



The Unclimbable Tree

As I look up, I realise I am in almost total shade. The tree has so many branches, spread so wide, that almost no sunlight reaches the ground.

It's an oak tree, and I think it's ancient although no one really knows. It stands in the middle of the green by the pub. It's sad and saggy with drooping arms that almost touch the grass before rising back up, as if challenging you to arm wrestle. You would think all those branches would make it easy to climb, and you'd be partly right. The first section is simple—ten metres of pure climbing joy. The top part looks like a doddle too, if you don't mind the height. A ladder to a view right across the village. But it's a view that no one has ever seen, not from the top of this tree anyhow.

It's the tricky middle section that gives the tree its name: the Unclimbable Tree. About ten metres without a single branch. You'd have to climb the trunk like a bear, gripping on and shimmying up. The problem is, humans are not bears. We have no claws, and no evolutionary experience of shimmying up anything, let alone tree trunks.

Two years ago, there was an attempt to climb it.

A fall.

Kids screaming.

Adults shouting. An ambulance, a hospital, an emergency operation. Several operations, actually. A mum and dad sobbing. A boy left in a wheelchair, maybe for the rest of his life.

After that, climbing the tree was banned. The council put a sign at its base. Red letters on white wood: DO NOT CLIMB. If anyone is caught trying, they will be... I'm not sure, actually. Probably just shouted at a lot.

Still, the tree has taken on mythical status at school. People whisper about it. Legends tell of secret summit attempts, although none have been confirmed. There's even a

rumour of treasure hidden at the top. In some stories, it's a bag of cash. In others, it's a solid silver rabbit, although I have no idea why, or who is meant to have put it there. But the real reward for climbing the Unclimbable Tree wouldn't be treasure. If anyone succeeded, they would have the respect of every kid in the village. They would be a legend.

There's a route though, I swear.

I shift a little, craning my neck to see higher up the tree's tricky middle section. They're hard to spot, but I know they're there. Eight little notches in the bark, rising in the shape of a capital F.

F for fingerholds.

"Daniel?"

The shout from behind snaps me from my gaze.

Wellies squelch across wet grass, rushing closer.

"Daniel, what are you doing there?"

I don't answer. As Mum grasps the handles of my wheelchair and pushes me back to the car, I turn my head, staring at the Unclimbable Tree.

I'll be back, I promise.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy a word that means “extremely old”.
2. Copy a metaphor that tells you the tree will help to give you a good view.
3. What does the phrase “secret summit attempt” mean?
4. What are “notches in the bark”?
5. Which word in the text means something that nobody is sure is true or not?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why is there no sunlight at the base of the tree?

R

What type of tree is it?

S

Why is the tree called the Unclimbable Tree?

I

What evidence is there that people still want to climb the tree?

I

Why are people desperate to climb the tree?

E

What is the big revelation at the end of the story?