



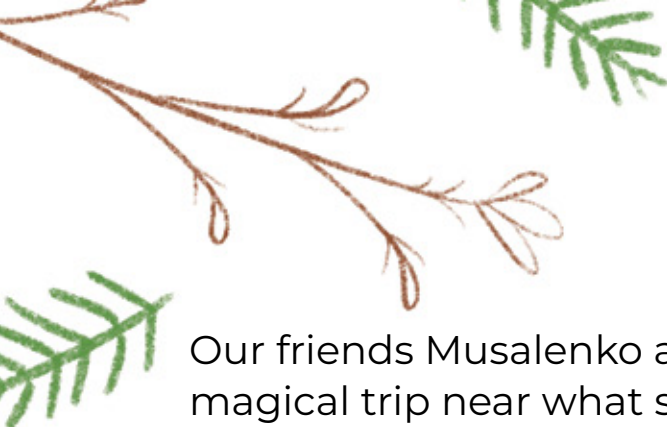
MUSALENKO

and the

Missing Holidays

Mystery






Our friends Musalenko and Mur came to the end of their magical trip near what seemed an even more magical puddle. Bear in mind it's not just a regular puddle, but rather a magical portal, which, in the previous book, teleported our friends to several different countries. In Egypt, Musalenko and Mur met the caravan- leading Camel, in Macedonia they met I'm-me, the Swan. They also met the smallest Colibri in the world, which was from Cuba, and a Wild Goat from Bulgaria, wearing a helmet and a headlight.

Musalenko was carefully going through the photos of that trip, which he found in his backpack. Each photo had different colours, called up memories of the various adventures they had been on and reminded him of his new friends. And once he closed his eyes, Musalenko could feel the aroma of every single country he had visited:

- Bulgaria smelled of mountain and herbal tea
- Egypt smelled of hot sand
- Macedonia smelled of green forests after a summer's rain
- And Cuba had the scent of ocean and endless beaches





The page is decorated with stylized blue clouds at the top and a green bush with white flowers on the right side.

Musalenko was daydreaming when he was suddenly startled by something that fell on his head. He was kind of hoping it was a drop from an invisible rainy cloud but it turned out to be... a huge piece of poop coming from a big, white bird. Mur was secretly smiling at his friend when he too fell victim to the bird (or rather his clean and fluffy fur did). Mur was very upset. He started waving his paws, bared his teeth and claws, which made Musalenko laugh:

‘You know, Mur, it’s a sign of good luck if an unidentified flying object drops its poop on you,’ Musalenko told his cat and went over to the nearby sink to clean himself up.

The big white bird that had pooped on our friends was there on the sink, looking at them rather ... gloomily.

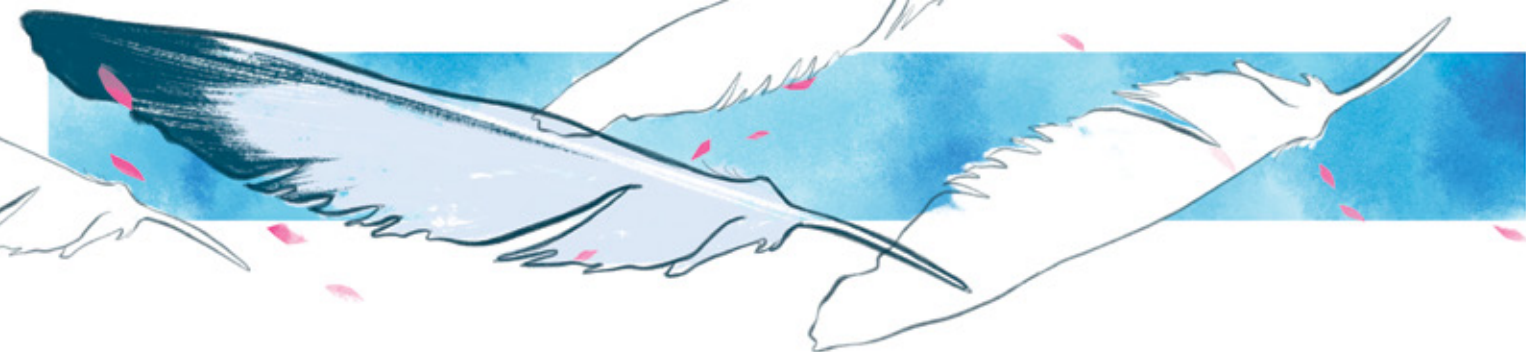
‘Hey you, boys, hop on my back and let’s go to Musala hut. I’ll let you know more once we get there.’

Musalenko gave the bird a look of surprise:

‘I don’t see how me and Mur, who are about 5 times heavier than you, will manage to climb up your back and fly off to wherever. It’s true I’ve been going jogging in the park for the last couple of weeks and I drink 3 liters of water daily, and I’m also on an afternoon diet, but still...’

‘Come on board!’ shouted the bird while Mur and Musalenko were still looking rather puzzled. ‘I’m lucky I managed to shrink you down to the size of lice. Otherwise,





my mission would have totally failed. Use my left wing as a ladder and hop on my back. We're off to a hut in the mountains where an important meeting is to be held.'

Musalenko and Mur climbed onto the bird's back. It flew faster than the wind. And I mean that kind of fierce sea breeze that makes waves as tall as a house. It wreaks havoc on your hair and turns your sun hat or umbrella into flying disks.

Musalenko, Mur and the white bird flew for 3 days and 7 nights. They passed through a tropical storm, clouds of pink cotton candy, a real tornado and an even more real waterfall, they dove into an icy river and came really close to a 103-degree-hot mineral spring. The bird took them far away, over mountains and rivers, and they finally landed safely on the roof of Musala hut. It was close to midnight there, the stars were scattered all over the dark blue sky, and the moon was shining too bright to be in a Saturn return (whatever that may mean). The air smelled of toasted bread, tasty bean soup, raspberry jam and herbal tea.

