

# A Collection of Short Stories by M. J. Copeland

## The Tree at Lakeside Woods

### Part 1

Pages 3-15

Ten-Year-old Annabella loved going for woodland walks down at Lakeside woods.

But on this particular visit, she stood looking up at this really big Oak tree and couldn't help noticing how very dry it was looking.

So out of the kindest of her heart Annabella gave the tree a drink of water from a girls bonnet she found half submerged at the water's edge.

But the tree proved itself to be very special, and became Annabella's friend, along with all the other animals that lived at lakeside woods, where the story is set within a Victorian era.

## The Acorn

### Part 2

Pages 16-28

Annabella saves the Lakeside Woods from the land developers

## The Adventures of Captain James Launder

### No Man's Lands

Pages 29-35

In the year of 1750 Pirate Captain James Launder and his ship's company of thirty men sailed the oceans in search of finding treasure.

When the Pirates eventually anchored their ship off an island called No Man's Land, they came across more treasure than any pirate could dream of finding.

But the pirates were cursed from taking any of their newfound bounty from the island.

## The Magic Box

Pages 36-39

Elizabeth and Cousin Thomas were going to spend the weekend staying at their grandparent's cottage, where they lived in the middle of the Devonshire countryside.

The weekend would be extra special for Elizabeth, because on Saturday she would celebrate her ninth birthday, a birthday she would never forget.

A Christmas Star  
Pages 40-44

Office worker Benjamin Blake contemplates how boring his life has become and makes a wish upon a fallen star he sees through his bedroom window. But the wish comes strangely true and gives Benjamin something different to think about when he gets catapulted from the year 2015 back to World War II where he meets British soldier Maurice Bridgman who is stationed with his comrades in France. Benjamin eventually manages to make it back to his own time and quickly goes in search of Maurice, to keep a promise he made to him back in 1944.

William  
Page 45-46

To feel warm in the cold winter months and to be loved and fed all year round, that's all William the ginger cat wanted. But on one cold winter's day William's master did not want a cat for a pet anymore and kicked poor William out of the house. He didn't have anywhere else to go, so he curled himself up into a ball and fell asleep on his master's snow-covered pathway.

## The Tree at Lakeside Woods

Mid-summer June and the late afternoon heat at Lakeside Woods was still very hot. Annabella decided to take shade from the sun underneath the branches of a very tall dried-out looking tree. She sat herself down on the ground with her back leaning up against the tree's big round trunk looking across the lake. As she gazed her eyes down to the water's edge, Annabella noticed a long piece of pink silk ribbon lying on the grass moving slightly in the breeze. She got up to investigate closer. The ribbon was attached to a lady's cream-coloured bonnet which was half submerged in the water. Annabella decided to fill the bonnet up with water from the lake several times and soaked the ground around the dried tree to give it a good drink, when suddenly she was interrupted by a young girl's voice.

"I'm sure I left my bonnet here father, I'm sure I did!"

On hearing the girl's voice, Annabella quickly ran around to the other side of the tree's big trunk to hide, holding the young girl's wet bonnet. Without warning, a big branch came down in front of Annabella and whipped the bonnet straight out of her hand, taking it back up into the tree.

"Do not worry yourself my dear," said the girl's father. "You have got lots of other lovely bonnets to wear so why worry yourself for losing that one."

As the young girl walked away with her father, Annabella peeked at the girl from behind the tree. She wore expensive fine clothes that included a long pretty lace dress that draped to her feet, which pulled in at the waist; with a silk pink ribbon band that matched the ribbon of her bonnet. Annabella thought to herself that she had never owned such a pretty dress as she stood looking down at her own tattered dress. The girl's bonnet was caught firmly high in the tree with the silk pink ribbon wrapped around the branches.

"The girl will never get that back not unless her father had the tree chopped down; and that would be such a waste of life for the poor tree" Annabella said to herself. As Annabella was looking up through all the bushy-leaf branches of the tree, she suddenly felt something scratch the back of her head. She quickly turned around to see what it was, but there was nothing there. As she made a further attempt to carry on walking, the same sensation happened again; only this time she really felt the scratch. Annabella walked around the trunk of the tree twice, but there was nobody there. "Who is that scratching my head?" Annabella asked firmly.

"It's me!"

"Who's me?" asked Annabella.

"Me!" the voice said again.

"It can't be the tree. Trees don't talk."

"I'm afraid this tree does," replied the Tree.

"Where are you speaking from Tree?" asked Annabella curiously walking in circles around the tree inspecting its trunk.

"I'm talking from the end of my branches," replied the Tree, lowering down two big bushy branches so Annabella could take a closer look. But when Annabella pulled back the leaves at the end of the branches, she noticed there were little wooden faces hidden underneath.

