

A new Version¹⁾ of Washington and Cherry Tree

Mr. Washington looked at the cherry tree and scratched his chin. “Now George,” he said to his son, “Are you sure you had nothing to do with chopping²⁾ this tree down?” “I don’t clearly recall chopping this tree down,” answered George. “Isn’t this your axe³⁾?” asked the father, pointing to the tool on the ground by the stump of the cherry tree. “That appears to be very similar to my axe,” said George. “Well, you’re a healthy young man, and I know you enjoy outside work like chopping firewood and such, don’t you?” “There may have been one or two times when I might have chopped firewood.” “With this axe?” “Possibly with an axe that in a general way resembles that one.” “I seem to recall that you chopped wood for Miss Jenny several times, I believe.” “Only once. It was not a continuing relationship.” “But she said you chopped lots of firewood at her place, and I noticed that all of it has a peculiar mark left by an axe blade with a small chip in it. Doesn’t your axe have such a distinguishing characteristic?” “I don’t recall ever noticing anything unusual about my axe. Besides, that was all in the past. It has nothing to do with how I behave now, or whether I would have chopped down your cherry tree.”

George’s mother commented: “I don’t believe George would do such a thing.” “But his axe is right here, and the tree is freshly cut, and he’s the only person around.” “Oh, just drop it, it’s only a tree,” said his mother. “But it’s not just the tree; we really need to find out if he’s being honest with us. I won’t put up with⁴⁾ lying, and he shouldn’t get you to cover up for him.” “Well, if he really had cut the tree, he would deserve to be punished, but I just don’t think he could have done it,” she said.

George spoke up, clearly angry, and he hooked his finger at them. “I’m going to say this one more time: I did not chop down that tree — the cherry tree — and I did not ask anyone to lie. Not one time. Never.” George’s father was not accustomed to his son being so direct, but had to admit the teenager seemed genuinely hurt that his integrity⁵⁾ was in question. Mrs. Washington was clearly uncomfortable with the situation and wanted the problem to go away. George’s father didn’t like the discussion either, but he had to get to the bottom of this. He continued: “George, there’s no fresh-cut firewood around, but your hair and clothing are full of wood chips, and the chips look like cherry wood to me. How do you explain that?”

George bit his lip and answered: “Clearly my behavior has been inappropriate⁶⁾, and I deeply regret the embarrassment I may have caused Miss Jenny, and the damage which seems to have been done to the tree. But I really need to get back to my chores⁷⁾ now.”

“We’re not quite finished yet,” said his father. “Now I’m going to ask you directly. Did you chop down that cherry tree?” “Define ‘chop’,” said George. “You know very well what ‘chop’ means. Anyone knows what ‘chop’ means.” said his exasperated⁸⁾ father, shaking. “Are you lying to me?” “Well, it’s possible that I might have swung the axe in an inappropriate manner which might have resulted in some harm to the tree, but at the moment you asked me, I was thinking of what ‘chop’ means and

my actions didn't meet my definition of 'chopping' so I really didn't lie. ”

George's mother was not entirely satisfied with this answer, but the affair was beginning to spoil her day and she really wanted to get it behind her. Her son was basically a likeable young man who did his chores most of the time — although his father swore the family—hired hands deserved most of the credit. She decided to put her foot down:

“This is not really worth all the fuss, ” she said, “Even if he did it, it's only a tree and every young man enjoys chopping a tree now and then. You've certainly chopped a few in your day. Now let's forget it and enjoy this lovely afternoon. ” She smiled and stroked George's hair.

Seeing that he had lost, George's father took a deep breath, turned and walked slowly toward the house. He shook his head in wonder; he had always given his wife credit for better judgment. “Why am I always the one who ends up in the doghouse? ” he thought.

George smiled and picked up his axe. As he ran his thumb along the keen edge, his gaze turned toward the stately oak tree on the front lawn.

