



STRANGER IN THE FOREST

By Nigel Toeg



HONEYBEAR STORIES BOOK 1

Honeybear Stories written and published by Nigel Toeg

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Honeybear

Honeybear lived in the middle of a large forest. She had built herself a fine Tree House and loved to sit inside, looking out at the tops of the trees. She was rather a lazy bear and didn't like going for long walks or bathing in the lake. Most days Honeybear was quite content to stay at home, where she would spend her time snoozing and preparing tasty meals.

Because she stayed at home a lot, she sometimes felt rather lonely. Honeybear knew most of the animals in the forest, of course, but none of them were what she would call a really good friend.

One day, while looking out from the Tree House, she caught sight of a dark shape in the undergrowth below.

Honeybear wondered what it was. 'Perhaps another bear?' she thought. 'Or, maybe, a fox or a badger?'

But then, it called up to her. "Gerumph, gerumph," it said.

Badgers don't usually say things like that, Honeybear decided. Or foxes for that matter and certainly not bears! It doesn't sound like any of those animals.

"Gerumph, gerumph," the call came again and, in spite of being so lazy, Honeybear felt she just had to find out what it was.

So, she climbed down from her Tree House and looked around. But whichever way she looked, there was no one to be seen.

Suddenly she jumped in the air with surprise as the 'gerumphing' noise sounded right in her ear. She was almost afraid to turn around and see who or what it was. But Honeybear was quite brave in her own way and she did so, coming face to face with a large black animal with long fur, a mournful face, sad brown eyes and very long arms.

"Who-who are you?" Honeybear stammered, trying to keep up her courage. "You gave me a fright, appearing out of nowhere like that."

The stranger looked at Honeybear with his mournful eyes.

“Gerumph, gerumph,” he said. “I’m a gorilla, of course, and I’m lost in the forest and don’t know how to get back to my home in the zoo.”

Honeybear didn’t know what a zoo was but she suddenly felt a lovely warm glowing feeling. Could this be the friend she’d always wanted?

“Why don’t you stay here with me in my Tree House for a little while and see if you prefer it to your home in the zoo – whatever that is?” she said.

The young gorilla considered this carefully, his long arms hanging down by his sides. After some time, he said: “All right, that sounds rather fun,” which made Honeybear laugh as he looked so mournful when he said it.

“If you’re going to be my friend,” said Honeybear. “You must tell me your name.”

The gorilla looked even sadder and said that he’d never been given a proper name.

“All right,” said Honeybear. “Then I shall call you Gerumph.”

At this, the gorilla thumped his chest with delight several times, making his gerumphing sound. Honeybear was pleased to have made him so happy and they both climbed up into the Tree House together.



Gerumph

In no time at all, Honeybear and her new friend were cosily settled in. Gerumph, who had lived most of his life in a zoo, loved the freedom of the forest and would swing from tree to tree while Honeybear looked on, wondering where he got his energy from.

But, as the days went by, Honeybear began to realise that no one had come to visit her. No one at all! In fact, she'd been expecting to see

Potting the pine marten who had promised to bring over some delicious berries that grew in a secret place near where he lived. They tasted wonderful dipped in honey and were one of her favourites.

Just thinking about them made Honeybear's tummy rumble. She began to feel very hungry and then rather cross. After thinking a little longer, she decided to go and see Potting and find out what was going on. Leaving the Tree House, she made her way along the track in the direction of Potting's home.

Approaching where he lived, she could see the pine marten sitting outside in the sun.

"Hello, Potting," Honeybear called out. "Have you any berries for me?"

Potting looked up.

"Oh, hello, Honeybear," he said. "Can't stop and talk, I'm afraid. Lots to do."

"But my berries!" Honeybear said and then added. "It doesn't look like you have lots to do. You were just sitting in the sun." She rubbed her round tummy. "You know how much I like those berries."

"I know," said Potting. "But the trouble is that nasty creature you have living with you. He chases us and gerumphs at us. All the animals are frightened of him and I won't come with the berries while he's staying at your home."

“He doesn’t mean to frighten you,” Honeybear said. “You see he hasn’t lived in a forest before. Please come round tomorrow and bring as many of the animals as you can and I’ll make sure he behaves himself.”

Later that afternoon, when Gerumph returned to the Tree House, Honeybear explained sternly about the problem with the berries and told him he would have to stop chasing the animals.

“I only wanted to play with them,” Gerumph said, mournfully.



Pine Marten

The next day, when Potting arrived with some of the other animals, Honeybear introduced them all to Gerumph.

“I’m very sorry if I frightened you,” Gerumph said, and then, just to show how friendly he was, jumped up and down and thumped his chest.

“There, you see,” said Honeybear. “Gerumph just wants to be friends with you all. There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Gerumph gave them all a mournful look and gerumphed in agreement—but not too loudly, so he wouldn't scare them.

So, Honeybear was able to have her berries again and, despite being very hungry, even shared some with her new friend.

Winter came and the first snowfall. The trees were covered in white and the little lake was frozen over. Honeybear and Gerumph were warm and comfortable in their Tree House and Honeybear spent almost all her time doing nothing more than eating and sleeping. She'd collected plenty of food and had fed herself well during autumn, knowing how difficult it would be to find anything to eat during the winter months.

