

Oliver Graf: Chocolate Bars

He stuffed nearly the entire content of the forbidden drawer into his bag, until it was heavy and fat. He thought back once more, but he had not forgotten anything.

Tired, morning became day. First glimmer of light on the horizon. He'd never gotten up this early in the school holidays. Thank god the alarm clock worked. He still wasn't sure about the clock, he'd more guessed what would be a good time to get up.

He shouldered his backpack, quietly pulled the door shut, and took the bags he had prepared. All of it was darned heavy. The handles dug into his fingers, and the straps of his backpack into his shoulders. Had he packed too much? Nonsense, it wasn't enough! Maybe he should have taken two trips, or gotten a little cart, but it was too late for that now.

It wasn't far. Usually, they hurried along the path, greedy for adventure. Of course, they'd taken things into the forest before, tools, planks and screws, food for the day, but he'd never been on his own.

When he entered the forest, he paused for a moment, turned, became unsure. The blunt silence that surrounded him, that seemed to reach for him, made him uneasy. But he had to carry on.

The ground was soft with moss and the needles from the trees.

How heavy the silence was, when you were alone, but he didn't dare sing or talk to himself to chase off his insecurity. He did not want to make the forest angry.

He'd have found the way blindfolded, but it had never seemed this long, and he had to force himself not to give up.

When he finally arrived, his cramped fingers were slow to loosen. He kneaded them, massaged his shoulders, and then climbed up into the tree, onto the platform he'd built with dad. He released the rope, let it down, and pulled up the backpack and the two bags. Like a monkey in the zoo, he thought to himself, as he kept overcoming the tree.

When he'd finally heaved everything up, he sat on the platform and looked to the clearing. Glistening, first rays of sunlight shone on needles and leaves, drying the dew in the grass and on the ferns. It smelled of the damp that the mushrooms love so much, it smelled like an old, lonely man, and yet fresh.

How beautiful it was here, how calm. And soon, they'd come and destroy it all.

He couldn't understand it when dad tried to explain it, and they talked about it in school, too. But he still couldn't understand.

That's why he was here.

He stapled the sheet's upper edge to the platform, and let it down. Then, he claimed down and looked at the piece of cloth that he had painted.

"LEEV THE TREEZ ALON"

Satisfied, he nodded. He took the barrier tape he'd taken from the workshop, and took it to the edge of the forest. He tied the end around one of the machines waiting there, and ran back to his tree, unrolling it as he went.

Back on his platform, he looked at the tape, snaking between the trees. Everything was ready. All that was left was waiting. He took a chocolate bar from his backpack and bit into it.

First, there were four of them. They'd followed the tape, and now they were standing below him, discussing, calling for him to come down and "stop this shit". Mum would have been mad if he had talked like that.

Then, one of them was on his phone, and then two more men came. They tried to climb up to him, but didn't make it. They were far too fat, and he had to laugh at their clumsiness. They asked his name, but he stayed silent. He did not say a thing. He wouldn't say anything if more of them came, he wouldn't come down, and he wouldn't let anyone up, either. He had time. And he had lots of chocolate bars.

Again, one of them was on the phone. Shrugging and shaking heads.

"You will see!"

And then, he arrived. He looked down on them as they talked to him. He tried to read his face. They were too quiet for him to understand a thing.

Dad climbed up and made it. Of course, dad made it. He'd been up and down a hundred times.

Now it mattered. He looked at him, scared. Would he be angry, because he emptied the forbidden drawer, because of the tape, because he had run away and was annoying the adults? Because of the forest?

But dad sat down next to him, patted his head, and pulled him close.

"Do you have any chocolate left? There's none at home."

Together, they sat on the platform, looked down, and waited what else the day would bring.

Winner, EuroNatur writing contest 2020

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