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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## The Talking Animals

Hulda and Nathan had heard tales of a marvelous forest where animals could speak, but they dismissed it as mere fantasy. That is, until one day when they found themselves wandering through the woods. Nathan, captivated by a squirrel, chased after it, with Hulda close behind. Almost catching the squirrel several times, they suddenly realized they had ventured into an unfamiliar part of the forest.

"We should turn back," Hulda suggested, "as darkness is approaching, and we may lose our way." However, instead of retracing their steps and finding the path leading out of the woods, they seemed to delve deeper into it. Soon, nightfall arrived, and Hulda's anxiety manifested in tears.

"Don't be afraid," Nathan assured her. "Tonight, the moon will shine brightly, and I am confident we'll find our way back."

"I fear we're lost," Hulda lamented as Nathan guided her to a seat beneath a grand tree. Suddenly, a glimmer caught their attention, and as they glanced upwards, they noticed a faint light filtering through a small window in the side of the tree. A voice beckoned, "Are you lost, children?"

An owl emerged from the window, and Nathan inquired, "Can you guide us out of the woods?"

"It's too far to travel tonight," the owl responded.

"Come inside, and I shall provide you with supper."

"I know where we are," Nathan exclaimed. "We are in the forest of talking animals."

The door swung open, and they entered a tidy kitchen. Mrs. Owl, adorned in a large white apron and a matching cap, was preparing supper.

"Please, have a seat at the table," she offered. Bowls and spoons were already set, and Mrs. Owl filled them with porridge and milk. Her kindness soon made Hulda and Nathan feel at ease. Once they finished their meal, Mrs. Owl inquired, "Would you like to see my babies?"

"Indeed," Hulda eagerly replied. Mrs. Owl led them to the bedroom, where three little owls lay fast asleep in a cozy bed.

"They are the loveliest birds in the entire forest," the proud mother proclaimed.

"I have no doubt," Hulda concurred, "especially when their eyes are open."

The following morning, after Mrs. Owl served them breakfast, Hulda expressed their need to depart. They bid farewell to Mrs. Owl and her babies, gratefully acknowledging her hospitality.

"Here comes Mr. Bruin," Mrs. Owl alerted. "He will guide you out of the woods. Don't worry," she assured the children as she noticed their alarmed expressions.

"No harm befalls anyone in this forest of talking animals. Good morning, Mr. Bruin," she greeted the bear.

"These children are lost. Will you show them the way out?"

"Certainly," Bruin replied. "They can accompany me. I am going on a long walk and would appreciate the company."

Hulda and Nathan strolled alongside Bruin, who proved to be amiable and engaging, quickly dispelling their fears.

"Good morning, Mr. Bruin," a blue jay called from her balcony. "Where are you headed?"

Bruin explained their destination, and the blue jay invited them inside. "Perhaps the children would like to meet my babies," she suggested.

"We would be delighted," Hulda responded.

The blue jay's home nestled within a large tree, featuring balconies on all sides. While Bruin remained downstairs, Hulda and Nathan followed Mrs. Blue Jay upstairs.

"Aren't they adorable?" she exclaimed, unveiling three little blue jays nestled in a cradle. "They are the most beautiful birds in the entire forest."

Hulda and Nathan wholeheartedly agreed, finding the chicks absolutely charming. After bidding farewell to Mrs. Blue Jay, they rejoined Bruin. "I live over there," Bruin indicated, pointing to a rock that peculiarly resembled a house. "My wife will be displeased if I don't introduce you to her."

"We would be delighted to visit," Hulda responded, and they soon arrived at the doorstep of Bruin's residence. Mrs. Bruin, donning a cap and apron, welcomed them with a warm smile, exuding a nurturing air.

"Come in," she invited. "I'll prepare lunch and introduce you to the children. You'll surely fall in love with them,"

she added as she and Bruin fetched their offspring. In a matter of minutes, they returned, each carrying a little bear under their arm. Placed in high chairs, the cubs playfully splashed milk with their spoons, much like misbehaving children Hulda and Nathan had observed. After lunch, they bid farewell to Mrs. Bruin and her little cubs, ensuring to compliment the babies' undeniable charm. Continuing their journey, they walked a considerable distance without encountering



anyone until they crossed paths with a squirrel and a rabbit. "Please join us for tea," the rabbit kindly invited. "And you must see my babies."

"And afterward, you must see mine," added the squirrel.

They first visited the rabbit, whose charming white house boasted vibrant green blinds, surrounded by flourishing vegetables. Mrs. Rabbit ushered them into a cozy sitting-room. While savoring their tea, a nurse entered with two baskets, placing them on the floor. Mrs. Rabbit lovingly uncovered the baskets, revealing her precious bunnies.

"I assure you," she proudly declared, "they are the most enchanting creatures in the forest." Hulda agreed wholeheartedly, admiring their delicate appearance. Next, they crossed the road to Mrs. Squirrel's dwelling, where her babies frolicked in the yard. Mrs. Squirrel explained, "I've let them run free so you can appreciate

their gracefulness. They are the loveliest babies in the forest."

"I believe you are right," Hulda concurred. "They are remarkably cunning."

Finally, as they approached the path leading out of the woods, Bruin informed them that he could go no further. "Entering that path causes any talking animals to lose their ability to speak," he disclosed.

"We are deeply grateful," Nathan expressed. "We have had a truly captivating experience."

"Please come again," Bruin extended his invitation. "We always welcome visitors." With those parting words, Bruin disappeared into the woods, soon vanishing from sight.

"I never want to eat mush and milk again," Hulda exclaimed. "They must subsist on it. Did you see how conceited those mothers were? It's rather awkward when they ask if their babies are attractive."

"You agreed with each mother," Nathan noted, "even with the owl, whose chicks were the homeliest I've ever seen."

"Do you tell a mother her baby isn't pretty?" Hulda questioned.

"No," Nathan admitted, "I suppose not."

"Well, it's the same with animals and birds," Hulda concluded.

Despite numerous attempts, Hulda and Nathan have been unable to find the path leading back to the forest of talking animals. Nonetheless, they hold onto hope, knowing it exists, and dream of rediscovering it someday.