“Sleeping and snacking,” she said to Gerumph. “That's what winter is for. Sleeping and snacking until the snow melts and it's Spring again.”

Unlike Honeybear, Gerumph became impatient if he couldn't get lots of exercise, so he would go outside and swing through the trees to keep warm, in spite of the branches being slippery and cold. He also enjoyed trying to slide on the lake when it was covered in ice, although he fell over many times with loud thuds. The ducks and geese would quack and cackle each time he overbalanced and Gerumph would get quite cross and shoo them away. With a whirr of wings, they would scatter in all directions, only to return to watch his next attempt.

At last, after several falls, Gerumph found he could slide quite well. What a wonderful feeling it was to glide over the ice – he almost felt like a bird himself!

He got bolder and bolder and glided out far into the middle of the lake.

The birds gathered round admiringly when, suddenly, there was a horrible cracking sound and poor Gerumph found himself deep in icy cold water. He clutched frantically at the edge of the hole he had made but the ice kept breaking off in his hands.

“Help, help,” he shouted. “I can’t get out.”

The ducks and geese came flying over and tried hard to help, plucking at his fur with their beaks. But they were not strong enough to pull him out.



Duck

While all this was going on, Honeybear had just decided that she really **MUST** stop eating and go for a walk: Although only a short one.

As she climbed down from the Tree House, a strange noise came to her ears. All the ducks and geese on the lake seemed to be quacking, cackling and screeching at once - what on earth could be the matter? Honeybear hurried over there as quickly as she could.

What a sight met her eyes! Over on the lake, Gerumph was floundering about in the icy water with all kinds of ducks and geese quacking and screeching around him.

“Hold on,” Honeybear shouted. “I’m coming to help you.”

She tried to move across to Gerumph but fell flat on her tummy and started to slither over the ice. It felt very cold but she managed to slide along until she’d almost reached her friend.

“Stretch out your hand,” she called.

“I can’t,” Gerumph shouted back. “If I do, I’ll go under water.”

“No you won’t,” Honeybear said, encouragingly. “Come on.”

At that, Gerumph very gingerly let go his hold on the ice and stretched out a hand.

Oh! What a comfort it was to feel Honeybear grab hold of it. But, try as she might, Honeybear was not able to pull him out.

“Come on you ducks and geese,” she called. “Stop making all that noise and give me a hand.”

As they gathered round, she told them to get into the water with Gerumph and help keep him afloat so it would be easier to pull him out.

What a quacking, splashing, pulling, screeching and shoving there was, with Gerumph shouting, loudly: “Mind what you’re doing – or we’ll all go under in a minute!”

But at last, with a final heave and pull, Gerumph found himself out of the water, lying like a stranded fish on the ice.

It was a great relief for Honeybear to see her friend safe at last.

“Now we must hurry home as fast as possible, so you can get warm and dry,” she said.

Gerumph was shivering. His teeth were chattering so loudly that he could hardly thank the birds for all their help. Honeybear told him he could do that later and pushed him along quickly until the Tree House came into view. Soon, Gerumph was back home and giving himself a good rub down to dry his fur.

Honeybear began spooning up food as fast as she could. It had really been a very busy afternoon and she needed to keep her strength up. She also thought how awful it would have been if anything had happened to Gerumph. Spring was on the way and he hadn't realised that the ice on the lake was getting thinner.

Gerumph had begun to recover now. Stretching out his long arms, he thought about the forest and how much he liked living there. Then he found himself thinking of his old home at the zoo. He certainly preferred the forest and the freedom it gave him and, of course, his new friend Honeybear. But he did miss his old friends – the llamas, the giraffes and even the noisy parrots.

And as he was thinking this, he suddenly had an idea — What fun it would be to introduce all his old friends to Honeybear.

Gerumph made the gerumphing sound that had led to him being given his name.

“Yes,” he said, with a smile. “What a wonderful adventure that would be!”

“What do you say?” asked Gerumph, the following day, looking over at Honeybear. “Don’t you think it would be exciting?”

The two were sitting in the Tree House having breakfast.

“Well. . . yes,” Honeybear answered, rather uncertainly. “Yes, I suppose so.”

“You don’t sound very keen.” Gerumph gave a rather mournful look. “If we go on a trip to the zoo, you can meet all my friends there.”

“I know,” said Honeybear, putting a handful of berries into her mouth. “It’s just that I’ve never left the forest before and I don’t know what to expect.”

“It’ll be fun, I promise you,” said Gerumph. “Let’s start making plans today.”

And with that, he climbed down from the Tree House and hurried off.

A little later that morning, Honeybear stretched and climbed down from the Tree House, only to find Gerumph sitting rather glumly on a log.

“What’s the matter?” Honeybear said. “Why the long face?”

The young gorilla looked up and made his gerumphing sound. “We have a problem,” he said. “I’ve been speaking to some of the animals but no one knows the way to the zoo.”

“Can’t you remember anything about your journey here?”

