

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

SYNOPSIS

Out of pure curiosity and recklessness, two bears - Tobias and his friend Charley – embark on a series of mischievous adventures. Responding to an advert they find impossible to resist they go to a flat at 13, Fog Monkeys Boulevard; the home of an unusual and not altogether pleasant family. There they meet an invisible creature who changes their lives entirely – a creature who makes them experience a wide range of feelings from shyness and fear to interest and compassion. The bears are very good-natured and always eager to help - it is these personal qualities which ensure the story has a happy ending.

The story has a wealth of comic episodes interwoven with sadder, more serious nuances – encouraging the reader to reflect upon the qualities of responsibility, compassion and honesty while at the same time enjoying an adventurous, fast-paced plot.

Chapter 1

THE ADVERT

‘Look!’ said Charley the toy bear, pointing his paw into the distance.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘I can’t see a thing. Birch trees and more birch trees!’ the other toy bear, Tobias, growled in reply.

‘Look, that white thing!’ Charley wouldn’t let it rest.

Tobias, scrunching up his eyes, looked harder. He could just about make something out - goodness knows what - pinned to one of the birch trees.

‘Let’s run!’ Charley raced away.

Charley hesitated for a moment and then followed his friend. They reached the birch tree at the same time.

‘Lift me up!’ Charley ordered.

Raised aloft, Charley read: “‘Ghost – free to good home.” There’s an address, too. Wait a second!’ Retrieving a penknife from his rucksack, Charley carefully pulled out all four pins, popped them in his bag and, holding the piece of paper between his teeth, slid back down the trunk to the ground.

‘Let’s get going!’ Charley prompted Tobias.

‘Where to?’ Tobias wasn’t following.

‘What do you mean, where to? To get the ghost! And hurry up or someone else might get there first! You can’t just pick up ghosts anywhere, you know!’ Charley was getting very excited, Tobias noted.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘Just like always,’ Tobias thought to himself, ‘when Charley wants something there is no holding him back.’

‘Well, I don’t know...’ Tobias said slowly, ‘are you absolutely sure we need our own ghost?’

‘Do we need a ghost? Of course we do! I’ve always dreamt of having my own ghost. A ghost is an absolute must!’

Yes, when Charley gets something into his head, he becomes quite impossible.

Tobias tried to distract Charley from thoughts of the ghost all the same.

‘Do you think our cat would like him? This ghost of yours?’

‘The cat?’ Charley looked thoughtful. ‘Well, that cat, you know ... Here one minute, gone the next. He comes and goes as he pleases.’ After a moment’s silence he announced: ‘But everyone knows that cats and ghosts are the best of friends! It’s a scientifically proven fact!’

‘Scientifically proven?’ Tobias said, sounding worried. ‘Are you sure of that?’

‘More than sure!’

‘I’ll try putting it another way,’ Tobias decided. ‘Ghosts usually live in castles. Maybe he wouldn’t even like living with us?’

‘In castles? Well, yes, I suppose they do ...’ Charley was at a loss. That would seem to be the case, judging by the films he had seen ... ‘We will just have to build a castle! Good job you thought of

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

that!’ he said, grasping Tobias’s paw and squeezing it. ‘You really are a true friend! Come on now, let’s get going! Can you remember the address?’

Tobias had no option but to nod in agreement.

‘Let’s go!’

Chapter 2

AT THE GHOST’S OWNER’S HOME

They didn’t have to walk far. Just through the copse of birch trees and they were on the street mentioned in the advert – Fog Monkeys Boulevard. They soon found number 13.

‘Doesn’t look much like a castle!’ Tobias growled pointedly.

‘Which is the reason why they are giving the ghost away! He can’t possibly be happy living here!’

Charley insisted. ‘He will be a zillion times better off at our place! Absodefinitely!’

As they were stomping about by the entrance to the building, a man’s head popped out of a third floor window as it was flung open.

‘Are you here for the ghost? Come on up to the flat Number 13, third floor. The entrance door is open.’

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘Have you got any money on you?’ Tobias asked as they climbed the stairs.

‘I do indeed!’ A jangling sound came from Charley’s rucksack as he shook it. ‘But we are going to bargain!’

‘But the advert said he was free!’ Tobias recalled ...

‘They always say that in adverts, just to get people interested. Well, we will see...’

The door of flat number 13 stood open. The same man who had stuck his head out of the window shortly before was there to greet them.

‘Come on in!’ he said welcomingly.

The bears could see the heads of two children peeping in curiosity from a room further back in the flat.

‘I’m very sorry but my wife is quite unwell ...’ the man said.

‘That ghost of yours has made us all ill! I’ve had enough of him! Just make sure I never clap eyes on him ever again!’ Charley reflected that he had never heard a poorly person call out with a voice like that before, but maybe she had an ailment as yet unknown to medical science.

‘How much do you want for him?’ Tobias asked.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘Nothing, nothing at all! We don’t want your money!’ the man waved them away with his hand.

‘We’re absolutely sick and tired of him! Just take him away! Do you have somewhere to keep him?’ It was clear he simply wanted to get rid of the ghost as quickly as possible.