"Would you like the chance to see the world from the very top of my trunk?" asked Tree.

"I know I'm only ten years old and a good climber, but you're much too high for me to climb, and it's a long way down to fall if I should slip," replied Annabella.

"I don't want you to climb the outside of my tree, I wouldn't ask that of you. There is a much easier way of getting to the top." The tree started to shake, and a big chunk of bark opened up at the bottom of the trunk. It led to a little doorway which was just about big enough for Annabella to climb through.

"Step inside my trunk and continue up and around the wooden steps until you reach the very top," said Tree.

Annabella stepped inside the trunk and the bark door closed behind her.

The steps inside the trunk looked very steep, so one careful step at a time had to be taken. On the way up the steps, there were little cupboards with names above carved into the walls of the trunk. Each cupboard was filled with different things. There was a half-eaten cherry tart and a selection of nuts and fish. Stored in one cupboard, Annabella could not believe what she saw. There were several gold rings and a gentleman's gold pocket watch.

"Who does all this belong to?" Annabella asked Tree. Tree put a big, long branch down inside it's trunk to answer Annabella's question.

"Well! The first cupboard belongs to Lottie, the sweet little dormouse. Cupboard number two belongs to Nicker, the magpie but I will say no more about him. Number three is Stinkers cupboard, the kingfisher bird. Everyone calls him that because he keeps bringing home fish and stinking the place out. Finally, number four cupboard belongs to Marbles the white rat. She keeps bringing back children's marbles and throws them down on people's heads when they pass underneath me."

"But there are house rules! Anyone who gets caught pinching from someone else's cupboard gets served with an immediate eviction".

Eventually Annabella got to the top of the tree where there was a wooden bench to sit down on.

"All those steps to climb have left my legs feeling like jelly and sitting down has never felt so wonderful," said Annabella.

At the top of the tree there were four holes on each side of the trunk that gave a full circle view of the woods and lake below.

"What a view!" shouted Annabella. "I can see for miles, this is amazing!"

"It is amazing," said Tree. "Especially with what I have seen and witnessed over the years from up here."

"What have you seen?" asked Annabella.

"Lots of things," replied Tree. "I remember seeing you with your parents when you were little, being pushed along in your pram by the side of the lake. And when you

were big enough, I would spend hours watching your mother and father teaching you how to walk.”

“Did you ever speak to my mother and father?” asked Annabella.

“A talking tree! Adults would have never believed it. They would have chopped me down with an axe... what a horrid thought,” said Tree shivering its leaves.

“I promise I won't say a word to anyone that I have had a conversation with a talking tree, cross my heart!” promised Annabella.

“You're a child,” replied Tree. “Nobody would believe you anyway even if you did tell them.”

“Am I the only person you've ever spoken to?” Annabella asked.

“You are the only person,” replied Tree. “I decided to speak to you because you gave me a drink of water out of the kindest of your heart; but I probably look dry and wrinkled because I'm very old, and one day you will be old too.”

“I'm much too young to think about being old, that's a long way off for me,” laughed Annabella.

“You might well say that now young lady, but that part of life eventually comes to us all,” replied Tree.

“Don't you ever get bored just standing there being a tree?” Asked Annabella.

“Bored!” exclaimed Tree. “It's a full-time job looking after all my house guest, and now that Mr and Mrs owl are moving into my tree with all their family next week, I won't have time to get bored. My big oak branches do seem to be getting rather full these days with everyone nesting and sleeping on them.”

“Well, it has been very nice speaking to you Tree, but I must be getting back home for tea. My mother and father will get worried if I'm late,” said Annabella.

“Excuse me for being rude,” said Tree, “but I didn't ask your name?”

“My name is Annabella!”

“That is the prettiest of girl's names I have ever heard. Will you come back and visit me tomorrow?” asked Tree. “I have so enjoyed this conversation with you.”

“It's Saturday tomorrow and I don't have school, so I promise I will visit you again straight after breakfast.” Annabella said.

“How wonderful!” Replied Tree. “I will be so looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. When you get down to the ground Annabella, I would like you to wait outside for a few moments. I have a little gift I would like for you to take home. I'm giving you this gift because when you gave me that drink of water you thought of someone else, and that was a very kind thing to do.”

“It was nothing... really!” replied Annabella as she made her way back down through the trunk of the tree.

“Every little thought counts no matter how big or small... now stand back Annabella!” said Tree in a firm voice.

A big, forked branch came down from the tree and was thrust into the ground, digging up a scattering of gold coins. “That should help you buy that pretty dress and do whatever you want in life... but spend it wisely” advised Tree.

“Are they real?” asked Annabella, examining the coins in her hand.

