

Save the Forest

by H.Q. MITCHELL

pre-intermediate



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CHAPTER 1

Christopher Andrews looked at the clock on the classroom wall anxiously. It was Friday afternoon and it was ten minutes to three. "Ten minutes until spring holidays begin!" he whispered to his best friend Michael Young. Michael's desk was in front of Christopher's.

Mr Edwards, their teacher, heard Christopher's voice. He was a tall, thin man with white hair, and he was very strict. He looked angrily at the boys.

"Be quiet!" he said, as he began to give the students their end of term reports. The reports were in white envelopes and the students had to take them home to their parents.

"You have done well this term," Mr Edwards told Michael. "Keep up the good work."

Mr Edwards didn't smile when he gave Christopher his report. Instead, he gave him a stern look.

"You can do better than this," he told Christopher. "You must work harder next term."

The bell rang, and all the students picked up their bags and left the room. Christopher and Michael went outside together. Their bicycles were parked under a big tree beside the front steps of the school.

"What's the matter?" Michael asked Christopher. "You look upset."

Christopher unlocked his bicycle chain. "I am upset," he said. "Look at my report! My parents won't be impressed. They want me to be a good student like you, but I just can't do it. School is so boring!"

Michael couldn't understand his friend's attitude. "I like school," said Michael. "Besides, I need to work hard. I want to become an engineer like my dad."

Christopher frowned. "My dad is the manager of a shoe factory. That's not very inspiring or interesting," he said.

Michael got on his bicycle. "Do you want to play basketball this evening?" he asked.

"No, thanks," Christopher said. "Maybe tomorrow. I'll call you."

The boys said goodbye and Christopher rode home. His parents were still at work. He left his report on the dining room table, made himself a cheese sandwich and went to his room.



At 5:30, Mr and Mrs Andrews came home. Mr Andrews was not very tall. He had black hair and brown eyes. He wore glasses and had a serious manner. Christopher's mother was a chemist at Barker's Pharmacy. She was a pretty woman with curly brown hair and green eyes, and Christopher looked a lot like her. She usually laughed a lot, but she didn't laugh when she read Christopher's report.

Mr Andrews read the report, too. Then he took off his glasses and put them on the table. He waved the report at Christopher.

"Look at this!" he said angrily. "All of your teachers say the same things. You are intelligent, but you don't try hard enough. What's wrong with you, Christopher?"

Christopher looked at his shoes. "I don't know. I just don't like school very much. The lessons are boring."

Mrs Andrews sat down at the dining room table. She looked worried.

"This is an important time, Christopher. You're almost fifteen. Soon you'll have to decide what you want to do with your life. What are you interested in?"

"I don't know," said Christopher and shrugged his shoulders.

Mr Andrews picked up his glasses and put them on again. He spoke slowly and sternly. "I want you to think seriously during these holidays. And I want you to try much harder next term. If I don't see an improvement in your next report, I won't take you camping this summer."

Christopher felt miserable. He loved camping, and he looked forward to it every year. His father was really angry!



CHAPTER 2

That night, Christopher didn't sleep well. In the morning he took his bicycle and rode down the street. His house was in Aylesworth, a small town in Berkshire, about an hour from London.

Whenever Christopher was unhappy, he rode his bicycle to his favourite place, a forest full of tall oak trees two miles from home. He loved the forest because it was beautiful and peaceful. It was filled with different kinds of flowers and wild plants. The trees were full of birds and little grey squirrels played in the branches. Christopher had even seen a fox once.

As Christopher cycled through the town, he enjoyed the warm sun on his back. The trees were beginning to grow new green leaves, and many gardens had colourful spring flowers in them. He saw a team of gardeners in a small park by the Town Hall. One man was cutting the grass, another was cutting dead branches off trees while a woman was planting red and yellow tulips in a flowerbed.

"I'd like to be a gardener," Christopher thought to himself as he rode past. "It's nice to work outside all day and make things grow. Besides, you don't have to be good at school to become a gardener."

A few minutes later, Christopher reached the entrance to the forest. He chained his bicycle to a tree beside the road. Then he took his pack with his picnic lunch and began to walk into the forest. He was looking for a good place to sit down and eat his lunch. He needed to be alone and to think.

The sun was warm, and the sky was blue with little white clouds which looked like fluffy sheep. A pair of black-and-white magpies flew through the air and called to each other. Christopher felt a little bit happier. He followed the birds into the forest. Then he heard voices. He looked ahead and saw two men. One of them was a young man, in his thirties. He was holding a long pole with yellow and black lines on it. An older man was standing a little distance away. He had an instrument that looked like a camera on a tripod. He looked through the instrument at the man with the pole, and then he wrote something in a notebook.

Christopher walked towards the men hesitantly. He started to feel a little uneasy looking at them work.

It was some time before he found the courage to ask, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

The man with the tripod answered him. "We're surveyors. Our job is to measure land. We're measuring the forest."

"Why are you doing that?" asked Christopher alarmed.

"The forest is going to be sold," said the other man firmly. "A building company will cut down the trees and build blocks of flats on this land."

Christopher was very upset. "Cut down the trees? You can't cut down the trees! This forest is so beautiful!"

The men looked at him. "Yes, it's a pretty place," agreed the younger man, "but it's going to be sold."

"It's not fair!" pleaded Christopher.

"Look here, son," said the older man. "I understand how you feel, but you can't do anything about it. Think about it like this; you're very lucky because you live in a small town which has countryside all around. Other people live in big cities like London and their children haven't got anywhere to play. They can't go out because there isn't anywhere to go. They want to move to the country, but there aren't enough houses for all the people who want to leave the city. That's why building companies have to buy land and build new houses."

The younger man with the pole nodded his head. "He is right," he told Christopher. "More and more people are leaving big cities these days. You can't stop progress. People must have places to live."

"I see," said Christopher. He turned and walked away. He didn't want his picnic lunch now. He didn't want to sit under a tree and think. He felt very depressed.

