

The Golden Horseshoe

- **fifteen adventurous bedtime stories**
 about four kabouters and a witch -

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Preface

More than 35 years ago I started telling kabouter stories.

In the evening before my children were going to sleep I sat at their bedside. I would start a story without knowing where it would end. Because my children played a role in the story. Sometimes they intervened, made a suggestion or responded otherwise (for example when they found it too exciting or too boring). One of my three children was our mentally disabled eldest. Recognizability was very important to him. Not always something completely new, but preferably simple stories with the same main characters.

Those main characters were the kabouters. And the witch of course.

The kabouters had names that my children and I knew from the well-known children's books and television programs that featured kabouters at the time. We knew kabouter Wipneus and kabouter Pim from the book series of the same name. Kabouter Spillebeen was sung about in the song about the red mushroom. And kabouter Kandelaar was one of the leading characters in a children's television program. The fire-starting kabouter that appeared in some stories also had a well-known name, Stokebrand. He was mentioned in a poem by Annie M.G. Schmidt (*).

Over the years the story repertoire became quite extensive and the adventures of the kabouters were not only heard in the evening before going to sleep. A quiet moment during the day and a walk in the woods often provided space for a story that was appropriate on the spot.

Children grow up and start reading and fantasizing for themselves and their need for a bedtime story diminishes. And that's how it should be. Only our eldest, permanently at nursery level, remained an avid listener. But when he left home in 2004, the moment came for him to say goodbye to the kabouter world.

Fifteen years later the kabouters made a glorious comeback. Our grandchildren were of the age where they liked to hear stories. My daughter and son-in-law already had the good and commendable habit of reading a story to their children every evening. When grandpa was in the house it was his turn to do that. Grandpa wasn't there very often. The grandchildren lived in New Zealand and grandpa lived in The Netherlands. In addition, on the few occasions when grandpa was there, he did not read aloud a story from a book, but stubbornly wanted to tell something himself. And there were the kabouters again. The same kabouters from long ago. But now in an English version. The grandchildren knew a few Dutch words, but a whole story in a language unfamiliar to them... grandpa had to do his best. So in English. But from the start the names of the main

characters remained the same as those with which their mother was familiar. And also: the main characters were 'kabouters' (*). This Dutch word sounded more appropriate, more familiar and more friendly than the strange English word 'gnome'.

When the grandchildren got older and learned to read themselves, they asked grandpa the question that their mother had asked thirty years ago: 'Would you like to write down the stories about the kabouters for us?' Grandpa hesitated. He no longer knew the stories exactly. He did remember a number of fragments. But the stories he had made up over the years, how was he supposed to find them back in his aging memory? For example that story about the treasure that the kabouters had found. What was that treasure again? Grandpa didn't remember. Granddaughter still knew about it.

Okay, let's go then. Get started with it. What do we agree? Grandpa writes down a number of stories, grandson James makes drawings and granddaughter Elise will color those drawings. And then we have a book.

As said, that's what we did. And here you have the result. The makers enjoyed making it. And they hope that readers enjoy reading it....

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Hamilton, New Zealand, October 14, 2025

(*) Of course, in a book that will be published you can't simply use names known from other publications. Therefore, the 'kabouters' in this book have different names than they had when the stories were told.

(*) 'Kabouter' is pronounced: 'ka' as in 'castle' ; 'bou' as in 'bowed' ; 'ter' as in 'mister' (with the emphasis on the second syllable)

Note: The translation of the original Dutch text into English was achieved with the help of ChatGPT with some corrections and additions by my daughter and my grandchildren.

1. A kind of rescue brigade

'What you say isn't right, Bobbe,' said kabouter Tim. 'You're completely mistaken.' Kabouter Bobbe looked a bit disappointed. He didn't like what his friend Tim said. But he also knew that Tim was usually smarter than him. Yet he had really thought that it was Friday and that the teacher had said that they had to be at the wooden bridge at nine o'clock this morning and that they would all go to the sports field.

'The sports day is not until next Friday,' said Tim, 'today is Saturday. We have time off. Don't you remember? We agreed that we would go to the forest. We have to collect twigs to put them around our garden, so that the hedgehogs don't eat the new plants later.'

'Oh yes,' said kabouter Bobbe, 'that's right. But we'll wait for Diederik and Turfie first, right? Then the four of us will go.'

'Ok Bobbe,' said Tim.

Bobbe, Tim, Diederik and Turfie, they had been close friends for a long time. They lived in the same street in the kabouter village. When they were about three years old they were already playing outside together. Because kabouters like to play outside.

Now they were at school. Of course they were, because stupid kabouters are of no use to anyone. They were in the same class at the kabouter school. They were actually always together. And when they had time off - and the kabouter children had time off quite often - the four of them always went out together. They had already had many adventures.

That the four of them were always good friends didn't mean they were all the same. Bobbe for example was the largest of the four. Some in the village thought he was a bit fat. Bobbe himself thought he was rather sturdy. Tim was not that sturdy. But he was very smart. He knew a lot and could think very quickly. Diederik wasn't that 'sturdy' either, but he was strong. And he was always up for adventure because he was not afraid. Sometimes he was even a little reckless. Very different from Turfie, the smallest of the bunch. Turfie was usually a little scared. But he was also very loyal. When his friends went on adventures, he always came along. Even if he himself thought it was dangerous.

There was no danger today, Turfie had thought. Today they went to the forest. Pick up twigs. He liked that. Just fun.