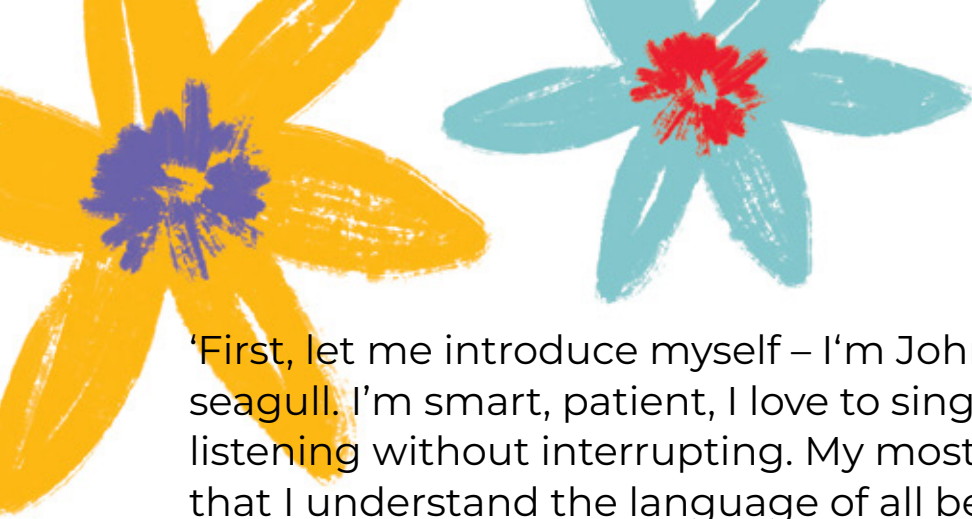
Mur and Musalenko made themselves comfortable on the roof while the white bird stood in front of them just like a teacher would and started talking... scolding them, rather. Mur and Musalenko couldn't quite tell.

'Please be quiet and listen carefully! I have a lot to tell you,' said the white bird.









'First, let me introduce myself – I'm Johnny, the talking seagull. I'm smart, patient, I love to sing and I'm good at listening without interrupting. My most incredible skill is that I understand the language of all beings - the language of people, animals, birds, trees, moss, bugs, microscopic euglenas, dragons, non-existing monsters under the bed, and so on. What I enjoy the most is helping a very big and good old man from the North Pole, who's constantly wearing red clothes and a red hat. All year round, he receives letters from children all over the world who know how to spell almost impeccably in almost all languages. Have you ever seen the spelling of the word 'hello' in Japanese? Here it is: こんにちは and it's pronounced / Kon'nichiwa/.

Oh wait, I almost forgot. I also speak the language of all fairytale characters. Fortunately, I'm not the only one who has this gift,' went on to say Johnny the seagull. 'A whole bunch of magical seagulls is what we are. We do our best to help the Earth stay healthy and happy and to keep revolving around the sun. Unfortunately, we've been quite busy the last couple of years, mainly with keeping the Earth clean. People use huge amounts of plastic bottles, toys, bags and what not. Did you know that people even eat microscopic amounts of plastic but have no clue whatsoever? They think that a broken plastic Indian toy or a doll somehow evaporate, but they actually remain buried in the ground for at least 200 years. And they don't turn into toys again, neither do they become invisible. They degrade into smaller pieces which in turn end up in



people's food by means of water and soil. It's a long story... What worries me the most is nature and the fact that I don't have enough time to help that old man from the North Pole. He is in charge of the Christmas and New Year presents for children. He is now too old and tired. He is increasingly making more and more mistakes – last year a Brazilian boy, who had asked for a puppy, was given a puzzle of a fairy. Not nice.'

But, what's even worse than everything I've told you so far, is that we've been facing a huge problem for the last couple of months – people all over the world can't seem to celebrate anything. Not a single holiday. They can't even have a proper holiday dinner. Representatives of the World Holidays Organization (or WHO) have gathered here in the hut in hope of finding a solution...'

'Hey, Johnny,' Musalenko interrupted him, 'Sorry for interrupting you. Achoo... I'm going to sneeze. Actually, I already did. Something smaller than me, but much more sparkling, has landed on my nose.'

'Oh, hi there, Mrs. Firefly,' said Johnny, glancing at Musalenko's nose. 'The rest of WHO are awaiting you in the hut. Some guests say that prior to their holiday failing, they can sense the smell of Sulphur – that stink of rotten eggs, you know. Real mineral springs smell like that. And then people start missing their festive utensils – food, yarn, egg





paint, masks, costumes... whatever it is they would need for their celebration.'


'From what you've told me, I can easily smell who's involved in all this - Evilla and Baddy,' said Musalenko.

'But figuring it out is the easy part. WHY are they doing it? What are they trying to achieve? How can we find them so everything can go back to the way it was? That's what we need to find out. Let's all go to the hut.'

The friends crawled through the chimney and ended up in a huge dining hall. Musalenko was amazed to see his friends from the magic trip there along with many interesting animals from all over the world. It was very noisy, as everybody was complaining about something to somebody.

'Dear members of the World Holidays Organization, please be quiet!' Johnny the seagull nearly screamed. 'Let's all sit around the table and discuss this whole mess. Musalenko and Mur are here to help us.'

There was silence. One could only hear the approaching thunderstorm which nobody was afraid of. Do you know why? Because they were all together!



'Let's start with the member who's come from the most distant place – the firefly from Japan,' Johnny introduced their guest, coming all the way here from the Land of the

