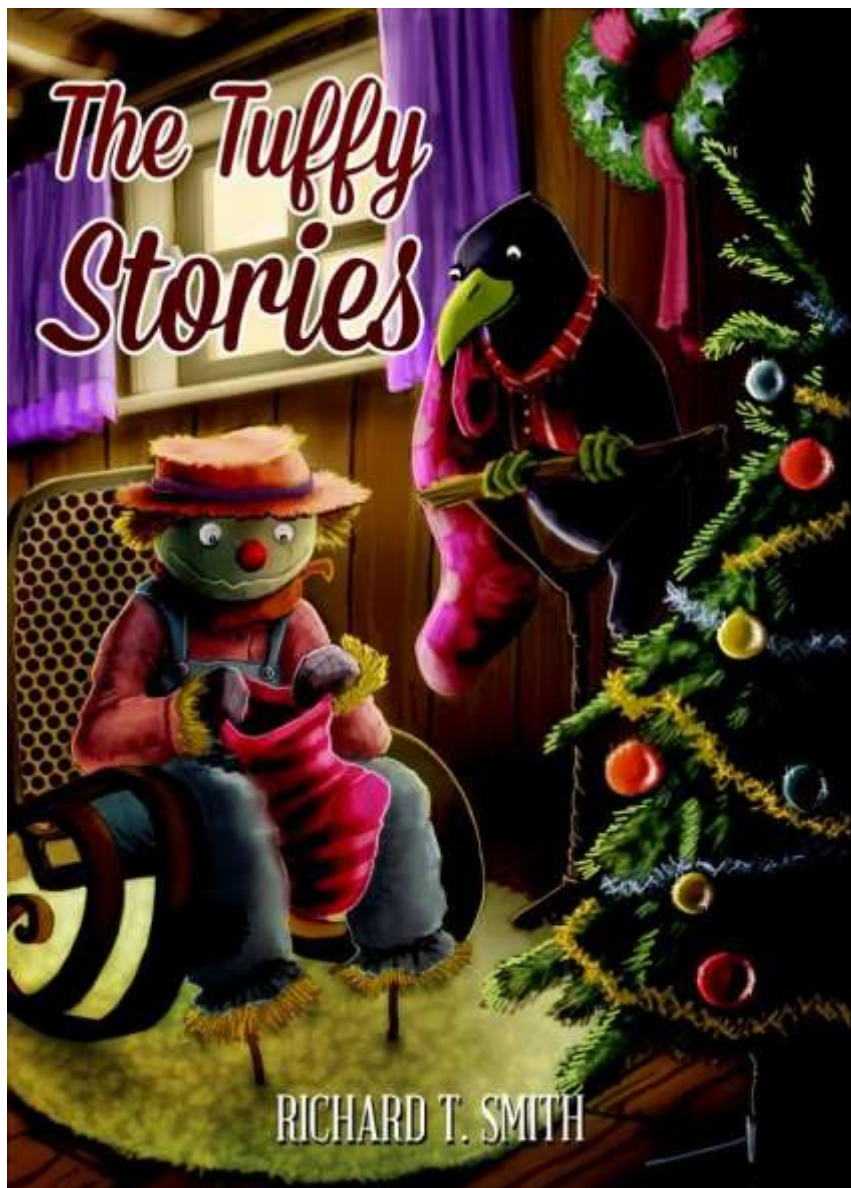


The Tuffy Stories



RICHARD T. SMITH

The Tuffy Stories

Richard T Smith

Copyright © 2014 by Richard T. Smith.

All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein.

Contents

Page

5	Tuffy the scareless scarecrow
11	Tuffy needs help
17	Tuffy's first Christmas
23	Tuffy and the snail trail
29	Tuffy and the wishing well
33	Tuffy builds a tree house
42	Tuffy meets old Magnus Magpie
53	Acknowledgments
54	Disclaimer
55	Other books by Richard T. Smith

Tuffy the scareless scarecrow

Just outside the village of Springly lies Farmer Jenks' farm, and in his field stands a scarecrow by the name of Tuffy. Along with straw and rags, the stuffing from an old teddy bear had been used to make the scarecrow. Tuffy's eyes had once been the teddy bear's big glass eyes, so Tuffy had been named after the teddy bear and left in the field to scare the birds away from Farmer Jenks' cornfield. So there he stood, propped up with the aid of a post in the ground.

One night something amazing happened. Tuffy was brought to life by Charlee, the fairy of the forest. At first, Tuffy was confused as he didn't know anything at all; he didn't know who he was or how he got there. Everything was completely strange to him: the cornfield, the forest; but Charlee explained to Tuffy all the things that were confusing him.

