

The Owls' Dorm

Youth theatre · 9-character play · 5 women, 3 men, 1 either · 15 min · Beginner · Ages 8+

The first night of a school residential trip, at an outdoor centre in the mountains. After lights out, the nine pupils in the Owls' dorm hear a strange noise in the corridor, then under a bed. Calling Sir is out of the question, or it's goodbye to tomorrow's marmot walk: they need guard shifts, a leader, and some courage. The trouble is, everyone wants to be leader, and nobody really has any courage.

A nine-bed dormitory in an outdoor centre in the mountains, on the first night of a school trip, the present day.

Casting

MARCO (Male role, Child) 10, Year 6, won the school cross-country race.

ALMA (Female role, Child) 10, Year 6, class rep.

ROSA (Female role, Child) 10, Year 6, has brought a head torch and a notebook.

INÈS (Female role, Child) 9, Year 5, reads every animal book in the school library.

ZOÉ (Female role, Child) 9, Year 5, slept with the light on until last year.

LINA (Female role, Child) 9, Year 5, has never slept anywhere but home.

LÉO (Male role, Child) 10, Year 6, can do twenty animal noises.

TOM (Male role, Child) 10, Year 6, has hidden a bag of sweets under the pillow.

SAM (No gender marker, Child) 9, Year 5, doesn't say much in class.

SCENE 1: LIGHTS OUT

(Nine mattresses on the floor, in two rows. The children are lying down, in pyjamas. A light goes off. In the corridor, an adult's voice: "Lights out, Owls. Bags stay in the corridor. Goodnight." Footsteps going away. Darkness, then a faint night light. A pause.)

LÉO. Hoo hoo.

LINA. Shh!

LÉO. What? We're the Owls.

ALMA. Sir said: we go to sleep.

LÉO. Owls sleep in the daytime. It's nature.

INÈS. It's true. They hunt at night. Mice, voles, little baby rabbits.

ZOÉ. Inès, please, not the little baby rabbits.

(A sound of crinkling paper.)

LINA. What's that noise?

TOM. Nothing.

ROSA. Tom, are you eating?

TOM. No.

ROSA. Your mouth's full.

TOM. My mouth's normal.

MARCO. At home, I get up at six. To go running.

ALMA. Nobody asked you, Marco.

LINA. I want to sleep. Tomorrow we get up at seven o'clock. Seven o'clock!

(A pause. In the corridor, a scratching, then a long, low noise: "Grrrhoooo." Everyone sits up. From now on, they whisper.)

ZOÉ. Did you hear that?

SAM. Yes.

ROSA. It's coming from the corridor.

ALMA. Léo, stop it.

LÉO. It's not me!

ALMA. It's always you.

LÉO. I'm right here, look! My mouth's shut!

ROSA. We can't see anything, it's dark.

LÉO. Well, believe me, then. For once, it's not me!

(The noise again, further off: "Grrrhoooo.")

INÈS. It could be a marmot. No, marmots whistle. A fox? A badger. Badgers grunt. Or a lynx. There are lynxes in these mountains.

ZOÉ. I'm going to get Sir.

TOM. No! If he comes, he'll find my sweets.

ALMA. And if he comes, no marmot walk tomorrow. He said so on the coach.

ZOÉ. I'd rather have no marmots and no lynx.

LÉO. Go on, then. And take your teddy.

MARCO. Teddies are for babies.

ZOÉ. I haven't got a teddy.

LINA. There aren't any lynxes in a corridor.

INÈS. Depends on the corridor.

MARCO. Right. I'm going.

ROSA. Going where?

MARCO. To look. I'm not scared.

SAM. On your own?

MARCO. A lynx hides when you look it in the eye.

INÈS. That's not true at all.

(Marco gets up and goes out of the door. Everyone stares at the door. A pause. The sound of a zip.)

ZOÉ. Marco?

LINA. He's been eaten.

ZOÉ. Lina!

(Marco comes back holding a rucksack. He shoves it under Tom's mattress.)

MARCO. Nothing. There's nothing in the corridor.

SAM. That was quick.

MARCO. I went right to the end. Twice. Running.

SAM. We didn't hear any running.

MARCO. That's because I run without making a sound.

ROSA. And what's that?

MARCO. My bag. I left my water bottle in it. I get thirsty at night.

ALMA. Bags stay in the corridor.

MARCO. Not when you're thirsty.

TOM. Why are you putting it under my bed?

MARCO. Because it's the closest.

TOM. You've got your own bed, Marco.

MARCO. It's full. Go on, go to sleep. I've checked everything.

(They lie back down. A pause.)

LÉO. I am the lynx and I'm coming to eat the Owls!

(Under Tom's bed: "Grrrhoooo." They all sit bolt upright.)

TOM. Under my bed. It's under my bed!

LINA. Shh!

LÉO. The second one wasn't me! The first one was, the second one wasn't!