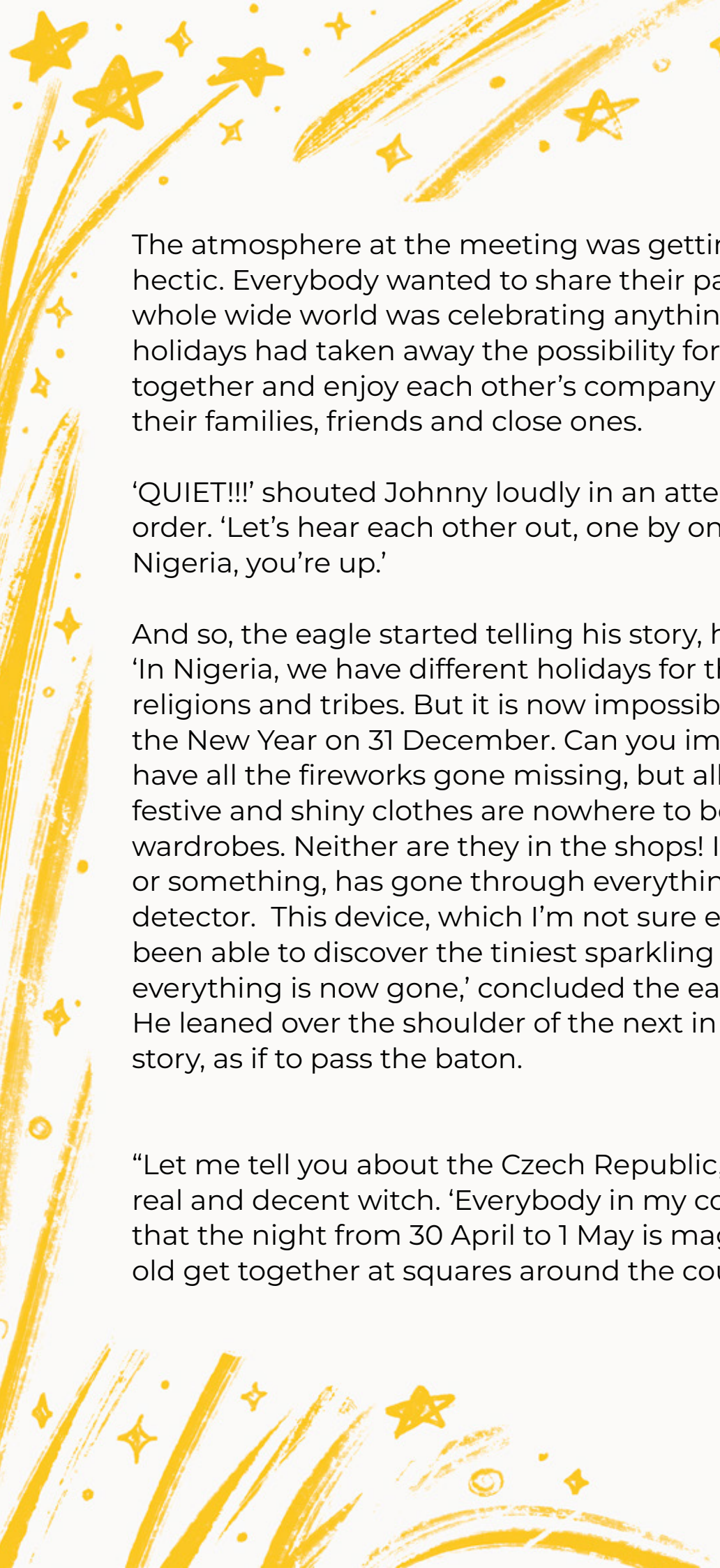


Rising Sun.

‘As you all know,’ started the firefly, ‘the most popular, beautiful, gentle and pink holiday in Japan is called Sakura, or Hanami – watching the cherry blossoms. At the end of March and the beginning of April, when most of our cherry trees, a symbol of our country, start blooming, we like to go on a picnic, called Hanami, under the blooming trees. But not this year. Someone stole all the blossoms, of all the cherry trees, in all of Japan. People became sick with sadness, and all the fireflies ceased glowing at night.’

‘I feel your pain, firefly. It’s the same in Macedonia,’ said I’m-me, the swan. ‘At Easter, we have the tradition of painting boiled eggs. This Christian holiday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first egg is always painted in red, and the rest can have any color or pattern you can imagine. There are chocolate Easter bunnies and treats everywhere. The coolest thing about this celebration is the so-called Egg Tapping. You do it to be healthy. Whoever has the strongest egg, is believed to have a lot of good fortune and excellent health. But such a bad thing has happened! All of our boiled eggs, millions of them, have disappeared along with millions of red paint bags. Gone in thin air! Niente! Zero! How are we supposed to celebrate now?’






The atmosphere at the meeting was getting tense and hectic. Everybody wanted to share their pain. No one in the whole wide world was celebrating anything. The missing holidays had taken away the possibility for people to get together and enjoy each other's company together with their families, friends and close ones.

'QUIET!!!' shouted Johnny loudly in an attempt to establish order. 'Let's hear each other out, one by one. Mr. Eagle from Nigeria, you're up.'

And so, the eagle started telling his story, hastily: 'In Nigeria, we have different holidays for the different religions and tribes. But it is now impossible to celebrate the New Year on 31 December. Can you imagine? Not only have all the fireworks gone missing, but all of people's festive and shiny clothes are nowhere to be found in their wardrobes. Neither are they in the shops! It's as if someone, or something, has gone through everything with a sparkle detector. This device, which I'm not sure even exists, has been able to discover the tiniest sparkling thing ... and everything is now gone,' concluded the eagle gloomily. He leaned over the shoulder of the next in turn to tell their story, as if to pass the baton.

"Let me tell you about the Czech Republic," said one very real and decent witch. 'Everybody in my country believes that the night from 30 April to 1 May is magical. Young and old get together at squares around the country where they




put up piles of wood. On top of these stakes, they position a witch made of straw or paper. Not a real one, of course. They believe that we (witches) can keep the cold. It's always been like that... except for this year. Someone has stolen all the wood needed for the stakes, we are unable to light bonfires and so the warm weather cannot arrive. It's so cold everywhere that kids' boogers freeze before they have the chance to lick them. And, to be honest, I'm sick and tired of keeping the cold all the time.

'We have a problem with summer,' said a moose, wearing a scarf made of northern lights. 'In Sweden, we greet the summer season with one of our most loved holidays – Midsommar. It's celebrated on the first Friday following the Summer Solstice. Festivities begin at noon and go on till next morning. Families and friends get together for some dancing, singing, playing games... There are wild flower wreaths and ribbons everywhere. And what do you think happened? Someone mowed all the flowers. I can't even make a single tiny flower brooch holding a tiny violet.' the sad moose concluded his story.

The atmosphere in the dining hall was getting gloomier.

