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Opening extract from

The Tree That Sat Down

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Chapter One

Judy Meets a Stranger

Judy was out in the wood, collecting Sleepo.

In case you do not know about Sleepo, I will explain. It was one of the things which Judy's grandmother sold in The Shop Under the Willow Tree. It was really her own invention, though other people in the wood had tried to copy it. But nobody's Sleepo was as good as Mrs Judy's; it did not send you to sleep nearly so quickly, and sometimes it gave you bad dreams. Mrs Judy's Sleepo never gave you bad dreams . . . in fact, she had an extra special variety, which cost a penny an ounce more, which gave you the most beautiful dreams. She put a dream in each of these special boxes, which were tied up with green ribbon. Sometimes, if she thought you looked sad,

she would pop in an extra dream for luck. The ordinary boxes, which had not got a dream in them, were only tied up with string. But even so, they were very good value for money.

Now I will explain how to get Sleepo, because you might like to try to collect some yourself.

*

Whenever a cat or a dog or a dormouse or any other animal is sleeping, the air it breathes out through its mouth or its nose has got a little Sleepo in it. You cannot see it, any more than you can see the air itself, but it is there.

Now if the animal just goes on sleeping, the Sleepo drifts away, like smoke, and goes up to the ceiling or flies out of the window. But if you take a glass jar, and hold it near its nose, a lot of Sleepo goes into the jar and settles down. And if you bottle it up and recite the right spells over the bottle, it will keep for a whole month; and when you pour it out of the bottle again, it will send you to sleep.

Now that sounds very simple, but it isn't really quite as simple as all that. First of all, the jar has to be specially treated before it will hold the Sleepo properly. It has to

be put under the branches of a willow tree at midnight. And then you have to wait until three willow leaves have fallen into the jar. And they must fall in *of their own accord*; it is not the least use putting them in yourself, or shaking the branches of the tree.

When the three leaves have fallen into the jar, you must carry it up to your bedroom, and put it as near as you can to your pillow. And every night, before you go to sleep, you must take the jar in your hands and look at the leaves and say:

> Sleepo, sleepo, three times three,
> Out of the branch of a willow tree;
> Sleepo come and make me wise.
> Give me rest and close my eyes.

You do this for three nights running; and when you wake up on the third morning you find that something very exciting has happened. The leaves of the willow tree have flown away, and in their place are three pennies. You must take these pennies and buy something with them to give away . . . you must not spend any of it on yourself. When you have done this (which will be a very nice and kind thing to do) you will be able to collect as much Sleepo as you want. And perhaps you may be able

to sell some of it for more than the three pennies that you gave away.

*

Now let us get back to Judy in the wood, and see how she is getting on.

She had just been holding the jar in front of the nose of a baby leopard. It was lying fast asleep in the sun and a lot of Sleepo was coming from its nose. And then a fly settled on its tail, and the baby leopard began to twist and turn, and not so much Sleepo came. So she closed the jar and walked on.

She came to a cornfield in a clearing and wondered if she should go in to look for dormice. They were always sleepy, and it was a very good quality of Sleepo which one collected from them, because they were such amiable animals, and always had the nicest thoughts. However, they were also very small, and it took a dreadfully long time to collect any quantity; you had to hold the jar in front of at least twenty dormice before you got more than half an ounce. What she really wanted was somebody like old Mr Sloth, who hung from a tree, with Sleepo pouring from him in bucketfuls.

Then, through a gap in the trees, she saw something

lying on the ground. It was covered with stripes, and at first she thought it must be a rug which somebody had left behind after a picnic. But when she looked more closely, her heart beat fast with excitement, because she saw it was a little zebra, sound asleep. And when zebras slept, they slept very heavily indeed. If she could only tiptoe across without waking him up, she would be able to fill her jar in no time, and go home to tea.

Very cautiously she began to creep through the bushes. Now and then the branch of a wild rose caught in her skirt, and once she nearly stumbled over a stone. But step by step she drew nearer to the zebra. What a pretty little thing he was! He looked so tired – his front legs were crossed over each other, and his head was thrown back into a cluster of ferns; she could see the Sleepo rising regularly, in tiny puffs, through the ferns, like pale blue smoke.