ZOÉ. It's in the room. The beast is in the room.

SCENE 2: TAKING TURNS

(Rosa switches on her head torch. The beam sweeps the room. Everyone has huddled together at the back, far from Tom's bed. They whisper.)

ROSA. Right. We need a leader.

ALMA. That's me.

ROSA. Why you?

ALMA. I'm class rep.

ROSA. Class rep. Not dorm rep.

ALMA. The dorm is the class, just lying down.

ROSA. I've got the torch. And I've been camping three times. In a real tent.

ALMA. Nobody cares about your tent!

(Under Tom's bed: "Grrrrhoooo." Everyone squeezes a bit further back.)

MARCO. Not so loud! You're making it cross.

ROSA. In a tent, there are creatures every single night. I know what to do.

ALMA. Let's vote. Who votes for me?

(Nobody puts a hand up.)

ALMA. It's dark. That doesn't count.

LINA. I vote for whoever lets me sleep.

SAM. We could have two leaders.

ALMA. Two leaders isn't a leader.

SAM. One for the start of the night. One for the end.

(Alma and Rosa look at each other.)

ROSA. I'll take the start.

ALMA. Fine. But I'm leader of the morning. And the morning is the most important bit.

ROSA. Why?

ALMA. Because that's when we tell Sir.

TOM. We're not telling Sir anything.

INÈS. Tom. What have you got under your pillow?

TOM. Nothing.

INÈS. Bears can smell sugar from miles away.

TOM. Sweets. A bag. A little bag. OK, a big one.

ZOÉ. It came here because of you!

TOM. It's not my fault my nan buys big bags!

ROSA. Hand them over.

(Tom holds out the bag. Rosa puts it in the middle, on the floor.)

ROSA. There. If the beast wants sweets, it can take them and leave us alone.

LÉO. And what if it wants Owls?

LINA. Léo!

(Rosa writes in her notebook.)

ROSA. Guard shifts. Two at a time, with the torch. Alma and me are leaders, so we don't do guard.

ALMA. Yes we do. Leaders do guard too. That's what being leader means.

ROSA. Fine. Zoé and Lina first. Then Tom and Léo. Then Inès and Sam. Then Alma and me.

MARCO. What about me?

ROSA. You've already been in the corridor.

MARCO. I can do guard all night. I never sleep anyway.

ALMA. Everybody sleeps, Marco.

MARCO. Not champions.

TOM. I'll do guard next to the sweets. To keep an eye on them.

ROSA. No. You'll do guard next to Léo.

(They all lie down, except Zoé and Lina, who sit side by side with the torch. A pause.)

ZOÉ. Lina. Are you asleep?

LINA. I'm on guard.

ZOÉ. Are you scared?

LINA. No. Are you?

ZOÉ. I'm scared of the dark. Not of the beast. Of the dark. At home, I leave my door open with the landing light on.

LINA. It's the first time I've ever slept away from home. At home, it smells of my dad's pancakes. Here, it smells of soup.

TOM. I'm scared too. I have nightmares about my Year Two teacher.

ALMA. Tom, you're not on guard, you're asleep.

TOM. I can't sleep, I haven't got any sweets left.

ALMA. I'm scared nobody listens when I talk. Like just now. Nobody put their hand up.

ROSA. It was dark.

ALMA. I know.

ROSA. I'm scared of getting lost. I got lost once when we were camping. I was five. I stood outside the campsite toilets for a whole hour.

LÉO. For me it's lifts. When the doors close, I feel like they're never going to open again.

INÈS. Spiders, for me.

LÉO. You? You know everything about animals.

INÈS. Exactly. I know how many eyes they've got.

LINA. How many?

INÈS. Eight.

ZOÉ. I didn't need to know that.

SAM. For me it's thunderstorms. I count between the lightning and the thunder. It works, but not every time.

(A pause. Everyone looks towards Marco's bed.)

ROSA. Marco?

MARCO. What?

ROSA. What are you scared of?

MARCO. Nothing.

LÉO. Everybody's scared of something.

MARCO. Not me.

(A silence. Marco turns over to face the wall.)

SCENE 3: THE BEAST

(Later. Tom and Léo are sitting up with the torch, and Tom is chewing. The others are lying down. Rosa sits up. They all whisper.)

ROSA. Tom. You're eating the beast's sweets.

TOM. It didn't come for them. They were going to waste.

ALMA. I'm the one who tells people off. It's my turn to be leader.

ROSA. No, it's still night-time.

ALMA. It's past midnight! Midnight is morning!

(Under Tom's bed: "Grrrhoooo." Everyone freezes.)

LINA. Well done.

ZOÉ. It's hungry. It's cross and it's hungry.

SAM. Wait.

LÉO. What?

SAM. It growls every time somebody shouts.

ROSA. Rubbish.