'You don't want to know what happened in Egypt..., ' said the camel. 'All the food disappeared at one of the most important Muslim holidays – Eid al-Fitr. Maybe you're thinking it's no big deal not to have food, but it is. This is a holiday celebrating the completion of the holy month




of Ramadan – that’s about 30 days of fasting. The exact number of days depends on the Moon, as Muslim holidays follow the Moon calendar. Let me remind you what fasting is – you can’t eat certain foods at any time. During this month, nearly all people (apart from children, pregnant women and sick people) are allowed to eat and drink water only before sunrise and after sunset. Fasting begins after the call for the first morning prayer. This is a way for Muslim people to cleanse not only their bodies, but their souls, too. Eid al-Fitr is the holiday signifying the end of fasting. A lot of dishes are usually prepared for the celebration – meat, pastries, pancakes with honey, jam, baklava, revane, halva, sutljash (sweetened rice with milk), etc. Children congratulate their parents and relatives and ask for their forgiveness. We cannot have a celebration without all this delicious food. We would not be able to share all this happiness with our families.’


The camel was really saddened. The goat patted her gently with her hoof and started telling her story:

‘First of all, excuse my lisp. I just turned 6 and my teeth are shedding. I now sound just like my grandma – Wise Old Goat, who’s read a truck of books and has one wonderful granddaughter – me. But let me go back to the problem we’re having in my country. What happened? There was fog and a smell of bad eggs when all the yarn, threads and strings disappeared from people’s homes. You’ll say ‘What’s





the big deal?'. Let me explain: in Bulgaria we use those to make martenitzas. These are bracelets, made from twisted red and white thread, which we exchange on 1 March. This holiday is called Baba Marta and symbolizes the coming of spring. Prior to 1 March, all Bulgarians make martenitzas which they exchange the day of the festival – it's a way to wish health and prosperity and to celebrate the coming of spring. I'm sure all of you are aware what spring is about, although it is absent in some parts of the world. This is when nature wakes up after the cold winter. Trees blossom, flowers grow, the weather starts warming up. Storks and swallows come back from the south... from Africa, to be precise. They keep themselves warm there while it's too cold in our country. And...



'I have a question!' our friend Musalenko interrupted the goat. 'Could you tell us more about the stink of bad eggs you mentioned?'

But before the goat had any chance to respond, another member of WHO joined the discussion.

'This awful stink reached Cuba the night before the festival,' chirped, or rather buzzed like a mosquito, the tiniest colibri in the world. 'In Cuba, there are several important carnivals during the summer held in the capital city of Havana or in Santiago di Cuba, the latter being the old capital of our fabulous country. Our festivals are awash with colors and a chance for the many dance schools from all over the country to compete against each other: salsa, rumba,




cha-cha... The streets become crowded with smiling people wearing colorful masks and costumes. The festivities go on for days on end. Everybody is happy. But not this summer! All the costumes, masks and decorations have disappeared, as if an evil, angry hand had waved its magic wand at them. Which, on top of everything, smells of eggs gone bad.

All the guests at the meeting started making noise again, interrupting each other all the time. There were so many creatures from countries all around the world having holidays they could no longer celebrate. The doorbell gave a loud ring. Johnny the seagull had to use his warning signal to have some order.

‘From the very beginning, it’s been my suspicion that Evila and Baddy have something, a whole lot, to do with this mess,’ said Musalenko, thoughtfully. ‘Johnny, is there a way you could take us to the chief of your seagull tribe? I read somewhere that...’

‘My grandma, One Wise Goat...’ Musalenko was interrupted by the goat wearing a helmet and a headlight, which not only liked to talk, but also really enjoyed interrupting others. ‘So, my grandma read to me stories about shamans, tribe chiefs and other such people of the highest importance in a tribe. They light a fire, dance around it, sing songs and somehow manage to tell the future, look into the past and make sense of what the Moon, the Sun, the stars and the mountain springs are telling them...’



Musalenko continued, excitedly:


‘Yeah, it’s something like that, I guess. I believe that the chief of the seagull tribe will help us. Johnny, could you poop on all of us so that we become nearly impossible to notice, and fly us on your back to your tribe?’

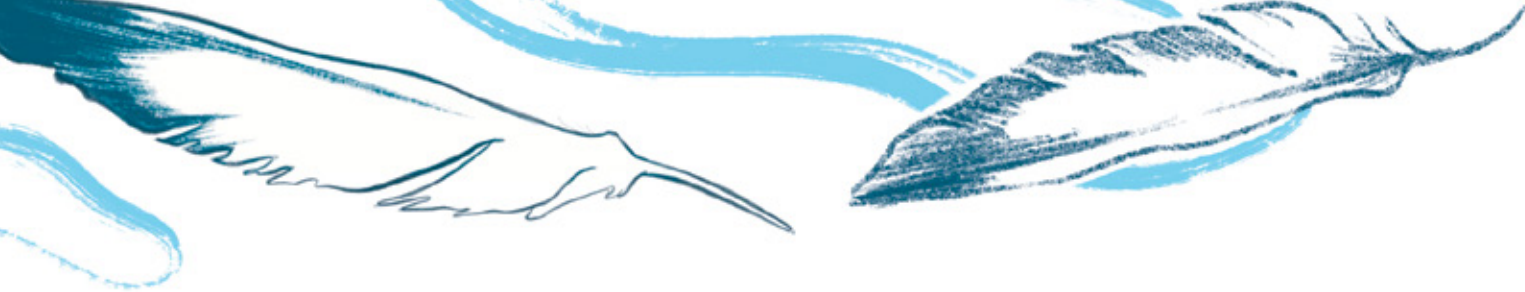
‘I have a better idea!’ said Johnny. ‘Why don’t you go on the night ski lift near the hut and I’ll be waiting for you down at the station. There’s a secret forest airport there, we might make good use of it.’

Everybody quickly got in the ski lift. The journey didn’t take long, or maybe it did. Nobody could tell. And when they finally got off at the bottom station, since the one at Musala hut was referred to as the top station, they noticed a huge white plane.

‘Come aboard on Johnny Air!’ a familiar voice said. ‘I’m your friend, the seagull, who can turn into a submarine, a parallelepiped and a... plane. This aircraft has a bit too many feathers but what matters is that it will fit all of you and will take you safely to wherever it is you want to go.’

