



An Old Gnome

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Magic

CHAPTER ONE: THE ANTS, SPIDER AND A BUTTERFLY

Once an Old Gnome, who served as a cloakroom attendant for two centuries at the Opera house, decided to go for a weekend to his home in the Dense Forest. He took a few CDs with Bel Canto operas, as since childhood loved this style and was going to surprise his loved ones. In the woods lived all his childhood friends with whom he grew up together and studied in the forest school. The Gnome early morning sat on a local train and long on it went, until he was at the last station. Nobody else was at the station. He stepped out of the train, and it went back to the City.

The Gnome was not a snappy dresser, and constantly wore a green cap, faded blue velvet pants and a red coat with yellow cuffs, glasses, cane and white beard. Now he anxiously looked around, seeing no taxi, no bus, no one and just nothing. Fortunately next to the cash register he noticed a dragonfly and asked her to take him to the forest. And for this he presented her a CD with some Opera. Dragonfly was very fond of music and Bel Canto, of course, was her favorite style. Furthermore Dragonfly said that she was familiar with a very pretty butterfly that danced all day in the Woods.

So she introduced Gnome to that beautiful butterfly and he immediately fell in love with her, and, almost crazy. She had light blue wings and thick eyelashes, which she so charmingly clapped. The wings were framed in a white fringe, in harmony with her slender silver body of the dancer. Her feelers were covered with little white spots, like drops of dew. A young butterfly was flattered that so respectable, though a bit old, Gnome, courting her, and she began to call him Gnomi. Gnome worked in the City, which none of her young fans was able to achieve. Butterfly gladly received the attention of the Gnome and they romped around the woods, of course, in a good sense of the word.

Gnome though he was fascinated by the butterfly, but did not forget his old friends. He had not seen them for

many, many years, since the school times. So first they decided to visit the village where he was born and raised. Along the way, they stopped at a black currant bush, where Gnomi had a dinner and the Butterfly at this time happily was flitting around.

Another 500 steps from the bush and it will be his village with neat blue and green wooden houses. He well remembered those houses, sweet to his heart, with a height of just over four feet along with the roof (the gnomes were about three feet: women and men). Gnome had sweet heart ached – he had not seen his birth place for ages! And here the last trees before the glade and Gnome's face became heavily wrinkled, and his lips trembled.

All the houses were destroyed and around them littered broken chairs and scattered things. The Gnome ran into the first house, it was empty, only everything broken, in another, the third... Everywhere there were empty houses, no one there, only one was left on the stove a still warm kettle, which means they were here recently. Gnomi with tears in his eyes ran from one house to another and the Butterfly, accustomed only to have fun, for the first time in her life felt sorry for someone. She even had tears in her eyes, glittering on her thick eyelashes. And she thought: "what a pity there is no nearby a photographer.

There is no doubt that light sadness and shine in the eyes would really fit to her beauty.

A Gnome stood at the last house and kept to his heart, breathing heavily. He didn't know what to do and where to go. He confusedly looked around, but suddenly noticed a red slipper under the adjacent tree. These shoes were worn by their neighbors, when he was young. He picked it up, intending to cry, but noticed nearby another one, also red. And not far away was another yellow, then green and so on. And with Butterfly they went on the trail, the gnomes have always been very smart people and figured out how to inform about them. They walked until the sun set. The tracks ended in a nearby grove, and it stood in front of a huge anthill: tall, as if put a few gnomes one on another, and with the width of the boa. Yes, the red ants live there – a warlike tribe that lived on Earth even before the dinosaurs. In the forest they were known for their cruelty, discipline and diligence. They feared no one, except the ant lion, but he has long retired and now spent time at his house in Africa.

The Black Queen ruled them – once upon a time she was flying, troubling and fearing forest dwellers, but then, they say, she had children and after that never came out of the nest. She bit off her wings and spent time in the throne room. Soldiers, workers and guards also lived in the Anthill. The ants worked as guard when being at their old age, and the soldiers when being young. Workers constantly built or repair the anthill and also collect food in the nearby vicinity of it.

