

EXTRACT

THE INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER WHERE WE MEET RASA, HER MOMMY, TOBIASS,
AND ZORRO

Rasa was already a big girl. Soon she'd be five years old. She knew how to read and how to write in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.

Rasa's mommy was named Laima. She was an artist and worked a lot. This girl knew – when mommy is working, then it's best NOT TO BOTHER her, but it didn't always work out that way.

Other residents of the house included Tobiass the Teddy Bear. A short while back he was joined by Zorro the Puppy. One morning he just SHOWED UP. Zorro was kindhearted, he never bit or barked at anybody. Rasa sometimes thought that Zorro might be a little SIMPLEMINDED. He could chase his own tail for hours on end, look out the window, bark at little cloud sheep, but when Rasa would flash a reflection on the wall with her little mirror, he'd rush to chase them!

Mommy laughed – if there ever were any burglars, Zorro would fix them some tea.

All of them lived on the fourth floor of a big house. Behind the window there was a balcony on which there were nasturtiums growing in pots, but downstairs – a street lined on both sides with chestnut trees. There was a park at the end of the street, that's where rabbits would bound about, but once when Rasa and mommy were taking Zorro out for a walk in the evening they saw two weasels running by.

The ZOO was at the park's far end.

In the spring, the chestnut trees would bloom with very beautiful pale green clusters of flowers. Rasa knew that after the flowers fell off, green spheres appeared that were as prickly as hedgehogs, but in the fall when they'd break open, brown chestnuts would tumble out of them. It was so much fun to toss them around! And also, it was possible to make chestnuts and acorns into little play cows, horses, and sheep. Matches were good for legs. Summer had only just BEGUN, but Rasa still had last autumn's chestnut HERD on her shelf.

Real cows, horses, and sheep lived out in the countryside. That's also where Rasa's grandmother lived. As soon as mommy had finished up her BIG project for the publishing house, they'd go to the country to visit grandma. But, Rasa twisted her face, both of her cousins would also definitely be there. They were TERRIBLE, and their names were – SIMPLY TERRIBLE! The oldest one was called Lutēcija. She was eight and was going to school and every once in a while would suddenly declare – BUT FOR THOSE OF US AT SCHOOL! The other cousin was six, but she'd lie and say that she was already seven. She also had a HORRIBLE name – Konkordija!

Konkordija was in kindergarten and just like her sister would show off: BUT FOR THOSE OF US IN THE OLDER GROUP.

Neither of them was good, they'd CALL EACH OTHER NAMES, and also – Rasa smirked – they played with dolls, with Barbies! Their Barbies were STUPID and CONCEITED, they whispered to each other behind your back, they gossiped and prattled on about nothing but outfits, all sorts of glitter and rattles! They were STUPID, STUPID, STUPID!!!

Rasa became lost in her thoughts and stuck her thumb in her mouth, then caught herself, no, thank God, nobody saw that! The girl smiled. This summer she'll show these SCOUNDRELS

and BRAGGARTS! Rasa had Zorro and Tobiass and she'll play with her cousins only if she actually wants to. She won't let them squeeze Tobiass or play with Zorro!

CHAPTER 1, WHERE WE LEARN HOW RASA, TOBIASS, AND ZORRO SPENT TIME AND WHY RASA THOUGHT ABOUT AN AFRICAN LION IN THE EVENING

Zorro was the first to wake up in the morning. He listened to hear if anyone else was already up. If nobody was up, then he'd loudly scrape at the floor with his claws – scratch! scratch! – he'd run into the room and stick his nose close to Tobiass – WAKE UP, SLEEPYHEAD! After that he'd jump into bed next to Rasa, grab the corner of the blanket with his teeth and start to wrestle with it. Usually Rasa pretended to still be sleeping, but seeing how Zorro was fighting with the blanket, she couldn't keep from laughing.

Plates were already clanging in the kitchen. Mommy was making breakfast.

While Rasa brushed her teeth and washed up, Tobiass and Zorro were playing hide-and-seek in the bathroom. Tobiass always won, because Zorro had gotten so big that he couldn't hide behind the washing machine or the laundry basket anymore. He'd be found quickly.