First, Tuffy asked Charlee why she had brought him to life. Charlee smiled as she told Tuffy that, as scarecrows go, he was the least scary scarecrow she had ever seen – and that she could foresee problems ahead.

'What do you mean?' asked Tuffy.

'A scarecrow that doesn't scare isn't of any use to Farmer Jenks,' replied Charlee.

Just then, a crow by the name of Willow dropped by and landed on the floor beside Tuffy.

‘Hello, I’m Willow,’ he said.

Charlee looked at Tuffy and said, ‘See what I mean?’

Tuffy looked first at Willow and then at Charlee and said, ‘But I don’t want to scare anybody.’

‘Maybe you don’t want to, or maybe you can’t scare anyone, Tuffy; but Farmer Jenks will not be pleased,’ Charlee explained.

‘What am I to do?’ Tuffy asked her.

‘You should do what all the animals of the forest do.’

‘What is that?’ asked Tuffy.

‘You should go to see Mr. Owl,’ she told him.

‘Why should I do that?’ asked Tuffy, more confused than ever.

Charlee explained, ‘Because he is wise, and he will know what to do.’

'But I don't know where he is,' Tuffy told Charlee and Willow.

'Don't worry, I'll take you there,' said Willow.

'I must go now,' Charlee told him.

'Will I see you again?' asked Tuffy.

'Not for awhile, but you will see me again,' Charlee assured him.

Tuffy looked sad.

'Don't worry, Mr. Owl will look after you. Heed his advice,' Charlee advised Tuffy, and with that the fairy flew away.

'Come on, follow me and I will take you to see Mr. Owl,' said Willow.

Arriving at a huge oak tree in the heart of the forest, Willow asked Tuffy to wait for him while he went to call on Mr. Owl. Willow flew up onto a big branch. Close to the branch was a door leading into the tree itself and on the door a small bell was hanging. Willow rang the bell and a loud voice shouted, 'Who is it?'

'It's me, Willow.'

Once again the voice shouted, 'Come in,' and Willow disappeared through the door. Willow had been in there for what seemed a long time before he re-emerged, followed by Mr. Owl.

Mr. Owl was short with grey feathers, wearing his glasses on the end of his beak.

'I see what you mean, Willow,' muttered Mr. Owl. 'He doesn't look scary at all.' turning to Tuffy he asked, 'Tuffy, is it?'

'Yes, that's right,' Tuffy replied.

'You have a problem, and the problem is that you're not scary enough to do your job, 'Mr. Owl informed him.

'What am I to do?' asked Tuffy, feeling miserable.

'You could start by looking more menacing,' Mr. Owl suggested.

'But I don't know how to look menacing,' Tuffy replied.

Mr. Owl looked at Willow and said, 'Show him a menacing look.'

Willow pulled a menacing face.

Tuffy tried to copy him but didn't quite have the hang of it.

'You need to twist your mouth more, and close your eyes into more of a glare,' Mr. Owl advised Tuffy.

With Willow's tutoring, Tuffy pulled more faces, trying each time to become more menacing.

'Now, off you both go, and remember: practice makes perfect,' Mr. Owl told them before disappearing through his front door and back into the tree.

Willow and Tuffy, from that day on, became very good friends. Willow helped Tuffy to look more menacing – whether or not it worked remains to be seen.

Tuffy needs help

One day, Tuffy noticed his friend Willow, the crow, flying rapidly towards him. As he landed on Tuffy's shoulder, very much out of breath, Tuffy asked him what was wrong.

Still puffing and panting, Willow informed Tuffy that he had heard Farmer Jenks telling his wife that his scarecrow wasn't scary enough, and that not only had the scarecrow not scared away any of the animals from his cornfield, but that he had encouraged more animals onto his field. Taking in a few gulps of air, Willow added fearfully, 'He said that if it doesn't change soon, it's the bonfire for you.'

Tuffy sat down on a log and started to cry. He just didn't like being scary.

One by one all the animals of the forest came to find out why Tuffy was crying.

Cedrick, the hedgehog, asked what they could do to help, and the animals looked at Willow for ideas.

'We need to go to Mr. Owl for advice,' he said, and the animals nodded in agreement as they set off.

Willow rang Mr. Owl's bell and, as always, his loud voice shouted, 'Who is it?'

'It's me, Willow,' Willow replied.

'Come in,' Mr. Owl shouted.

But Willow replied, 'I think it's best if you come out here please, Mr. Owl.'

Following a few muttered words that Willow didn't understand, Mr. Owl appeared. Looking down at all the animals in surprise, he asked Willow, 'What do you all want?'

Willow told Mr. Owl the full story in detail.

'This is a problem. You didn't use the menacing look I advised you to use last time we spoke!'

