

Tommo *of the* Wood



By Raymond Howell

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Chapter 1

The Discovery

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**T**om, Tommo to his mates, his gang, his life support system, sat miserably down upon the stunned and weeping stump of a newly felled tree. Only recently it had stood so regally, so innocently and he guessed happily in the little wood. Just like me in this once tree-studded realm, playing without embarrassment or restraint or care for historical accuracy. Or so his shell-shocked smirk relayed to no one but his lonely spirit that sagged with the realisation that it had no say in this world of adults prey. Or of businesses slay and their thoughtlessly driven possessive narcissistic need to impose decay.

This little wood has seen modern soldiers fighting Romans. Red Indians scaling the walls of Cirencester castle to rescue a princess... Linda...! He smiled and sighed.

“It was always my Linda who got rescued. Well... She could scream like a good’en” He recalled with a fond smile.

Along with a soft blush. It rose within the ghost of her breath which always quickened whenever she kissed his cheek in thanks. But she won't be doing that today. Or maybe never again, his sorrow mused, while fingers toyed remorsefully with a twig which only days ago might well have been whittled into a finely tuned arrow, a spear, or a magic wand.

Yes, you and me twig, we would have played... his thoughts pricked sharply as childhood memories stirred - some as recent as only a few days ago. But already they seemed so far away, their substance blurred and hard to grasp and drained of all colour. In sketchy outline, he recalled sitting beneath this very tree welcoming its shade or using the thick cover to hide in as he scaled the trunk commando style to reach the top branches, before swinging into the thick canopy to take a seat - a fighter's cockpit. A bench in a medieval turret. Or the 360-degree lookout of a pirate's crow's nest.

“My seat amongst the clouds,” he whispered to the agonised and shocked air.

“Me throne where I sat and argued with ancient gods. Or, shot arrows down to take out a marauding horde. Yeah, you lot, me skulking mates.”

His brief smile as he seemingly studied the twig as once he might have done to work out where best to start whittling with his little pocket knife disappeared as he looked up and around. Those ranging eyes filled with widening disbelief he finally accepted and took in the mess that was once the local wood. Only a few days ago it had stood in green and shadowed splendour, enjoying their childish awe while soaking up their gleeful yells and screams as it turned their joys into glossy leaves. Our wood. Yes, our wood... But it's nowt now but a grubby, stump-filled patch waiting for bulldozers. What else can become of it now that the canopies have been felled and the wood silenced forever?

What was once thick and flourishing, his breaking heart explained simply to his young self, for it had yet to develop a true inner poet, ‘is now bare and empty of life’. Except for a robin sitting, or rather he fancied, clinging possessively to a thin branch jutting from a felled trunk that had yet to be carted off.

A branch, his spirit murmured, which my fingers might well have grabbed during an ascent into fantasy.

With growing empathy, he watched the bird and realised it did not possess cartoon-Bambi eyes. The thing was real and breathing the same air as me. It has a brain and needs to. It thinks. And it's probably the last bird that will ever visit here, he reasoned miserably. Only for that mood to plummet further when the robin cocked its head as if looking up at him and then down again at the ground where the gesture seemed to plead. 'The woods gone... I've lost my song... Where's the wood gone... I've lost my song...'

"You're in shock, aren't you mate?" Tom whispered.

"Just like me. And I'm sorry, but as much as I want to, I can't put it back. Not for you. Or for me. Or for me mates either."

It struck him hard that none of the gang had come from those homes of red, yellow and grey brick in sunless and grassless lanes which he had never visited. What need had any of them of shoddy homes and wandering hostile streets when they had this woodland kingdom to make their wants complete?

But now it's gone..., they're gone..., me mates in play sent away, turned to blurry ghosts of me old days and that's it, we're done. It's over and it's all finished...

"Yes, you and me robin, we're the same, aren't we? Your world and mine have been taken away. And what for...? And who did this...?"

"Yeah, who did this...?"

## Chapter 2

### Wobegon

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U nsummoned tears rose from an unfamiliar font of adult outrage to prick his tender boyish eyes, echoing his lightly uttered, but instinctive deeply felt regrets. Those silvery elastic orbs in shackled trains rolled and swelled, falling upon the soil and the frightened disturbed inhabitants of some of the woodland's millions and millions of domains. Beetles, ants, centipedes, spiders, worms and bacteria all scurried in confusion about his feet. While overloaded mycelium networks twanged with messages of sorrow, fear and cried, "Where do we go from here?" And scared seeds prepared themselves for centuries long, maybe a futile long, wait in unnatural darkness.

While he could neither hear nor feel the panic and screams erupting around him, the stream of childish tears as they soaked into the soil, opened a connection which his instincts gladly received and interpreted. This is the start of the mass genocide of life which has evolved and existed for billions of years. Say goodbye to it all Tommo, for in a week it will lie beneath concrete and you'll never see its like again here. Sixteen houses Tommo to replace the wonder of billions.

Of billions...

Billions.

His sense of loss, of finality and bleakness, infected his hand with a heaviness he had never experienced. Instead of just swiping those childish tears away his childhood was taken along with them.