All the tiny creatures – Musalenko, Mur, the Firefly from Japan, Merry Cockroach from everywhere, the worm from Norway, an evil fly from a made-up country, and at least 45 more unknown miniature creatures, jumped into the pocket of a very colorful elephant from India, dressed in dungarees. This was the only way for the tiny bugs to travel





on the plane without getting stepped or sat on, or even worse – drowned in tears. Why do we mention all this? On board the plane, there was a very beautiful Weeping Willow. She was constantly crying over the elves living in her roots. It turned out that someone had stolen their hats, without which the elves were no longer able to pull berries out of their sleeves, sing elf songs or become invisible. And what do you need an elf for if they can't do all these things? Besides, there was still the smell of bad eggs coming from their home. I guess now we all know who did this. Don't we?

'Let me tell you a joke,' said the slightly dizzy Rhino's wife.

'Please be quiet and listen:

A rabbit comes into the forest candy shop and asks 'Mrs. Owl, do you happen to have 100 carrot cakes?'

'We don't, Rabbit'

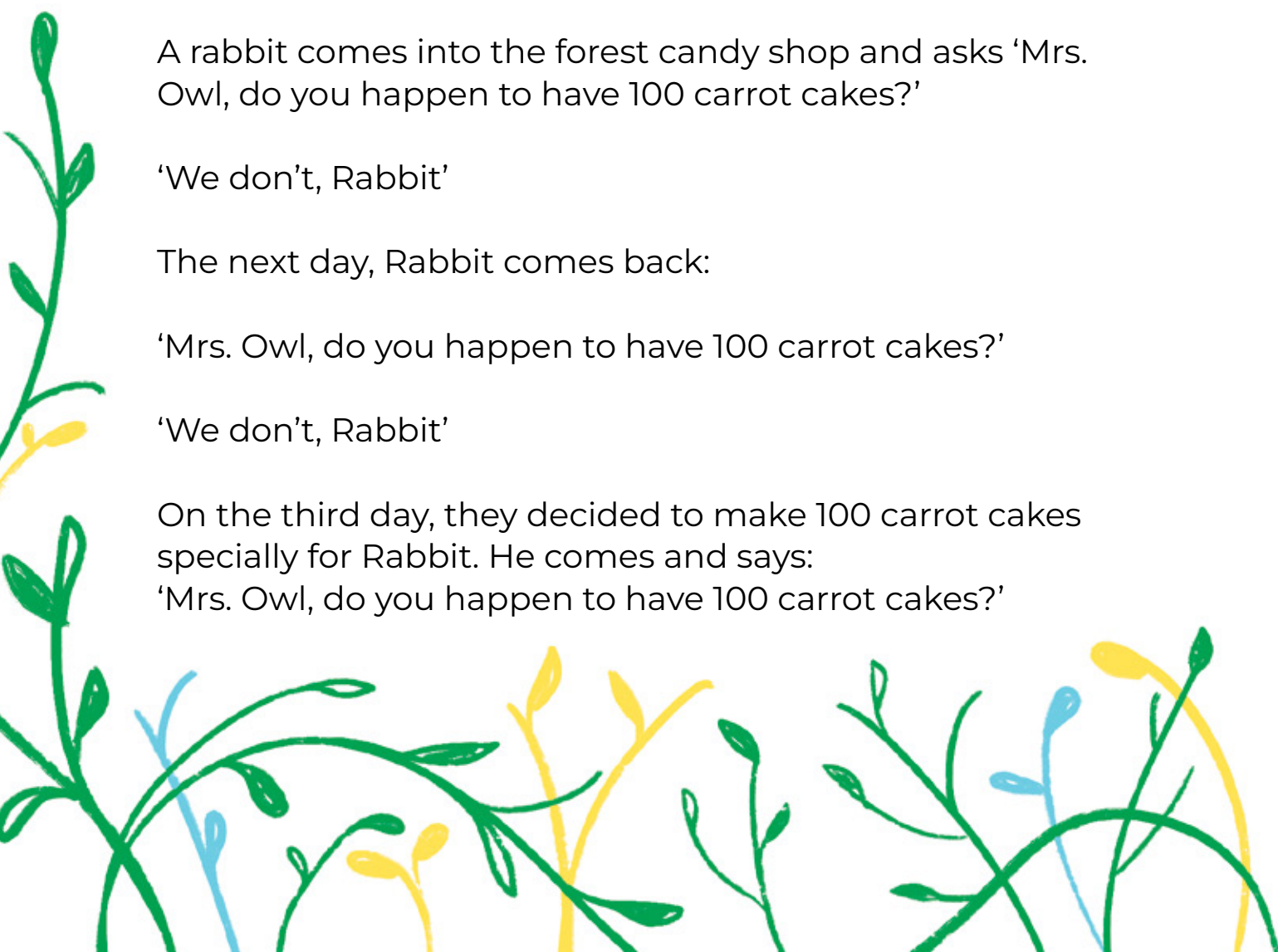
The next day, Rabbit comes back:

'Mrs. Owl, do you happen to have 100 carrot cakes?'


'We don't, Rabbit'

On the third day, they decided to make 100 carrot cakes specially for Rabbit. He comes and says:

'Mrs. Owl, do you happen to have 100 carrot cakes?'







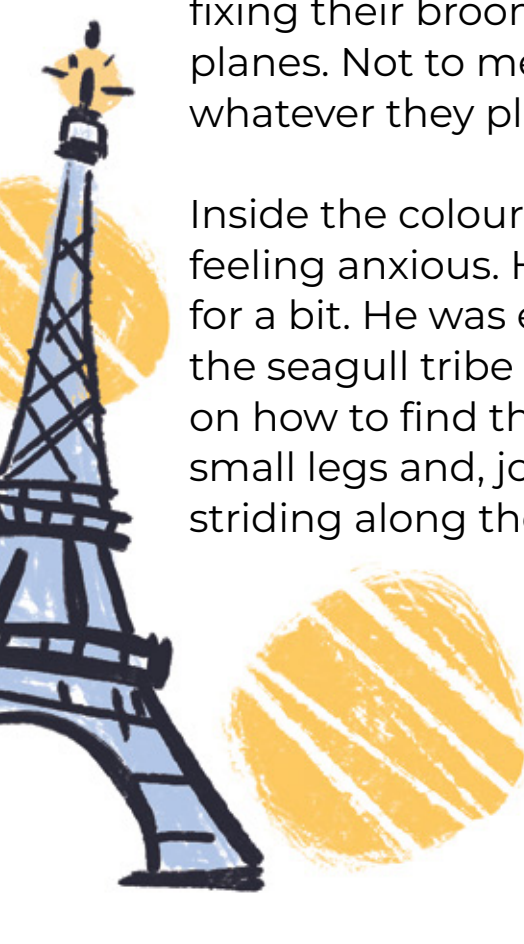
‘We do, Rabbit.’


