

‘Ucklepuckle Thinks Outside The Box’ by Zane Zusta
Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

Ucklepuckle Opens Her Eyes

A cold autumn wind was blowing along the dark streets of the city of Liepaja. Ucklepuckle was bewildered as she read the sign she had almost bumped into - ‘Beware of the wind!’

‘How I can beware of the wind when it is SO strong?’ Ucklepuckle asked herself, worried that she would be late for her meeting. ‘Such a strange city ... so windy,’ she tiptoed onwards, still wondering about the odd sign. But the wind didn’t let up and the little owl started to shake and shake in its strong gusts ...

‘Good morning, Ucklepuckle! You are such sleepy-head, stop dreaming, it’s time to get up!’ Chris snatched up his favourite toy from the comfort of his warm bed and ran to the bathroom to start his morning rituals – brushing his teeth and having a quick shower.

‘Brushing my teeth made me so sad while you were away – we always used to do it together!’ Toothbrush in mouth, Chris tried to keep the conversation going with his favourite night time toy who had recently spent some time on her own in Italy, on the beautiful Lake Como.

‘Not to worry, it was just a short business trip,’ Chris continued, now in extremely good spirits. ‘My toy is so incredibly clever that she even goes on business trips that I, a nine year old boy, am not invited along to!’ Chris chuckled.

Laughingly dabbing spot of toothpaste on Ucklepuckle’s little beak, the boy declared, ‘Party time for tooth decay monsters in Chris and Ucklepuckle’s mouth is now officially over! I salute you, day, with a clean mouth and fresh breath!’

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Rubbing their noses together affectionately, the friends dashed cheerily out of the bathroom and headed towards the smell of delicious pancakes, a sign that Mum was on top of things as always and a yummy breakfast was being served.

Ucklepuckle Gets Kidnapped

While Chris was gobbling down one pancake after another, sprinkling each one with sugar and laughing in the face of healthy lifestyle fans, his little brother, Peter, sat down at the table, humming a jolly tune.

'Look bro, what's that out of the window?' Craftily, the little lad waved his chubby hand at the window, distracting his brother's attention.

'Nothing I can see' Chris replied unperturbed and went on with his breakfast.

'I'm not hungry,' his little brother said before darting up to his room on the first floor.

'Hey, where's Ucklepuckle?' Chris exclaimed. 'Did you take her? You are such a baby! You are a right little baby!' Chris shouted angrily and chased after his brother who had already got up to his room and hidden Ucklepuckle. Chris's good mood disappeared like a burst bubble.

'Why are you being such an annoying baby!?' screamed Chris, desperate not to be parted from his favourite toy again.

'Mum, help! He's attacking me!' Opting to use defence tactics to distract Chris for a moment, the younger brother gained enough time to quickly lock his bedroom door.

Chris hammered on the door in vain. He knew that Ucklepuckle was safe and his brother wouldn't harm her but still, he was very annoyed at him being so mean.

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‘You owe me TWO euros for this!’ Chris grunted, snatching up his backpack and going to the landing to get dressed for school. ‘I want Ucklepuckle in my room - on my bed - when I come back!’

The Newly Discovered Room

Peter’s sole aim, it appeared, was to tease his brother since, no sooner had Chris left for school, Peter forgot all about Ucklepuckle and went off to play with all the other toys in his brother’s room. Ucklepuckle had never been in Peter’s room before. It had yellow walls covered in posters of pirates, bits of Lego strewn all over the floor and a large tank sitting on the desk, filled with colourful fish. There were drums, a skipping rope, a toy cash register, balls, a sock ... all sorts of different things - this room was so different from Chris’s, who liked everything shipshape and tidy, almost obsessively so. When he grows up, Chris wants to be an inventor – to invent and create new things. Peter is only into football and drums – the stuff of a young business man in the making.

‘You can see how different they are,’ Ucklepuckle thought to herself.

Looking calmly around the newly discovered room, Ucklepuckle heard Peter and his mum going out, leaving the little owl at home on her own. ‘At last – a day to myself at home!’ she thought, contently flapping her wings.

