

## GEORGE AND THE OWL

One frosty morning when the country looked like a big white blanket George came into the world.

One can't imagine John's joy, the father, who jumped like a cricket in the spring announcing the news to the whole neighborhood. Everyone rushed to see this beautiful ruddy and healthy baby, he was beautiful like a big red ripe apple. Strangely that night, an owl stood on the huge oak near humble John's house, like a sentry on guard.

George grew up among the courtyard's animals and his sensible mother taught him not only animals' names but also their character. Surely, observing them well, every animal has its peculiarity: the chicken is shy and curious, careful to look around but also concentrated on pecking insects from the grass. The goat who seems to be saying: "Here I am, but be careful not to bother me." And the horse, the extraordinary horse, the royal horse. John inherited a horse from his uncle. It was a beautiful big black horse, it was as big as a bear, as black as the night and as elegant as a king. His name was proud and impetuous: Gale.

When Gale saw George, he approached him with an unusual sweetness, like a sensible mother does when she caresses you while you are sleeping. Both of them grew together, one more and more impetuous and stronger and the child lively and intelligent.

George woke up every morning at 5.00 a.m. and with his sensible mother Emily and his father John took care of animals. Then his sensible mother went home and prepared a rich abundant breakfast like a wedding banquet. George liked mum's breakfast very much, especially the honey-filled pancakes that looked like a big mountain with gold snow.

George went to school with Gale who waited for him until he finished. The other children thought George was a strange child, like someone from another planet. Some ignored him and thought he was strange because he spoke to animals, others made fun of him, two children occasionally, in a stupid and wicked way, threw stones not only at him but also at Gale who willingly would have kicked them with his hoof but was promptly stopped by George.

One evening, when everything became dark like the bottom of a well and in the sky there were only the stars and the moon, George saw his father under the big oak tree talking with his head upwards, and a question came suddenly: "Is my father mad?" George's curiosity became like that of a cat that sees something moving in the grass. Suddenly he got dressed and ran to the tree and saw his father talking to an owl. "It is the famous owl that my sensible mother used to tell me about, which was on the oak tree when I was born!" George approached like a cheetah, fast and silent, trying to hear what his father was saying, but he could only hear some words: rude children, careless parents and the owl that said: "They will be their own victims, forgive them".

George didn't sleep that night thinking about his father's words but especially about the owl's answer.

The next morning, as usual, the family woke up at 5.00 a.m. with sensible mum's beautiful smile, a smile like sunshine after a storm. They had a wonderful breakfast like a wedding banquet and then George went to school.

There was something new at school that morning, a lesson about farm animals. Everyone was surprised because they didn't know anything about them. The girls tried to pet rabbits and chickens. The boys were attracted by the ram, the pig and the donkey. Obviously George was used to seeing them and also spoke to all of them and so he heard the rabbits saying: "We hope this day will pass soon." And the hens: "We hope we don't become a soup." And the pig: "Is there anyone that would like to grill me?" The ram: "I see two children that I don't like." And the donkey: "Have you seen them, too? They have already thrown two stones at me." George thought about the owl's words and he felt like a cloud in a spring day.

Suddenly the ram ran towards one rude child, the donkey towards the other, all the animals escaped from the paddock. There was a lot of confusion like when you hear the earthquake and everyone runs away. A big confusion. The donkey kicked one child who implored the animal's forgiveness, the other hid behind a low wall, but the ram had already kicked him. George suddenly shouted: "Stop!" Like magic all the animals stopped in a moment that seemed eternal. George said to the animals: "Now you will return to your paddock, I promise you that nobody else will hurt you." Like magic, all the animals returned to their paddock. Everyone in the school was

immobile like wax statues in a museum. Suddenly everybody clapped their hands except for the two unrecognizable children.

"How did you do that George?" said his companions. "I don't know," he replied. George was amazed too at what he had done, stopping the ram and the donkey and in that moment he thought about the owl's words: "They will be their own victims, forgive them."