‘Oh no, and what are you going to do with all those cakes?’

Nearly all the passengers were cheered up by the joke. They made themselves comfortable and put on their seat belts. The plane rose incredibly high in the sky. They were excited to witness amazing views and landscapes. They flew over the Amazon in South America, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Niagara Falls in North America, Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, took a glimpse of the grown bean stem from ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, and almost got hit by a flying ebony horse – you’ve probably heard of it in the Scheherazade stories.

‘There’s a lot of traffic in the sky,’ said Johnny from the pilot cabin. ‘There’s flying rugs and fairytale characters, birds flying to the south and north. Witches can’t get used to fixing their brooms so they constantly need to hitchhike planes. Not to mention all the shooting stars doing whatever they please – disregarding all traffic rules.’

Inside the colourful elephant’s pocket, Musalenko was feeling anxious. He decided to get out and stretch his legs for a bit. He was eager to land and meet somebody from the seagull tribe who could give them directions and tips on how to find the perpetrators. He jumped out with his small legs and, joined by Mur with his small paws, started striding along the aisle. They reached a small window - it



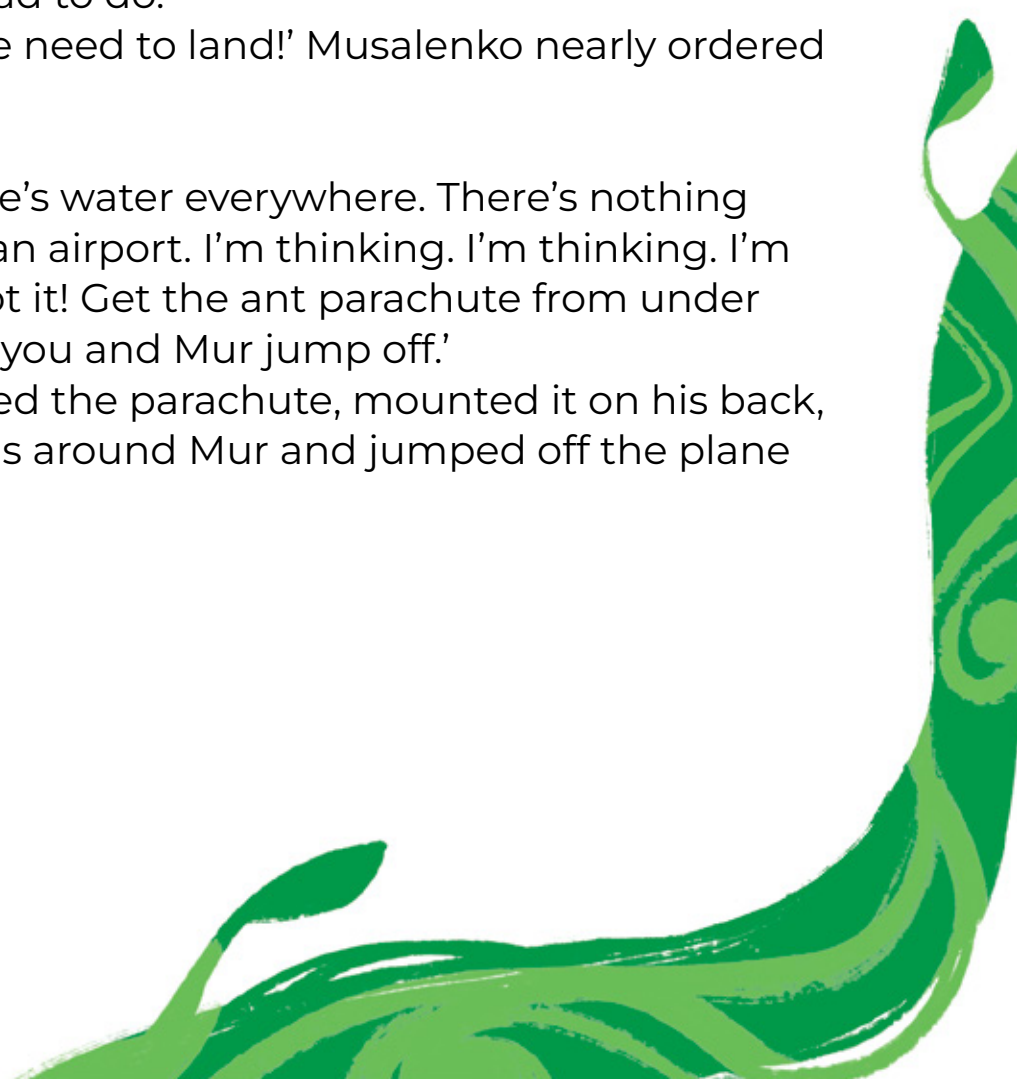



was already dark outside. They were flying over the endless ocean while the sun was shedding its last rays above the horizon. Musalenko was enjoying the falling darkness. Suddenly, one of Muslanko's whiskers trembled in a funny way – both whiskers, actually. They started doing a Mexican wave, kind of.

'Mur, is everything all right?' asked Musalenko. The cat was pointing at something out the window and Musalenko was trying to see what it was. In the darkness, over the endless ocean, there were massive fireworks. Right there, in the wilderness.

'What's the big deal, Mur? Maybe we're flying over some island,' Musalenko said without a care. But the moment he said that, he felt the awful smell of sulphur and he knew exactly what he had to do. 'Johnny, quick! We need to land!' Musalenko nearly ordered Johnny.