There were large and small branches everywhere along the forest paths. The kabouters were supposed to collect small branches. But only small branches that were straight and sturdy. Branches that could easily be pushed upright into the ground and that would not break immediately. Not all twigs were suitable. The

friends selected the best and strongest ones and when they had collected a bunch, they tied them together into a bundle. They left that bundle along the path and then went further into the forest.



Diederik, who had seen some beautiful twigs lying some distance from the path, crawled on his hands and knees through the bushes to pick them up. 'Ouch, that hurts,' he said. This time it wasn't nettles. When Diederik looked at what he had pricked himself with, he saw a hedgehog. A young hedgehog. He had expected the hedgehog to quickly run away, but it sat very still. Diederik crept a little closer. 'There's a hedgehog here,' he called to his friends, 'but it looks like it's stuck to something.'

'Never mind,' Bobbe shouted back, 'at least this one can't root up our garden.'

'No, Bobbe, that's not a very nice thing to say,' said Turfie, 'we have to help that animal.'

'But I'm not going to lift him like that,' said Diederik, 'he's got all kinds of spikes.' Tim picked up a few large maple leaves and crawled through the bushes to Diederik. He placed the leaves over the hedgehog and was then able to carefully

lift the animal. Then Diederik saw that the hedgehog had gotten one of its legs stuck on a thorny string of branches of a blackberry plant. 'Be careful,' said Tim. 'Of course,' said Diederik. He gently pried the string loose from the hedgehog's leg. Then Tim put the animal back on the ground and removed the leaves from its spines. 'Go back to your mother quickly,' said Diederik, as the hedgehog shuffled through the bushes into the forest.

'Well done Diederik,' said Tim, as they crawled back to the forest path.

They continued collecting twigs and along the forest path they soon came to the clearing, which they often visited. There were often many branches along the edge of the clearing. This time there was also a small bird on the ground. Turfie saw him first. 'Look, a baby bird,' he said, 'it must have fallen out of its nest. He's making such a sad sound. He has to go back. Back into his nest.'

Back into the nest? Easier said than done. They could see the nest. It was not very high in the branches of the tree. But how did one get there?

'Can't you climb the tree, Diederik? You're brave enough to do that, aren't you?'

'Yes, I'm brave enough, but I don't think it will work. The branches are much too close together. There's no way you can get through them.'

Tim had an idea: 'We have to make a see-saw.'

'A see-saw?'

'Yes, it's not that difficult.'

On the ground under the nest was a large tree trunk. Tim found a sturdy, thick branch, dragged it to the tree trunk and laid it across it.

'Turfie, you are the smallest and the lightest. You stand there on that side of the branch. And Bobbe, you are the biggest and heaviest. Now you climb onto that tree stump over there and then jump as hard as you can onto this side of the branch.'

'And then?' Turfie was shocked. He suddenly saw what Tim meant.

'If all goes well, you fly into the air and when you get to the top, you quickly put the bird back in its nest.'

'Do it yourself,' said Turfie.

'No, you are the lightest, you reach the highest.'

'Yes, but then I'll fall.'

Oh yes, Tim thought, that's true. 'What can we do about that?'

Diederik said: 'We are making a beautiful pile here of moss and grass and leaves. Then Turfie falls softly when he comes down.'

'Good idea, Diederik.'

'No, I don't want to,' Turfie shouted.

'But what about that bird? Please do it for that poor animal.'

Turfie sighed. 'Okay then. I'll do it for this poor thing.'

He stepped onto one end of the large branch with the bird in his hand. He lifted the animal up so he could immediately put it back into its nest.

Bobbe was standing on the tree stump. He took a deep breath and jumped up as high as he could to land as hard and heavy as possible on the end of the branch. It was a big blow. The other end of the branch popped up. Turfie let out a scream and shot into the air. The idea was for him to go almost straight up and then fall on the soft grass next to the branch. But he shot up diagonally. Luckily he got just close enough to the nest to quickly put the little bird in it. But he had gone off course.

'Help,' he shouted. But there was nothing his friends could do to help. And he would have ended up on the hard ground right next to the soft pile if his hood hadn't got caught on a branch of the tree.

There he was, hanging from a tree branch. Almost one and a half meters above the ground.

'Help,' he shouted again, 'help me!'

Diederik ran towards him and tried to grab Turfie's foot by jumping. That didn't work.

'Tim, you have to do it,' he said. 'Bobbe, come over here. Grab me by the shoulders.'

Bobbe grabbed Diederik's sturdy shoulders. Diederik held on to Bobbe's broad shoulders. 'Climb on top, Tim,' said Diederik.

'On top of what?'

'Of us of course! Stand on our shoulders.'

Tim climbed up and then straightened up. A bit wobbly but still. And he could just reach it: he was able to grab Turfie by the legs of his trousers and started pulling on him. And again. One more time. And suddenly the hood of Turfie's jacket came loose. He fell down. He half fell over Tim. Tim could no longer stay upright either and rolled onto the ground between the heads of Diederik and Bobbe. Then Turfie fell and hit them on their head and the entire tower collapsed. There they lay, all four of them, across each other in one big heap. Tim was the first to get up. He said to Diederik: 'Thanks for your great idea! Mind you, I'm probably going to get a big bump on my head.'

'Like I will,' said Bobbe. 'My arm is scraped and my knee hurts.'

'But you fell on top of me,' Diederik grumbled, 'I could have broken my back.'

Turfie said nothing. He was just very shocked. He looked up at the bird's nest.

'But we did it,' he sighed. 'The sweet bird is home again.'

And that was true – they'd achieved something.

'Are we going to continue looking for branches?,' asked Bobbe.

'Just around the clearing here,' said Tim, 'there are quite a lot of branches.'