Tuffy didn't reply; he just shook his head sadly.

I suppose we can't turn you into something you're not. It's those eyes of yours; they look so warm and friendly,' Mr. Owl said thoughtfully.

'What can I do?' asked Tuffy.

'I don't know yet, I haven't decided; I need more time... All of you, call back this afternoon,' he told them, turning and disappearing behind his front door.

‘Cheer up, Tuffy. If anyone can help you, it’s Mr. Owl,’ said Cedrick.

‘I could always run away,’ Tuffy suggested.
‘Don’t do anything hasty,’ advised Willow, ‘that’s the last resort.’

The day dragged on. It seemed as though the afternoon would never come. At last they heard Mr. Owl’s hooting call. All the animals of the forest hurried to Mr. Owl’s tree to hear what he had to say. There was a hushed silence; then Mr. Owl started to speak.

‘Step forward, Tuffy,’ Mr. Owl instructed.

‘I have given this matter a great deal of thought, and I have come to the conclusion...’ the animals were hanging onto every word as Mr. Owl stopped to clear his throat. ‘As I was saying,’ he continued, ‘I have given this a great deal of thought, and my conclusion is that we cannot change Tuffy as he is too nice to scare anyone.’ Once again, Mr. Owl stopped to clear his throat. ‘Therefore, we will have to help him.’ The animals of the forest nodded eagerly.

‘But how?’ asked Tuffy.

Mr. Owl's attention was now fixed on the birds as he spoke. 'Whenever Farmer Jenks is around, you must appear to be flying in fear from Farmer Jenks' cornfield.' Turning his attention to the foxes and rabbits he continued, 'and you must be seen running scared from Farmer Jenks' cornfield. This you must all do if you want to save Tuffy from the bonfire. And you, Willow, are the biggest threat of all as you are Tuffy's best friend; you will have to be careful about being seen together.'

From that day on, the animals were true to their word. Whenever Farmer Jenks was around, the animals flew or ran from his cornfield – not because they were scared, but because they liked Tuffy so much and knew he couldn't really scare anyone away.



Tuffy's first Christmas

One morning when Tuffy woke up he was surprised to see that everywhere was white, and as it was cold he decided to call on Mr. Owl to see if he could explain what had happened. On the way over to Mr. Owl's, Tuffy saw Farmer Jenks carrying a tree into the house. It was a small tree, but still a tree nevertheless. As soon as he arrived at Mr. Owl's home he told him about having seen Farmer Jenks taking a tree into his house, and asked him about all the white stuff. Mr. Owl explained everything to Tuffy. 'There are four seasons, Tuffy; spring, summer, autumn and winter. We are now in the time called winter, and in winter we have the snow that you see all around us now.' Mr. Owl went on to tell Tuffy about all the things it is possible to do in snow. 'You can build snowmen, slide down the hills on sledges and even have snowball fights.'

'But what about Farmer Jenks and the tree?' Tuffy asked.

'Ah, I was coming to that, Tuffy,' said Mr. Owl. 'Also in the wintertime comes something called *Christmas*.'

'Christmas?' asked Tuffy.

‘Yes, Christmas; it’s a time for good will to all, a time for giving and receiving presents.’

Mr. Owl told Tuffy about Father Christmas and Christmas stockings. Tuffy thanked Mr. Owl and went on his way. A short time later he bumped into his friend, Willow, and told him what Mr. Owl had said.

‘Yes, it’s a great time of the year, Tuffy,’ said Willow.

A sad-looking Tuffy told Willow that he didn’t have a fireplace on which to hang a Christmas stocking; in fact, he didn’t even have a Christmas stocking!

‘You can stay at my house,’ Willow told Tuffy.

‘Can I?’ asked Tuffy, suddenly cheering up.

‘Yes; and you can help me with the Christmas preparations,’ Willow told him.

‘Preparations?’ repeated Tuffy, puzzled.

‘There’s the Christmas decorations, the Christmas pudding and jelly; oh, and let’s not forget the Christmas tree... and we have to write a letter to Santa.’

‘A letter?’ repeated Tuffy.

‘Yes, a letter telling Santa what we would like,’ Willow explained.

‘But I can't write,’ said Tuffy.

‘Don't worry, I'll do it for both of us,’ Willow promised.

With Tuffy's help, Willow completed everything on the list. The only thing left to do was to hang up the stockings and leave a mince pie for Santa. They were both very excited as they said goodnight and went to bed.

Early the next morning, as Tuffy awoke, he noticed a robin standing on the window ledge. Although he had seen robins on many occasions, this time it was different somehow. It's red breast really stood out. Maybe it was because of the snowy, white background. Suddenly the silence was broken by Willow running in shouting, ‘Come on, let's see what Father Christmas has left for us.’

