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Flag House

by Holly Raber

From his vantage point high in the branches of the old Elm, George surveys the early morning comings and goings of Flag House. Earlier pockets bulging with an apple and a still warm boiled egg, he had slipped unseen from the house and is now ensconced in his favourite spot enjoying his solitary breakfast.

Although it is still early a miasma of heat shimmers above the grass scorching away the last vestiges of morning mist. At the farthest end of the garden where the verdant lawn gives way to the encroaching sand, Freddie the gardener's son is engaged in the daily task of clearing the path. George watches him gather the giant pine cones, which fall nightly like a meteor shower, into a precarious pile. As he sweeps sparkling eddies of sand rise briefly in the air before settling in fine ridges and escarpments between the stone flags.

Last summer, Freddie had spent most afternoons with George. Once free of his morning chores they had scaled the dunes, skimmed stones and once paddled 'Flora' the dinghy across to 'Brown Sea Island' returning breathless and triumphant with three peacock feathers purloined from its native birds. Now things are different. Nothing has been said but George finds himself unaccountably awkward faced with Freddie's newly fledged muscular form which he now glimpses furtively through the protective branches of the Elm. As he bends to his task a flash of red is just visible riding above the waistband of Freddie's trousers.

George shifts uneasily in the fork of the branches trying to ease an unfamiliar ache low in his stomach. Turning his attention to the house, he sees Francesca his sister dragging a decidedly unwilling Seamus, the basset hound, in the direction of the beach.

He tracks their progress along the herbaceous border with its tall Lupins and Foxgloves, across the sun baked lawn and into the shade of the tall Scots Pines where Freddie has just finished excavating the path. No words are spoken or so it seems to George at this distance, then all three, his tall sister, his erstwhile friend and the treacherous dog turn and walk off towards the beach trailing mocking laughter. The garden was now deserted except for a red book which lay sunning itself upon the path.

George drops soundlessly from his tree like a ripe plum and makes his way towards it checking all the while that he is unobserved. Although it is only small and just recently abandoned the book feels hot and heavy in George's hand. Retreating into the welcoming gloom of the pines George opens the book, and greedily devours page after page fat tears melting the ink as he reads.