One time both of them – Tobiass and Zorro – had secretly snuck into the bathroom and also tried to brush their teeth. That ended with Tobiass smeared head to paw with toothpaste and Zorro still blowing white bubbles for a long time afterwards. No, toothpaste isn't tasty, that's something they both would unanimously claim later on!

Breakfast was already waiting for them in the kitchen. Three bowls of oatmeal with HONEY! Mommy, Rasa, and Tobiass had a DOUBLE DOSE OF HONEY, three cups of coffee, for Rasa and Tobiass “with MILK, boiled eggs and freshly baked pastries with CINNAMON and GINGER!” breathing in deeply, Zorro announced while licking his chops.

His bowls, filled with oatmeal and water, and also a big CHEWING BONE were placed on the ground, because sitting at the table, as Zorro himself admitted, isn't comfortable. He didn't, of course, refuse any of the pastries that Rasa and Tobiass would secretly feed him.

Then mommy went to her room to work, but Rasa, Tobiass, and Zorro could do whatever they wanted, though, of course, as mommy warned them, only within REASON!

And yet, that wasn't easy. To read books – that was even pretty interesting – it didn't get too boring, too quickly, because Tobiass and Zorro made Rasa read in a loud voice. The cartoons on TV, if they weren't about TEDDY BEARS, seemed boring to Tobiass. Zorro, once he found out that nobody lives in the TV box and that it also doesn't smell LIKE ANYTHING, decided not to try to be friends with it anymore.

Of course, what there was to do wasn't, unfortunately, always within REASON!

Football is a very anxious game. Rasa played on one team, but Tobiass and Zorro on the other. There was just no referee, so for that reason instead of hitting it into the goal, it often ended up SOMEWHERE ELSE. Often something fell and broke, other times the ball flew out of the open balcony doors.

Then mommy would come in, wave her arms, and both football teams would be led outside into the yard.

Rasa didn't play in the sandbox anymore; she was too BIG for that.

Tobiass liked to build sand forts and fortifications, but Zorro dug VERY DEEP holes, saying that he was looking for treasure.

Rasa was swinging on the swings, she studied the birds sitting in the tree branches, and helped bugs find their way home. No, it was never boring for her.

Mommy appeared on the balcony. LUNCHTIME! EVERYBODY, EVERYBODY!

Lunch was very delicious. After lunch Rasa helped mommy wash the dishes. Zorro was winding in between everyone's legs, because he always wanted to help, but Tobiass hid, so nobody would see him, and yawned.

After lunch Rasa had to take a MIDDAY nap. Arguing didn't help, because GROWING children definitely had to take a MIDDAY NAP, so they'd grow up faster. Rasa was a GROWING CHILD.

Tobiass fell asleep right away, Zorro arranged himself next to the couch on the rug, snored in his sleep and JIGGLED his paws. He definitely was hunting something in his sleep.

Rasa couldn't fall asleep for a long time, because she was thinking. She was thinking about what she'd be when she grew up. There were a lot of plans, they were of all sorts and often changed. She could become a teacher, no, better to be an artist, no, better to be a traveler who travels to all types of faraway lands FULL OF ADVENTURE where giraffes, antelopes, and rhinoceroses lived.

Rasa had seen many animals of all kinds at the ZOO, which her cousins – Lutēcija and Konkordija – called the WILD ANIMAL PARK. That was COMPLETELY OFF, because it wasn't just wild animals that lived there, but also birds, fish, bugs, and all kinds of reptiles.

Rasa went to the ZOO for the first time in her earliest childhood, she was still in her stroller. Back then, so mommy tells it, Rasa thought that the elephant wasn't an animal, but a VERY LARGE HOUSE and had asked where its DOOR was.

The ZOO also had monkeys, but Rasa didn't like to look at them, because people would always be crowding around them. Many of these people behaved VERY STUPIDLY. They bothered the monkeys and laughed loudly. Rasa thought that it would be good to put these same people into cages instead of the monkeys. That would be very fair.