“No—not a thing. I just remember leaving the zoo and then being lost.”

“Who have you asked?” said Honeybear.

“Well...” Gerumph scratched his head. “I spoke to the squirrels next door, Arly the badger, some of the deer, Potting the pine marten and even Castor the beaver.”

“And none of them could help?”

Gerumph shook his head, giving a heavy sigh.

“None of them had any idea where the zoo might be.” He raised his sad brown eyes. “If we can’t find out how to get there, we can’t even begin our journey. For all we know, we could be going in the wrong direction from the start.”

Honeybear thought for a while. “I don’t know what to suggest,” she said at last. “But, if I’m going to think about this properly, I’d better

have a snack.” And leaving Gerumph sitting on the log, she went up into the Tree House and returned a few minutes later with a bag full of nuts.

She offered some to Gerumph and he put out his large hairy hand.

“The trouble is,” said Honeybear, taking nuts for herself and putting them into her mouth. “Most of the animals are like me—they won’t know the way to the zoo because they’ve never left the forest. So what we need to think about is who we know who HAS left the forest.” She placed several more nuts in her mouth and chewed thoughtfully. “That’s what we need to be thinking.”

“But that’s brilliant!” Gerumph said, smacking his head and jumping up quickly from the log. “I know the answer—I know who we should ask.” He waved his arms in the air making flapping motions. “The birds—that’s who. They’re the ones who can go long distances. We need to ask the birds.”

Startled by her friend’s sudden movements, Honeybear had let a few nuts fall to the ground.

“What an excellent idea,” she said, bending down and carefully picking up the dropped nuts. “And I think I know just who we should speak to.”

“Who?” said Gerumph, eyes wide with excitement.

“Let’s ask Cato the owl,” Honeybear replied. “If anyone knows, he will.”

Gerumph had wanted to go and find Cato straightaway, but Honeybear told him there was something she had to do first.

“What’s that?” asked Gerumph.

“Well, two things really,” said Honeybear. “I was thinking of having a short snooze and then I was going to visit the old tree—the one that was hit by lightning.”

“Why on earth would you want to do that?” said Gerumph.

“The other day I found some excellent shoots growing there,” Honeybear said. “They were really sweet and juicy and I thought I’d go back and collect some.”

“And this is more important than finding out how we get to the zoo?” Gerumph gave Honeybear one of his most mournful looks.

“It’s just that they were so good,” Honeybear said. “A lot of the animals have been eating them and I’m sure they’ll be gone soon.”

“Do all bears think about food all the time, or is it just you?” Gerumph said, and was about to add something else, but contented himself with a shake of the head and a series of discontented gerumphs.

Honeybear could see the gorilla was unhappy and, not wanting to hurt his feelings, tried to come up with a compromise.

“How about—if I skip the snooze and you come with me to help collect the shoots. Then we can go on from there to find Cato.”

Gerumph took a moment to think about this. “Well, all right,” he said at last. “But only if we can go now.”

The two friends followed a narrow trail through the forest until they came to the tree which had been struck by lightning. It lay bent over with the outside bark blackened and split, but all around green shoots were sprouting up from the ground.

“See what I mean,” said Honeybear, pointing at the shoots. “Don’t they look delicious!”

Gerumph had to agree they did. He’d brought along a sack and immediately started collecting the shoots and placing them in it. Honeybear did the same, although it seemed to Gerumph that she ate almost as many as she put in the sack.

When it was full, Gerumph tied a knot in the top and slung it over his shoulder.

“Come along. Let’s go and find Cato,” he said, and set off, hurrying ahead through the trees.

“Hold on,” Honeybear cried out. “Don’t go so fast!”

“Come on, slowcoach,” Gerumph called back. “The sooner we can speak to him, the sooner we’ll be able to find out whether he knows the way.”



Owl

Cato the owl lived in a tall tree with a thick twisting trunk.

“You call him,” Gerumph said to Honeybear, as they stood at the base of the tree, peering up into the branches. “He knows you better than me.”

So Honeybear called out to the owl: “Are you there, Cato? Please come down and see us, we have something very important to ask you.”

They waited for what seemed a long time and just as they were thinking no one could be at home, the owl arrived on a nearby branch in a flutter of wings.

“Hello Cato,” Honeybear said. “Thank you for coming down.” She pointed at the young gorilla. “You remember Gerumph, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes,” said Cato, blinking and turning his head slowly side to side. “He’s not someone I’m likely to forget.”

“The thing is,” Honeybear continued. “We want to take a trip to the zoo, so Gerumph can see his friends and I can meet them too - but we don’t know the way. Can you tell us how to get there, please?”

Both she and Gerumph looked expectantly at the owl, waiting for him to reply.

“Yes, I can tell you the way,” Cato said, looking from one to the other. “But the journey can be quite dangerous and you’ll need to look out for cars and roads.”

“What sort of animals are cars and roads?” Honeybear asked.

“Just as I thought,” the owl said, with a sigh, and went on to explain: “Cars and roads are not the names of animals. Roads are like tracks in the forest but much wider. And cars are what people use to get about. They can go very fast along the roads and you don’t want to be hit by one. And, speaking of people, you’ll need to be careful that none of

them see you on the way.” He blinked twice. “Have you two thought about that? —Hmm?”