“Let's just say the highwayman seemed to bury them very quickly.”

“How long have these coins been buried here?” Asked Annabella.

“To long to remember,” answered Tree.

“What shall I tell my parents when I get home? I can't tell them a tree gave them to me.”

“Well... you could tell them that, but I think there's very little chance they would believe you,” replied Tree.

“What if I tell my mother and father that I found the coins buried under some leaves while I was in the woods picking bluebells?” questioned Annabella?

“Sounds perfect,” said Tree. “Oh, and don't forget to take your mother home a handful of bluebells will you.”

Annabella safely placed all the gold coins inside her dress pocket and quickly made her way back home, waving goodbye to the tree. As she returned, remembering to stick to the story that she found the scattering of gold coins underneath some leaves, her parents were completely convinced with her story. The gold coins were put into a cloth and safely placed hidden under the bedroom floorboards of their house until mother and father decided to sell them. After a long day, Annabella was feeling very tired and went straight to bed after supper. The peacefulness of a long night's sleep was interrupted by the streams of early morning daylight breaking through the bedroom curtains. While Annabella was sat at the kitchen table eating her breakfast, she couldn't help but think about her newfound friendship with a talking tree. It was all very exciting, but like Tree said, nobody would believe her even if she did want to tell someone, so not a word would ever be mentioned to a living soul. As soon as breakfast was finished, her father left for work and Annabella set off on her journey to visit Tree at Lakeside Woods, leaving mother at home to look after her little brother.

The morning was very quiet. The only noise was an older gentleman walking his dog along the pathway on the other side of the lake. The tree's door was closed, but as Annabella looked up, she noticed a white rat holding a marble sat among the branches and leaves of the tree.

“I've never seen a white rat before, let alone a white rat holding a marble,” said Annabella inquisitively looking up at the rat.

“You must be Marbles the rat! Tree told me all about you and I hope you weren't going to throw that marble down on top of my head?”

“And you must be Annabella?” replied Marbles. “Tree has been up all night telling everybody in the woods about you, and that's why everybody is feeling very tired, and tree is still asleep,” said Marbles tapping his foot on Tree's branch.

“I didn't expect you to answer,” replied Annabella, looking very surprised. “A talking tree and now a talking rat.”

“Everyone who becomes Trees friend gets touched by his magical spirit. Well, that's what Tree said anyway,” replied Marbles. “Don't you believe in magic Annabella?”

"I wasn't sure, but I certainly do now. And you still haven't answered my question, Marbles!" asked Annabella. "We're you going to throw that marble down on top of my head?"

"No of course not... I was just sitting here holding a marble."

Annabella wasn't so sure that Marbles was telling the truth. Then suddenly Tree gave a big yawn, stretching out every branch.

"That's Tree waking up," said a little squirrel scurrying the ground for food. "Tree goes through this noisy routine every single morning without fail... Of course, I'm not saying there's anything wrong in waking up. Just do it more quietly."

"Nobody else seems to be complaining," muttered Tree.

"A talking squirrel?" said Annabella. "This is all becoming rather strange."

"I couldn't agree with you more Annabella," replied Marbles. "It almost scared the living daylight out of me when Squirrel said good morning; I thought I was going mad."

"So, there's nothing strange about a talking rat then?" remarked Squirrel.

"I don't mind being strange," replied Tree. "There's always something different about being strange."

"Good morning Tree," said Annabella. "I promised I would come back to visit you!"

"Good morning Annabella," replied Tree, lowering a branch down. "How wonderful to see you again, I've told everyone in the woods about you!"

"Tree is continuously being taken advantage of," said Squirrel interrupting. "Tree allows everyone to jump all over him anytime they feel like it."

"I hope you're not excluding yourself," protested the tree putting the end of a big branch two inches from Squirrel's face. "It's called being hospitable actually."

"Hos... hospitable!" repeated squirrel. "I don't know the meaning of such a big word."

"It means next time when Ginger the cat is chasing you and you're in such desperate need of a tall strong tree in close reach to scarp up..."

"Alright Tree, keep your leaves on and don't get your branches in a twist, 'I see your point', so I apologise," said Squirrel. "But I'm not apologising for everything I've said... Or ever going to say, you hear?"

"Yes I hear you," replied Tree yawning. "I'm too tired to argue with you Squirrel. "

"Hope you don't mind me asking," said Marbles, looking down surveying the ground from Tree's branches "Why is part of your ground all dug up?"

"Yes look at that!" interrupted squirrel pointing to the ground. "I could have fallen down that hole and really hurt myself."

"God forbid," said Tree. "If that had happened, we wouldn't have heard the last of it."