The next morning, he woke up at 5.00 a.m., he took care of the animals and during breakfast his sensible mother told him that he had to walk to school because she needed Gale to go to the doctor.

Sensible mother Emily was strange and hugging him she said: "Be strong and love yourself and when you don't know who to talk to, talk to the owl."

Obviously George did not notice his sensible mother's words with that natural lightheartedness that children have.

George stayed at school all morning. While he was walking home, he saw Gale near a moat, neighing desperately, as if someone important had died. In the moat there was his sensible mother Emily, dead, immobile and as cold as the glass of a winter window. "Mum, mum!" the child desperately screamed. "Gale, what did you do? Did you kill my mum?" The screams attracted father John who ran to the place and cried hugging his wife and brought her into the house.

The cold wind of death had frozen everything in a deep silence like an abyss. No noise, no verse, nothing at all. Mother was no longer there. John and his son were alone.

The alarm clock still rang at 5.00 but there was no more breakfast. Gale was guilty of his mother's death. School, that was already a problematic place, became unsustainable.

The two insensitive bullies like hyenas near a dying animal were waiting for nothing more than to act cruelly on George. They didn't understand the child's big and deep pain at all. George didn't forgive himself for not hugging his sensible mother, he didn't forgive God for taking her away, he didn't forgive his friend Gale.

A grudge against everything and everyone moved an uncontrollable hate like a stormy sea. Day after day George became more and more impatient towards the

animals, towards his classmates, towards his father John, towards Gale but especially towards himself.

He didn't love the animals anymore, he replied badly to his father and hated the two children. In the evening he saw his father John talking to the owl near the big oak and he thought: "Why is my father talking to the owl? It is as stupid owl, my sensible mother didn't come back." But in that moment, like sunshine after the storm, his sensible mother's words came back to him: "Be strong and love yourself and when you don't know who to talk to, talk to the owl." But the pain was too much to understand them.

George decided that those two insensitive bullies wouldn't bother him anymore.

He dug a moat, he covered it with reeds and grass, he made a trap. He went to school and at the sound of the bell he started to make fun of the two kids. Obviously the two didn't want anything better and they chased him but this time they were the victims. They fell into the trap like two ripe pears. In the moat things changed; for the first time the insensitive bullies became victims and not the executioners. The tears came forward like a spring rain and the mocking words were replaced by pity words. George thought: "I had to do it first. Now you scream for mercy. Now you aren't bullies."

With the satisfaction that a leader has when he wins a battle, the child returned home thinking: "It's true, I'm satisfied but I don't feel better. Why don't I feel better? Why don't pain and anger go away?" "Be strong and love each other and when you don't know who to talk to, talk to the owl." The echo of his sensible mother's words. George went to his father John and asked him: "Can I talk to the owl tonight?" "Of course my son," he replied.

George asked the owl: "Owl, I'm sick, do you know why?"

"YOU MUST FORGIVE" said the owl. George asked again, he wanted to hear something else but the owl was still and silent on the oak tree that was so big. George was angry, he thought the owl was stupid, indeed he thought about killing that stupid owl and cutting down the tree. "So I feel the same satisfaction as when the two bullies were in the moat." But who is born round can't die square.

In his pain, the boy thought about the two bullies in a moat, afraid like puppies without their mother. He thought of Gale tied to the chain. "I said he was guilty but I

didn't know. I wasn't sure." He thought of his father John left alone without help and without affection. He thought of himself and all the hate that he was giving to others and to himself. He thought of the owl's words.

In the middle of the night George went to free the two boys who, frightened, apologized to George for everything they had done to him over time.

The next morning, he woke up at 5.00 a.m. to take care of the animals with his father John, he hugged him with love, he made breakfast as sensible mother Emily would have done. He released his friend Gale and went to school smiling. After the day was over he went back to the owl and asked him: "Why do I feel better in spite of everything?"

THE OWL REPLIED: "FORGIVING OTHERS BUT ESPECIALLY YOURSELF IS LIKE SUNSHINE AFTER THE STORM. WE NEED FORGIVENESS TO LIVE A LIFE IN JOY."