
Hazelwick
the Third
CHRISTOPH WOODS

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— Christoph Woods

Hazelwick the Third

A story of the greatest acorn ever acorned

by Christoph Woods



Hazelwick the Third lived in a great acorn tree.

It was the same acorn tree his father had lived in, and his father's father, and his father's father's father, and his father's father's father's father, all the way back to the very first Hazelwick, who planted his very first acorn and said: *This will do.*



Hazelwick was the Keeper of the Tree.

Every morning, he counted his acorns.

Every afternoon, he polished his acorns, one by one, until they shone.

Every evening, he put every acorn back in its proper place, in its proper order.

A place for every acorn, and every acorn in its place. That was the rule. That had always been the rule.



And in the highest store of the tree, in the very best spot, sat the finest acorn of them all.

His grandfather's grandfather had marked it himself, long and long ago, and everyone knew what the mark meant.

It was the greatest acorn ever acorned.



Then, one night —

— a wayward fairy broke into the tree.

She crept past the counting places. She crept past the polishing places. She crept all the way up to the highest store, and she took the greatest acorn ever acorned, and she flew away into the dark.



In the morning, Hazelwick counted his acorns.

One was missing.

The greatest one.

Hazelwick did not panic. Keepers do not panic. Keepers ask questions — and Hazelwick knew exactly who to ask. He went to see the one who sees everything.

He went to see the Owl.



"Who did this?" asked Hazelwick.

"Who," said the Owl. "Who. Who."

The Owl knew exactly who — he just couldn't help saying it that way.

"I was out hunting in the middle of the night," said the Owl, "and I saw her myself. All seven inches of the wayward fairy, flying home with your acorn."



"She went back to her lair," said the Owl, "over the hill, where all the fairies live."

So Hazelwick packed his satchel. A keeper packs properly: a snack, a map he had never needed, a squirrel-sized Swiss Army knife (just in case), and one ordinary acorn, for evidence.

Then he locked his tree, took a deep breath, and set off through the unknown.



Up the hill.

Over the hill.

Down the hill.

And there it was, in the hollow below: the fairy village, glowing in the morning like a jar of fireflies.



The first fairy Hazelwick met was gathering sticks. Hazelwick marched up, very cautiously, and made his case.

He explained about the break-in. He explained about the sanctuary. He explained about the wayward fairy, seven inches tall. He explained that he wanted his acorn back — and compensation for his long, tough journey.

And all the fairy heard was:

Squeakety squeak squeak, squeak squeak, squeak squeak, squeak squeak, squeak squeak, squeak squeak, squeak.

"Hi, squirrel," said the fairy.



Hazelwick sighed a keeper's sigh.

He took the ordinary acorn out of his satchel, and he pointed at it.

Then he pointed up the hill, at the wayward fairy's house.

The stick fairy looked at the acorn. The stick fairy looked at the house. The stick fairy's eyes went very wide.

"Oh," said the stick fairy. "Oh dear. Come with me."



They went up to the wayward fairy's house, and they knocked.

The door opened.

Out came the wayward fairy — holding a lute. A beautiful lute. A lute carved and strung and polished… made out of an acorn. *His* acorn. The greatest acorn ever acorned, with strings on it.

Hazelwick fainted.



When he woke up, two fairies were standing over him, waving air at his face with their wings, very worried.

Hazelwick stood up all of a sudden.

He pointed at the fairy.

He pointed at the acorn lute.

He pointed at himself.

That. Is. Mine.



Just then, a gnome walked into the picture.

His name was Marvin, and Marvin could understand animals — every squeak of them.

"Well," said Marvin. "Let's hear it properly, shall we?"

And for the first time, somebody listened to Hazelwick's whole case, in full sentences.



Marvin told the fairies everything: the tree, the fathers, the mark, the night, the theft, the long tough journey.

Pip — for that was the wayward fairy's name — put her hands on her hips.

"A misunderstanding!" she said. "This is all just a misunderstanding! I found the most beautiful acorn in the world, that's all. I didn't know it had a keeper. I didn't know it had a *name*."



Hazelwick looked at the lute for a long time.

His most cherished possession in all the world… was a lute now. An acorn can be many things, but it cannot be an acorn again, not once it has learned to sing.

"Very well," said Hazelwick at last, through Marvin. "Keep the lute. But hear my terms."



"Every time you play it," said Hazelwick, "before the first note, you will say it out loud: that this lute was made from the greatest acorn ever harvested — the acorn of Hazelwick the Third, which you stole."

Pip blinked. Then Pip grinned, the way fairies do when a bargain sounds like a party.

"Deal," she said.



So Pip came back with Hazelwick to his tree, and all the squirrels came out to watch — from the lowest branch to the highest store.

Pip stood up tall (seven inches tall). She held up the lute.

And before she played a single note, she said it, loud and clear, for every squirrel to hear:

"This lute was made from the greatest acorn ever harvested — harvested by Hazelwick the Third's grandfather's grandfather, and kept by his father, and his father's father, and his father's father's father, in the great acorn tree."



Then Pip played.

And it was the most beautiful song the tree had ever heard, because it was the greatest acorn ever acorned, singing.

Hazelwick sat in his proper place, in his proper order, and he listened, and he polished nothing at all.

Some acorns you keep in a store.

And some acorns you keep in a story — where no one can ever, ever steal them.

The End

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— Christoph Woods