'No way, boy! There's water everywhere. There's nothing even resembling an airport. I'm thinking. I'm thinking. I'm thinking fast... I got it! Get the ant parachute from under the pilot seat and you and Mur jump off.' Musalenko grabbed the parachute, mounted it on his back, wrapped his hands around Mur and jumped off the plane like a pro.





The wind was whistling and Musalenko was flying. The silhouette of a large ship, in the shape of a Sperm whale, was starting to appear in front of him. Musalenko opened the parachute and landed successfully on its deck, right behind a pile of red and white yarn, thread and strings. He looked around and his eyes got big as pancakes with chocolate spread. The ship was full of stuff – a pile of eggs the height of Everest, another pile of carnival costumes, a third one - of cherry blossoms...

Musalenko and Mur couldn't believe their eyes. They stood there completely still. It was the stink of sulphur that brought them back to reality. They looked around and rushed to hide themselves upon hearing approaching steps. That's when they realized they had been shrunk down and were almost invisible. They stood calmly by a red-painted egg and waited to see who was coming.

'Baddy, we haven't run out of fireworks, have we?' said the familiar voice of Evilla. 'I wish I could stay on this deck for at least a million years, watching the starry sky.'

'Moo,' said Baddy, walking around in a cow's costume.

'I think we have enough fireworks for only a thousand years more. I'm more concerned about the amount of food – the baklava will be enough only for the next 697 years. And I love eating sweets while listening to music. And vice versa.'

'Baddy, stealing all the holidays was such a good idea. I've




never celebrated anything, received a present or sat at the table surrounded by friends; nor have I ever smiled. Things took a turn for the worse at New Year, you know. Instead of a plush owl in its hollow, which I had wished for last year, I received a box of sparkly slime meant for squishing. Something for me to play with and calm my nerves!! Can you imagine? Even to a disgusting person like me, this thing looked rather disgusting. And from now on, every day will be a different holiday. For the next 697 years, at least.

Musalenko got a little sad while listening to the conversation between the two malfeasants. All this mess was caused by their lack of friends and family and the disappointment with a New Year's present. Musalenko had an idea.

'Mur, quickly, come with me,' and they went into a cabin.

'Listen to me carefully, Mur. We have to think of a special holiday for Evila and Baddy so that they stay happy and give back the holidays to the people. While they are both sleeping, we'll build a second ship full of cookies for Baddy. We'll decorate it. We'll make presents. We'll use our creativity. It's easy to make an owl hiding in its hollow, and





we'll make a CD with music they could listen to for at least a thousand years.

Musalenko and Mur waited for Evila and Baddy to fall asleep and got to work. But it was too big of a plan, with too many tasks to be executed in just one night. It was especially hard for Musalenko's tiny hands and the even tinier paws that Mur had.

'Hey, boys! We're here to help!' our heroes heard a bunch of voices. 'It's us – the sea creatures. Each one of us has the magical power of seas and oceans. Every fish, urchin, seaweed, coral, cuttlefish, shark, and just any sea creature you can think of, is part of this power.'

Suddenly, all kinds of fish, jellyfish and mermaids hopped onto the deck. They started helping Musalenko and Mur. The moon was helping them, too, casting its soft white light all around. Just before sunrise, everything was ready. An octopus family managed to bring a Christmas tree which they decorated with sparkling garlands and toys and positioned in the middle of the new cookie ship.

Everybody managed to hide just a minute before sunrise, when Evilla and Baddy woke up and came out onto the deck to throw up some snakes and lizards - it turned out to be a very fashionable thing to do.

'Evilla, do you see what I'm seeing?' said Baddy, dreamily.