They had their slaves – orange ants whose hill was in a nearby forest, where they were friends with everyone

and ate and drank cultivated mushrooms and milk of the aphids. But the red ants periodically raided them and stole their children out – larvae which then become slaves. In the ant-hill also lived a few winged ants, which did nothing, just sunbathed and whistled different popular melodies.

Then came the night, the moon appeared and shined with its silver and flickering light the anthill which made it look like a castle of a dark wizard or a terrible Eastern king. At least it was what the Gnome thought. He and Butterfly climbed on a nearby tree, watching the anthill.

In his Opera house the Gnome loved not only to listen to the operas, but also to read about them. He now recalled a terrible Opera about a daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh who was bricked up in the pyramid. It seems so, or approximately so. Ah, what beautiful and sad music flowed while he's resting his chin in his fist and sitting in the locker room and drank tea with biscuits.

His eyes were dimmed with tears and he thought that life was passing by, and he never married, but all his friends already had grandchildren. But more than anything else, even more than his marriage, he loved shortbread, although, sometimes, was not averse to taste chocolate ones as well. Yes, now it all was so far, as in another life.

So why ants kidnapped gnomes? And then he was pierced one scary thought: maybe they also want to immure them in the anthill? But why, what's the point? And the butterfly who loved to read all kinds of scary and mystical tales suggested that for their terrible ant rite, those she did not really know which one. So it is urgent to figure out how to get into this anthill! Guard is all around and does not sleep days and nights!

A wind blew, stirring the leaves and Gnome saw right in front of him eight gleaming eyes. The butterfly tried to scream, but someone clamped her mouth with blue furry paw. Shimmering pale light of the moon highlighted the stranger Spider Blue-Furry: its eight legs were blue, and his head, as if covered with white down. Gnomi smiled and rushed up to him.

It was his old school friend – they called him the Wise Shaggy. He was the best student in the school, and then was going to be an architect. Spider also recognized Gnomi, released the butterfly and hugged his old friend. Parents of Gnome were teachers and not as rich as the Spiders' family, but still were not against the friendship of his son with the Gnome, because he was a good guy.

The Spider's parents worked in a very important institution; even the people were afraid of them, although they were perfectly safe and have never attacked first. Yes, there were some distant relatives who lived very far away, and who could send the man to the hospital. The fact is that all spiders remembered very well from childhood tales about ancient spiders and ancient people, who was eating their ancestors. Remembered and feared, trying to hide from the people in the darkest corners. Only the bravest fought, and there was another

group of spiders radicals who believed that they were to taking revenge for all.

“How are you?” – Politely asked the Spider;

“Terrible,” replied the Gnome. I came home and no one was there, all the houses were destroyed

“That’s probably the red ants” said the Spider. Last year they attacked our sacred ancient city and ripped out the very first web and captured all the spiders that protected it. Do you know who wove the web? Our main God which is Arachnalf. It was our sacred place.

“Why are they doing this?” dazedly asked the Gnome.

“They want to show their strength to everyone. They say that the whole world doesn’t like them and for that they need to punish it. They especially don’t like the orange ants, which built many different anthills around. And the red want to change the order in the forest. The Black Queen rules them, and she wants to establish a great empire of the red ants. They began to seize and plunder the neighboring ant-hills. Rumors are that they are planning to attack even animals and then the fishes and other sea creatures, allegedly preparing the sea ants that will breathe with gills and build underwater anthills”

«Yes, quite strange,” muttered Gnomi, but why they attacked the village?

«I heard also that they stole the magical book of the Snakes, and it was described there how to prepare terrible weapon – the black poison. And if the ant soldiers have that weapon, then even the lions and the bears would be really frightened of them and that’s what the red need».