"The holes not that deep," said Annabella. "It's just a bit of mud dug up."

"I only picked a few bluebells for Annabella to take home to her mother, isn't that right Annabella?" said Tree.

"It looks a bit more than just a few bluebells!" replied squirrel sharply. "You sure somebody hasn't been digging up recently?" Marbles accidentally drops a marble, which lands on Squirrels head.

"Ouch! That really hurt!" shouted Squirrel rubbing his head.

“Sorry Squirrel,” said Marbles laughing. “That was an accident.”

“You’re always doing that to people, that was no accident!” replied Squirrel in an angry voice.

“I remember you telling me yesterday, Annabella, that you didn’t have school today,” said Tree. “What is school exactly? What do you do when you have school?”

“I go to school to learn,” answered Annabella.

“That’s sounds interesting,” said Marbles listening to the conversation.

“Yes, that does sound interesting,” curiously replied Tree, scratching a branch on the side of its trunk.

“I would rather spend every day visiting the woods than going to school. This is much more fun,” said Annabella.

The tree started to shake, and when the bark door opened, everyone stood there holding their noses. The smell that came from the inside of Tree’s trunk was absolutely disgusting. It smelled like rotten fish.

“Oh dear!” Said Tree. “That smell must be coming from Stinkers cupboard. Please excuse me for a few seconds while I do a bit of fishing out.” The tree reached in with a long branch and pulled out all the dead rotten fish from Stinkers cupboard.

“Sorry about that everyone. Stinker collects fish like they’re going out of fashion,” said Tree. After ten minutes of the door being left open, the worst of the horrid smell was gone.

Annabella stepped inside the trunk and made her way up the steps, taking a little peek inside each cupboard. Lottie the dormouse was sound asleep over a piece of cherry tart. There were several more gold rings inside Nicker’s cupboard in addition to yesterday. And even though Tree had thrown out the rotten fish from Stinkers cupboard, it was still quite smelly with bits of fish skin stuck to the floor. After passing Marbles cupboard, there were just a few more steps to go until Annabella reached the very top of the tree. It was easy for Squirrel and Marbles; they both ran up the outside of the trunk reaching the top in no time. “What part of the tree do you live on Squirrel?” asked Annabella.

“I don’t live anywhere on Tree,” replied squirrel. “I prefer to live in the middle of the woods actually. It’s less noisy. A branch broke off in high winds some time ago and left a little snuggle hole for me to sleep in. It’s very warm and comfortable.”

Suddenly people’s voices were heard walking underneath the tree. Annabella leaned out of a hole looking down to the ground below. It was the same girl that was here yesterday with her father searching for the bonnet that Annabella had filled with water. This time the girl was accompanied by an older lady and gentleman carrying a basket. The girl carried on walking down to the lakeside while the lady and gentlemen stayed back, sitting directly underneath the tree preparing a picnic of strawberry and cream tarts.

“Strawberries and cream fit for a Queen!” said the older lady.

“Strawberries and cream fit for a rat too!” whispers Marbles peering down over.

“Grandmother! Grandfather! Quickly! I can see fish swimming in the water!” said the girl calling both her grandparents.

"I'm sure the girl's Grandparents wouldn't mind if a few strawberry cream tarts went missing... would they?" wondered Tree. While the girl was with her Grandparents down by the lakeside looking into the water, Tree used a long branch to pick up three strawberry cream tarts and brought them back up to the top of the tree.

"One strawberry cream tart for Annabella, one for Marbles and one for Squirrel," said Tree.

"They really do taste as good as what they look," said Annabella with her mouth full.

"Totally agree," replied Marbles and Squirrel.

"Somebody has stolen our strawberry cream tarts!" The grandfather was heard shouting. "Thieves! You're all thieves I tell you! I know you can hear me wherever you are!"

"Oh dear," said Squirrel.

"It's too late to give them back now; we've eaten them all," said Annabella wiping her lips with the back of her hand.

"I'm sure the girl's family have got more strawberry tarts at home to eat, why worry themselves for losing three," remarked Tree.

"I feel really full after eating that strawberry tart, especially on top of all my breakfast," said Annabella.

"You should only eat when you're hungry!" exclaimed Marbles.

"That would cover most of the day for you then," answered Tree in a giggle.

"I'm not always eating!" said Marbles sharply.

"You're always eating when I see you," added Squirrel.

"Now! Now! Please no arguments," said Tree. "I'm much too old these days for arguments."

"I couldn't help noticing that some of your branches are getting rather crunchy to sit on," said Marbles tapping his foot on Tree's branch.

"Are you thinking about moving out and leaving me for someone younger?" asked Tree.

"Of course not!" replied Marbles. "I wasn't implying that... I was just saying some of your branches are a bit crunchy."

