

Robin of Sherwood by Michael Morpurgo

There had never been a storm like it. The wind roared in from the west one evening in early October. No one was expecting it. Least of all the forecasters. The ground, already saturated by a week of continuous rain, could not hold the trees in place. They, too, had been caught unawares. I watched all evening long, faced pressed up against my bedroom window. Still top heavy in leaf, the trees were like clippers in full sail caught in a hurricane. They keeled over and could not right themselves. Great branches were torn off like twigs. Roots were wrenched from the earth, and towering oaks and beeches sent crashing to the ground. Gran called me from downstairs again and again, but I did not want to leave my window. The trees I loved were being massacred before my eyes, but perversely I could not bear to drag myself away. In the end Gran came up to my room to fetch me.

The safest place, she said, was under the stairs. That was where they had always hidden during the war, when the bombs were falling. Now, as then, the electricity was cut. The telephone was cut too. We were on our own and no one could help us. The stair-cupboard was a clutter of brooms and hoovers and old tennis rackets, all interlaced with cobwebs. We huddled together, covered ourselves in a musty blanket and watched the guttering candle.

"We have plenty of candles," she told me, "and plenty of hot tea." She patted a thermos beside her. "We'll be all right. Try and get some sleep now." But it was to be a sleepless night, and the longest night of my life.

The storm lashed the house, rattling doors and shattering windows, shaking the place to its foundations. Both of us soon gave up any pretence of not being frightened. We cling together as the beast outside roared and raged, doing his worst to destroy the house and us with it. At least, I thought, at least my tree would be safe. It was the biggest in the forest. It took five grown-up people, hands touching, to encircle its massive trunk. No storm in the world could blow it down, not even this one. That gave me some comfort through the long night.

When morning came, and the beast had gone, we at last dared to venture out. From the kitchen window, most of which had been blown into the sink, we looked out on a scene of utter devastation. The lawn was littered with roof tiles and branches, and the garden shed had been lifted up bodily and smashed against the wall. Gran sat down slowly at the table and put her hands over her face for a few moments. As she took them away again, I could see she was trying to smile through her tears.

"How about some breakfast?" she said.

"My tree," I told her. "First I've got to see my tree."

Questions

- 1) How do we know that the cupboard under the stairs is not used much? (2)

- 2) Re-read the opening description of the storm. What is the meaning of the word 'saturated'? (1)

- 3) The author refers to the storm as a beast. Is this an effective word? (2)

- 4) Why do they seek shelter under the stairs? (1)

- 5) Why do you think the candle and the tea are important? (2)

- 6) The narrator describes it as the longest night of his life. Why? (2)

- 7) How would you have felt if you had been under the stairs? (2)

- 8) Why is the narrator comforted by the fact that his tree will be safe? (2)

Total marks 14