They ran downstairs to the Christmas tree and there, carefully placed and decorated with sparkling tinsel, lay their presents. Tuffy received a hat and gloves, while

Willow received a sleigh. They were so excited that they went outside immediately and ran to the top of the hill to try out Willow's sleigh. As he already had a hat, Tuffy decided to give his new hat to Willow, who happily put it on to keep warm. They did all the things you could do with snow; they made a snowman, had snowball fights and, of course, had sleigh rides down the hill.

Later, they returned to Willow's home to have Christmas dinner in front of a log fire, wishing each other a very merry Christmas.



Tuffy and the snail trail

'I've never been in a cave,' Tuffy thought to himself, 'I wonder what's inside. I'll go and see Mr. Owl, he'll know.'

Tuffy went to see Mr. Owl whenever he needed advice or information. Mr. Owl was respected by all the creatures of the forest for his wisdom. Nobody knew how old he was, but they knew he was old because of his grey feathers and because of the glasses he needed to improve his poor eyesight. When Tuffy arrived at Mr. Owl's, he was standing where he always stood, on the branch next to his front door. He had been standing there so long that the bark of the branch bore the mark of his claws.

'Good morning, Mr. Owl,' said Tuffy.

'Hello, Tuffy,' replied Mr. Owl, squinting to get a better look at him. 'What can I do for you?'

'How did you know I wanted anything, Mr. Owl?' Tuffy asked.

Mr. Owl smiled. 'I know you too well, Tuffy. Go on then, ask your question.'

'I was wondering what is in the caves on the edge of the forest,' said Tuffy.

‘The caves are home to many creatures, Tuffy; bats, spiders and all kinds of insects.’

‘Are they dangerous?’ asked Tuffy.

‘Not really, Tuffy,’ Mr. Owl assured him.

‘What are bats?’ Tuffy asked.

‘They’re funny creatures, Tuffy; they hang upside down.’

‘Wow! I would like to go and see the bats,’ Tuffy told Mr. Owl.

‘You can, but don’t go alone, Tuffy,’ Mr. Owl warned him.

‘Why not? You said it wasn’t dangerous,’ Tuffy asked, feeling puzzled.

Mr. Owl replied firmly, ‘It isn’t, but I don’t want you to go alone.’

‘Who should I go with?’ Tuffy asked him.

‘Take Slug, the snail; and beamer, the glow-worm,’ Mr. Owl replied after some thought.

'It will take a long time if Slug comes with me, he is so slow; and Beamer is too small to carry anything,' Tuffy told Mr. Owl.

'You have a lot to learn, Tuffy; now off you go,' Mr. Owl told him.

Tuffy didn't know why Mr. Owl had advised him to take a snail and a glow-worm with him to the caves, but he decided to take his advice because he knew Mr. Owl was very wise, and later that day Tuffy set off to find Slug and Beamer.

He explained to them that he didn't know why Mr. Owl had advised him to take both of them with him to the caves, but asked them if they would accompany him.

'I'll come with you, Tuffy; although I am very slow,' said Slug the snail.

'I'll come with you as well, although I am small and cannot carry anything,' said Beamer.

'That's ok,' said Tuffy, feeling happy that they were so willing to go with him into the unknown.

So off they went to the caves, and although it took a long time to get there because of Slug, it didn't seem that long because they talked to each

other along the way till they reached the entrance of the cave. As they entered the cave Tuffy remarked that it was good that Beamer had come along as he lit up the cave so they could see where they were going.

As they wandered through the different tunnels within the cave, they saw many creatures along the way, finally reaching the bats, hundreds of them, all hanging upside down! After admiring the bats Tuffy decided it was time to go home.

‘There are so many tunnels I can't remember which one we came down,’ said Beamer, sounding alarmed.

‘I think we're lost!’ Tuffy said, suddenly feeling scared.

‘No, we're not,’ said Slug, ‘we can follow the silvery track that I always leave behind me as I travel.’

As they made their way through the tunnels and out of the cave following Slug's silver trail, Tuffy remarked that it was a good thing that Slug had come along.

On the way home Tuffy, Slug and Beamer agreed that they had had a good time, and Tuffy

realised why Mr. Owl had advised him to take a glow-worm to light up the cave and a snail to help him find his way out again.

Tuffy and the wishing well

Looking up at the stars one clear night Tuffy saw that there was not a cloud in sight, and the moon was lighting up the whole of Farmer Jenks' farm. As Tuffy looked around him, something caught his attention. He noticed a small light flying through the air over to Farmer Jenks' house. A short time later he saw it come out of Farmer Jenks' house and fly through the air and into the wishing well. Tuffy hurried over to the wishing well to see what it was.