"I wouldn't want anyone staying where they didn't want to live," said Tree inspecting a branch.

Annabella looked out from the top of the tree and noticed the girl and her grandparents had packed up their picnic and left.

"Just to let you all know... Miss Badger is in sight and heading straight this way," said Tree. "And last night I told Miss Badger all about you Annabella and she could not wait to meet you. She's very funny with her riddles."

"Miss Badger is very funny when she's not continuously repeating them and telling everybody to have a nice day, it's so annoying," said Squirrel.

Annabella made her way back down the steps from the top of the tree, while Marbles and Squirrel ran down the outside of the trunk to meet Miss Badger.

"Miss Badger is from America," whispered Marbles.

“Miss Badger thinks she is,” replied Squirrel. “The woman has never even been to America, she’s clearly mad.”

“Miss Badger was actually born underneath that weeping willow tree over there,” said Tree pointing with a long branch. “I do remember that moment very well, her poor mother screamed for hours.”

“Miss Badger could make a spider scream for hours, without any difficulty!” rudely remarked Squirrel.

“Excuse me my girl! Come here and give Miss Badger a big kiss and a hug.”

“If you don't want to get squeezed to death, just say, 'no thank you, not today.' You don't want to be squeezed to death on any day,” Squirrel firmly told Annabella.

“Be quiet Squirrel!” snapped Miss Badger. “I have a brand-new riddle I would like you all to hear, listening everyone!”

“Listening!” everyone replied.

“The maker doesn't want it. The buyer doesn't use it. The user doesn't see it. What is it?”

Everybody went about their way of thinking and was thinking very hard.

“Come on! Come on! I don't have all day!” Said Miss Badger impatiently foot-tapping on the ground. But not one sound of an answer came from anyone.

“Sorry Miss Badger,” replied Annabella, “But I don't think anybody knows the answer to that riddle.”

“A coffin!” answered Miss Badger aloud.

“A coffin?” Repeated Annabella, Tree, Marbles and Squirrel all staring at Miss Badger.

“Start laughing,” whispered Tree. “If she kicks off, we'll have more than glass marbles thrown at us all.” Everyone started laughing to keep Miss Badger in a good happy mood.

“I'm so glad you all enjoyed my new riddle. It's been a pleasure to meet you Annabella, but I'm sorry I can't stay any longer, I have a dinner date with a new admirer.” No sooner had Miss Badger gone on her way, Stinker was overheard shouting furiously from inside the tree.

“Somebody has been in my cupboard and stolen all of my fish!” All the shouting and noise woke the little dormouse from her sleep. Lottie was so small she could hardly be seen sitting on Tree's branch.

“Nobody has stolen anything,” said Tree putting a long branch up through the stairwell to speak to Stinker. “I'm sorry but I simply had to throw the rotten fish out because your cupboard was rather smelly.”

“I can't help the fact that fish smell rather smelly! What else do you expect me to eat?” argued Stinker.

“Just don't keep so many dead fish in your cupboard, that's all I have to say on the matter,” insisted Tree.

“Help! Help!”

“That's sounds like Miss Badger's voice!” Said Annabella turning around to observe where the screaming for help was directly coming from. Miss Badger was on the

other side of the lake, being chased by a big aggressive dog with snapping jaws. She managed to make it into the water and swam as fast as she could across the lake, but the big dog didn't stop giving chase to Miss Badger at the water's edge. The dog gave a springboard leap from its hind legs and plunged into the water.

"The dogs gaining on Miss Badger!" yelled Annabella. "We can't just stand here; we've got to do something to help!" Everyone joined in shouting for Miss Badger to swim faster. The ordeal was petrifying to watch. She finally made it across the lake and scrambled out of the water, but the big dog was in no mood to give up easily and kept up its pursuit. Marbles and Squirrel quickly ran up Tree for safety. It was all too scary for Lottie to watch, and she covered her eyes with her paws. Tree used the end of its branches to grab the dog by the collar to give Miss Badger and Annabella more time to make it into Trees door. The bottom half of Miss Badger was considerably larger than her top half, which caused a big problem regarding getting inside the door. Annabella tried very hard pushing with both her hands on Miss Badger's bottom. "Breathe in Miss Badger!" Annabella shouted.

"I'm trying to!" Shouted Miss Badger.

"Hurry up!" frantically shouted Tree. "I can't hold this dog much longer; the end of my branch is about to snap off!" Annabella pushed with her back and dug her heels into the ground to get Miss Badger through the door. The end of Tree's branch suddenly gave way, and the dog was set loose. One last big push and Miss Badger was finally in; and Tree quickly closed the door behind them, leaving the dog barking outside.

