THE FAMILY TREE

MAL PEET

Illustrations by

EMMA SHOARD

Barrington Stoke

First published in 2018 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2018 Mal Peet
Illustrations © 2018 Emma Shoard

The moral right of Mal Peet and Emma Shoard to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-805-3

Printed in China by Leo



1

I was shocked. No, upset. Like when you upset a glass or something, and everything spills out.

I thought, 'The New People haven't looked after it. How could they have let it get into this state?'

Then I thought, 'It's probably not the same New People. We left here almost twenty years



ago. My God. The house could've been bought and sold any number of times since then.'

And then I thought, 'You shouldn't have come back. You should never go back.'

*



In fact, I hadn't intended to. It's just that I was driving past the end of the lane, coming back from a job, and decided to come and have a look. I hardly ever find myself in this part of the world. So let's call it a whim. Let's not say that it was as if another hand, an invisible hand, had reached across and turned the wheel.

There's a little pull-in fifty metres or so past the house. Trees, half-bare, and beyond them a ploughed field, regular as corrugated cardboard. I parked the van and got out. There was a squashed KFC box and two Sprite cans

in a puddle. I walked back to where I could see into our old garden without being seen from the house. There's a long black railing that separates the garden from the lane. The big old – no, ancient – beech tree is at the far end of the railing. It stretches some of its arms across the lane. I'd driven under them. It stretches others towards the house, over the lawn. The Nest is built into these branches.

What am I saying, is built?

My dad built it. It took him weeks. Or months. Time's bendy when you're little.



I stood there looking at the scruffy

wreckage in the tree's lower branches, hanging

there like a mishap.

