For my friends, with
gratitude for their support.
E.M.



For Alex and Sylvie.
E.B.

OLD OAK AND THE WILD FLOWERS

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Old Oak and the Wild Flowers



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Pikku Publishing



All was quiet in the field. The sun was strong, and a gentle breeze brushed the ears of barley, which nodded softly in response.

Old Oak stretched his branches and smiled. A moment later Mr Shield trundled by.

'How are you today?' Old Oak asked, always concerned for his trusty companion.

'Not so well I'm sorry to say,' replied Mr Shield, continuing on his way.

'Come, this is not like you,' said Old Oak. 'Tell me what is bothering you.'

'We shields are few in number this year. And Holly Blue flew to the woods last week and never returned.'

Old Oak frowned. A lone wasp alighted on his nose. He and Mr Shield stared gloomily at the field. The barley was short and thin this year. Something was amiss.



'Winter was too long,' mused Old Oak, 'and now the summer is hot and dry.'

'No rain for weeks,' said Mr Shield. 'No rain.'

'Now I think of it, the robin's song is quieter this year, and where is the cuckoo?' added Old Oak flatly, glancing at some unfriendly caterpillars on his trunk.

His branches drooped a little. The grassy margins were crisp, yellow and silent.

Then something in the field caught his eye. A head popped up above the barley, then another – and another!

Old Oak smiled. 'The children are playing their hiding and finding game,' he explained to a baffled Mr Shield.

The children's laughter broke the silence, and Old Oak saw that Beech was smiling over in the Far Hedgerow.



'There is something most wonderful in the joy of children,' sighed Old Oak, as the dunnocks and robin fluttered down to join him.

Later that day, the farmer entered the field. His face clouded over when he saw the flattened barley. Old Oak stiffened, and the birds and insects took flight as they felt his bark shrink.



'What's happened here?' exclaimed the farmer, coming to a stop. 'More problems! A poor harvest and now this!'



Two days later the big machine came as it always did, and soon the barley was gone.



'At least the weather has been kind to dear Blackthorn,' said Old Oak brightly. 'You are full of juicy fruit this year.'

'But my haws are rather small,' ventured Hawthorn meekly.

'Don't worry,' said Old Oak. 'Do you remember when the Far Hedgerow was felled? Now there she is, grown strong once more. Better times always come along.'





But still he knew there had been fewer birds and little wanderings in his branches these last two summers...



While Old Oak and his friends were puzzling over things, down below in the Hollow, inside Old Oak's ancient trunk, an important meeting was beginning.

Bees, bee flies, butterflies, wasps and ladybirds all fluttered, hummed and buzzed. Then a mighty stag beetle appeared from behind a pile of leaves and clambered to the top.

'Friends, welcome,' he boomed. The insects settled down. The Hollow fell silent. Only the young ants' nibblings could be heard.