moment. Then the boy said, "This story never had any moral, I believe, papa?"

"Not a bit," said the papa. "Unless," he added, "the moral was that you had better not be ambitious, unless you want to come to the sad end of this proud little pumpkin-glory."

"Why, but the good little pumpkin was eaten up, too," said the boy.

"That's true," the papa acknowledged.

"Well," said the little girl, "there's a great deal of difference between being eaten by persons and eaten by pigs."

"All the difference in the world," said the papa; and he laughed, and ran out of the library before the boy could get at him.

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