

HERE BE TREASURE

Not so long ago, in the park near to the children's playground, men came and dug a deep hole. In it they planted an avenue of saplings. Exotic trees whose origins are found in both Japan and Siberia, giving them the power to resist nasty diseases. They are New Horizon Elms.

The trees grew tall and beautiful. Their branches spread into an elegant crown. Each year the oval leaves stay green late into the autumn and then burst into the colours of fire, yellow and orange. Early every spring, if you look very carefully, you can see small reddish flowers which, by autumn, grow into seeds, seeds with wings! And every time the wind blows they twist and spin as they spiral away from the trees.

Moths and butterflies lay their eggs in the trees and when the caterpillars hatch they feast on the leaves until they are big and healthy. Then they spin their cocoons and they change inside them, bursting out as beautiful butterflies and moths. Birds nest in the trees and raise their young. Mice and hedgehogs and squirrels come and feed off the seeds. Foxes and badgers sniff around its roots as they pass by at night.

The children from the nursery school come and play on the swings and slides in the playground, laughing and shouting with delight.

All the children talked about the trees. Jack said that when it rained hard, snakes lived in the puddles under the trees.

Mary said that at night a grumpy bear prowled around to guard the trees because someone had hidden a box of treasure nearby.

All the children had their own ideas about what that treasure might be. One thought it would be a crown for a princess. Others said it was jewels or gold coins. No one knew who had put it there. Jack said it might have been a friendly ghost. Some thought it could have been fairies and the treasure might be a magic wand and fairy dust. Sarah said she knew her brother had a treasure map.

She would borrow it and they could find the treasure.



Sarah brought the map to the playground. It was a tatty piece of paper drawn on in different coloured crayons. The route twisted and turned, wiggled and wobbled until it came to a large red cross, with the words 'Here be Treasure'.

They decided to follow the map. "This way," said Jack looking up from the map and off they went, twisting and turning, wiggling and wobbling, then twisting and turning again before they wiggled and wobbled again, then they had to twist and wiggle and then wobble and turn, until they reached the spot on the map that was marked with the big red cross.

"Here be Treasure!" Jack shouted, "Here be Treasure!" they all replied, then they looked around and found they were standing underneath the avenue of elm trees.

"But where is the treasure?" Sarah asked.

"Right here," came the reply from behind the trees and out stepped a Japanese wood nymph, a Kodama. "This is the treasure," he said. "These wonderful trees."

"But what about the jewels and the gold?" Harry asked. "And the crown?" asked Mary.

"The jewels and the gold are the leaves and the seeds," the Kodama replied, "and the crown is that the trees can resist the nasty diseases that have killed the old elm trees."

"Oh," the children said, "so our beautiful trees are the treasure we have been looking for! It's the most exciting treasure ever."

Based upon the ideas from the Children at Coton Green Pre-school.

Written by Mal Dewhirst and Christine Genders.

A Kodama is a Japanese tree spirit who guards trees. Any tree that is cut down or harmed that has a Kodama brings bad luck. Many trees can have a Kodama, but all trees that are over 100 years old are considered to have a Kodama.