Budgie

Little Gems

JOSEPH COELHO

ILLUSTRATED BY
DAVID BARROW

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CHAPTER 1

A Chick in a Tree

I'm climbing up a tree with my friend Chris. It's near my flat, on our estate. The pine's bark is sticky with sap and the branches brush past my face as I edge my feet around its trunk.

"Can you see the top yet?" asks Chris.

I push my head up through the last few branches and come face to beak with a nest of squawking birds! I thought chicks were cute, but these three are enormous and bloated with sticky-out feathers.

The chicks snap at me! I fall down! Just a couple of branches, then I grab hold of the tree trunk. My heart thudding.

"You OK, Miles?" shouts Chris, but before I can answer I hear another voice … Mr-Spoiler-Of-Fun … Mr-Thinks-He-Owns-The-Trees … Mr Buxton.

"Get out of that tree!" he shouts, and he limps over to us on his walking stick.

I shimmy down the trunk in a shower of pine needles. Hit the ground, wipe my sticky hands on my trousers, shake out my curls, jump on my bike and speed after Chris down the main road of the estate, Mr Buxton, our angry neighbour, angry and panting behind us.

Chris and I pedal hard, whooping and cheering as we speed away from Mr Buxton.

Just as we reach my block I hear, "MILES, DINNER!"

Mum's voice comes flapping down to us. Wherever I am on the estate I can always hear her. Chris's mum doesn't call. Chris gets a text message … I wish I had a phone.

*

After dinner, Mum and my little sister, Mary, are staring out the window.

We're on the third floor and have great views, but they are looking down at the bushes and trees that grow along the red wall that goes around the whole estate.

Mr Buxton is down there with a black plastic bag in his hands. He's swooping it around the branches of the trees like he's doing some sort of rubbish dance. (Ha ha – *rubbish dance*!)

Mary is giggling. She's only four, but even she knows that Mr Buxton does not like the kids on the estate going near the trees.

"What's he doing, Mum?" I ask.

Mum just shakes her head and takes a big slurp of tea.