

Excitement in the Forest of Wonders - And all because of this disease

Ben is a little bear. He is three years old. He lives in the forest of wonders, with his parents and siblings. It's a wonderful place with all kinds of animals. Most of all, Ben likes his many friends from kindergarten. Everywhere there is something to see and to play with. Grandpa and Grandma bear live close by in the very same forest. Ben loves being at his grandparents' place.

Every Wednesday after kindergarten, he comes to visit them. On weekends, he is even allowed to spend the night at their house. Ben likes his parents' house as well. Usually, he gets along very well with his little sister and his elder brother. But, naturally, they also fight sometimes.

One day Ben listens to a conversation between his parents. They are talking about a disease. Somewhere far away in another forest, many animals got sick. It is because of a disease that no animal has ever had before. The animals there get a cough and a high fever. Many of them recover very quickly, but a few animals turn very sick. They need to go to the hospital. Most of those animals are old. Some of them have been sick of other diseases, even before the new one started spreading.

Ben's parents are a little concerned, that this new disease might show up in the forest of wonders as well. But not that much, because really, this other forest is pretty far away.

Then, just a few weeks later, Ben hears, that the badger in the forest of wonders has a cough and a fever, just like the animals of the other forest. Actually, coughing and having a fever isn't that bad, but now everyone, including Ben, thinks that it might be the new disease.

And it is actually true. Luckily, the badger recovers very quickly, but because the disease is very contagious, little by little, more animals get sick. It is just the way it was in the other forest: the young animals recover quickly or they don't notice anything at all. Most of the animals don't even get sick, but some of the older animals aren't that well and get very sick.

The owl is the head of the forest of wonders. Something like a mayor or a queen. It is her job to make sure that everything in the forest is going all right. . She needs to find a solution to stop this disease. She is sure, thatIt is only going to work if the animals stop seeing each other so they can't get infected.

So she tells all the animals, what she came up with: Both the school andthekindergarten of the forest of wonders are being closed immediately. All the little animals are supposed to stay at home and stop seeing each other. That's why nobody is supposed to play at the forest-playground either. Just like their children, the bigger animals should best not leave their caves and nests. The only exceptions are searching for food and getting something they need extremely urgently. Ben and the other animals are all very surprised. Some can't believe what they just heard. Everything is closed? How could that be? Besides all of that, everyone is supposed to wash their paws frequently. Coughing and sneezing are only allowed with one arm covering the face. Ben knows that and sticks to the rules, but he is sad that he can't go to his kindergarten anymore.

And then, the owl announces something else:

Until this disease is over, children are unfortunately not allowed to see their grandparents under any circumstances.

This surprises everyone the most. What was the owl thinking? Ben gets very upset. He has tears in his brown eyes. The owl explains to the people of the forest: "for older animals, this disease is particularly dangerous. Younger animals might infect them." This makes sense to everyone.

All the grandmas and grandpas get sad as well. They love their grandchildren.

But everyone remains understanding, as the grandparents definitely should not risk getting sick. So Ben's grandparents remain in their tree house for a while. They only go out if they need to search for food. Of course, they also appreciate people placing food or other important items next to the tree for them. The little animals remain in their houses with their parents as well. This way, they get to spend a lot of time playing with their families.

The weeks go by. One evening, Ben listens to his parents talking to each other again. They say that the amount of animals who get infected is becoming lower every minute. This means, that fewer animals are going to get sick. Finally, Ben can visit his grandparents again. What a joy! He is so glad, that they didn't get sick. Ben can't stop telling them stories and cuddling with them.

A few days later, the kindergarten opens again as well. Ben was looking forward to that a lot.

Finally, everything is back to normal, thinks Ben. His parents look happier now too.

„We all did very good“, Ben's mother says proudly. Ben agrees. Such a stupid new disease, we don't need that again anytime soon, though!

(Björn Enno Hermans, translated by Sandhya Küsters)