

## **Solace by Charlotte Coleman**

Reece Taylor was a quiet boy who didn't like to follow the crowd. He lived on a large estate with his mum and older sister. Reece was often alone but he enjoyed his own company, and this helped him develop his inner life. Reece didn't have a lot of interest in his schoolmates, particularly the ones who enjoyed bullying and causing mayhem. There was a gang in his class who liked to terrorise smaller boys. When they chose to pick on a small under nourished boy called Joe just for fun, Reece wanted no part in it. His real interest lay in exploring the less well-known bits of his area.

Just at the back of his house was some waste ground where children used to meet or play football. Beyond there was a secluded woodland with winding paths, a stream and a small mysterious wooden hut in a state of disrepair. Reece found that he was drawn to this place as if an invisible magnet, over which he had no control, was pulling him. He found that the more he played in the woods he discovered he enjoyed solitude as opposed to loneliness, which was an entirely different feeling. The woods gave him a feeling of independence and security that he couldn't find elsewhere. He loved the sun dappled paths and the fullness of the hundreds of trees at the height of summer. One of his favourite things was to sit beside the little stream that gurgled along at the very bottom of the clough and sometimes he would paddle or jump across from side to side.

One day in the holidays, as he was crossing the waste ground he could see a small figure hurrying towards him. As the figure grew nearer he could see that it was Joe and Joe looked troubled.

"What's up Joe? Do you want to play in the woods with me?"

"What do you do there?" Joe asked.

"Come on and I'll show you" coaxed Reece.

Soon they were running free through the woods, jumping the stream and revelling in the open spaces. They had wet feet but they didn't care. They explored all the paths and Reese showed Joe the trees he loved to climb. They headed for the wooden hut with its rickety windows where they could watch the creatures that lived there. Reece wanted to show Joe his special place, eager to share with a kindred spirit.

'See Joe I've seen loads of different birds.' Reece's eyes shone with pleasure at his secret life.