

The Whispering Tree

Written and Illustrated by Christopher Francis
Teacher's Guide by Nicole Hamel and Holly Moniz

Chapter 1: The STUPID FIELD TRIP



Port Glarington.

I had no clue why I was there.

I didn't understand at all.

Why would the 'The Mayor' of Red Apple Creek take our grade four class on some stupid trip to Port Glarington? It didn't make sense. The place was cold, cloudy and miserable. Just because I saved our school from 'the Ogre-Beast' the month before it didn't mean we should have been punished and sent on a trip to some boring old Port.

It wasn't even a city.

At least cities had museums, science centers, space observatories, planetariums or...Extreme Jumbo Pizza.

What was so great about Port Glarington? Oh wait, The Mayor lived there.

Big, fat, hairy deal.

I guess I was mad because I had to spend an entire day partnered up with Oscar Westberry. He talked too much and always poked me in the arm when I wasn't paying attention to him.

"This is so cool, I can't believe we get to spend an entire day here and with the Mayor as well...this is epic!" said Oscar, walking beside me up the ramp toward the ferry boat. "...all because you saved Red Apple Creek from the giant Ogre-Beast."

"Yeah," I replied. "Tres cool."

The class was just about to get a guided tour of Glarington River. I wasn't really sure why because we had a river in Red Apple...well, it was a creek, but same diff.

"Did you know that Glarington River is one of the fastest flowing rivers in the country? Did you know it runs right out into the Atlantic Ocean? Oh yes it does...it has some of the rarest animals and birds and trees and..."

Blah, blah, yada, yada...

I stopped listening. He drove me bonkers.

Mrs. Featherly, our teacher made us all sit at the front of the ferry so that we could listen to the tour guide talk to us about a bunch of useless facts that no one really cared about at all. The tour guide probably didn't even care. I know Mrs. Featherly didn't, because she was already sneaking glances down at her phone. Same with the man named "The Mayor." I was positive he had his eyes closed behind his big doughnut-sized sunglasses.

Anyway.

The boat was pretty big and was going to take us from the Port all the way to the Marina which was about three hours up river.

I was sorta mad because we were going to be passing the cage where the government people were holding the Ogre-Beast. Apparently he's become some sort of tourist attraction. It bugged me to think that he helped the people of Red Apple Creek understand that being different was okay, and then they go and lock him up anyway.

Stupid Mayor.

He just wanted people to visit his stupid town.

The tour guide stood at the very front and as we began moving she started talking about the history of the river and a bunch of other nonsense.

Hearing her was kinda hard because the engine on the boat was really loud and she sorta sounded like a mouse.

However, about twenty minutes into the ride, the boat trip began to get a little more interesting.

“Okay kids, if you look to your left you will see a rare type of tree along the riverbank,” announced the tour guide as loudly as she could, (well, as loud as a mouse could).

“They are called ‘Whispering Trees’. It has been said that they can predict the future, and if you listen very carefully, they will tell you the world’s deepest secrets.”

The whole class all squished to the left side of the ferry trying to catch a glimpse of the giant trees. They were really fat trees and filled with twisted, snake-like branches. Oscar Westberry squeezed in beside me and leaned over the railing.

“Who said that they could predict the future?” I asked with my hand waving high above my head. I didn’t often ask questions in front of so many people, but for some reason I couldn’t help myself. Besides, I wanted an excuse to sniff my armpit.

The mousey tour guide looked at me and tilted her head. “Locals,” she replied. “People have claimed to have experienced an entire event, only to discover it hadn’t happened yet.”

“Wow-wee, I can’t believe I’m actually seeing them in real-life. They are sooo cool,” exclaimed Oscar, wiping his glasses with his sleeve.

I wanted to ask her another question but I noticed, just upstream, that there was a huge Whispering Tree in the water, coming toward us. I raised my hand again hoping to ask why such an important and special tree would be floating in the water. Maybe nobody noticed it yet, or maybe it just blew over. Maybe somebody needed to fish it out and replant it or something. However, as I flailed my arm around the tour guide turned the other way and continued her talk.

Oh well.

At least my armpit smelled good.

Anyway.

“If you look over to the right side of the boat, you will hopefully catch a glimpse of the Ogre-Beast resting in his new home.” said the tour guide. “He’s often seen in the daytime, trying to sniff the flowers through the steel bars.”

She didn’t get a chance to finish. The entire class darted to the other side of the boat. There was no way the

Whispering Tree was going to be more interesting than the Ogre-Beast.

Seriously.

As they smothered themselves over the railing, I couldn’t help but look away. I couldn’t see him like that. I wanted to remember him, free and happy.

So...I stayed on the other side of the boat.

“Hey Henry, you gotta see this. Holy doodles, the Ogre-Beast is trying to bite the cage. It’s so cool.”

According to Oscar Westberry, everything was cool.

“I’ll be there in a second,” I replied.

I lied.

I couldn’t do it.

So, I stared at the Whispering tree in the water.

I leaned farther over the railing as it approached the boat. For a minute I thought we were going to collide, but the tree was out just a ways.

Then a weird, tingly feeling slipped inside my stomach. Was the tree whispering to me?

I looked back at the class and Mrs. Featherly for a moment. They were all still in ‘awe’ at the Ogre-Beast on the other side of the riverbank. Not one person was looking at me.

No one.

I’m not sure why, but I climbed over the railing and stood for a moment on the edge of the boat.

The tree was just about below me in the water. The thing was gigantic.

It was beautiful.

As I stood there, holding tightly onto the railing my mind suddenly went blank, and a little voice began to mumble inside my head.

“It’s coming...”

“What’s coming?” I replied.

My eyes were glued to the tree. The voice must have been talking about the tree.

“Jump,” whispered the voice.

For a second or two, it seemed like a crazy idea. I mean, why would I jump onto a floating tree? But there was just something weird about the voice. It seemed so...convincing...and confident.

“Jump,” it repeated.

I looked back one last time at everyone on the other side of the boat. I knew what I had to do.

I closed my eyes, held my breath...and let go of the railing.