‘We would like to have a look at him first. We don’t want to buy a pig in a poke, you know.’ The man was so eager to get rid of him that Tobias had become rather suspicious.

‘I’m sorry but you can’t ...’ the man hesitated. ‘He’s invisible.’

‘Completely?’ said Charley, taken aback. ‘Even at night?’

‘Completely invisible,’ the man confirmed.

‘Well...’ Charley faltered.

‘Are you taking him or not?’ The ghost’s owner was getting a bit edgy. ‘All sorts have been coming round here and but then they are not happy with this, not happy with that ...’

‘We will take him!’ When Charley got something into his head, it was impossible to shift him. ‘Just tell us a little about him. What does he eat? How does he behave?’

‘I don’t really know ...’ the man said, again hesitant.

The boy and girl slid silently through the door.

‘He’s horrible, that ghost! Nothing is ever good enough for him! He spends the whole night opening and closing the fridge door!’ the girl said angrily.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘He did a wee in my old tennis shoes!’ the boy joined in. ‘And he howls at night!’

‘Well, you know we are the best ...’ Charley started but then stopped in his tracks. He was going to say “ghost trainers” but then thought better of it. The ghost might be offended. So instead he said, ‘The best ghost researchers in the world.’

‘Excellent! It’s a deal! So, you’re taking him?’ the man asked in cajoling tones, handing the bears a sack. ‘I only just managed to get him in that bag! It was no easy task, believe you me. I put some bones in there with him, too, he goes mad for them! Gnaws away for hours!’

Tobias reached out and touched the sack tentatively. Yes, there was definitely someone in there! The sound of quite heavy breathing was coming from the sack, rather like a rasping noise, and the odd low growl.

A little baby crawled on all fours out of the next room.

‘Bow-wow!!’ the baby started screaming, seeing that the sack was to be taken away.

The man picked the baby up and soothed him, motioning to the bears to leave.

The bears nodded. Tobias heaved the heavy sack up over his shoulder and they left.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

Chapter 3

THE GHOST GOES TO HIS NEW HOME

A croaky voice emerged from the branches of a tree as the bears reached their front door. ‘What have you got in that sack?’

‘Magpie Agatha! As always ...’ Charley growled.

‘She pokes her beak into everything! Flapping around and chattering!’ Tobias agreed. ‘We are busy!’ he growled loudly.

‘No one ever wants to talk to me! Always keeping secrets from me! Never mind, I will find out for myself!’ With a flap of her wings, Magpie Agatha flew away.

‘Nosy parker!’ Charley called after her.

Once indoors, Tobias lowered the sack slowly to the floor. Inside, something moved. The sack fell open as it sank to the floor. From the sound of it, something came slinking out then set off round the flat, stopping at the tap over the kitchen sink.

‘He is thirsty!’ Charley exclaimed.

‘Do you think so?’ Tobias wondered how Charley knew that.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘Definitely!’ Charley got his favourite bowl with Snoopy on it out of the cupboard, filled it with water and placed it on the floor. There was a slurping sound and the water in the bowl started disappearing.

The bears heard a scratching at the front door.

‘The cat!’ Tobias went to let him in.

The cat was just called Cat, with a capital ‘C’.

‘A dog!’ Cat stated, sniffing the air. ‘Where is he hiding? Under the bed? In the wardrobe? I want to see him!’

‘He’s invisible!’ Tobias exclaimed.

‘And he’s not a dog, he’s a ghost!’ Charley added. ‘He’s come to live with us.’

‘A ghost?’ Cat shook his whiskers in disbelief. ‘Well, well...’

He padded over to the empty bowl, sniffed and said: ‘It IS a dog! Visible or not, there’s no question about it! My sense of smell is as good as any dog’s!’

Then someone – could it really be their ghost? – barked.

‘I told you!’ Cat announced proudly. ‘If it smells like a dog and barks like a dog then, visible or not, it IS a dog!’

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘That’s what I thought too! I thought that all along! The baby called him bow-wow. That’s what little children call dogs!’ Charley exulted.

‘You are right. I AM a dog - an invisible one unfortunately ... and a very hungry one at that!’

Charley and Tobias swung into action; flinging open the fridge door, rummaging about in the cupboard and discussing what they were going to eat and what invisible dogs might like to eat. In the end, they decided on porridge with a generous dollop of raspberry jam.

As it turned out, it was exactly the right choice! The bowl of porridge was licked clean in seconds.

Their new house-mate had another drink of water and said to them, ‘Thank you! And now it is high time that we had a little chat. I have so much to tell you.’

Chapter 4

THE GHOST DOG’S STORY

‘I was for sale in the market place. When the family that bought me took me home, I was passed around like a parcel. “What a lovely puppy! He’s mine! No, he’s mine!” the brother and sister argued over me. They tied ribbons round my neck, put me in the doll’s pram!’

The boy wanted to train me: “Jump! Walk on your hind legs! Bark!”

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

But no one ever changed my litter tray and, you know, puppies wee rather a lot! They only gave me dry dog biscuits – no tasty bones to chew! And I longed for something to chew!