In kinship with the lone robin's desultory nods his heavy heart fuelled the message, there's nothing for me here now. Nothing. It's time to go. Time to leave behind what was.

After stooping to pick up and pocket a tiny but recognisable sliver of trunk, the 'L' of the Linda he had secretively carved into his once favourite tree, he slowly stepped away. Uncertain of path this once happy, nearly fourteen-year-old boy headed off into those giddy, misty gushing heated realms that were already teeming with many new emotions and questions, haunted by so many angry and disappointed youths. Now he was adding even more. The sense of them was deeply slashing him raw, leaving him stinging without sight of balm or ease. His had become that lost-to-futility-finger caressing a gun's trigger. The finger driven by a heart without vision, hope, or ideas of morality and totally void of all sense of a sun rising on a new tomorrow because the old tomorrow that is so hauntingly painful simply refuses to leave. His is the finger so taut that if caught in an emotional sneeze it might well in sudden reflex squeeze.

Those new emotions were destined to change who once he was. Already, they were altering the shape of his steps and mind.

The fall of his uncertain tread compressing the loam and disturbing the bacteria of both soil and feet also suggested to the new part of his changing brain, you might well as you walk forward turn into a loving boyfriend, or a good mate, a doting father or a fair ecologically minded provider. Then as those steps as they fell from loam onto hard paving invoked a wonder, maybe even a gardener? Or a mathematician? A musician? Or a shelf stacker? Which stirred a vision. He was filling a supermarket shelf, but not with tins

and packets. Trees... The ones he would dearly love to see replanted. While those out-of-date-shelf items were turning wonderfully into those ecological violators he would happily cast into a bin.

Crossing the road to the path that will lead eventually to his street, those rebellious feet suggested he might become a murderer, but with a side note, an ecological avenger. Or a terrorist, or even a major criminal, or worse, a heartless selfish devourer of continuous wants. Or, conversely, a voraciously relentless campaigner against such wants and destruction. All those possibilities were there in his heavy steps as he passed house upon house upon house, which in straggling rows seemed never to want to end.

Or his feet might stir into life a spirit that never settles. And never wants to feel again the pain of such blindly caused unnecessary loss. Or a sense of inadequacy, or helplessness. Or the bewilderment and unfairness he felt for both his lot and that of the poor robin.

Chapter 3

Nothing For It But

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Picking through the shattered pieces of childhood he headed off towards a home which those new emotions were causing him to feel so differently about. This area once so familiar was rapidly growing into an alien place wreathed in mist where the past is only vaguely glimpsed. And dare it be thought, distant and unfriendly and much less a home now. Much less my spot, for I've seen the horrors which lay in my future. How can I ever be comfortable there again knowing what I do about adults and their ways?

And what use is a home if you can't leave it to go somewhere good, his attitude reeled rebelliously. While an emerging poet's spirit suggested... 'afore returning to its embrace, flushed of heart and smiling of dirt-streaked face, so ready to spill with laughter in that safe sheltering space, the place you once called home'.

But not anymore.

No...

An emerging sense of fairness then took up the rebelling call and what hope for those locked in an abusive home with nowhere outside to retreat. To hide in and be safe. Like some of me mates needed... Tommo seethed, while heavy feet dragged through those long streets empty of fantasy, bare of trees, so hardening of heart and scourge of younger playing knees. And where

almost human-like wicked creatures lay in wait to deal various insidious fates - delivered by needles or pills.

Already he could sense his future steps tarrying in the realms of someone else's normality - caring only to be part of the daily broil and all that it produces without thought. Without care for how it comes, or from where. And he did not like the sense of it one little bit.

With lowered head and sagging shoulders, as if bearing a heavy yolk, he saw the immediate future sat alone in a room that wasn't truly his, staring out of the window into a purposeless gloom. Only then for it to lift again as he suddenly thought. I don't have to live like that. I could leave and take off to the wilds - that is, if I can find any - and live alone and off the land, never speaking to, or trusting anyone ever again. Other than those trees in that future wood. My wood. The wood where I'll live - if it will take me in and call me friend. And if it does I promise I will defend it with my life, right until the end. Then he was home.

*Yes, it does seem smaller and not mine anymore.*

"I'm going to me room Mam, call me when it's tea."

He said at the bottom of the stairs, before mounting them sorrowfully, but quickly lest she came and saw his tears. Placing his hand upon the familiar bedroom door it all suddenly felt strange, as if he had counted the houses in the street wrong and wandered into the neighbours by mistake.

Disorientated he mumbled.

"Then call me again Mam when it's time for school and then again for me tea."

Slowly turning the now heavy handle that spoke not of awaiting adventures with books and games but of an outrageously abusive journey, an older-serious-self entered his frivolous younger domain.

School and tea, school and tea reluctant feet grumbled as they crossed the bedroom floor. And there's nowt in between, nothing left for the robin and me, just more blimming school and blimming tea. As if in agreement the bed springs squealed as he fell dishearteningly upon it with a deeply sighed...

“No... There's nowt left for robin and me. Nothing... unless I can escape this crap and go off and live simply and free to do what I can to protect the trees and robin. And yes..., to protect me too, me, Tommo of the trees.”

The End