

# 1 The escape

The little owl struggles and fights under the light of the setting moon to break the tether binding its leg. It doesn't want to die, eaten like its parents — will it manage to escape and find refuge elsewhere?

## **The Escape**

Under the light of the setting moon, the little owl struggles and fights to break the tether binding its leg. It pecks at the rope, which frays little by little.

It has managed to slip through the door of the dark, immense greenhouse where it has lived confined its whole life.

At the other end of the tether, a large owl with a wicked gaze pulls to bring the fugitive back.

The outcome is uncertain; the little bird is not strong enough to resist for long. But it no longer wants to be the slave of the eagle-king and his court of great horned owls, the object of their violence and their contempt. It doesn't want to die like its parents, and it pulls, pulls, pecks! ...

Suddenly, the rope snaps! The little owl topples, gets back up, and rushes toward the nearby undergrowth, running on its small legs.

The great owl takes flight to catch it, punish it, eat it ...

Otus, that's the little owl's name, has hidden inside a tree stump; its grey plumage and small size serve it well, for once.

It hears the muffled beat of its pursuer's wings pass by again and again, and closes its eyes to avoid any glint that might betray it.

The hours pass, day breaks.

Otus still doesn't move. It thinks of its parents, eaten a few days earlier by the eagle-king.

Loving, affectionate little owls, but so weak against the dominant birds ... The strength of their love wasn't enough to save them; deep in its hiding place, it despairs at this violent world.

It must flee, quickly, but where to go? And it doesn't know how to fly, it wasn't allowed to.

Its parents spoke to it several times of a welcoming greenhouse bathed in beautiful light, far to the south.

It decides to set out in search of it!

## The Journey

Once night falls, Otus sets off and gives the dark greenhouse a wide berth. The great owls have already gone out in search of new prey, new slaves.

It takes great care to stay under cover, and watches, astonished, the world outside the greenhouse.

The wind, the rustling of leaves in the trees, the delicate step of a spider on the ground, the faint light of the stars it discovers, the hooting of other owls ...

It breathes deeply and savors the richness and depth of its connection with this world around it!

Crack! Its attention slips for a moment, and it steps on a twig that snaps with a sound like thunder! Quickly, it slips into a small hole in the ground and stays motionless, heart pounding. Two great owls have just arrived, and swoop down straight toward it.

Suddenly, a bright light appears from nowhere and blinds them. Startled, they pull back up ...

The light disappears. Unsettled, the great owls resume their search, but a little further off. Phew!

Later, Otus continues on its way. What luck it had! Its mother used to speak of its lucky star, maybe it saved its life? For a moment it seemed the light had come from its own body, but that can't be it!

It is hungry but doesn't know how to feed itself in this world. It walks slowly, ... for a long time ...

Rounding a tree, it spots in the distance another greenhouse, dark and immense as well. So there are others in this world, it thinks, trembling with fear! It stays motionless for a good while, weighing the risks of being so close.

A noise to the left makes it jump. It turns its head and sees a little owl approaching.

– What are you doing here, the other one asks?

– I'm looking for a bright, welcoming greenhouse, further south, Otus replies, relieved to break its solitude.

– It's not here you'll find it! This dark greenhouse sows desolation and death throughout the whole region.

– Yes, I suspected as much. But you, what are you doing here, putting yourself in danger, so close by?

– I'm a lookout!

– A lookout?

– Yes, to warn my clan when the great owls go out.

– A clan?

– Yes, a clan. If you like, I'll take you there at the end of my watch. My name is Pilo.

– And I’m Otus.

Later, Otus joins the clan with its new friend. It is welcomed by one of the elders.

– Hello little owl, my name is Kotis. What are you doing here, all alone?

– Hello, my name is Otus, my parents are dead and I’m searching for a bright, welcoming greenhouse, further south.

– Yes, I’ve heard of it, says Kotis, but I believe it’s a legend; the greenhouses I’ve known were all dark, alas! Would you like to rest and eat with us?

– Oh yes, gladly, thank you! Otus replies. I’ll continue on my way afterward.

It enjoys its rest in the hollow of a sweetly scented tree, and the varied, delicious food made of small insects.

At dusk, Pilo, panic-stricken, comes to warn Otus: the great horned owls have left the greenhouse in search of fresh flesh! No more moving, not a sound, nothing!

Otus hears once more the muffled flight of the great owls, passing back and forth, searching the whole territory.

It is afraid, makes itself as small as possible in its tree hollow, and once again despairs at the violence of this world.

The alert is finally lifted. The clan hasn’t been spotted, and so won’t have to move urgently to another part of the undergrowth.

Otus thanks the birds who welcomed it, then resumes its journey south.

It rests during the day, hidden in small tree holes or in the ground, and travels at night, cautiously, on its little legs. It grows more confident, now knows how to avoid the main dangers, and feeds when it can on insects found here and there.

One morning, tired from its nighttime walk, it falls asleep and dreams that it finally finds the bright greenhouse.

It wakes at the end of the day, surprised to have slept so long, and relieved to still be alive!

It resumes its journey, but ... something intrigues it. Senses on alert, it studies its surroundings at length — the sounds, the movements, the smells that might signal danger ... Nothing ...

And then it clicks: this path, it knows it — it’s the one it walked in its dream!

It walks, walks ... The sun will soon rise. Otus knows it is now very close to the bright greenhouse and quickens its pace.

Suddenly, a shadow, the muffled sound of wings, a great owl swoops down on it ... It doesn’t have time to move, to hide. It closes its eyes, makes itself as small as possible, and waits for the impact, for death ...

But nothing happens.

It opens one eye, and sees a great horned owl perched beside it, smiling broadly.

– Forgive me, little owl, for startling you. I mean you no harm! My name is Bubo, and I'm glad to welcome you.

– He...he...hello Master, Otus stammers.

– Call me Bubo, no need for formality between us. What's your name?

– Otus.

– Well then, Otus, follow me, says Bubo, opening its wings.

– I...I don't know how to fly, says Otus, I'm sorry.

– Ah, poor little owl, what a shame not to know how to fly, for a bird! But that can be fixed, follow me!

And Bubo sets off walking slowly, followed by Otus.

### **The Arrival**

The two of them emerge into a vast clearing, with a magnificent greenhouse at its center, radiating a clear, warm light!

Otus stands there, breathless, filled with wonder ...

It is introduced to the community by Bubo. The birds rejoice at its arrival and welcome it warmly. Otus notices that the smiles are warm, like those of its parents and friends once were. Tears of gratitude overwhelm it. It feels good, here.

Later, settled in the hollow of a small tree trunk, Otus falls asleep and dreams of its parents, its friends, its past, of the great journey it has made...  
It also dreams of new adventures and smiles in its sleep.