

The Toy Tree

By Nicky Saint

It was a bare, craggy tree with spindly branches which looked like they might snap at any moment, but it was the only tree in the estate gardens.

Gabe loved the tree. He and his friends played by it all the time. They built dens against it, they sat in its shade on sunny days, and it was always their base when they played tag. And, in spring, the tree cheered up the grey concrete with its blossom.

Mr Snider the caretaker hated the tree. When he had to mow the grass around it or sweep its blossom from the path, he'd grumble, "It's in my way!" or "Who has to clean up all this mess? Me, that's who!"

Sometimes he threatened to cut it down, but Gabe didn't think he'd ever go through with it. However, one drizzly morning he spotted Mr Snider striding towards the tree with a chainsaw.

Gabe leapt up and shouted, "Mum! What's Mr Snider doing?"

Mum put down her knitting needles – she was knitting everyone scarves for Christmas – and came over to the window.

"Is he going to cut our tree down, Mum? He can't! We've got to stop him!"

Gabe grabbed his mum by the hand and they pelted down two flights of stairs to the garden. They were soon standing between Mr Snider and the tree.



“Out of my way,” said the caretaker. “It’s time for this eyesore to go.”

Gabe crossed his arms and gave Mr Snider his best scowl, and his mum asked, “Have you got permission to do that, or a licence?”

“Don’t need one – I’m the caretaker!” sneered Mr Snider.

“But you can’t cut down public trees without a licence,” said Mum, trying to sound important. “And this tree is of great public interest.”

“How is it? It’s a flaming nuisance, that’s what it is, and I want it gone!”

“This is where we play. We love this tree,” pleaded Gabe.

“Not a good enough reason.” Mr Snider was getting his chainsaw ready.

Gabe desperately tried to think of more reasons to keep the tree, then he remembered the Christmas tree he’d seen in town. It had colourful tags on it and written on every tag was the name of a toy a child had wished for.

“You take a tag and buy the gift on it,” his mum had explained, “then a charity sends it to a child who might not get Christmas presents.” ➡



Before he knew it, Gabe said, “You can’t cut it down. It’s going to be a toy tree. We’re going to decorate it and put tags on it so we can buy Christmas presents for children who need them!” He flashed a warning look at his mum.

“Yes,’ Mum said enthusiastically. “We agreed it at the community meeting. You weren’t there, Mr Snider. We’re decorating it this weekend.”

Mr Snider looked suspicious. He almost turned purple trying to think up an argument, but he was beaten. He lowered his chainsaw and stormed off.

That evening, Gabe and his mum put up posters to let everyone know about the toy tree, and they contacted the charity to find out how to get tags.

By the weekend, the charity tags had arrived and the whole community was looking forward to decorating the tree. They brought along decorations, and someone baked mince pies. They all sang Christmas carols as they dressed the branches with baubles and tinsel, and it felt like a proper party.

Gabe and his friends hung the charity tags from the branches too. Everyone thought it was a wonderful idea.

When they had finished, the branches looked dazzling, but the trunk was still grey and bare.

“Hang on!” said Mum. “I’ve got just the thing.” She ran up to their flat and came back with a bundle of scarves in a rainbow of colours.



Every child grabbed a scarf and wrapped it around the trunk. The old tree soon looked bright and Christmassy.

As Gabe stepped back to admire everyone's handiwork, he spotted Mr Snider looking out of his window with a grumpy frown.

"Can we do the toy tree every year, Mum?" he asked.

"Definitely," she said. "You never know, maybe even Mr Snider will join in with the fun next year."

Gabe waved at him, but he closed his curtains. "Let's just leave one tag here – maybe he'll take it," he said.

So that's what they did, and everyone took a tag from the toy tree and went home feeling full of Christmas spirit. 🌀