'Happy S-u-r-p-r-i-s-e Day!', Evila managed to read. 'This is



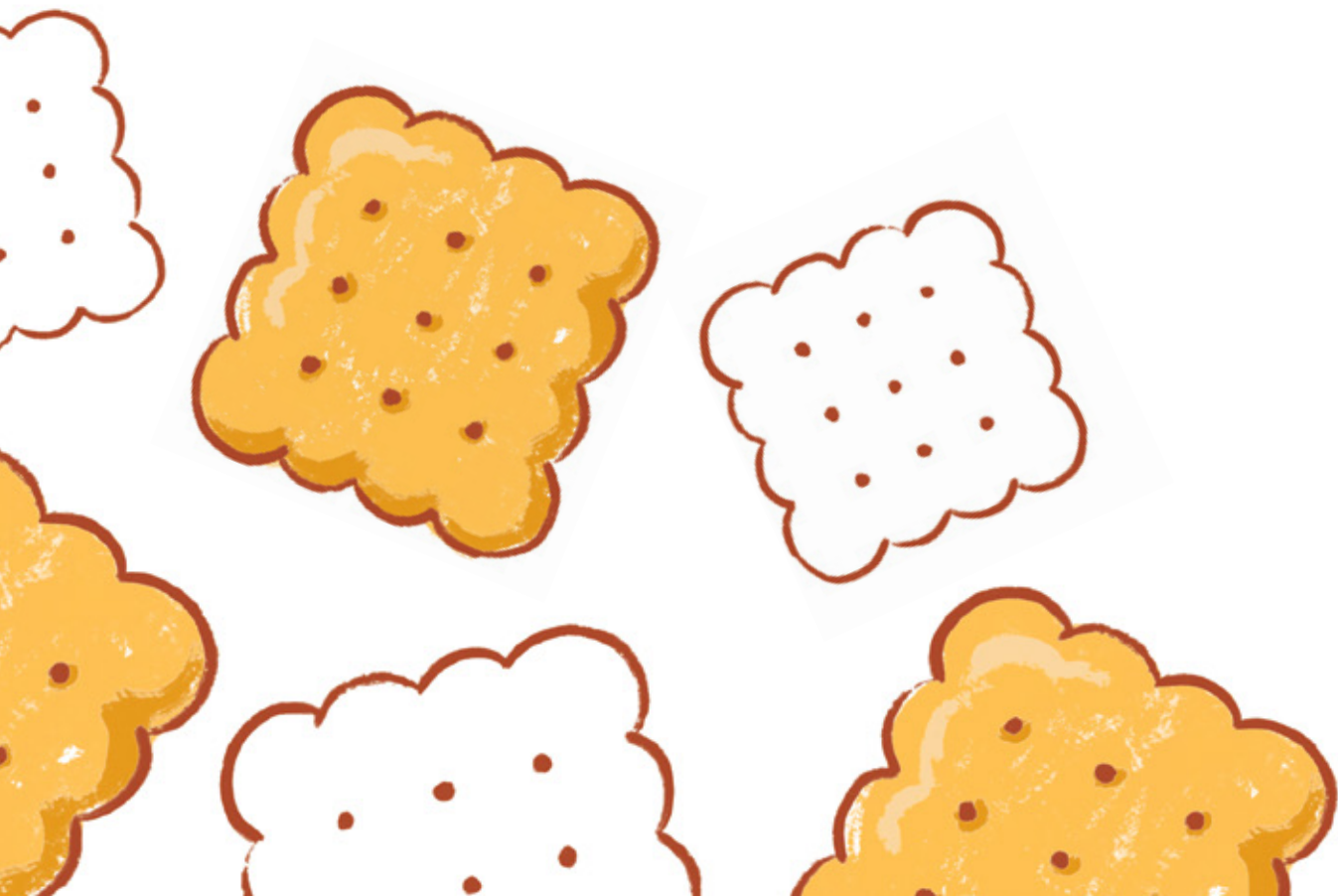




Evilla and Baddy's special holiday. It's to be celebrated with a lot of smiles and good music. On this day, it is mandatory to surprise at least one close friend.'

'I can't believe it!' said Evilla, smiling. 'A ship made of cookies and decorated with balloons. A Holiday banner. A Christmas tree in the middle... And presents underneath it. What a wonderful surprise!'

Evilla and Baddy were so excited that their smell of sulphur got even sharper; they then quickly hopped over onto the holiday ship. Evila opened her present and the smile on her face widened. It was probably the first time something like this was happening to her. Baddy started munching on one of the ship's decks. He decided to take his time so that he had cookies for a longer period of time. Under the tree, they found a letter:



Hello Evilla and Baddy!

I am the spirit of the holiday created especially for you.

It's called the 'Surprise Holiday'. You can celebrate it whenever you want, as often as you like. I recommend at least twice a week. You should surprise yourselves first and then all the other living creatures - with a good word, a glowing pen, candy, roasted pistachios, an electricity meter, a flower in a pot, a bead, a glass of water... You could use the tears of a weeping willow to water a sad cactus, or feed ants with the crumbles of a freshly baked bread. You can find ideas all over you.

And don't forget - doing good is an excellent idea.

Because it will be returned to you - someday, somehow.


Have a nice Surprise Day!

Love,

The Holiday Spirit

Right after they finished reading the letter, all piles of yarn, eggs, baklava, carnival costumes, fireworks, and food immediately went back to their places. Evilla and Baddy were not sure exactly how they were feeling. It was definitely a new sensation they could feel in their hearts and stomachs... They didn't know what it was or whether they wanted it to last. Maybe they were just hungry. Or were they full?





While the two villains were thinking about their feelings, Musalenko and Mur looked at each other, jumped off the ship and onto the crest of a wave. And the wave took them straight home.

The two friends, still the size of lice, were standing in front of their home. Musalenko was thinking of a way to open the giant-looking door with the tiny key he was holding.

‘Home is best, right, Mur?’ Musalenko asked his friend although he knew the answer. ‘Especially if you get to open the door, lie down in your own bed and fall asleep for a long time. After an adventure like this, I could eat all the cinnamon buns in the entire world and sleep for at least 1001 nights.’

One could hear Johnny’s voice coming from somewhere. The seagull landed nearby.

‘Boys, on behalf of the World Holidays Organization, I’ve come here to thank you. We would not have been able to manage without you in this holiday mess. All is almost right in the world of people. Now, get ready to be pooped on so you can go back to your real size.’

Musalenko and Mur got as big as they had always been.

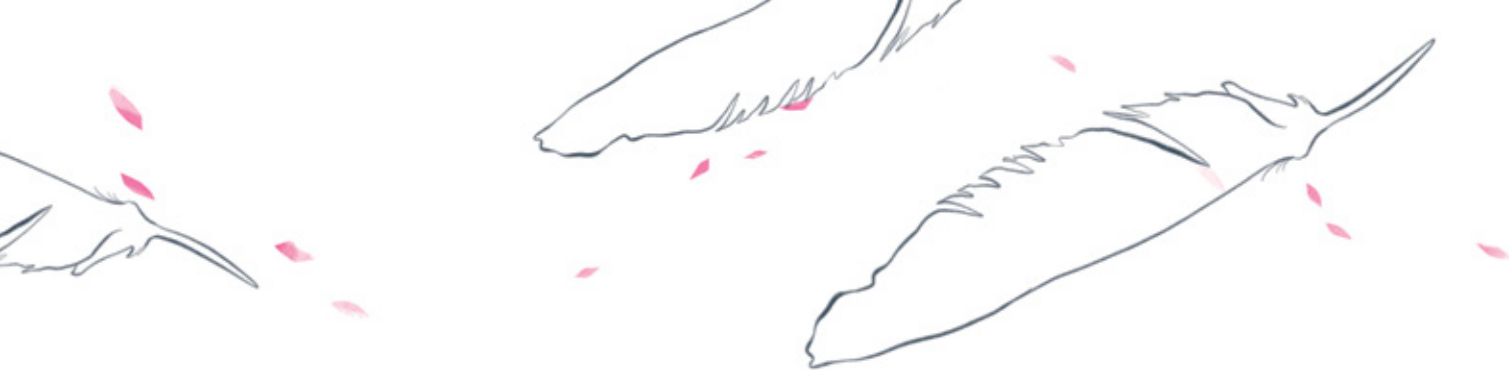




Musalenko managed to unlock his front door. He looked around – everything was in its place. He quickly brushed his teeth, put on his pajamas and lied down in his soft bed. He closed his eyes, and just before setting off to the land of dreams, he thought: I'm so grateful for everything that happens to me and Mur. I'm so happy to have such a true friend with whom I could go through anything.'

THE END





@Musala Soft

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