At first it was pitch black, then, all of a sudden, he noticed little flecks of light moving around at the bottom of the well. Tuffy stayed at the wishing well for the rest of the night hoping to see the light come out of the wishing well again, but sadly it didn't. In the days that followed he continued to watch, hoping to see the light come out of the well, and he had just about given up when suddenly a small light rose up from the wishing well travelling away from Tuffy's direction.

Tuffy plucked up some courage and shouted in a very loud voice, 'STOP', but the light didn't stop. Tuffy gave it one more chance and shouted, 'PLEASE STOP'. The light stopped, but it was too far away for Tuffy to make out what it was. Tuffy didn't really know what to say, so he introduced himself. 'I'm Tuffy.' Tuffy heard a voice from the light saying, 'I know who you are.' This left Tuffy feeling very confused, but the light suddenly diminished making it possible for him to see who it was.

‘Charlee!’ Tuffy gasped in amazement.

It was Charlee, the fairy who brought Tuffy to life.

‘Hello, Tuffy,’ Charlee said, greeting him with a smile.

‘I didn't know you lived in the wishing well,’ said Tuffy, sounding surprised, then asking out of curiosity, ‘Why did you go over to Farmer Jenks’ house the other night?’

‘That wasn't me, Tuffy; it was a different type of fairy.’

‘Why are there different types of fairies?’ asked Tuffy.

‘That’s because we all have different jobs to do. The fairy you saw was a tooth fairy.’

‘A tooth fairy?’ asked Tuffy.

‘When a child loses a tooth, the tooth is left under their pillow before they go to sleep. While they sleep the tooth fairy takes the tooth and leaves money in its place... but only if the child has been good.’

‘Where does the money come from?’ asked Tuffy.

'We use the money that people throw down the wishing well,' replied Charlee.

Tuffy was curious to know who in Farmer Jenks' house had lost a tooth, and he put that question to Charlee.

'It was his daughter, Lily-Ella,' she told him.

'I'm sorry Lily-Ella lost a tooth,' said Tuffy, sadly.

'Don't worry,' Charlee explained, 'it was only one of her baby teeth; another tooth will grow.'

Tuffy was glad to hear that Lily-Ella's tooth would grow back again.

Tuffy told Charlee it was great to see her again and that it would be nice to see her more often as it sometimes got lonely standing in Farmer Jenks' field alone.

Charlee told Tuffy that if he ever needed her he was to go to the wishing well and call her name. She would then come up to see him.

This made Tuffy very happy.

Tuffy builds a tree-house

One day Tuffy went over to Mr. Owl's to ask for his advice.

'What can I do for you, Tuffy?' asked Mr. Owl.

'Mr. Owl, I was thinking about a house.'

'A house?' asked Mr. Owl.

'Yes, a house. You have a home, and Willow has a home. As a matter of fact, everyone in the forest has a home; that is, except me. I'm always stuck in a cornfield overnight.'

Mr. Owl looked up into the sky, indicating that he was thinking, and when he was thinking Tuffy knew never to interrupt.

'A home, eh?' Mr. Owl muttered. 'Why not?' he asked, nodding his head.

Tuffy was happy to hear Mr. Owl say that.

'What type of house do you think I should build?' asked Tuffy.

'I think you should build a tree-house, off the beaten track, camouflaged so, that way, it will be out of sight of anyone travelling through the forest.'

‘But I don't know how to build a tree-house,’ said Tuffy.

‘You need to talk to the beavers that live in the river on the other side of the forest, they know how to build homes with branches and logs. They call them **lodges**. What's to say you can't put the same home up a tree? Now, off you go, as I have to catch up on my sleep,’ Mr. Owl muttered as he went through the door to his home.

‘The beavers,’ Tuffy thought, ‘I'll ask them.’

When Tuffy arrived at the river there wasn't a beaver to be seen.

‘They must be in their lodges,’ Tuffy thought, ‘but I don't know what they look like, so how can I find them?’ he asked himself. Just then Dax, a male deer, who was passing by a short distance away, noticed Tuffy and asked him why he was on this side of the forest.

‘I'm looking for beavers to help me build a home, but I don't know what their home is like so I don't know where to look for them,’ Tuffy explained.

‘Their homes are in the water; they look like bits of twigs and logs stuck together,’ Dax explained, helpfully.

‘Like that one there?’ asked Tuffy, pointing to a round pile of twigs in the river.

‘Yes, just like those,’ replied the deer.

‘How can I get to them?’ asked Tuffy.

‘Don't worry, I'll get them for you,’ offered Dax. He walked slowly into the water, making his way over to the beavers' lodge and calling to them.

A few minutes later two beavers appeared. ‘What do you want?’ they asked Dax, surprised to see him there.

