

EXTRACT

OWLY GETS LOST

An almost true story...

CHAPTER ONE

Home again, and a nasty surprise

It was early in the morning. The sunbeams were already sneaking through the window, and the early birds were warbling joyfully. Chris's eyelids felt so heavy with sleep that he couldn't open them. But his parents didn't believe him.

'Quick, quick! Get dressed. Let's go, or we'll miss our plane!'

Chris rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and started to look for his socks. As usual, his mum had folded his clothes neatly beside his bed, but one sock was missing. Trying to find the sock, Chris almost fell out of bed. But it was right there after all – it had fallen onto the floor as if it wanted to make Chris get out of his warm blankets just to pick it up.

The amazing holiday in Italy was over, and Chris and his parents had to go home to Latvia. As usual, they had packed all their things the night before, and all they had to do this morning was get dressed and go.

'Everybody ready?' Mum called cheerfully from the lobby. And the suitcases, on their small wheels, with their human assistants – Chris and his family – rolled towards the car and then onto the 'big bird', as Chris called the plane.

The first day back was full of excitement. Chris was thrilled to see his toys again, Mum was in a rush to water the plants, and Dad went through a heap of newspapers and letters that had been stacked up inside the porch. Life might have gone on as normal, if not for –

‘Oh, no!’ Chris ran out of his room, tears pricking his eyes. He cried and sobbed, sobbed and cried, completely unable to tell his mum what was the matter. She put her arms gently around her son and picked him up, placing him in her lap. He finally managed to whisper: ‘I left Owly in our Italian house!’ It was his favourite cuddly toy. And he continued to cry, unable to imagine life without her – not for a minute . . . not even for one second . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Owly is heartbroken

Meanwhile, in Italy, a little owl was weeping. There was a heavy silence in the house, and she couldn’t hear Chris or his parents. She lay still for several days. Then Owly finally understood: ‘I’ve been left behind in Italy...’

Owly was heartbroken and confused – she didn’t know what to do. But then she remembered what Chris’s mum always said: ‘Don’t be discouraged – everything will be just fine in the end; and if it isn’t fine, then it isn’t the end!’ Owly was afraid, but she was also determined. She jumped out of the bed, shook the dust from her right ear, and toddled off towards the bedroom door.

‘Well, well, well . . . ’ A deep voice came from the other end of the room.

Owly turned round to see a spider racing towards her. ‘I’m not afraid, I’m not afraid,’ Owly chanted to comfort herself, trying not to look at her tiny shivering legs.

‘I’ve been watching you over the last few days!’ The spider said in a friendly voice. ‘I was thinking that you were dead and gone – just like my Aunt Titch from next door, who accidentally wandered into the death trap for ants!’

‘Ant . . . death . . . what?’ Owly was utterly confused. Although the owl considered herself to be rather clever (her big glasses and intelligent face were proof of that), she had not heard of death traps for ants . . . not to mention death, whatever that might be.

‘The house is full of ants. Tourists leave breadcrumbs and scraps on the floor, so the ants swarm in and eat everything they can find. And the humans aren’t stupid – they’ve set traps. If an ant wanders into the trap, he soon dies and it’s game over,’ the spider told her, looking wise and serious. ‘Speaking of my Aunt Titch, I hope it didn’t hurt. Everybody told her not to go in there, but she wouldn’t listen; she was determined to find out what was inside!’

Owly listened carefully. For some reason, she was glad that in this terrifying situation, even without Chris, she could still learn new things. If she ever saw Chris again, she would tell him all about the death trap for ants, and that no one should go in there under any circumstances.

‘But you look fit as a fiddle. What’s your name?’ the spider asked.

‘My name is Owly. I’m Chris’s cuddly toy,’ she answered politely.

‘And where is your friend Chris? The house has been silent for a week – if it wasn’t, I would have been swept out of here long ago!’

‘I think I’ve been left behind,’ said Owly, a tear shining in her eye.

‘There, there. Dry your eyes!’ The spider tried to cheer her up. ‘Oh, I’ve been through so much myself. I’ve been chased with a brush, I’ve outrun the vacuum cleaner tornado, I’ve been attacked with a book, and even with a slipper! And I can assure you, one thing is clear: as long as you’re alive, there’s hope! Where’s your friend Chris now?’

‘I don’t know,’ she lowered her voice, trying to hide tear number two and tear number three.

‘We’ll find him. Don’t worry. Out on the terrace is the Great Mosquito – he’s very clever. We must find him – he’ll be sure to know where to look for that boy of yours!’ said the spider, starting to move towards the door.

Owly wasn’t at all sure whether she wanted to follow the spider. To be honest, she didn’t know a single thing about him: he hadn’t even introduced himself! But it was clear to the owl that she had a decision to make. She could stay all alone in the bedroom, or she could go into the unknown, no matter how frightening that might be. After weighing up all the pros and cons, and all the advantages and disadvantages, she arranged her glasses on her face and stepped over the threshold.

CHAPTER THREE

The impolite ant

Owly was certain that wherever she went, it would be a step closer to Chris. The little owl knew that the boy would be looking for her too and that they would both see each other again.

‘Step aside, step aside!’ The sudden shouting frightened Owly so much that she closed her eyes and her glasses clattered loudly to the floor.

‘One-two, one-two, one-two,’ a big, brown ant was shouting commands at a whole army of ants, who were carrying various bits of food on their backs. Never in her life had Owly seen an ant – and all of a sudden, here were hundreds of them! To be honest, they didn’t look very friendly, which made the little owl wary of them.

‘What are you staring at?’ the ant commander shouted at Owly, who had just managed to put her glasses back on and was taking everything in.

‘And I was sure no one was in the house . . . ’ she thought to herself.

‘Are you deaf?’ the ant said rudely.

‘My name is Owly. And I can hear and see you clearly,’ the little owl replied.

‘You seem to be a very impolite ant!’ Owly continued, feeling a little more confident.

‘You are an unwelcome guest and, as you can see, you’re standing in our way. I don’t know what you think gives you the right to do such a thing, but you’d better not slow us down.’ He spoke quickly, trying to keep control of his army at the same time.

‘The spider and I are going to see the Great Mosquito who lives on the terrace. Word has it that he is the wisest of everyone here, and he will help me find my way home,’ Owly continued.

The mention of the Great Mosquito impressed the ant commander. ‘The Great Mosquito? Is he expecting you? Does he know who you are?’ He sounded sceptical.

Owly wanted to speak up, and she had already taken a deep breath, but the spider pulled on her wing, guiding her through the army of ants.

‘Don’t listen to him – we’ll only lose time!’ the spider instructed her.

‘Hey! Where are you two going? What bad manners – going off in the middle of a conversation!’ the impolite ant grumbled. All of a sudden, he turned to his army: ‘I told you NOT to go into the death trap! You crazy creatures!’