"Good pushing girl!" laughed Miss Badger. "That is what I call a close nip in the butt." "It was no laughing matter Miss Badger! That nasty dog could have killed us both!" Annabella said out of breath. There was very little room at the bottom of Tree's trunk for Annabella to pass, so Miss Badger took the lead up around the stairwell.

"That is so sweet," said Miss Badger looking inside Lottie's cupboard. But she was certainly taken back by surprise when she looked inside Nicker's cupboard and caught sight of all the gold rings. Miss Badger could not resist trying one on her claw. "It fits perfect!" she said, holding her hand up in the air admiring the ring on her claw. "I'm sure the owner wouldn't mind if I took just one, would they?" said Miss Badger while she carried on walking up the steps.

"Don't open Stinkers cupboard," said Annabella. "It's a bit dirty and smelling of fish." "I do have very good hearing," replied Stinker overhearing the comment. Just as Miss Badger was about to peer inside Marbles cupboard, Nicker came down over the stairs and noticed instantly that Miss Badger was wearing one of the rings that came from his cupboard. Nicker stood on the stairs in front of Miss Badger, with a wing on each hip and feet astride looking very angry.

"Take that ring off your claw immediately and put it back in my cupboard where you found it!" Said Nicker in a sharp orderly voice. Miss Badger quickly took the ring off her claw and passed it back down to Annabella, who then placed it back inside Nickers cupboard.

"I can't have you served with an immediate eviction because you don't live here!" sharply replied Nicker.

“Miss Badger was only admiring the ring... weren't you, Miss Badger?” quickly replied Annabella, trying to defuse the confrontation.

“I totally agree with Annabella, I was only admiring the ring and just forgot to take it off.”

Nicker turned around and went back up the steps. The top of the tree was finally reached, and Miss Badger was completely out of breath, and sitting down, had never felt so wonderful.

“Charles! Come here boy!” The big dog was heard being called back by its owner.

“Thank goodness that's over and done with,” said Tree. “And why is Nicker not looking in a very happy mood?”

“Miss Badger shouldn't touch what doesn't belong to her,” replied Nicker, who was perched on the outside of Tree's branch.

“Maybe that's something you should learn to do too,” replied Tree lowering a branch in front of Nicker's face.

“What are you implying Tree?” asked Nicker.

“Well Magpies do have a reputation for taking things that don't belong to them,” interrupted Annabella overhearing the conversation.

“People shouldn't leave their things lying around unattended then should they,” replied Nicker.

“But it's still not yours to take,” said Squirrel. “And hiding stolen goods, well! the police could have Tree charged with being an accessory to a crime.”

“Tree could end up being sent to jail,” said Lottie.

“The police are not going to put a big tree in jail, they'll just have Tree chopped down with an axe,” laughed Squirrel.

“Stop talking silly, nothing like that is ever going to happen,” insisted Annabella.

“Sorry for interrupting this depressing conversation but would you like me to sing a song or two?” asked Miss Badger. “I have a fabulous high-pitched voice that I would love Annabella to hear.”

“The first and last time Miss Badger used her vocal cords all the birds flew out of the trees,” said Squirrel.

“And I didn't come back for nearly two weeks and that's why everyone decided to have hands up vote that Miss Badger wouldn't sing again,” smirked Nicker.

“I loved your voice Miss Badger,” replied Lottie. “I thought it was wonderful.”

“Well thank you Lottie,” replied Miss Badger bowing her head. “You just can't please everyone these days can you. So how about another riddle instead then?”

Suddenly everybody's attention was drawn to silence when three loud banging noises were heard on Trees door. The banging echoed right up through the stairwell, making everyone jump with fear. The noise even made Stinker run out of his cupboard and up the steps.

“Everyone stay right where you are and don't move,” ordered Tree. “I will investigate the situation by lowering a high branch down to take a closer look outside.”

“It could be that girl's grandfather wanting his strawberry tarts back,” said Marbles. The banging noise happened again. BANG! BANG! BANG!

"This tree would make a lot of wood for someone's fire. It's sounding a bit hollow inside." A man was overheard saying. What Tree saw and overheard made every branch tremble and shiver with fear.

"What's happening?" Everyone asked Tree.

"The time has come, there are four men standing by my tree each holding a big axe. It's been lovely to have known you all and thank you for being my friend, but you must leave now while there's still time."

"That's what happens when you talk about these things," said Miss Badger clipping her paw across the top of Squirrel's head.

"I really did not mean for Tree to get chopped down," said Squirrel crying. "Tree is my friend."

Annabella, Marbles, Squirrel, Lottie, Stinker, Nicker, and Miss Badger all leaned-out of the hole at the top of Tree's trunk so they could get a better hearing of what the men were saying.