‘It's not me who wants you, it's Tuffy,’ he told them, indicating Tuffy who was standing on the bank of the river.

‘Tuffy?’ asked one of the beavers, ‘we've heard a lot about you... What is it you want?’

‘I want to build a tree-house and I don't know how to build it. Mr. Owl suggested I should ask you for advice as you are always building homes,’ Tuffy explained.

‘Yes, but our homes are on the river, not in a tree!’ said the other beaver, in disbelief.

‘Mr. Owl said he doesn't see why the same house couldn't be built up a tree,’ said Tuffy.

‘We could get as many logs as you need to make it,’ suggested the first beaver.

‘But you would need lots of help getting them up the tree to the upper branches,’ said the other beaver.

‘You could ask the squirrels to help put the ropes over the branches to pull the logs up,’ said the first beaver.

‘I don't have any rope, but I do know where there is a rope that I may be able to borrow,’ said Tuffy, beginning to feel excited.

So Tuffy, the beavers and Dax the deer went off to find a suitable spot to build a tree-house.

Before too long Dax shouted to them, ‘This seems an ideal spot, not too far away from Farmer Jenks’ field.’

Joining him, the beavers started to study the trees. They constantly argued about which tree would be the best for building the tree-house, but after much disagreement they finally agreed on the oak tree.

Tuffy agreed, as it was the type of tree in which Mr. Owl lived.

The rest of the day was spent getting the logs from the river to the oak tree. Dax helped with the carrying, as did other animals of the forest. In the meantime, Tuffy went to the wishing well and shouted, 'Charlee' in a loud voice, just as the fairy had instructed him. A short time later Charlee appeared from the wishing well.

'Hello, Tuffy,' she said.

'I need your help,' Tuffy told her.

'What is it you need?' she asked.

'I need to borrow a piece of rope, and I noticed you use rope to pull the bucket up out of the wishing well,' Tuffy explained.

'And you would like to borrow it?' Charlee asked.

'Yes, if you don't mind,' Tuffy replied.

'Not at all,' Charlee told him.

With the rope in his hands Tuffy went on his way, promising to bring it right back after he had finished with it.

When Tuffy arrived back at the oak tree that was to be his home, he was in for a surprise as all the animals of the forest had arrived to see his house being built. Even Mr. Owl had come along to preside over the procedure. It wasn't long before Mr. Owl had to interrupt all the animals who were voicing their opinions as to how Tuffy's house should be built.

'Quiet!' Mr. Owl shouted in a loud voice.

All the animals stopped talking and looked up at Mr. Owl to hear what he had to say.

'With all this squabbling we shall be here all night. The beavers know how to build houses out of logs and branches, so let's leave it to them.

'Beavers, what can we do to help?' asked Mr. Owl.

'The first thing we need to do is to make the floor of the tree-house by binding the logs together with reeds. Then we need to pull the floor up to the first two branches of the tree. Next we must bind them to the branches to keep the floor firm. Finally, we have to build the rest of the house on the platform of the floor.'

With the help of the squirrel, who put the rope over the branches; and the badgers and foxes, who

pulled the rope to lift the floor; and the beavers, who stood on the floor as if it were a lift taking them up to the branches of the tree, enabling them to do their work as, one by one, the logs were lifted, the job was done. Most remarkable was that the beavers had made the tree-house square, like a normal house, instead of like their own lodge, which was round.

When the beavers had been lowered from the tree-house to the ground Mr. Owl asked them a question.

‘Haven't we forgotten something?’

Puzzled, the beavers looked at each other without replying.

‘How is Tuffy supposed to get up to his tree-house?’ he asked.

‘We don't know,’ admitted the beavers. We don't have that problem.’

Suddenly, Willow had an idea. ‘I have seen Farmer Jenks climb a thing called a ladder to get into the hayloft.’ Picking up a twig, he drew a ladder in the soil to demonstrate how it worked.

‘Beavers, can you make a ladder for Tuffy?’ asked Mr. Owl.

‘That should be easy enough. All we need is two long branches and many short branches, and then we can weave them together with reeds,’ they replied.

With the help of Tuffy's friends the ladder was built.

‘Well, Tuffy, off you go, up to your new home,’ Mr. Owl instructed.

Tuffy climbed the ladder to his new tree-house, and as he leaned out of the window he thanked everybody for helping to build it. He told them they were welcome to visit any time they wished, and over the following months they all visited him. Even Cedrick the hedgehog visited and helped him to clean the floor in autumn by rolling around on the floor to collect the dry leaves that had blown into Tuffy's house then going outside and shaking himself till the leaves fell from his spikes.