“But how they were able to read this book? It’s in ancient snakes language that only knows three rat snakes in our forest. They got it from the messenger of the ancient boa Indicus – mother of all snakes who hunted on dinosaurs.” As you can see, Gnome was also well-read forest inhabitant, no wonder he was taken to work in the Opera house, even as an attendant. Speaking between us Gnome dreamed to be gradually promoted to be a Director, because he has heard the Director should have a very nice salary.

“Ants caught one of them and forced to translate this book for them, and then locked up in his anthill. I know from the red ant, which last week got into the web. He said that an ancient spell will take effect, if the most peaceful and kind inhabitants of the forest would be sacrificed – the Gnomes.”

CHAPTER TWO: IN THE ANT HILL

“So that’s why they all got kidnapped, but it is urgent to help them before it is too late!”

“I’ll help you, my friend,” firmly said the Spider. But my help is not enough; we need someone who can fly.

“It may be a Butterfly?” suggested the Gnome

“Ah, please, no, of course not, I’m still too young to take that risk. The case is something dangerous” – said nervously Butterfly and snorted. However, excessive closeness of the Spider snapped her magically. She lifted

her cute little nose and said, “Well, I thought about it and decided, why not to help my good friends. I agree!”.
“Perfectly muttered Spider, then I’m starting to think”.

And the Gnome knew that all spiders were very smart. For some reason they reminded him of octopus which is an intelligent and unusual cephalopods of the inhabitants of the oceans with a beak like of a parrot. But he didn’t know exactly which way reminded – by their mind or number of limbs. It’s a pity that the octopus didn’t go to their forest school or not been at least some exchange programmes with Maritime schools.

And so the Spider said: “We the spiders, well, or rather some of us can fly on the webs, crossing the sea and flying over mountains and forests. Personally, I think people took from us this ability and began to make their parachutes and balloons. If we would talk in human language, then would have demanded the bonus for the invention of it” – chuckled the spider.

“Now, there is a problem – Gnomi is much larger and heavier than those flying drones – so I will weave a giant web, and you, Butterfly, call your friends, may be they help us. I assume that red ants also too often hurt you. And we’ll fly together to the hill, and there you will leave me and Gnome.

Butterfly nodded and flew away. She wished she could brag to her friends that she was given such an important order. And she never, even for a moment doubted that they would agree to help them. Butterflies were, of course, quite frivolous, but not bad and really kind creatures.

“Brilliant idea, said the Gnome. But how in the anthill we would find the gnomes, and will handle the guards?”

“I will handle the guard” smiled the Spider. And you will look for your fellows. I hope you remember how in school we drew the structure of an anthill?”

«Certainly, proudly answered Gnome, and I got the best mark for it».

“Well, fine then, – happily said spider! We will fly the next night, then we will be harder to be noticed, and now I begin to weave a web”.

The whole next day the Spider spent weaving the web and the Gnome found a Firefly and made with his aid a small flashlight. Fireflies communicate with each others with glow and they decided to take part in the operation to rescue the good gnomes. Butterfly just fluttered and did nothing, as she could not do anything. And then came the night, the moon pulled the lacy clouds and five brave Butterflies friends flew to them. Spider and the Gnome had tied webs around; butterflies grabbed over the web and took off. Naughty midges, usually playing and frolicking all night long, now all hide – it had started to rain.

“This rain will help us”, thought Gnome.

They flew up the anthill without any incident and just in time before the downpour. Butterflies landed them on top of the anthill and instantly flew away, and far away. The guards hid from the rain, besides none of them

thought that someone could attack the anthill.

The spider began to gently pull the web, which was invisible in the dark, into the aisle and like froze. He was an experienced hunter because has caught in his life more than one ant. Gnome also lurks, almost not breathing. Here gossamer jerked slightly, the spider pulled the end, something has moved and the spider instantly appeared in the aisle, and after a short struggle crawled out of there with wrapped in the web ants.

“Congratulations, the Gnome said solemnly, winking at his old friend.

“Much obliged,” laughed the Spider, the business is launched. But where are our flying beauties, he asked in surprise?”

“Unfortunately they’re all gone” sadly replied Gnomi.

