

Only made of Wood

One Saturday afternoon Stephen and his mother came to Emma's house.

"What a nice surprise," Emma's mother said.

Emma didn't think so. Stephen was always boasting.

"Why don't you children go and play?"

Emma's mother asked.

Emma and Stephen went upstairs. They took out all Emma's toys but Stephen didn't want to play with any of them.

"My toys are better than these," he said.

"What else have you got?"

"Nothing else," Emma said, "except Rocky." Rocky was Emma's rocking-horse. He was very, very old. He had belonged to her mother and her grandmother before her.

"What good is he?" Stephen asked. "He's only made of wood."

Suddenly Rocky spoke. "Only made of wood!"

"He can talk!" Stephen said.

"Of course I can talk," Rocky told him.

"But you've never spoken before," Emma said.

"I only talk when I've got something very important to say"

"What have you got to say?"

"Just this- wood is wonderful. But perhaps it's better if I show you. Climb on my back, both of you."

The children did as he said and Rocky began rocking backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards. As he did so everything around them changed. The walls of Emma's bedroom disappeared and there were trees all around.

"What happened? Where are we?"

"We're in the past," Rocky said.

Emma and Stephen got down from his back and looked around them. "What do you mean?" Emma asked.

"This is what our country used to be like long before your house was built," Rocky told her. "In those days there were fewer people but there were lots and lots of trees."

One of the trees was bigger than any of the others. It was an oak tree. Rocky went over to it.

"This tree is special," he said.

"Why?" the children asked. But Rocky didn't answer. He seemed to have forgotten all about them.

"That is the tree he was made from," said a voice.

The children looked around and saw that an owl had landed beside them.

"How do you do?" said the owl. "My name is Silva. I'm a friend of Rocky's."

"Is Rocky sad?" Emma asked

"He's not sad," Silva said. "He's just remembering what it was like to be a tree, growing in the middle of the forest."

"What sort of creatures live in this forest?" Emma asked.

"All sorts of creatures," Silva said.

"Are they wild?"

"Very wild indeed."

"I'm not frightened of them," Stephen boasted.

"Aren't you?" Silva asked. He looked at Stephen and his eyes got bigger and bigger. "Let's see, then." He flapped his wings once, twice, three times. Suddenly the children found themselves getting smaller and smaller.

"What's happening?" Stephen asked.

"You're going to meet some of the creatures who live in the forest," Silva told him.

Just then they heard the sounds of marching. Left right, left right, left right! A giant ant came crashing through the grass towards them, then another and another.

"Help!" shouted Stephen. "Monsters!"

The ants were carrying something on their backs.

"It's an acorn!" Emma said.

The ants stopped in front of Emma and Stephen and the acorn rolled off their backs. "This is for you," they said. They all spoke at the same time and their voices sounded strange.

"I want to be big again," Stephen said. He was very frightened.

"All right then," Silva agreed. He flapped his wings once, twice, three times and straight away the children grew back to their normal size.

When they looked down the ants had gone but the acorn was still there.

"Ah there you are," Rocky said. "Did you meet the ants?"

"They certainly did," Silva told him.

Emma picked up the acorn. "They bought us this."

"Good," said Rocky. "I was hoping they would."

"But what's it for?"

"You'll find out later."

"Can I ask a question, Rocky?" Stephen said.

"Go ahead."

"If we go back to my time, this forest isn't there. The trees have all gone. What happened to them?"

"They were cut down to make things."

"What sort of things?"

"Houses and ships, tables and chairs, tools and toys. And, of course, paper."

"Paper!" Emma said, in surprise. "I didn't

know that was made out of wood."

"It certainly is," Rocky said. "Like I told you, wood is wonderful stuff."

"But why don't we run out of wood?" Emma asked.

"Because people keep planting new trees," Silva told her.

"Planting trees is one of the most important things you can do. Did you know that?" Emma and Stephen shook their heads.

"You human beings couldn't even breathe without trees."

"What do you mean?" Stephen asked.

"How can trees help us breathe?"

"Trees help keep our air clean," Silva said.

"That's why the world needs trees."

"It's time we were going," Rocky said.

"Have you got the acorn?"

Emma nodded. "Here it is," she said.

"Good. Now climb on my back again."

They did as he said and Rocky started to rock backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards. Once again the world began to change around them. The trees disappeared and they found themselves back in Emma's bedroom.

"There's something important you have to do," Rocky told them when they had got down from his back.

"What's that?"

"Plant the acorn."

"Where shall we plant it?" Stephen asked.

"In a pot in the garden."

"Won't it grow too big for the pot?" Emma asked.

"Of course, but when it's big enough you can take it out and find a better place for it," Rocky told her.

Emma and Stephen went into the garden, found a big pot and filled it with soil. They made a little hole in the soil and dropped the acorn in. Then they carefully covered it up. Afterwards, they watered it.

Just then their mothers came out. "Have you two been getting on?" Emma's mother asked.

"Of course," Emma said. "We're friends."

"We've been playing with Rocky," Stephen told them. "He's much better than any of my toys."

"Who's Rocky?" his mother asked.

"Emma's rocking-horse," Stephen told her.

"Look, there he is!" He pointed to the window of Emma's bedroom and there was Rocky looking out.

Stephen's mother looked up. "Good heavens!" she said. For a moment she felt sure that Rocky was smiling at them. But of course he couldn't have been doing that. After all, he was only made of wood.