SAM. Lina shouted "seven o'clock": it growled. Léo shouted "it's not me": it growled. Léo did the lynx: it growled. Alma shouted about the tent: it growled. Alma shouted "midnight": it growled.

ALMA. I didn't shout. I spoke with conviction.

INÈS. No animal does that. When you shout at animals, they run away.

SAM. Let's test it, then.

(Sam claps hard, once. Under the bed: "Grrrhoooo." Zoé hides under her blanket.)

LÉO. Whoa.

TOM. I'm never sleeping in that bed again.

SAM. And another thing. At the start, the noise was in the corridor. Marco went into the corridor. Marco came back. And now the noise is under Tom's bed.

TOM. With Marco's bag.

(Everyone turns to look at Marco.)

MARCO. It's my water bottle.

LÉO. Your water bottle growls?

MARCO. It's a mountain water bottle.

INÈS. That's not a thing.

SAM. Can I have a look?

MARCO. No!

(Under the bed: "Grrrhoooo.")

ZOÉ. Marco, please. Or I won't sleep all night.

(A pause. Marco doesn't move.)

SAM. I'll go.

TOM. If you don't come back, can I have your pudding tomorrow?

SAM. If I don't come back, you're allowed.

(Sam lies flat and wriggles under Tom's bed. Rosa shines the torch. Sam comes back out with the bag, opens it, and pulls out a toy owl with two big feathery ears.)

LINA. Oh.

INÈS. An eagle owl. Look at the ears. It's the biggest owl in Europe.

LÉO. A teddy. Marco's got a teddy!

ALMA. Léo, not so loud.

(The toy, in Sam's hands: "Grrrhoooo.")

SAM. That's the beast.

MARCO. His name's Plume.

(A pause.)

MARCO. My gran gave him to me. When people talk loudly, he answers. He used to go "Hoo hoo". Now the batteries are nearly flat, so he does that. There's no button to switch him off. I tried, in the corridor. I wanted to leave him at home. I put him back in my bag at the last minute. I've never slept without him. Not one night.

LÉO. Not even when you won the cross-country?

MARCO. Especially not that night.

ROSA. Why didn't you say?

MARCO. Because tomorrow the whole of Year 6 will know. And at cross-country, I won't be the champion any more. I'll be the baby with his owl.

(A silence.)

LÉO. I won't say anything. A lift is worse than an owl.

LINA. At home, I've got a fabric rabbit. He's called Carrot. I left him on my bed so I'd be like the big kids. I've wished I hadn't since we got on the coach. Can I hold him?

(Sam hands Plume to Lina. Lina sniffs him.)

LINA. He smells like a home.

ZOÉ. Can I have a go too?

(Lina passes Plume to Zoé.)

ZOÉ. We don't tell anyone.

ALMA. Not anyone. Not even Sir.

ROSA. Not even tomorrow morning.

ALMA. I'm leader of the morning, and I say: not even tomorrow morning.

ZOÉ. Let's make an oath. Owls' honour: beaks shut, wings folded, not one word.

TOM. And not one sweet either.

INÈS. One hand on Plume. That way it counts.

(They all put a hand on the toy, Marco too, and repeat the words under their breath.)

LÉO. Can we at least fix him? With that lynx voice, he's scary.

TOM. He needs new batteries.

INÈS. Nobody's got batteries. They weren't allowed, it said so on Sir's list.

(A pause. Everyone looks at Rosa's head torch.)

ROSA. No. That's the leader's torch.

ALMA. You're not leader any more. It's past midnight.

ROSA. If I give up the batteries, we'll be in the dark. And Zoé's scared of the dark.

(Everyone looks at Zoé. A pause.)

ZOÉ. Take them. In the dark, I won't be on my own. There are nine of us. Ten, with Plume.

(Rosa opens her torch and takes out the batteries. The torch goes off. There is only the night light left. Feeling around, Sam opens Plume's tummy, swaps the batteries, and closes it up.)

LINA. It's dark.

ZOÉ. I'm OK.

MARCO. Thanks, Zoé. Thanks, Rosa.

LÉO. Goodnight, Plume!

(Plume, in a clear voice: "Hoo hoo." Footsteps in the corridor. The adult's voice, behind the door: "Who's doing the owl in there?" A silence.)

LÉO. It's me, sir. Sorry.

(The voice: "Léo. Sleep." The footsteps go away. They all whisper.)

TOM. You got yourself in trouble for an owl.

LÉO. For once it wasn't even me.

(Marco puts Plume between his mattress and Zoé's.)

MARCO. He's sleeping in the middle tonight. That way, he belongs to

everyone.

INÈS. Eagle owls live for ages. Fifty years, sometimes.

LINA. Then he'll look after our children too.

SAM. Goodnight, Owls.

(A pause. Tom unwraps a sweet. The wrapper crackles loudly. Plume: "Hoo hoo.")

LINA. Tom!

(Plume: "Hoo hoo.")



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