□by Rex Crigger

《华盛顿与樱桃树》新编

编者按：《华盛顿与樱桃树》的故事在美国家喻户晓。小时候，华盛顿用自己的小斧头把父亲心爱的一棵樱桃树给砍掉了。他知道父亲会生气，但还是如实相告。美国的父母总是给孩子讲这个故事，教育他们学习国父华盛顿的诚实。而《华盛顿与樱桃树》新编，则影射了当今美国一些政客出于政治目的而大玩文字游戏撒谎狡辩的行径。

华盛顿先生看着樱桃树，挠挠下巴。“乔治，”他问儿子，“你肯定与砍掉这棵樱桃树无关吗？”“我记不清有没有砍掉这棵樱桃树，”乔治答道。“这把斧子不是你的吗？”父亲指着地上樱桃树桩旁边的斧头问道。“好像和我的斧头很相似，”乔治说。“你是个健康的青年人，我知道你喜欢在外面干点活儿，比如砍砍柴火之类的，对不对？”“也许有一两次我可能砍过柴火。”“是用这把斧头吗？”“可能用过与这把大致相似的斧头。”“我好像记得你给珍妮小姐砍过几次柴火，没有错。”“只有一次，以后就没有再砍了。”“可是她说你在那儿砍了许多柴火，而且我注意到那些柴火上都有一个小缺口斧头留下的特别的痕迹。你的斧头不是就有这样一个明显的特征吗？”“我想不起来曾注意到我的斧头有任何特别的地方。再说，那都是过去的事，与我现在的行为无关，也与我是否砍掉你的樱桃树无关。”

乔治的妈妈说话了：“我相信乔治不会干这种事。”“可是，他的斧头现在就在这儿，树也是刚被砍的，而且周围也只有他一个人。”“哎，算了吧，不就是一棵树嘛，”他母亲说。“这不是一棵树的问题；我们真需要弄清楚他对我们是不是诚实。我不会容忍他说谎，他也不应该让你来为他掩盖。”“是啊，如果他真把树砍了，那是应该受到惩罚的。但是，我就是觉得他不可能干这种事的。”她说。

乔治开口了，显然很生气，手指点着他们：“我再说一遍，我没有砍那棵树，那棵樱桃树，我也没有叫任何人说谎。一次也没有。从来没有。”儿子说话这么直截了当，父亲还不

习惯。但他不得不承认，孩子看上去真受到伤害了，他的人格受到了怀疑。华盛顿夫人对此显然感到不快，想息事宁人。乔治的父亲也不喜欢这样谈话，可他必须搞清楚这桩事情。他接着说：“乔治，这周围没有刚砍的柴火，可你的头发和衣服上全是木屑，这些木屑看上去像是樱桃木的。这，你如何解释？”

乔治咬咬嘴唇回答道：“显然，我的行为是不恰当的，我对可能已经给珍妮小姐带来的尴尬和对那棵树造成的损害深表遗憾。可我现在真需要回去干活了。”

“我们还没有说完呢，”他父亲说，“现在，我要直截了当地问你，你有没有砍了那棵樱桃树？”“什么叫‘砍’？”乔治问。“你很清楚‘砍’是什么意思！谁都知道‘砍’是什么意思！”父亲气得发抖。“你是在跟我说谎吗？”“好，我有可能不适当地挥动了那把斧头，结果对这棵树造成了一些损害。但当你问我的这一刻，我在想‘砍’的意思，我的行为并不符合我对‘砍’的理解。所以，我真没有说谎。”

乔治的母亲对儿子的回答并不完全满意，但这件事开始把这一天的家庭气氛给搞糟了，她真想了结。儿子基本上是个招人喜爱的年轻人，大部分时间都在干活---但是他父亲肯定地说，大多数活儿都是家里雇的帮手干的。她决定当机立断：“这件事不值得那么大动干戈，”她说，“即使他砍了这棵樱桃树，不就是一棵树嘛；年轻人都喜欢时不时砍棵树。你年轻的时候一定也砍过几棵！忘了这件事吧，好好把这个下午过好。”她微笑着，抚弄着乔治的头发。

乔治的父亲知道自己失败了，深吸了一口气，转过身朝屋子慢慢走去。他不解地摇摇头；他一直相信妻子有良好的判断力。“为什么结果总是我没有理呢？”他想。

乔治笑了，捡起自己的斧头。当他的大拇指在锋利的斧头刀刃上滑动时，他的目光转向了前面草地那棵高大的橡树。

NOTE 注释：

1. version [ˈvɜːʃ(ə)n; (US) ˈvɜːʒn] n. (一种)说法，看法，译文
2. chop [tʃɒp] vt. 剁碎，砍
3. axe [æ ks] n. 斧
4. put up with 容忍，忍受
5. integrity [inˈtegriti] n. 正直，诚实
6. inappropriate [ɪnəˈprəʊpriət] adj. 不合宜的；不适当的
7. chore [tʃɔː] n. 家务杂事
8. exasperate [ɪgˈzɑːspəreɪt] v. 激怒