“Oh dear,” Honeybear said, shaking her head. “I hadn’t thought about that at all.”

“Don’t worry,” said Gerumph. “I managed to get here in one piece and I’m sure we’ll be all right.”

So Cato told the two friends how to get to the zoo, drawing a map on the forest floor with his claws, so they could see more clearly.

“And you’re sure this is accurate?” Gerumph said.

Cato looked down his beak at the young gorilla. “I hope you’re not doubting my word? —Hmmm? —Owls are not called wise for nothing, you know.”

“Thank you, Cato,” said Honeybear, stepping in quickly, before Gerumph could say anything further. “I knew you’d be able to help us.”

“Have a safe journey,” the owl replied and, with a swoosh of his wings, flew back up into the tree.

Honeybear and Gerumph set off for the zoo the next morning. It was a good day to travel, with a bright sun in the sky and birds singing in the trees.

They hadn't gone very far when Gerumph spotted a movement in the bracken.

"Who's there?" he wondered, pointing a finger so Honeybear could see where he meant.

A moment later his question was answered when Snoddy appeared, uncoiling his long body onto the forest path.

"Hello, Snoddy," Honeybear greeted the snake. "Isn't it a lovely day!"

"Is it?" Snoddy answered in his usual grumpy fashion. "I hadn't noticed."

"Of course it is," Honeybear continued. "And we're off on a journey to the zoo so Gerumph can introduce me to his friends there."

"Maybe I'll get some peace then," Snoddy said. "All that running about the forest you've been doing gathering flowers."

"We were making a garden at the bottom of our tree house and collecting flowers to plant there," Gerumph pointed out. "And I'm very sorry for what happened. I've already told you that."

What had happened was that Gerumph had seen a beautiful purple flower and had gone to carefully dig it up for the new garden. But as he began, Snoddy suddenly appeared from underneath the flower where he'd been having his afternoon nap. Gerumph had been so startled that he'd jumped in the air and fallen over backwards with a thump.

"And I must say," Honeybear added. "The garden looks really beautiful now that it's finished."

“Bah!” Snoddy muttered. “Stuff and nonsense all this talk about gardens. What use are they?”

And saying this, he slithered off.



Snake

Setting off again, the pair followed Cato's directions, traveling towards the northern part of the forest with its little lake. Gerumph remembered it well. It was here that he'd met Mother Duck and her ducklings.

Not knowing how to swim, the gorilla told Honeybear how much he wanted to float on the lake. And soon after saying this, he'd made the first of several visits to Mother Duck who had been happy to try and teach him. After a while, he actually got as far as putting his feet in the water—But he hasn't learnt to swim yet!

The ducklings were growing up now and they greeted the pair with a chorus of quacks as they passed by, wishing them good luck on their journey.

Continuing onward, they soon came upon a little circle of trees with very dark bark. Cato had mentioned these and it showed they were still going in the right direction.

"And over there is the fork in the trail," Gerumph said, remembering the map.

"Yes," Honeybear agreed. "This is where we must take the left hand way."

A short while later, Gerumph suddenly stopped. "Look," he said, pointing up ahead. "We're coming to the place where the forest ends."

Honeybear felt excited, but also a little nervous because she'd never left the forest before. Peering beyond the last tree she could see a trail leading away into rocky hills.

“I remember this now,” Gerumph said. “This is the way I came. It’s all coming back to me.”

They could see a path rising gradually into the hills, with a river flowing between large boulders. The water sparkled in the sunlight as it hurried over smooth rocks.

Honeybear thought how strange it was to have left the forest and kept looking up at the sky, which was almost all blue except for one small cloud.

That cloud has no friends, she thought. I wonder if it’s lonely up there all on its own? Turning to Gerumph, she said, “Don’t forget how Cato told us we must keep an eye out for people.”

“Yes, I know, I hadn’t forgotten.” Gerumph raised a hand and pointed ahead. “You see that grey line in the distance?” Honeybear looked where he was pointing and nodded. “That’s a road,” Gerumph continued. “And the red thing moving along it is a car.”

After a little while, the path they followed came down out of the rocky hills. Up ahead was a large sandy area with bushes and small trees leading to the road, which was much nearer now.

Soon they were hiding behind a bush right by the roadside. Two cars went by, one much bigger than the other. The big one was a silver colour and the smaller one blue.

“We must look very carefully both ways before we cross,” Gerumph told Honeybear.

His friend nodded and, when there were no cars in sight, they hurried across and stood in the shelter of a large bush bursting with black berries. Honeybear tried one and found it nice and sweet. “Mmm,” she said, picking some more and popping them into her mouth. “These are really good.”

“If Cato’s directions are correct, the zoo is not too far away,” said Gerumph.

They kept going, and successfully managed to cross another road before being forced to hide in a tree while a group of people passed by, only just managing to climb up in time.

“That was close!” said Gerumph. “I thought for a moment they’d seen us.” He climbed a little higher and looked out from the top of the tree. “Oh, I say!” he called out. “It’s there—the zoo. I can see the giraffes.”

