

Chapter 4

The World Outside

The first few steps away from home are always the hardest. Casting furtive glances back, Rebecca and Silver Sky slowly made their way up the driveway in the cool spring weather.

Rebecca, holding the compass, kept them going in a generally South East direction, with many a detour around the neighborhood houses and fences and occasional nasty dog or overly inquisitive cat. They tried their best not to be spotted by curious children or adults.

The thrill of being out of the old cardboard box was quickly wearing off as their legs, unused to walking such distances, began to tire.

“I need a rest,” pouted Silver Sky, nudging Rebecca’s shoulder with his nose.

“I’m not tired yet, we can walk a little bit farther,” Rebecca replied.

“No fair,” grumped the model horse. “I’ve got twice as many legs to wear out.”

Rebecca pointed back over Silver Sky’s shoulders. “You can still see our house from here. At least let’s go until we can’t see it anymore. Otherwise, I might be awfully tempted to go back,” she said.

Silver Sky sighed, but relented. He understood. While he, too, wanted to see Timothy and Samantha, he knew this was not going to be an easy journey. Though he would never admit it to Rebecca, he was scared.

They trudged on in awkward silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Eventually, the houses began to thin out. Rebecca assumed this meant they were nearing the edges of the town.

“Let’s duck under the porch of that one and take a rest,” she said, pointing to an older looking green house. The porch was raised off the ground, providing a shaded shelter.

The shade provided some relief from the hot afternoon sun. Relaxing and stretching out, the two worn out toys realized just how tired they were. They’d walked several miles already. Slowly, they both fell asleep.

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“What is it?” Silver Sky heard on the edge of sleep before being rudely awakened when something thumped his head.

“Ouch!” he said, sitting up just in time to see two furry creatures scurry into the darkness under the porch.

“It talks,” said one. It was dark brown and held a stick in its hand.

“Indeed, how odd,” said the other scribbling furiously into a notebook.

“They are out of their natural habitat. Careful, they could be dangerous,” the first one cautioned.

“Great, more rats,” growled Silver Sky as he nudged Rebecca awake.

“It’s confused, probably delirious. It is outside without a child, after all. Rebellious toy.” The first instructed the second. Then, looking at Silver Sky and the still

sleepy Rebecca, and talking very slowly he continued. “We’re voles. Voles. V, O, L, E, S. Understand?” he asked.

Rebecca rubbed her eyes and focused on the first furry creature. “Not more gerbils?”

The first approached Rebecca sternly, like a father about to scold a child. “Voles.” He looked back to his assistant. “Be sure to mark down ‘not very intelligent,’ please.”

The second vole scratched notes into her book, watching the two toys from a safe distance.

Speaking slowly once more, the first vole continued, “I am Dr. Falltree and this is my assistant Miss Springfield.” He pointed at himself, “Doctor Falltree.” He then pointed at the other vole, “Assistant Springfield.” He then pointed at the two increasing flustered toys. “You?”

Sensing Silver Sky was in the process of formulating an inappropriate response, Rebecca quickly answered for them both. “I am Rebecca and this is my friend Silver Sky,” she said. “You don’t have to talk so slowly, we understand you,” she added.

Dr. Falltree looked unconvinced while Miss Springfield continued to jot down notes. “Yes, so you say,” he mumbled.

Miss Springfield approached Dr. Falltree. “Perhaps they are scouts for a larger group seeking territorial expansion,” she postulated.

“An army of toys? No, they could never be so organized. That requires tactical thinking, strategy, logistics and planning. No, I don’t think they are up to such a task,” replied Dr. Falltree.

“Hey now! We can hear you, you know!” fumed Silver Sky.

“Violent temper,” mumbled Miss Springfield, tapping at her notebook.

“Well, now that’s not right!” stated an increasingly furious Rebecca.

“A disagreeable lot, for toys,” noted Dr. Falltree.

Both Rebecca and Silver Sky huffed indignantly.

“You’re getting it all wrong,” Rebecca stated, looking angrily at her furry tormentors.

“Yeah, we’re nothing like what you are saying,” added Silver Sky.

Both voles looked at the two toys doubtfully. “You’re not, aye?” questioned Dr. Falltree. “Then tell me what you are doing here, so far from home,” he challenged.

“We’ve lost our children,” Rebecca started. She recounted their story from the box, to meeting Germaine, to climbing the bookshelf and finding the map, to her and Silver Sky’s first fateful steps out the door.

The two rodents scribbled notes, paying particular interest to each mention of Germaine. When Rebecca finished her tale, they took a few steps away whispering to one another and comparing their notes.

“What on Earth could they be talking about?” wondered Silver Sky, scratching his chin with his hoof.

“I don’t know,” admitted Rebecca, becoming increasingly worried that their journey would end so soon.

After what seemed like hours for the two impatient toys, the furry voles returned.

Dr. Falltree looked solemnly at them, his notepad clenched tightly in his hands.

“You need to talk to Tula Ulari,” he said simply.

“Who?” they said together.