

The Inn at Chillingford

A fairy story from Tales from Beyond the Wood by Adrian Farrel

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Yesterday evening, at half past six or thereabouts, as I was making my way home from the fields where I had been weeding the lilies, I was stopped by a bear who asked me, in the most courteous of words, if I wouldn't tell him the way to Chillingford and give him directions to the inn that is situated there.

Well, I didn't much like the sound of that: a bear drinking at an inn with the common people, and on a Sunday too. So I feigned ignorance, and told him I was unable to be of assistance.

"It is of no matter," said the bear. "Please don't distress yourself on my account. But allow me to walk with you a while as I have no better plan."

Well, it was only a moderately sized bear, certainly smaller than many I have met, but I did not wish to appear rude by refusing it in case it insisted. So we walked on together, from time to time pointing out interesting features of the scenery to each other and discussing the market price of livestock and especially fish.

After a while we came to a fork in the road and the bear sat down on the milestone to decide which way he would go.

I noticed a rich crop of wild berries nearby and began to graze upon them. This gave the bear an idea and, pulling a string bag from his pocket, he set about picking the fruits and collecting them in that receptacle.

"These," he informed me, "will make an excellent cordial that I can take to my grandmother."

After a time, when his bag was bulging full, the bear bade me good day and set off on one path. I, following the signpost to Chillingford, selected the other and, on reaching the town, made my way to the inn where I took a few drinks to steady my nerves.





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