“Let me look,” said Honeybear, climbing up next to him. She peered out through the leaves. “Don’t they look strange with their long necks. I’ve never seen animals like this before!”

“What we need to do now,” said Gerumph, “is think of a plan.”

“What kind of a plan?”

“Well, we have to work out the best way for us to get into the zoo and meet the animals - without us being seen.”

Honeybear and Gerumph decided to stay in the tree while they tried to come up with a plan. But the harder they thought, the more difficult it seemed to become.

“I can’t think of anything,” Honeybear said after several minutes had passed.

“Nor can I,” Gerumph agreed, shaking his head.

“Didn’t you think about this before we set off?” Honeybear asked, feeling a bit cross.

“Not really,” said Gerumph. “I was so excited about making the journey that I didn’t get further than that.” He gerumphed rather apologetically. “I’m sorry, I know I should have.”

“What are we going to do?” said Honeybear. “We’ve come all this way!”

“All right,” said Gerumph. “Don’t give up. We just have to think a little harder.” He scratched his head with his large hairy hand and, after a few moments, began to get an idea. “Well, first of all, I think we should visit the zoo at night. I don’t think it’s going to be possible for us to get into the zoo during the day without being spotted.”

He looked across at Honeybear, who was nodding in agreement.

“But the thing is—if we do this, it would be better to contact the animals in some way first so they know to expect us. If we creep up on them after dark, they will probably get frightened and make a lot of

noise and this will bring the keepers out.” He shook his head. “But I can’t think of a way to let them know.”

“Perhaps I can help?” said a voice.

Both Honeybear and Gerumph looked around but were unable to see who had just spoken.

“Over here,” the voice came again. “I’m on the branch just above you”

Looking up, they saw a rather fine looking bird with bright blue in its feathers.

“Who are you?” asked Honeybear.

“And how do you think you can help us?” added Gerumph.

“Well,” said the bird. “To answer your questions, my name is Jip and I think I have an idea which may solve your problem.” The bird cocked its head, adding, “By the way, I didn’t mean to listen in to your conversation but I couldn’t help overhearing what you were saying.”

“What sort of bird are you?” asked Honeybear.

“I’m a jay,” said Jip. “Can’t you see the blue in my feathers?”

“Yes, I can,” Honeybear replied. “It’s just that I’ve never met a jay before.”

“So, what’s this idea?” Gerumph asked, anxious to hear what the bird had to say.

“It’s simple,” said Jip. “If you give me a message, I can fly into the zoo and give it to whoever you want.”

Honeybear clapped her paws in delight.

“That’s a brilliant idea.” She looked at Gerumph. “Don’t you agree?”

“Yes, I do,” Gerumph said, without hesitation. “It’s just what we need.”

“What do you want me to say?” asked the jay.

Gerumph thought for a few moments, leaning back against the branch.

“Say that we’ll be there tonight,” he said, at last. “But not until after it’s been dark for some time.”

“Who would you like me to give the message to?” said Jip.

“Best to tell the giraffes and they can pass it along,” said Gerumph. “They’re more sensible than some of the other animals.” He lifted a large hairy hand. “Whatever you do don’t tell the parrots. They can’t help repeating everything they hear and the keepers at the zoo will soon learn what’s happening.”

“Got it,” said the jay. “Shall I go now?”

“Yes please,” said Honeybear and Gerumph together.

“You wait here,” said Jip. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

With a flash of blue, the jay spread its wings and flew away.



Jay

The pair sat quietly in the tree while another group of people passed below.

When they were gone, Honeybear asked, “Are you happy living in the forest?”

Giving a slightly puzzled look, Gerumph replied, “Of course I am. Isn’t it obvious?”

“Well yes, I suppose so,” Honeybear continued. “It’s just that you seem so keen to see your friends at the zoo.”

“That’s because I am keen,” Gerumph said. “But it doesn’t mean that I want to live there.” He shifted his weight on the branch. “And my forest friends are just as important—Potting and Arly, Harold, Geraldine and all the others. You, of course,” he added, with a twinkle in his eye.

“I see,” said Honeybear, sounding relieved.

“And think of all the things that have happened in the short time since I arrived there,” Gerumph went on. “Like the journey we made to the waterfall. Although it took some doing persuading you to go.”

“Well, it wasn’t exactly nearby,” Honeybear said. “And you know I’m not fond of long walks.”

“But you must admit it was worth it. And . . .” Gerumph made fluttering motions with his fingers. “Do you remember that butterfly with the bright red marks landing on your arm while we were walking there.”

“Yes,” said Honeybear. “I love butterflies. They have such beautiful colours.”

“An excellent day out,” Gerumph said. “And best of all was how you growled at those two men who suddenly appeared to frighten them off and stop them seeing me, so they couldn’t tell the zoo they’d found their missing gorilla.” Gerumph scratched his head with his hand, thinking

for a moment. “And other things, like those strange birds who appeared in the tree next door with the long sharp beaks——what are they called?”

