

CHESTER BARKY

No one alive could remember Chester Barky before he was a fully-grown horse chestnut tree. He had been brought from the Balkans as a sapling and planted in the grounds of a great estate when horse chestnut trees were new to England and a popular tree in the grounds of fashionable estates.

But now he was an old tree. A long dry summer had taken its toll on Chester and the sap had drawn back into the trunk, away from the heavy branches.

A young girl, Bonnie Blessing, started to pass the tree every day on her way to school. She was new to the school and had made very few friends. It didn't help that no one else walked home the same way as she did. She felt so lonely.

Chester also stood alone as Bonnie felt that she did. She began to pause each morning on her way to school to talk to the tree.

Then one day as she walked home a group of boys were around the tree. They were throwing stones up into the tree to try to dislodge the conkers which were not yet ripe and ready to fall in their spiky cases.

Bonnie was so angry. She ran at the boys shouting, telling them to leave the tree alone. They surrounded her and laughed at her and threw their stones at her until she ran home, determined not to cry in front of them.

She fell asleep that night with thoughts of Chester and in her dreams he came to life. His branches became muscular arms; his leaves, like dinosaur paws, became hands. Golden, crystal eyes burned at the top of his trunk. He raged at the tormentors, he threw balls of fire at them to try and protect her.

But from that day the boys waited for her at the tree. Going home became like a nightmare for Bonnie. Every day the boys threw anything they could find into Chester's canopy, damaging his branches.

One very windy day the boys stopped throwing stones when they saw Bonnie approaching. As they surrounded her, a great branch fell from the tree, narrowly missing them. They ran home terrified, telling their parents what had happened. But the exultant Bonnie, released from her tormentors, truly believed the tree was protecting her.

The incident of the falling branch was reported to the tree officer, who inspected the tree and reported that Chester had become brittle and weak because of his age. There was a danger that more branches might fall and hurt someone, so an order was made for Chester to be cut down.

When Bonnie heard she was so sad, she cried herself to sleep. Her dreams turned to nightmares.

Where she heard a loud bang, the sun exploded and everything went black. Bonnie jolted upright in her bed and screamed and screamed. Her mother ran to comfort her. As she listened to her distraught Bonnie, she realised the friendship Bonnie had made with the tree. Carefully she explained how old the tree was and why it needed to be cut down.

The next day Bonnie and her mother went to visit the old tree and together they found conkers scattered around the ground where Chester had stood, still in their prickly cases. They took them home and carefully planted them so that one day the saplings grown from them would be ready to plant out, to grow for the next 300 years into beautiful mature horse chestnut trees, just like Chester.

Based upon the ideas of the children of Birds Bush Primary School.

Written by Mal Dewhirst and Christine Genders.