They couldn't agree on a name for me, either. You can't imagine some of the names they came up with, all most unsuitable for a dog; Trumpy, for instance! What sort of name is that? So I ended up without any name at all...

The only person in the family to be kind to me was the baby, but he was only one and a half ...

It was nearly Christmas. For days, the children had been talking of nothing but the presents Father Christmas would bring them. The girl was in desperate need of new dolls, as if her room wasn't full of them already! And her brother wanted a remote-controlled car, a robot and some trainers with flashing lights in the heels – one of his classmates already had a pair! The list went on and on!

I wondered if dogs got presents, too. A bone, say?

The grown-ups were planning a skiing holiday in the Alps right after Christmas; the only question was what to do with me. Taking me with them would have been very expensive! They eventually decided to leave me in kennels, just while they were on holiday, of course! But they only accepted dogs that had been given all their jabs and vaccinations, and it was outrageously expensive, too!

Christmas Eve arrived; the brightly-lit tree, the table groaning with food, the flat full of guests! They all tucked in to the most delicious-smelling, mouth-watering things – but no one gave me a second thought. I was given my boring old dog food, the cheapest and driest you can buy.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

Then there was a ring at the doorbell. Someone went to open it and a giant of a man with a bushy, white cotton wool beard, red nose and a sack over his shoulder bowled into the living room. The children recited rhymes and were handed gifts – immediately pulling off the bows and ripping the wrappers from sweets.

All of a sudden, Father Christmas noticed me and bent to try and pet me. ‘Good doggy! I thought it was a toy dog!’

Father Christmas didn’t smell very nice. He smelled like the drinks the grown-ups were guzzling, scowls on their faces.

I tried to wriggle backwards into the corner but was snatched up and held high in the air. I scrambled to escape his grasp, caught his beard and, ripped it off! Father Christmas threw me roughly to the floor then, staggering about, he trod on my tail. I howled in pain and bit his leg.

‘What a little ... toerag!’ He roared, his voice very rough-sounding. ‘Get off of me! Get out of my sight!’ he bellowed before snatching up his empty sack and, still muttering angrily, stomped out of the door.

The invisible dog sighed and continued:

‘And that is how it happened ... I became invisible ... They looked for me high and low but couldn’t find me. They thought maybe Father Christmas had taken me away with him ...’

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

No one, neither the grown-ups nor the children, imagined that I was still there. Only the baby, crawling about on the floor, cried out to me; “Bow-wow! Bow-wow!” And I was there all the time, but invisible. Only now, no one put any water down for me, or any food, not to mention the litter in my tray ...

I really didn't have any choice! I decided to take revenge! By day, I slept quietly behind the sofa. By night, I scared them to death! I would spend the whole night raiding the fridge – I did have to eat after all. I gave blood-curdling howls and upended everything I could get my paws on!

After that, they decided to try and get rid of me. They called in various specialists, people calling themselves ghostbusters or something – oh yes, ex-or-cists! They lit horribly smelly incense sticks, jingled a few tingly things, repeated magic chants ... all completely useless, of course!

Then they must have started putting adverts up. Hordes of people came but they all wanted to see me first.

The invisible ghost dog sighed again and continued: ‘And then you came! You know the rest ...’

Inquisitive and eager to learn as always, Tobias asked, ‘What’s your name?’ Without waiting for a reply, he announced proudly, ‘My name is Tobias! I’m a toy bear!’

‘And I’m Charley! I’m a toy bear, too!’

‘I’m Cat! With a capital C!’ Cat with a capital C raised his paw in greeting.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

The invisible dog remained quiet and then said shyly: ‘You know I have no name ... and I don’t want to have one of those cutesy names, like Zorro or something. I’ve thought it over and I will chose a name when I’m visible again. If I ever am ...’ he added sadly.

‘You will be!’ Charley exclaimed. ‘You most definitely will be!’

‘One hundred percent certain!’ Tobias agreed.

‘Let’s hope so ...’ Cat with the capital C added.

‘I do hope so,’ the Invisible Dog agreed hopefully.

For a moment, everyone was silent.

Tobias was the first to speak.

‘I think we should all go for a walk!’

‘What a good idea!’ Charley agreed. It was obvious he just wanted to show the Invisible Dog off to everyone he met. They would be the envy of the town! No question about it! Absolutely!’

‘Only no one will be able to see him!’ Tobias remarked, reading Charley’s thoughts.

‘Why?’ Charley didn’t get it.

‘Why? Because he’s invisible!’ Tobias replied, amazed that Charley hadn’t worked it out for himself.

Tobias, Charley and the invisible ghost by Juris Zvirgzdiņš

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, edited by Sarah Smith

Published by Pētergailis

Contacts: zanete@latvianliterature.lv

Mara.uljanova@petergailis.lv

‘He can bark though!’ Charley insisted. ‘At least he can make himself heard!’

‘I really don’t think it’s a very good idea,’ Cat with a capital C objected, ‘People will hear him but they won’t know where the barking is coming from. We might get into trouble. You know what people are like!’ he concluded and the others agreed.