“Hérons,” said Honeybear, smiling. “It’s funny how we’ve never been able to get them to speak to us, however hard we try.”

“That’s right,” Gerumph said. “And the strange way they have of staring all the time.”

“And then there was you falling through the ice on the frozen lake,” Honeybear said, laughing. “And the ducks and geese helping me to rescue you.”

“Yes,” Gerumph said. “But it wasn’t funny. I don’t think I’ve ever been so cold.”

“And you finding the beautiful purple flower,” Honeybear went on.

“And annoying Snoddy, even though I didn’t mean to,” Gerumph said with a smile.

“And making the lovely garden,” Honeybear continued, smiling at the thought. “And planting the beautiful purple flower there.”

“And how we had to stop the squirrels digging it up because they’d buried their winter store of nuts just where we’d planted it.”

“And Potting not wanting to bring me his Special Berries because you’d been chasing the animals and gerumphing at them.”

“He should have known I was only playing,” Gerumph said. “I didn’t mean any harm.”

“I know that,” said Honeybear. “But it took the other animals a little while to find out what you were like. You have to remember, none of us had ever seen a gorilla before.”

For a few moments they both sat in silence.

“You know,” Honeybear told her friend. “It’s good to talk about the things we’ve done like this. It brings it all back. It sort of makes it real again.”

“That’s called a memory,” Gerumph said. “And the more things we do, the more memories we will have.”

“Yes, I can see that,” said Honeybear.

“And so,” Gerumph said. “When you think of all the good times we’ve had in the forest, there’s no way I would want to go back to living at the zoo. To start with, there’s not a lot going on. All I did during the day there was sit in my enclosure, eat, talk to the nearby animals, try to amuse myself making faces at the zoo visitors passing by, move about a bit or sometimes use the branches they’d put there for me to climb on.” He raised his sad brown eyes. “But that’s about it. Pretty boring really!”

“Yes,” said Honeybear. “I see what you mean.”

“But what’s most important of all,” Gerumph said, suddenly rather serious. “Is that I’ve found my freedom in the forest and that’s a really big thing and something I didn’t have at the zoo.”

The morning became the afternoon. Honeybear and Gerumph were still sitting in the tree waiting.

“How long do you think Jip will be?” Honeybear wondered, looking out through the branches in the direction of the zoo.

“I don’t know,” said Gerumph. “As long as it takes, I suppose.”

“How long’s that?” Honeybear continued. “We’ve been waiting for ages.”

Gerumph was just about to answer when the jay alighted on a nearby branch.

“It’s all set,” Jip told them. “I spoke to Osmond the giraffe. They’ll be keeping an eye out for you.”

As daylight faded, the two animals watched the moon rise into the darkness - a slice of light in the sky shining with a silvery beam.

“Isn’t the moon pretty,” Honeybear said. “I know we see it in the forest but here, without the trees all around, it just seems so much bigger.”

“And brighter,” Gerumph said, nodding his head. “It looks much brighter.”

“When shall we start out for the zoo?” Honeybear asked.

“I think we should give it a little while longer,” Gerumph said. “Once the zoo closes, it becomes very quiet and the longer we leave it the quieter it will be.”

“There’s one thing that worries me,” said Honeybear. “What if a keeper sees you and tries to take you back to the zoo?”

“Well, I’ll just have to make sure that doesn’t happen,” Gerumph said, turning away from the moon and looking at Honeybear with his sad brown eyes. “What you need to remember is that this is an adventure and all the best adventures have little bits of all sorts of things in them.”

“Like what?” asked Honeybear.

“Like being daring and doing unexpected things,” Gerumph said. “And feeling excitement and danger and seeing new places and making new friends and doing new things.”

“I see,” said Honeybear with a long sigh. “The trouble is that I don’t think I feel very adventurous.”

“Don’t worry,” Gerumph said. “Once we get going, I’m sure you’ll find out that you do.”

After it had been dark for some time, Gerumph raised a hand. “I think we can go now,” he said, looking around to make sure there was no one about.

“All right,” said Honeybear. “You lead the way.”

Keeping out of the moonlight as much as possible, they made their way quietly towards the zoo. It wasn't long before the main gates came into view, with a wall running away on either side.

"The gates are closed," said Honeybear.

"I know," said Gerumph. "That's because the zoo is shut for the night." He pointed ahead. "We can climb up that tree and drop down inside."

This took them no time at all, and soon they were standing on a path inside the zoo.

Honeybear looked all around but the moon had gone behind a cloud and she could see almost nothing in the darkness.

"We go this way," Gerumph said, setting off along the path.

After a few minutes, the moon came out again and Honeybear could see they were approaching a large enclosure, in the middle of which stood a tall building.

"That's where the giraffes live," Gerumph said, when Honeybear asked what it was. He pointed to a corner of the enclosure. "We can climb in over there."

Soon, they were inside and made their way towards the tall building. As they were approaching, a head on the end of a very very long neck poked out.

Now that she was up close, Honeybear couldn't get over how tall the giraffe was.

“This is Osmond,” Gerumph said, introducing him to Honeybear.
“Osmond, this is my friend Honeybear.”