At the ZOO, Rasa liked the lions most of all. There was a VERY BIG and KINDHEARTED LION named FELIS LEO. That's what a plaque by the cage stated.

Already falling asleep, Rasa thought how good it would be if she, Tobiass, and Zorro could become friends with Leo and ask him all about Africa. As she thought about that, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER 2, WHICH TELLS THE STORY ABOUT THE GREAT MEASURING AND SITTING ON THE BALCONY

Without noticing it, the day passed and evening came. After dinner the dishes were washed and the great measuring began. All three of them – Rasa, Tobiass, and Zorro – measured themselves by the door jamb. The results were recorded each evening with a marker. Of course, everyone wanted to have grown a bit TALLER during the day, so that's why a little bit of DECEPTION crept in from time to time.

Zorro was standing at the door jamb on his hind legs again, Tobiass had put on Rasa's winter boots – the ones with the VERY THICK SOLES, but Rasa herself was standing on the TIPS OF HER TOES.

Usually, Zorro had grown the most, Rasa would get taller very slowly. But Tobiass? Even though it seemed to Rasa that the teddy bear had stopped growing, she always declared that Tobiass had grown ONE HAIR'S BREADTH, but Tobiass was stubborn and insisted that he'd grown at least TWO HAIRS' BREADTHS.

And then mommy would join them. They'd sit on the balcony, drink peppermint tea, and nibble on homemade cookies (here it must be said – the cookies mommy baked herself!) and listened.

All sorts of sounds drifted over from the ZOO. The piercing cries of peacocks, the growls of leopards. "They're TIGERS!" squeaked Tobiass.

The LION roared louder than all the rest of them.

"That's definitely Leo!" declared Rasa and everyone agreed. Truly, only Leo knew how to roar like that.

Soon, not listening to Rasa's, Tobiass's, or Zorro's protests – "just five little minutes more!" – mommy sent them to get washed up and go to bed.

CHAPTER 3, WHERE EVERYTHING HAPPENED AS USUAL, BUT IN THE EVENING EVERYONE WAS OVERTAKEN BY DARK SUSPICIONS

For three days already it had been raining teeny-tiny, and VERY ANNOYING, little drops, nonstop, and that's the reason why the football game in the yard was canceled. They wandered across the apartment from one corner to the other, briefly arguing, then making up.

And that's how evening came. All three of them, teacups in hand and paw, scattered – as they say! – out onto the balcony.

During the summer the evenings are long and it gets dark slowly. Gradually, the moon appeared in the sky, after that – the stars. Sounds drifted over from the zoo. The leopards were growling or maybe, as Tobiass thought, the tigers were growling, then a peacock shrieked and others joined in. There was the sound of loud laughter. Maybe those monkeys are laughing about the humans? The only sound that couldn't be heard was Leo the lion's roar.

"It's the third night already..." announced Tobiass.

"The fourth!" claimed Zorro.

Rasa thought about it. The third? The fourth? As she counted she folded her fingers over and only one remained, the smallest one of all, so – FOUR!

"Leo hasn't been heard for four nights!" she said.

"Maybe he was KIDNAPPED?" Tobiass wondered anxiously.

"Kidnapped?" laughed Zorro. "Think about it. Who could kidnap him?" Zorro also added: "The zoo has a VERY HIGH FENCE and there's also a guard!"

"But what could have HAPPENED to him?" Rasa thought out loud.

"Maybe he GOT SICK?" Tobiass wondered.

"HE CAUGHT A COLD!" it was all clear to Zorro. Recently he, having eaten too much ice cream, had gotten sick and LOST HIS VOICE.

Rawrrr! or The Lion's Roar by Juris Zvirgzdiņš
Translated by Uldis Balodis

“How could we help Leo?” Rasa furrowed her brow.

“But how?” Zorro wanted to know, too.

Well, we could visit him and clear everything up,” Tobiass said confidently.

“Tomorrow! At the crack of dawn!” decided Rasa. Tobiass and Zorro agreed with her.

Having washed up, but NOT TOO MUCH, and brushed their teeth, but REALLY SLOPPILY, they all hurried to bed so that the morning would come quicker.