
Dominika's Daring Discovery

As she slammed the door deliberately behind her, Dominika stomped along her garden path and gave the front gate an equally hard swing.

"Why can't you stop treating me like a child?" she bellowed in the direction of the house through gritted teeth but out of anyone's earshot. Even though she was 12 years old and almost five years older than her little brother, it was like her parents thought they were both still infants.

Defiantly, she trudged down the road and round the corner towards the old garages while kicking stones as she went and batting away low branches as she neared the gravelled entrance. She hesitated; she knew she shouldn't be there amongst the mostly abandoned lock-ups and grey concrete structures that stood in front of the woods. Local kids called them 'Devil's Woods' and told stories about how, sometimes, strange, screaming noises could be heard there. She told herself (and her mother) that she was old enough to be around there now, though, not believing the myths and tall tales, and something burned inside her to show that she could prove it.

"Gimme five minutes and meet me where we agreed," came a voice from inside one of the low-roofed, crumbling buildings. Dominika was startled – hardly anyone used these garages anymore – and she darted quickly out of sight, just in time as a shifty-looking man emerged from underneath an open overhead door.

Behind a stack of wooden crates, which had open slats to see right through, she felt she was still easily visible. After waiting a moment until the man turned his back, Dominika climbed inside another hollow crate into a bed of straw and pulled the lid shut over the top of her. Bad move! Another crate was lifted

by the mysterious man onto the top of the one in which she was hiding, then the flat, metal, double-pronged base of a furniture-moving trolley was shunted underneath her crate and she was tilted backwards before being rolled along the bumpy surface.

Feeling that the route was leading downhill, which probably meant into Devil's Woods, she pushed up against the wooden lid but found that it was weighed down with the extra crate above it. She daredn't make a noise for fear of being discovered by the stranger who was now wheeling her towards some awful fate. Inside her tiny prison, still leaning backwards at an odd angle, the cramped space was being dimly lit by narrow shafts of light that bounced around as the trolley wheels bumped over rocks and twigs. She wondered whether she would be better to scream or stay silent.



In the corner of the crate, Dominika realised that she was not the only cargo. Next to her shoulder lay two extremely large, dark brown, speckled eggs. She pulled one towards her. It felt warm. Before she could examine it any further in the darkness, the motion of the trolley came to a halt and she was tipped back into an upright position. She heard what she thought was the top crate being lifted off the top of hers and onto the ground, in desperate fear that she was about to be exposed. Then, an aggressive voice spoke again.

Another man had arrived. Dominika peered cautiously out from under the lid and could see the two men exchanging money, which was followed by raised voices – it became apparent that they were arguing.

"You can't get away with this," came one shout from the new man as he threw his arms in the air. "These things are rare, precious, priceless even!"

Suddenly, from amongst the trees, a huge winged creature swooped down with outstretched claws aimed at the two men. A squawking and screeching accompanied it then the creature swooped down again from the opposite direction for another attack.



It looked like a marvellous bird but bigger than she had ever seen before – and it was not happy! Immediately, a third swoop and this time the men ran, screaming, deeper into the woods. Dominika squeezed out of her box. She saw the back of the two figures flailing their arms, still being pursued by the creature from the air.

Quickly, she turned around with one thought in her mind: three other crates lay around in the small clearing where she found herself. Through horizontal gaps in the crates, she could see small bird-like creatures inside two of them, who appeared to be trying to flap their fragile wings, looking frightened and alarmed. Bulging eyes, which were full of curiosity, rested upon long, curved beaks; they looked more like miniature dinosaurs than birds – but one thing was for sure, they looked like baby versions of the huge creature that had just swooped down from the sky. Talking of which... in another instant, the big one was back, circling, squawking and swooping down over her head. Dominika ducked

but realised it was not aiming at her but at the crates.

Grabbing a sturdy-looking stick from the ground, she used it to prise open the lid of one crate, then another. Out hopped the creatures and the squawking of the big 'bird' changed to sounds of happier excitement – like a mother reunited with her babies. Soon, Dominika was surrounded by seven hopping, waddling, flapping creatures; two of them had emerged from the very eggs that had been inside the crate with her. The smallest, fluffiest looked straight at Dominika and let out a contented little noise. Then it took a few quick steps and launched into the air, followed one by one by each of the others. Within seconds, they had joined what must have been their parent and all had disappeared into the distance.

Dominika thought about her own mother: did she wonder where Dominika had gone? Was she out looking for her? Would she want to protect Dominika, like this mother protected her babies?

Up the path and through the trees she ran from the earthy floor onto the gravel surface next to the old garages. She continued all the rest of the way home, into the house and gave her mother a tight, grateful squeeze.

"Sorry, Mum," smiled Dominika.

"It's OK, darling," replied her mother. "You know, I actually have something for you but maybe you're too grown up for it now."

"Thanks. My favourite!" said the girl as she took the chocolate egg and went upstairs to her bedroom to unwrap it. It was one of those with a toy or a model inside it. At least, as she carefully peeled off the foil paper and thought about the crazy adventure she'd just had, that's what she hoped was inside...