Giraffe

“Pleased to meet you,” said the giraffe.

“Yes,” said Honeybear. “Me too.”

Then another head appeared next to Osmond.

“And this is Norma,” Gerumph said.

When the introductions were over, Gerumph told the giraffes all about what he’d been doing since leaving the zoo, with Honeybear chipping in from time to time. The giraffes were very interested and asked lots of questions about the forest and the animals that lived there.

“Who else have you told about us coming here tonight?” Gerumph asked Osmond, when the giraffes had finally run out of questions.

“I told the llamas,” Osmond said. “They know to expect you.”

“Then I think we’d better get going,” said Gerumph. “I want to try and see as many of the animals as I can before the night is over.”



LLama

The llamas were in the next enclosure to the giraffes.

After saying their goodbyes to Osmond and Norma, the two friends made their way towards the llama enclosure, and had no trouble climbing in.

The llamas had been waiting for their arrival and they all came out together.

“This is Betty, Bobby, Billy and Vanessa,” Gerumph said, as the four llamas gathered around in a circle. “Llamas! This is my good friend Honeybear.”

“Pleased to meet you all,” said Honeybear, nodding at each of the llamas in turn.

As with the giraffes, Gerumph told the llamas all about what it was like living in the forest. When he’d finished, he said: “So, tell me—what happened when the keepers discovered I was missing from the zoo?”

“Well,” said Vanessa. “To put it mildly, there was a big commotion.”

“A really big commotion,” Betty put in.

“What’s a commotion?” Honeybear asked.

“A lot of people running about and looking all over the place,” Vanessa explained.

“Looking everywhere,” Betty added.

“And then what happened?” said Gerumph.

“A whole lot of new people arrived.” Vanessa continued. “I don’t know who they were but they were all dressed the same. And they helped the keepers look and then they went and looked for you outside the zoo.”

“That’s right,” said Betty. “They helped and then they went and looked outside.”

“And that’s about it,” said Vanessa. “They couldn’t find you and then, I suppose, they just gave up.”

“And what about my keeper Jim?” Gerumph asked. “Who does he look after now?”

“I don’t know,” said Vanessa. “We haven’t seen him since the day you left. I think they blamed him for you leaving.”

“That’s right,” Betty put in. “I heard one of them say it was all Jim’s fault.”

For a moment, Gerumph felt sad as he realised that his keeper Jim must have lost his job because of what he’d done. Jim had fed him and looked after him and Gerumph couldn’t help feeling a little guilty for what had happened.

But then again, he thought, if I hadn’t left the zoo, I’d never have met Honeybear, lived in the Tree House in the forest, met lots of new friends and had the freedom to swing through the trees and go where I wanted.

The zebras, llamas and giraffes had been Gerumph’s closest neighbours, the animals he knew best in the zoo. As the llamas had already passed on the news about Gerumph’s arrival to the zebras, this was where they went next.



Zebra

Gerumph had expected to be met by Hiram, the oldest of the zebras, but instead it was Mia, his daughter, who came to greet them with a soft whinny of delight. Behind her, Gerumph could see Fleet and Miskin, her two children, and noticed how much the young zebras had grown since he'd been away.

Gerumph introduced Honeybear, who was amazed by the black and white stripes on the zebra's coats, standing out clearly in the moonlight.

"I never thought we'd see you again," Mia said. "So much time has gone by since you left."

Gerumph was looking around as she spoke. "Where's Hiram?" he asked, not finding any sign of the old zebra.

"I'm afraid he died," said Mia.

"Oh, I'm very sorry."

"He was old," said Mia. "And it's what happens. He was very wise and he taught me a lot about being a zebra. I will never forget him."

"Nor will I," Gerumph said.

After a moment of silence, Mia asked Gerumph to tell them about his adventures.

"Well," said Gerumph. "The first thing I must tell you is . . ."

But he got no further because a bright beam of light suddenly started flashing around the enclosure.

"It's one of the keepers with a torch," said Mia. "Quick—you must both go before they see you."

"This way," Gerumph said, grabbing Honeybear's arm.

As quickly as they could, the two friends hurried over to the place where they could climb out.

Gerumph was first over but as Honeybear went to follow, the torch beam flickered across her large shape, picking her out.

“Hey,” the keeper called out in a loud voice. “What’s happening here?”

“Hurry,” said Gerumph, trying to help Honeybear up.

But it took Honeybear several seconds longer to climb over and, by this time, the keeper was shouting and running towards them.

“It’s a bear,” they heard him shout into his radio. “A bear – can you believe it? No, I’m not joking. In with the zebras. Yes—that’s what I’m saying. The bear was in with the zebras.”

At last, Honeybear was over the wall and the two were running down the path, followed by the beam from the torch, flashing from side to side across their backs.

“And there’s another animal as well,” the keeper barked into the radio. “I think it’s . . . Yes, I’m sure it is—a gorilla. Like the one that escaped.”

“We’ve got to go faster,” Gerumph said over his shoulder to Honeybear, who was finding it hard to keep up. “If we’re caught, we’ve had it!”