The Undercarpet Creature

Ucklepuckle was terribly hungry. She stepped over the sock, the skipping rope, dodged between the balls and left the yellow room. She knew the rest of the flat well – she had lived there with Chris for several years. Ucklepuckle decided to head for the kitchen and have something to eat - she just had to get across the brown fluffy rug in the hall. Ucklepuckle sometimes felt that crossing the carpet was like being hugged by a giant bear. The brown wool of the carpet tickled Ucklepuckle’s

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tummy and feet and, laughing, she raced through it. But today, the obstacle that every other time had been so pleasant seemed weird. Crack! What was that? Ucklepuckle felt some sort of dent under the carpet. Crack – the strange sound again. A small mound emerged from the middle of the carpet and came rushing over to Ucklepuckle. The little owl took a couple of steps backwards and covered her eyes with her wings, going rigid with fear and not knowing what to expect next. She thought there must have been some sort of animal beneath the carpet – not too big and not too small, quick and apparently quite fearless, seeing as it made such unexpected moves in broad daylight. The carpet was moving up and down, back and forth, Ucklepuckle followed the mound carefully with her eyes. And then, something unexpected happened. Crack! Again that strange sound and the movement under the carpet stopped. There didn’t seem to be anything there anymore ... Ucklepuckle waited a moment but, not wishing to come face to face with the undercarpet creature, not quite yet at any rate, she gave a sigh of relief and rushed away. ‘Perhaps we’ll meet some other time’ Ucklepuckle muttered, climbing onto the banister and sliding down to the kitchen on the ground floor. ‘Whee! Watch out, pancakes – here I come!’

A Tumble Into The Unknown

Ucklepuckle slid swiftly down the banister. She had done so many times before and it was as exciting as any merry-go-round. Of course, you had to keep your wits about you, and children were forbidden from doing it, but it was alright for a soft toy made of fur fabric who was at no risk of getting hurt or killing herself. Even so, she had to concentrate – one slip and the ride down the banister could turn into an unexpected flight. Ucklepuckle couldn’t fly, being just a toy owl, so it would be more of a nasty fall. And believe it or not, on this occasion, Ucklepuckle did actually slip and tumble!

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‘Aaaah, help, I’m falling!’ Ucklepuckle shrieked and closed her eyes tightly, expecting a rather unpleasant landing. She fell so quickly that the air tickled her cheeks and she remembered her dream from the night before; ‘Beware of the wind!’ So she had dreamt that for a reason! She had no time to think about it any further before she hit the ground and opened her eyes. No wait, did she have her eyes open or shut? Ucklepuckle opened and closed her eyelids but the darkness didn’t go away.

‘Where am I? Where am I?’ Ucklepuckle asked anxiously, all the time thinking there was no one to answer her.

‘Oh, no! I’ve fallen into a cardboard box!’ The little owl stated measuring the high sides of the box the new washing machine had come in with her little wing. ‘I’ll never get out of here ... Who on earth leaves a box in the middle of the room?!’ she moaned. But Ucklepuckle didn’t panic, instead she remembered the advice of her friend, Little Spider: ‘Where there’s life there’s hope!’ Ucklepuckle sat down and started to think...

Ucklepuckle Thinks Outside The Box

Soon Ucklepuckle’s eyes got used to the dark and she took a closer look at the trap she had fallen into. Only one flap was open on top of the box and it was through this that Ucklepuckle had managed to dive, rather like a champion tumbler in a ‘Falling down the stairs’ competition.

‘Well done, Ucklepuckle, you are a great owl, great at flying and landing, too!’ She was making fun of herself – look at her she seemed such a wise little owl.

‘Think outside the box ... Think outside the box,’ Ucklepuckle had heard Chris’s dad repeating something like that when he was doing his homework. ‘What does it mean to think outside the box?’ The owl tried to figure it out. Had Chris’s dad ever been in a similarly tricky situation?

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Ucklepuckle even laughed out loud, thinking of Chris’s dad, a big man, trapped and helpless in a cardboard washing machine box.

‘No, that’s hardly likely,’ Ucklepuckle said to herself, wiping away a tear of laughter. But Ucklepuckle couldn’t stop wondering about this ‘thinking outside the box’ business.

‘Now let me think about this. If I were outside the box right now, I would be eating delicious pancakes. But what difference does it make thinking about them if I can’t have them and I’m still stuck in this stupid box just like before?’ Ucklepuckle reasoned. ‘On the other hand, if I’m in the box, I’m in the box and that’s it. Isn’t that so?’ the owl started to feel she was competing in a speech-giving contest, as Chris would call them. Sometimes Chris would go on so much about his dreams and future plans that his mum would say, ‘That’s a great speech but back to your books for now, please!’ When the boy wanted to know what a speech was, his Mum explained that a speech is a monologue given by one person to one or several others. One thing was clear to Ucklepuckle – in this box she was all by herself, so it could be said that she was trapped in her own speech.

‘Or something like that, maybe ...’ Ucklepuckle pondered, still lost in thought.