"The tree does look a bit old and dried up, but it's a shame to chop the old boy down yet. Let's take another look in a few more years." And the four woodchoppers went on their way.

"Thank goodness!" said Tree. "That is what I call a close nip in the butt." Annabella waited for five minutes until the men were out of sight before she made her way back down Trees stairwell; followed by Miss Badger. As Miss Badger went to put her head out through Trees doorway, she suddenly remembered Annabella helped push her in and there was nobody behind Miss Badger to help give her a push back out.

"How on earth am I going to get out of this one?" asked Miss Badger looking at Annabella.

Tree lowered a big branch down to take a closer look at the situation.

"Can I make a suggestion?" said Tree. "Why don't you lay on your side Miss Badger and then I will tie a branch around your feet, breath in and I will pull you out that way."

"Well, if that is your suggestion Tree, I hope no one is watching!" Yelled Miss Badger.

"Yelling like that Miss Badger you could entice the dog back!" said Tree losing patience.

"It's not Trees fault you're funny shaped," replied Squirrel, standing outside.

"No fury little vermin talks to Miss Badger like that Squirrel! You wait till I get outside, then you can do all the talking you want; if you survive it!" said Miss Badger, angrily.

"Obviously my services are not wanted so I'm going home for a few hours' sleep, so sort your own mess out Miss Badger!" abruptly replied Squirrel running away into the woods.

"When a girl is out of choices, you just use someone else's... So just get on with it Tree and make it quick!" One big pull by her feet, and Miss Badger was pulled out of the doorway.

"Well done Tree!" said Annabella and Marbles clapping their hands.

"That wasn't so bad, after all that shouting you made! was it Miss Badger? At least you're out now," said Marbles.

“Well, I can't say I've ever been through worse,” replied Miss Badger brushing off the dust from her coat. Suddenly a very loud thunder noise was heard coming from the woods.

“Another poor tree being chopped down,” said Tree.

Squirrel came running back completely out of breath.

“The noise wake you up Squirrel?” asked Tree.

“Wake me up!” Shouted Squirrel, “I didn't have chance to go to sleep, it was my tree those men were chopping down. They didn't even give me time to pack all my things.”

“You knew they were in the area,” replied Stinker, who was perched on a branch beside Nicker.

“I'm homeless, all of my belongings have gone,” said Squirrel feeling very upset.

“Please don't upset yourself Squirrel,” said Annabella “Nobody's going to see you homeless.”

“Well he isn't living with me!” said Miss Badger. “I've never seen this guy de-flee himself once.”

“I will not allow for anybody to become homeless,” said Tree. “I will find you a safe snug little hole to live in within my tree, so don't worry Squirrel.”

“Safe! They were thinking about chopping you down five minutes ago.”

“Just be grateful Squirrel,” replied Nicker.

“I am grateful Nicker! I'm always grateful,” said Squirrel.

“Nobody has been hurt and we're all still together so why don't we call this a day while the endings good,” said Lottie.

“I agree,” said Annabella. “My mother told me not to be late getting back home because my grandparents are coming for tea.”

“I wish I was invited for tea,” said Tree, “But I don't think I would fit inside Annabella's house.”

“Will you visit me again tomorrow Annabella?” asked Tree.

“I would love to see you all again tomorrow and I will be here straight after breakfast,” promised Annabella.

“Goodbye! See you tomorrow Annabella,” said Lottie, Stinker, Knicker, Marbles, Miss Badger, and Tree all waving goodbye.

Annabella came back to visit the tree every day for the rest of the summer, but with the good fortune the tree had given Annabella and her family, they all had the chance to start a new life together, moving far away, and was never to visit Tree again. Until one day, many years later in her life, she decided to bring her own family back for a holiday. Walking down by the Lakeside Annabella noticed four men chopping down the tree; she ran over to the men shouting.

“Stop! Stop! Why are you chopping down the tree?” Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

“Sorry Miss,” replied one of the woodchoppers. “We have been given orders to chop the tree down. Apparently, the old boy has been dead for quite some time. It's a big tree to come down, so you and your family had better stand over there.” The tree fell

with a big bang, and floating down in the breeze of the fall, was a bonnet with a pink ribbon tie.

*When the dust settled on the fall of the tree,  
I picked up an acorn to take away with me.  
I know it will take years for that seed to sow,  
but from little acorns big trees grow.*

## The Acorn

Annabella picked up an acorn that lay on the ground beside the fallen oak tree and placed it inside her coat pocket. But as she stood looking at the sorrowful tree with all its broken branches scattered into pieces, Annabella couldn't help thinking back on fond memories of such wonderful times she had talking with Tree, and playing with the animals that became her friends at Lakeside Woods.