“Yes, fickle they are, but ah, well, let’s continue our operation. You will be looking for the comrades, and I monitor that no one would prevent you.

And stealthily they crept through the hole. All around was darkness, no sound. But somewhere there was a little room in which orange slave-ants reared larvae of red ants, in which ants-cleaners laundered their dirty counterparts, where orange slaves built warehouses with food, mycelium and shuttles, cross-linking between sheets. But now everybody was soundly sleeping.

The Gnome knew that if his friends are alive, then for sure, at least in one of their pockets was hidden musty cheese. This cheese was a favorite delicacy for the gnomes. Long ago, when their ancestors lived in caves and mined gemstones, and they were ruled by a great magician and wizard Paracelsus, they accidentally discovered the recipe for this wonderful cheese. One of them forgot his lunch portion, and after a while, when they were already working on, then felt this amazing smell. So our Gnome started to sniff, looking around. And after a while it smelled he finally and gently slid in the direction where the smell came from. The spider crawled behind him on the ceiling, looking at the whole aisle in the back and the front, top, and bottom. Finally he saw; or rather felt that the room is just in front of him. Apparently the gnomes slept too, because he only heard their snore. He carefully took out flashlight fireflies and opened the lid. A faint light illuminated the room where his companions slept on the floor with their heads on one another. The strongest of them slept close to the lattice of branches. Gnome called him softly and he opened his eyes, Gnome put his finger to the lips. He nodded his head and began to wake the others. What was a joy among them, though very quiet. With hushed whispers they told him what happened with them during this time. Then the Spider asked everyone to move away from the bars, and grabbed with two hands and pulled lattice, it did not react, then he was joined by the Gnome, then by other gnomes. And together, they pulled the lattice out. Then they all crawled in single line behind the Spider. He knew the way back as they tied the output cobweb and unwound it, following the

Gnome. So in ancient times did one of his distant relative, when she helped to a hero to find a way out of the maze, in which lived a monster.

And finally they are out, now they should cautiously and quietly go down, as dawn was coming. The same web was used for it, the good deeds it was as hard as steel rods. The spider was guarding the exit, and the Gnome kept the web, to make it more convenient to go down. Already, all the gnomes went down and stayed past – the old, fat, and bearded gnome, and then they would follow him. This gnome kept all the keys of the front door, so his name was a Key Keeper. He was approaching the ground when badly bumped over the ledge of the nest, and rolled head over heels down. The bad thing was not that with the head over heels, but that with a huge rumble. From this the rest of the guards awoke, the gnomes fled, and ants followed for them. But soon the ants were forced to return, as the rain that started last night turned into a heavy downpour.

After a small scuffle Gnome and the Spider were twisted and tied and brought them to the ant Queen. The spider was badly bitten and could barely walk, and the Gnome was breathing heavily, his fists were covered in blood.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RITUAL

The Queen's hall, named the Black Hallo, was in the heart of the anthill. At the entrance stood her wings, and near the throne lay a few eggs which the worker ants were transferring to nannies. The Queen looked fiercely at the captives and said:

It does not matter that those escaped, we will sacrifice the ones, the Book says nothing about the number, although, of course, the more the better. Now, no one would disturb us, so take them to the room of the Last Rest and Reflection, and give them bitter juice, I will start to prepare the ceremony.”

But the ants didn't move. The Queen discontentedly turned back – the younger Queen, who was her rival, entered the room. She was young and brought much more eggs than she.

She lightly smiled: “Of course, take these ones, but why the ritual will prepare only you? I'm also a Queen and should take part in it”.

The Black grimly looked at her and said, “Certainly, my dear, together we'll do the ceremony. I just didn't see you and that's why didn't want to detach you from the rest”.

Then the prisoners were led into the room and they got drinks with the bitter juice, and lapsed into unconsciousness. The Black Queen lit a fire and began to throw in some crushed herbs. The Younger Queen was watching it. She already had long intended to take the place of the elder, as the worker ants loved her, and obeyed to the Black more as a part of their tradition. In the old days there were many cases when the rebel ants killed the Queens, which lost their trust.