Tuffy meets old Magnus Magpie

‘Good morning, Tuffy,’ said Cedrick the hedgehog.

‘Good morning, Tuffy,’ said Brock the badger as he hurried towards Mr. Owl’s home.

‘Good morning, Tuffy,’ shouted Dax the deer as he, too, made his way over to Mr. Owl’s home.

‘Stop!’ shouted Tuffy, ‘Where is everybody going?’

‘Don't you know?’ asked Dax.

‘Know what?’ Tuffy asked.

‘Old Magnus Magpie is here from Scotland, visiting Mr. Owl.’

‘But why is everyone going to see him?’ Tuffy asked.

‘Old Magnus Magpie tells the most wonderful stories about his travels around the world,’ Dax explained.

‘Do you think he would mind if I came along?’ asked Tuffy.

‘I don't think he would,’ answered Dax.

So Tuffy joined Dax and set off for Mr. Owl’s home.

When Tuffy and Dax arrived there was already a large crowd waiting for Old Magnus Magpie to arrive, but there was no sign of him. Suddenly, Mr. Owl's door opened and out he came to stand in his usual place on his branch. The creatures of the forest stopped talking to listen to what he had to say. Mr. Owl, looking over his glasses, began to speak.

'As you all know by now, my dearest friend, Magnus, has paid me a visit, and I know you all like to hear the stories he tells.' There were cheers from the crowd of animals, birds and insects. 'So, if you all could be a bit more patient, I'm sure he won't be too long.'

Just then, the door opened and out from Mr. Owl's home came Old Magnus Magpie. As he walked along the branch, Mr. Owl bowed his head, gesturing to his old friend that the stage was all his.

Old Magnus Magpie looked a little like Mr. Owl as he, too, had grey feathers, wore glasses to improve his poor eyesight and used a crooked stick to help him walk – although he could still fly very well. Old Magnus Magpie sat down on the branch to rest his legs. Putting his walking stick to one side he began to tell one of the many stories that the creatures of the forest looked forward to hearing.

‘I’m going to tell you about the Land of the Fungi, where the Mushies and the Toadies live. Their villages are separated by a river that runs between them. The two villages look very different from each other; the Mushies’ village is bright with different kinds of flowers growing everywhere.

The Mushies are kind and very friendly people, and not at all like their neighbours, the Toadies, whose land is overshadowed by an enormous forest. The trees are so tall they block out the sun making it a dark place to live.

The once-beautiful lake has turned into a swamp. No birds go there and they have been replaced by bats. No flowers grow, only weeds. The houses are grey and black, whereas the Mushies’ homes are colourful and clean. This caused the Toadies to be very jealous of the Mushies.’

Old Magnus Magpie paused as he noticed Young Badger with his hand up, wanting to ask a question.

‘What is your question, Young Badger?’

‘Why do the Toadies live like that, Mr. Magpie?’
Young Badger asked.

‘They didn’t always live like that. As a matter of fact, the Mushies and the Toadies were once good

friends,' Old Magnus Magpie explained.
'What happened?' asked Young Badger.

'But,' Mr. Owl interrupted. 'If you stop asking questions and let Mr. Magpie finish his story, then no doubt you will find out,' he said, quite sternly.

'It's alright, Mr. Owl; I don't mind them asking questions, it proves they're listening,' said old Magnus Magpie.

Mr. Owl mumbled something under his breath before saying, 'Alright, continue.'

'As I was saying,' old Magnus Magpie said, returning to his story, 'they were good friends until one day Tukumbi, the leader of the Toadies, got greedy and ventured up the Hill of Thrones belonging to Mordich.'

Once again, Young Badger interrupted, 'Who is Mordich?' he asked, which caused Mr. Owl to shake his head and look up in the air showing his annoyance at Young Badger interrupting Mr. Magpie again.

'Mordich is the wizard of their forest, just like the fairies you have here,' explained old Magnus Magpie.

‘Why did Tukumbi go to Mordich's hill?’ asked Cedrick the hedgehog.

‘Now see what you've started, Young Badger,’ Mr. Owl complained.

Old Magnus Magpie told Mr. Owl it was quite alright, and went on to explain why Tukumbi went to Mordich's hill. ‘You see, Cedrick, inside Mordich's hill there are crystals with special magical qualities and Tukumbi's intention was to steal them – that is, until Mordich caught him.’

The animals in the crowd responded to this with a, ‘Wooooooo.’

‘Well, as I was about to tell you,’ old Magnus Magpie continued, ‘Mordich punished the Toadies by casting a spell on the forest, causing it to grow to the height it is today, blocking out the sun and the moon and making it a dark and depressing place, where nothing good grows. This has caused the Toadies to become bitter towards the Mushies and very jealous, because everything is wonderful in the land of the Mushies.’

