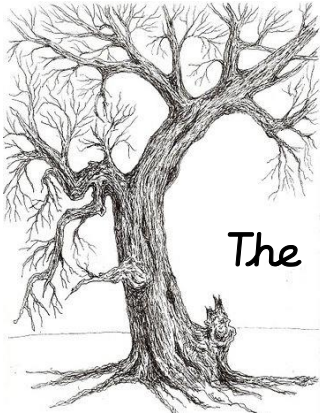


*The Wise  
Old Oak*





## The Wise Old Oak

The old oak tree sat tall and proud in the indoor woodland. It was happy there. It had lots of animal friends who sheltered under its wide branches; Frog, Badger, Fox, Mouse, Bat, Hedgehog, Squirrel, Rabbit and Wise Owl. It also had lots of other friends; children! Every day, children would skip pass the old oak tree, smile, say hello and wave as they went to and from their classrooms. Some even stroked its branches as they passed and spoke quietly to the animals who called the old oak tree their home. The children always took care of the old oak and its family of animals - they were all, always well looked after.

Seasons came and went. The old oak lost its leaves every autumn, shivered under the ice and snow of winter and showed off its green foliage in the summer. Towards the end of every year, the old oak would grow the most amazing acorns; each one a tiny seed that stored the magic to grow into another mighty oak.

As the years went by, the old oak tree settled into a happy and contented life.

What the old oak didn't know was that something strange was happening all around the world, something that would stop the old oak being content, something that would stop the old oak from feeling so happy.



## COVID!

*It was March 2020.*

*The days were definitely getting warmer and the old oak was almost ready to show off its summer green foliage. It had heard the children muttering strange words that it had not heard before; covid, coronavirus, home schooling, lockdown.*



*The old oak wondered what all this could be about.*

*It didn't have to wait long before it found out.*

*Before the old oak could ask the animals what they thought about what they had heard, there was a sudden and unexpected silence across school. A grim, dark silence that was filled with worry and anxiety. Where had everyone gone?*



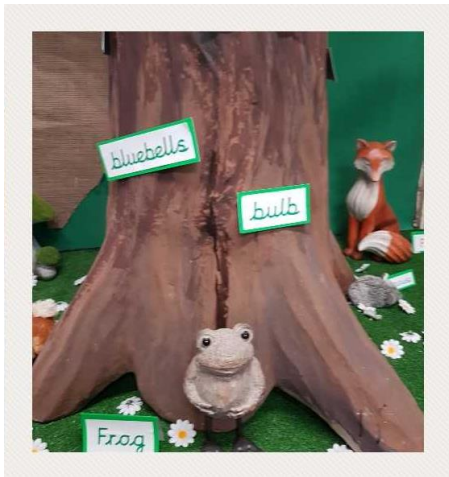
*No longer did the children gently stroke the old oak's branches.*

*No longer did they chatter to the animals that called the old oak their home.*

*No longer did they smile, wave and say hello to the old oak as they passed by.*

*Summer came and went. The dreary, dark silence never really lifted but stubbornly hung around like a heavy cloud in the blackest of storms.*





*No-one witnessed the oaks summer foliage.*

*No-one told the old oak how beautiful it looked, how tall and proud.*

*No-one asked the animals how they were. No-one seemed to care.*

*No-one asked because no-one was there.*

*The animals and the old oak sunk into despair and sadness. They had nothing to look forward to, only the bleak silence of every day to keep them company.*

*One day, without any warning, the animals and the old oak were woken by the sound of children's footsteps. Could it be that the children have returned? They all thought. Excitedly, the animals gathered together under the branches of the old oak to watch for the children coming back to school. As the noise got louder, the animals and the old oak got more and more excited.*

*As soon as the old oak saw the children walking towards their classroom and hearing them chattering to each other, it shuddered with excitement. So much so, it nearly lost all its summer leaves in one go!!*

*At last, those quiet, lonely days were over and the old oak could, once again, think about the changing of the seasons. Finally, it could get on with preparing itself for the autumn bloom of brown, red, yellow and orange, knowing that the children had returned and everything was good.*