Grass flashed and the Black and started to mutter something, and then to circle around the fire. She watched the proceedings carefully at the same time. Other ants as fascinated looked at it, and the young Queen just smiled as if to say, I know all your tricks. The Black began to roll on the floor, her eyes turned back she was muttering faster and faster. The fire flared brighter. A few winged ants Princes, as they were called, came into the room, one of them was going to marry the Queen, if not overthrown before that.

The ants began to swing behind the Queen, they rocked harder and her cries became louder and louder. Then she yelled something terrible, with foaming at the mouth, with wild eyes she looked around and sternly said, "Bring the victims now!".

The soldiers led, or rather brought unfortunate friends who could not really move and could barely breathe. Everyone was so engrossed with what was going on, that didn't notice as it was getting darker and darker around, because the spiders covered the whole anthill with web. The gnomes run away from the Reds, and asked everyone, and the spiders from the entire forest gathered to help their fellow and the Gnome as well. Other animals were coming to the hill and even orange ants from a nearby to rescue fellow slaves caught by red ants.

In the Royal hall all as fascinated watched how Spider and Gnomi were placed on the bottom of the pit, dug near the fire and the Queen whispered some incantations. The young Queen also began to enter into ecstasy, or rather pretending to, seeing how others react to what is happening. And the Black raised the foot up, and circled round like a dog in search of his tail. But it got worse and worse to see. One ant ran to find out what happens and came back with the horror and terrible news:

"We're trapped," he shouted.

The Black Queen heard nothing, as was continuing the ceremony, but the young realized that she needed to escape and shouted: "Follow me, my faithful warriors" and rushed to the exit. More precisely speaking directly to the web, and hung stuck with all her legs. Some of the ants followed the young, and also hung next to her in the web. Others remained in the Royal hall – everyone had to take a handful of earth and cast into the pit with our friends. But the excitement was passed on to them, they began to whisper and look back.

The Black menacingly shouted at them, ordering to perform the ceremony. From her terrible scream the walls of the ant hill started to shook, and continued to swing, even when she paused. But no, it's not because of her voice, the hill began to swing. All in fear rushed outside, leaving the Queen alone. She, too, would like to join her subordinates, but she had pride and remained, continuing the ritual. Here began to crumble the walls of the nest, shattering and spreading. This because the moles daggered the anthill to help our friends. They were friends with the gnomes, and though blind, attended every their party.

Outside the storm hit, getting more and more furious, then there was a wild deafening roar, like the roar of a huge waterfall. Gnomes arrived in time and managed to pull a Spider and a Gnome out from under the collapsed walls, and then dragged them to a safe distance. Deep water of the nearby lake silently and grimly closed over the wreckage of the ant hill of the Black Queen, engulfing her down.

At this time the spiders tied with the cobwebs all red ants and dragged them to a clearing with the young Queen. There they tied them to a big old tree, so they could not run away. Then they brought a Spider and Gnome on their hands to the clearing and gave them water so they departed from that juice of bitter herbs. Then a trial with the Queen and her subordinates started; it attracted all inhabitants of the forest. By that time the Queen managed to chew off her wings and tried to convince the judges that she's just an ant, but failed, as she was much larger than the rest of the ants.

Finally, the court decided that red soldiers and workers were released, on the condition that they will immediately cease to attack others, or hurt the weak. They all gave their word of honor that would never do it. But the young Queen and several of her servants were sent to a small stone island in the middle of the lake. After that all helped the gnomes to rebuild their village, and in the evening made a huge joint celebration. Everyone there had fun until the morning, eating berries and drinking juices, but most of all they liked how the Gnome feelingly sang arias from different operas, mostly Bel Canto ones of course. His voice was not very strong, but excellent hearing so that he never sung out of tune or at least no one noticed, as had never heard anything of the Opera stuff.....

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