"I would truly love to come back and live here again," said Annabella as she turned to look at her husband Edward and their little four-year-old Son Alfred.

"You've always spoken about this place and how special it was to you as a child Annabella; I can see no reason why we all can't, and I'm sure Alfred would love to live here," replied Edward rapping his arms around them both with great affection. The thought of moving back made Annabella so happy, she couldn't stop thinking about it.

Annabella and Edward wasted no time to embark on their plans, as they returned on their long journey back home. Within six months their house was sold and a beautiful, thatched cottage with a large orchard garden, that directly over-looked Lakeside Woods was purchased with their money. Edward's application to work in local government was accepted to an office in a nearby city only twenty miles away by train.

On the following day after their long journey moving into their new house, Edward started work at his new office, which left Annabella and Alfred at the cottage to unpack all the boxes of their belongings. But that didn't bother Annabella; she was so happy she had all the time in the world to unpack. The warm rays of the morning sunshine and the beautiful pollen scent that floated in the breeze from the woodland flowers and trees, infused every room in the cottage through the open windows. Once Annabella had swept all the floors and dusted their new house, it was time for a break, so she made herself a pot of tea. When Annabella put the tea into the teapot and poured the hot water in, an acorn floated to the top.

Suddenly Annabella realised it was Tree's acorn that she placed in the tea pot for safe keeping. She quickly grabbed a wooden spoon from the kitchen drawer and used it to lift out the acorn from the boiling hot water and put it on the kitchen table to cool off. The little brown Acorn did not appear to be damaged in anyway as Annabella sat looking at it while sipping her cup of tea. But there was only one way to find out, she thought, and that was to find a safe place in the woods to plant the acorn, where it would hopefully grow into a beautiful tall tree.

Annabella put the acorn and a small garden trowel into her dress pocket and set off down too Lakeside woods with little Alfred. After fifteen minutes walking around, she found the perfect spot not far from where Tree lived, so she took the trowel out of her dress pocket and dug a little hole, just deep enough to bury and cover the acorn with the soil. But when she turned to walk away with Alfred, from the corner of her eye,

she thought she saw the soil move. Annabella looked for a moment where she had buried the acorn,

"no, it couldn't had," thought Annabella it will take years to grow. Annabella and Alfred then took a slow walk back home along the Lakeside.

The acorn was left all alone, buried in its little hole at Lakeside Woods. But this was no ordinary little acorn; this acorn came from Tree. And within an hour of being buried under the soil, the acorn sprouted its first wooden sprig. And another wooden sprig came from that one and another and another. The acorn did not stop growing and growing until it became the most beautiful, biggest, tallest solid Oak tree, towering above all the other trees in the woods. Later that afternoon, two burly wood cutters each holding a long-handled axe were walking around the woods inspecting all the trees for any loose hanging branches that could be used for burning wood.

"I'm sure this big Oak wasn't here last time we were here," said one of the wood cutters. "Well, it must have been here," said the other woodcutter. "A tree does not suddenly decide to sprout feet and take a walk miles around the lake to see what the view is like on the other side from where it once stood."

But just as both the woodcutters walked away, a long-forked branch came down from the big Oak tree and whipped the brown peaked cap straight off the top of one of the woodcutter's head. The woodcutter quickly turned and could see the forked branch taking his peaked cap high into the tree.

"That tree just took the cap off the top of my head!" Said the woodcutter to the other pointing at the tree.

"First of all, you said that tree wasn't here before! And now you're saying it's just took your cap! Maybe the branch was just stuck and sprung back up accidentally catching the back of your cap! And I wouldn't attempt to climb that size tree to get it back either."

"I have a spare cap back at home you can have," said the other woodcutter, as they made their way back out of the woods.

Annabella and Alfred were both back at the cottage with plenty of unpacking and tidying up to do before Edward got home from work. But Edward was over two hours later than expected, which left Annabella feeling a little worried.

"Sorry I'm late but I had to pick up two presents for you both!" Said Edward, as he came in the door and placed a biggish box on the kitchen floor and placing one smaller wrapped up parcel on the kitchen table.

Annabella and Alfred undone the bigger box first and sat Inside looking up at them both was a little tiny black and white puppy dog.

"The puppy is absolutely beautiful!" Said Annabella kissing Edward on the cheek.

"What shall we call the puppy?" Asked Annabella.

"Let's call him Minty! the name in Greek means protector," replied Edward taking the puppy out of the box before placing Minty on the kitchen floor to run around.

Annabella unwrapped the second present, and to her surprise it was a carved wooden plaque which read, Annabella Cottage with the letters painted in a pink pastel colour.

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