*The terrible storm had passed.*

*The dark, gloomy days were over.*



*As autumn went by, the old oak gradually lost its leaves and stood tall and proud ready for the onset of winter. One day it noticed that some children were saying the same words that had troubled it before the summer; covid, home schooling, lockdown.*

*Not again it thought. This couldn't happen twice. The children can't leave us again? Will they ever come back?*

*The start of 2021 was a dismal time for the old oak and all the animals that called it their home. Without the warmth of the children's laughter and sounds of their voices echoing through the corridors, the old oak sank into a long, deep, bitter cold sleep. Frost gripped tightly to its branches. Snow settled and refused to thaw. The heart of the old oak was cold and completely frozen. All the love and warmth had gone. The old oak was sure that it would never see its friends again. Sure that its heart would never again know the love and warmth of friendship.*



*What the old oak didn't know was that the children hadn't left but were patiently waiting for the time when they could return. They hadn't abandoned their friends and wished with all their hearts to come back. A few children were still coming into school and the others were working hard with their home school, just waiting for the moment when they could come back to school and be with their friends again.*

January rolled into February.

February rolled into March; still no change.

Then suddenly without warning, the unmistakable sound of voices - children's voices. The animals climbed onto the branches of the old oak and strained their ears. The old oak twisted its branches so it could see a little better, a little further.

It was Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Could this be the day all the children returned?

Could this be the day when friends would be reunited?

All the animals and the old oak didn't dare believe this could be true, after such a long time.

They waited quietly, patiently. They held their breaths, not daring to move in case today wasn't the day and all their hopes and dreams would be in vain!

But today was the day!

The old oak couldn't believe its eyes when it saw all the children skipping towards the classroom door. The animals couldn't believe their ears when they heard the excited voices echoing round the corridors. Slowly, surely the old oak's cold heart began to thaw. The ice began to melt and the snow dripped, like tears from its branches, creating tiny pools of icy blue water.

The old oak felt that spring was finally on its way. It could, once again, look forward to a wonderful summer of blossom, warm sunny days and...

best of all...

...friends...

...together...

...again!!



Everyone had suffered the worst of times, the loneliest of times, the saddest of times.



But from today, a new feeling was creeping through the old oaks branches - a feeling of hope, a feeling of happiness, a feeling of friendship, a feeling of gratitude that everyone was together again.

Once again, the old oak dared to believe that it could be content and happy. With its friends around, it would know that feeling again.

As the old oak settled into a peaceful night waiting for the children to return the next day, it over heard the animals chatting.

'Wise Owl?' said Squirrel. 'How do you spell love?'

'Oh my word Squirrel!' exclaimed Wise Owl. 'You don't spell it. You feel it!'






*“I would rather walk with a friend  
in the dark, than alone in the light.”*

*Helen Keller*





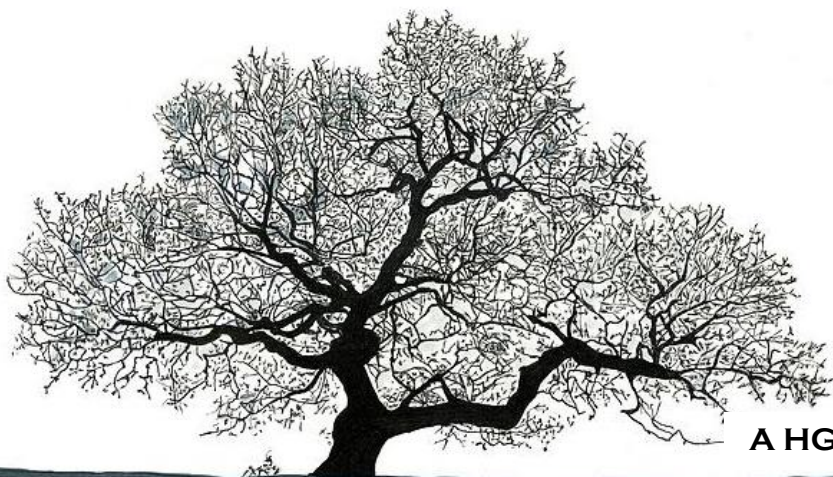
*“Many people will walk  
in and out of your life,  
but only true friends will  
leave footprints in your  
heart.”*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*



*“Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud.”*

*Maya Angelou*



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