Honeybear tried to put on a spurt and managed to come alongside Gerumph. She wished she hadn’t eaten quite so many shoots and berries as her tummy still felt rather full. “What can we do?” she asked between puffs.

“Keep going and make for that tree over there,” said Gerumph. “The one beside the elephant house.”

They could hear the keeper running hard behind them. “Call everyone out,” they heard him shout into his radio. “We can’t let them get away!”



Elephant

All the noise had brought out Konga, the biggest of the elephants, and he trumpeted loudly as they hurried by. At last, they arrived at the tree

and Gerumph leapt into the branches, before reaching down and extending a hand to help Honeybear up.

The tree was growing right up against the wall of the zoo and they were soon over.

Once outside, Honeybear stopped to catch her breath.

“No—no—no,” Gerumph said, pulling at his friend’s arm. “No resting ‘till we’re safe.”

The pair set off again, heading away from the zoo as fast as they could possibly go.

“Do you think we’re safe now?” Honeybear asked, after they’d been going for a little while.

“I hope so,” said Gerumph. He looked back along the way they’d come but it was difficult to be sure.

A short time ago, they had crossed the second of the two roads. Now they were making their way across the sandy area with its bushes and small trees.

Suddenly, Gerumph stopped. “Quickly! Over here,” he said, trying to tuck himself behind a tree. The area was rather open, with few places for them to hide. “There’s a car coming and we mustn’t let them see us.”

At this time of night, it was unusual for there to be any cars on the road at all, as it only led to the zoo and the zoo was shut.

Honeybear hurried to follow but, before she'd taken two steps towards the tree, there was a shout and she knew she'd been seen in the bright moonlight.

Soon, the two friends were looking back with worried faces as a pair of headlights swung towards them, dipping up and down on the uneven ground.

"It looks like a big car," Gerumph said, as they hurried on.

"I thought cars went on roads," said Honeybear, trying her best to keep up with Gerumph.

"Well, they usually do. But there are some that can go off the road as well."

"What do we do?" asked Honeybear, hoping Gerumph would have some kind of answer.

"This way," said the gorilla. "If we can reach the hills before they catch us we'll have a chance of getting away. A car can't follow us up there." He looked across at Honeybear. "Come on, one last big effort—we need to go as fast as we can."

And they did, concentrating on running and only looking up from time to time to see how much further there was to go.

But the noise of the car seemed to be getting closer and Honeybear cast an anxious glance over her shoulder. The hills were much nearer

now but there was still some way to go, and Honeybear could see that the car would catch them if they kept to the open ground. Just as she was thinking this, the headlights picked out Gerumph running beside her, causing the young gorilla to make his loud gerumphing sound.

Looking anxiously from side to side, Honeybear could see that away to her right were a lot of thick bushes stretching into the distance.

“Forget the hills,” she called to Gerumph. “Let’s go this way.” She waved her paw in the direction they should go. “The bushes will make it impossible for the car to follow.”

“All right,” said Gerumph, already turning as he spoke.

Soon, they were in among the bushes and it wasn’t long before they heard the car come to a stop.

The two kept going, pushing their way through the leaves from bush to bush and, after a while, heard the car start up again.

“Oh, no,” said Honeybear.

But, when she looked behind her, the car could be seen driving slowly back the way it had come.

“Well done, Honeybear,” said Gerumph. “It looks like they’ve given up.” He gave a gerumph of delight. “You’ve saved the day. All I could think about was to keep running - and that would have got us caught.”

They stopped on a piece of high ground and watched until the car was out of sight. After it had gone, they could still hear the noise it made for a little while longer but then, even that sound faded away.

For several moments, the two friends stood still, listening to the silence of the night. Honeybear could see a number of stars in the sky and wondered to herself whether they were friends with the moon.

“Best be getting on,” said Gerumph. “If we keep going, it looks like we can take the long way round to the hills.”

Honeybear had never been more pleased to see the familiar shape of the Tree House. And didn't think she'd ever felt quite so tired – so much so, she wasn't even interested in eating!

“It's good to be home,” she said to Gerumph as they climbed up.

“Yes,” he said. “But what an adventure we had!”

“We certainly did,” Honeybear agreed. “And now I think I've had enough of adventures for a while.”

Gerumph made a small gerumphing sound with a mournful look, to show that he didn't necessarily go along with this.

“You know what I like best about adventures,” he said, after a while. “It's that when they're over you can sit back and think about all the things that happened.”

“Well, I suppose that's true,” said Honeybear, deciding that, after all, she could probably manage eating a small bag of nuts.

“And when you remember all the things that happened on an adventure,” Gerumph continued. “You can think about how brave you were and how frightened you were and all the different choices you had to make along the way.”

“Mmm,” was all Honeybear could manage to say, through a mouth full of nuts.

“And, of course,” Gerumph went on. “You are then able to tell everyone you know about all the things that happened.”

“Yes,” said Honeybear, swallowing the last of the nuts. “But I still think I’ve had enough of adventures for the time being.”

“We’ll see,” said Gerumph, looking across at his friend with a mischievous glint in his eye. “I’m sure it won’t be long before I can think up something exciting for us to do.”

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