‘One day, one of the Mushies ran to the mayor’s home shouting for him to come out of his house. When the mayor came out to see what all the commotion was about, the Mushie explained

that the Toadies were refusing to let the Mushies get water from the river to drink and threatening to harm any Mushie who ventured down there.'

The crowd listened intently to every word as Old Magnus Magpie continued his tale.

'After taking a moment to decide what to do, the mayor decided to pay Labby a visit.

Labby was the village professor and he was always the one they called upon if the village was in trouble. After the mayor had explained the predicament the village was in, Labby pointed out that they still had a few days' supply of water in the tower to tide them over until a solution had been found.'

'Did they find a solution?' asked Young Badger eagerly, ignoring Mr. Owl's suggestion of waiting for old Magnus Magpie to finish his story and once again causing Mr. Owl to shake his head from side to side in disapproval.

'Yes, they did, Young Badger; but it was still dangerous for them, as you will see,' old Magnus Magpie replied.

'That's if he can contain himself from interrupting you, Mr. Magpie,' remarked Mr. Owl.

Undeterred, old Magnus Magpie continued his story.' Labby told the mayor that there was a magic tree in the forest and that whatever was built from it became magic. The mayor was unconvinced and asked for further explanation. Labby told him that if he were to build a water tower, for example, it would always be full of water and would never dry up, adding that they could also build something magical with any wood left over.'

All eyes were on old Magnus Magpie as he continued.

'But the mayor wanted to know how Labby knew about the magic tree, and Labby explained that all those years ago when Mordich had cast his spell over the forest, it had felt as though a huge wind had blown through the forest. Puzzled, the mayor wanted to know how Labby knew about this. Labby told him he knew because he had been there, holding onto a tree in fear of being blown away as the spell enveloped both him and the tree. Labby explained that as Mordich's spell had been aimed at a bad person, it had the opposite effect on the tree he was holding onto.

'Interrupting Labby, the mayor asked him if he had known then that the tree was magic. Labby confirmed that the only thing he had noticed was that it was the only tree that hadn't grown tall, and it

had taken on a golden colour. The mayor wanted to know how Labby had discovered the tree's magic powers, and Labby described how, over the following few months, he had visited Mordich and told him what had happened, stressing that he had had nothing to do with Tukumbi and the theft of the crystals.

‘Mordich told Labby that he believed him, and that because the spell had flowed through him to the tree, the tree was also magic, and that anything that was made from the wood of the tree would have magical powers.

‘The mayor was very interested and wanted to know who else knew about it. Labby confirmed that he had never told anyone about it before. After some thought the mayor said that as the tree was in the forest on the Toadies' side of the river, finding it would be a problem. However, Labby explained to the mayor that finding it would be the easiest part as it was the brightest tree in the forest and stood out from the rest. In addition to that, the tree was not in the heart of the forest but was on the far side; quite a distance from their village.

‘The mayor was unconvinced, commenting that it was more than their lives were worth to venture over to the other side of the river. But Labby had an idea.

He explained that they could keep the Toadies occupied by pleading with them for water from the river. The mayor pointed out that the Toadies were heartless and would never agree to it. However, Labby explained that it wasn't really about talking them into letting them have water. It was really just a ploy to distract them while the others crept round to the other side of the forest, cut down the magic tree and brought it back to their village.'

The crowd before old Magnus Magpie was listening intently as he continued.

'The mayor was beginning to seriously consider Labby's proposal, but was still doubtful and asked if Labby really thought they could manage it. Labby assured him that it wasn't a huge tree as it had not grown big like the other trees, but that it was big enough to build a large water barrel. So the mayor and Labby called the Mushies of the village together and explained their plan.

'Later that day the mayor took a small number of Mushies up river to plead with Tukumbi, the leader of the Toadies, to let them have water, but to no avail. The Toadies just laughed and mocked the Mushies, but unbeknown to them Labby had taken a party of Mushies around to the other side of the forest. There they had cut down the magic tree and

taken it back to their village. The mayor had distracted the toadies long enough for the Mushies to complete their task.'

'What happened then?' asked Young Badger.

'Well, the Mushies built their water barrel and asked the barrel never to be empty of water. And it never was, from that day on,' said old Magnus Magpie.

And, as usual, all the creatures of the forest gave old Magnus Magpie a huge round of applause.

Thank you for purchasing my book

Acknowledgements

Absolute editing
Steffanie Burnet
Stephen Williams

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Other Books by Richard T. Smith

The Chestnut Man

The Gobbledygook

A Story Teller

Don't Stop the World I Want To Stay On

Small Book of Life Changing Quotes

100 Nuggets of Gold

One Liners & Put Downs