She was nearly on him now, and was just about to undo the lid of her jar, when suddenly the air was rent with a shrill cry. Out of the shadows leapt a boy, with a ragged shirt and red hair. Over his head he waved a glass jar. With a single jump he landed on the zebra's back and clamped the jar over its nose. For a second the poor little beast seemed stunned, then it jumped to its feet with a loud neigh. The boy was still holding the jar to its nose,

but when the zebra leapt up, he was thrown from its back into a bramble bush. As he fell, he clutched his jar very closely to him.

The zebra darted away into the woods and the boy scrambled to his feet. Judy wondered where she had seen him before; then she remembered . . . of course, it was Sam, whose grandfather had just bought the only other shop in the wood, which was called The Shop in the Ford. (We will tell you more about this shop later.)

Judy did not like the look of Sam very much, but she was a polite little girl, so she said, 'Good afternoon.'

'What's good about the afternoon?' snapped Sam. 'And who are you, anyway?'

'I live in The Shop Under the Willow Tree.'

'That old dump!' Sam made a rude face. 'I wouldn't live in a place like that if you paid me a thousand pounds.'

Judy was about to say that it was not very likely that anybody would want to pay him a thousand pounds, when she noticed that his knee was scratched.

'Oh, you've hurt yourself!' she cried.

'It's nothing,' he retorted. 'And anyway it's none of your business.'

'Really,' thought Judy, 'he is the rudest boy I ever met.' However, she made another effort to be pleasant.

'Were you collecting Sleepo?' she asked.

'Sleepo! That stuff! Of course not. I was collecting Wakeo.'

'Wakeo? Whatever's that?'

'It wakes you up. Every time you startle an animal out of its sleep its breath has got a lot of Wakeo in it. Only don't *you* go collecting it, because my grandfather's going to patent it.'

'I certainly shouldn't dream of collecting such a thing,' replied Judy indignantly.

'You couldn't even if you tried,' sneered Sam, 'because you have to have a magic jar, or it escapes. And anyway, you'd be too frightened.'

'No I wouldn't.'

'Yes you would.'

'No I *wouldn't*.' Judy stamped her foot. 'It isn't because I'd be frightened but because I think it's very unkind to go jumping about on animals' backs when they're tired out and want to sleep.'

'Pooh! Who cares about being kind to a lot of silly animals?'

'I do. Besides, I'm quite sure it can't be good for people to take Wakeo.'

'Oh, yes it is! It makes them jump and sing and go on like mad. Old Mrs Parrot bought some the other day; she's a hundred and eight; and after the first dose she

climbed to the top of a tree and began to sing hymns.'

'I don't think people ought to sing hymns on the tops of trees, not if they're a hundred and eight,' replied Judy severely. 'She might have fallen down and broken her neck.'

'All the better,' chuckled Sam. 'Then we could have sold her some Necko to mend it again.'

'Don't you ever think of anything but selling things and making money?' asked Judy.

'Not very often. I'm going to be a millionaire. That's more than you'll ever be. In fact, if you don't look out, you won't have anything left at all. You'll be turned out of that old shop of yours.'

Judy felt a little cold shudder run down her spine, for her grannie was very poor, and was always afraid of being turned out of the shop.

'How do you mean?' she whispered.

'I mean that all the animals are going to come to *our* shop. We're going to sell all sorts of new things, and they'll be much cheaper, and we're going to advertise.'

'Advertise? Whatever's that?'

'Of course *you* wouldn't know. It means painting things on tree trunks and writing things on leaves.'

'What sort of things?'

'Things letting the animals know that we've got

everything they want – telling them that we can cure them of all their illnesses.'

'But can you?'

'Of course not, but we shall *say* we can. What does it matter as long as we get their money?'

'It sounds downright wicked!' cried Judy.

'You only say that because you didn't think of it yourself.'

'I should be ashamed if I *did* think of such things. It's wicked . . . telling lies to poor animals.'

'Oh, you *are* goody-goody!' jeered Sam.

'I don't care if I am. I'd rather be goody-goody than a thief.'

Sam shrugged his shoulders and grinned. 'Have it your own way, goody-goody,' he said.

Judy could bear it no longer. She turned on her heel and ran rapidly through the wood. And after her came the harsh echo of Sam's voice, growing fainter and fainter as she plunged deeper into the shadows:

Goody-goody Judy
Judy, Judy
Goody-goody Judy
Judy . . . Judy . . .