

## **The girl, her curiosity and their animal adventure**

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Somewhere in Sydney, Australia, a lovely little family of three lived on a field. The field was surrounded by a forest and had a road straight up the middle, which was always quiet. On the right side of the road, there was a small cottage. It had flowers surrounding the house and ivy covered the light-yellow walls. There was a small stone path leading up to the doorway.

On the other side of the door there was less of a calm environment. Ava was watching TV in the living room, knowing that her father was about to go. Sam and Alexa marched out of the kitchen and up the small hallway to the door. "I'm sorry but I have to go. My team needs me and no matter what I will always be thinking of you honey," Sam turned around to face Alexa. "It's just, I don't want to lose you and even if I do, imagine how Ava would feel. She would be heartbroken all because you went to war and never came back." Alexa turned around to look at Ava and sighed. Thinking he would only be gone for a year or so she turned back around to face her husband. "Go, the country needs you. It's either Ava or the whole country." Sam nodded and turned to face Ava. "Ava, remember, don't give up on yourself. Don't give up on me and don't give up on your dreams. I want you to have your own animal rescue and care centre and I want you to call it Ava's animal centre." Then he waved goodbye and walked out the door.

That night, Ava couldn't sleep. She looked out the window and stared at the forest outside. She had never been in the forest before and her curiosity wouldn't be held back. She crept out of her room, sneaked along the corridor and slipped through the front door. She ran up, excitedly and slowed down as she reached the forest edge. As soon as she took the first step she couldn't stop.

After exploring for what felt like hours, Ava decided to turn back and get in bed before anyone noticed, but once she turned around, she realized that she couldn't remember the way back. And then it came to her that she wasn't the only one in the forest. She was in a place where deadly creatures hunt for their prey and she could easily be that prey. Ava wasn't too scared though. She loved all sorts of animals and knew so many facts about every single animal, even breeds. She walked back the way that she thought she had come. She didn't recognize any of the plants that she had walked past so far. Soon, she started to get a bit scared. Ava knew that no one would hear her if she called out because she was too deep in the forest. Every cry would just be a waste of breath.

Ava walked over to a big tree. She leant against it and slowly fell to the floor, the rough bark scratching at her back. She tucked her head into her legs and sobbed as she felt a tear roll down her cheek. She felt so lonely that she could start talking to a plant. Ava lifted her head and looked straight. To try and let go of her stress, she called out to the animals, "I'm over here! Come and help me out. Tell me I'm ok! Tell me that you're not here to kill me or hurt me. That you just want to be friends and you want to help me!" Silence fell upon the trees. A small hush fell from the wind. Ava thought that she would die in the forest but a little more light came into her when she heard a brush against the leaves up above. Ava stood up and looked around. She was being surrounded by almost every animal in the forest. A monkey

threw a banana at her head and a cheetah brushed against her legs. Taking a huge risk, Ava decided to sit on the spotted predators back...

Before she knew it, Ava and the crowd of animals were running through the forest. Ava was having the greatest time she could ever have. She felt the wind in her hair, pushing it behind her. She could see all the multi-colored birds racing against each other, looking like a rainbow and she even saw a river where a crocodile jumped out the water and belly flopped back in, a bit like a dolphin. When Ava looked back in front of her, she got whacked in the face by a flower and once she got all the purple petals off her face the animals came to a stop. The sun started to rise, and Ava got off the cheetahs back noticing that they had gone back to the entrance of the forest. She started to walk to the grass but before she reached it, she turned around and smiled. Ava waved goodbye to the animals and put her foot on the grass. It felt fluffy though. Usually, the grass was spiky and itchy. That's when Ava realized the yellow and gold dust and glitter surrounding her. Soon, it started to close the gap over Ava's head, and she couldn't see anything except the yellow and gold cloud. After a few seconds, the dust and glitter disappeared leaving Ava confused. "Are you ok?" A voice came out of nowhere. Ava spun around looking for someone who could've said it. Once, she started to get dizzy she stopped. "Who said that?" Ava looked around her again but there was no one to be seen. "Down here, dummy. You know the cheetah you rode for about half an hour?" Ava brought her attention back to the animals. They were all gone though, except for the cheetah and the monkey that threw a banana at her head. "Yeah, me, hi. My name is Felix. I am kinda like the boss of this forest. Everyone listens to me because I actually know what I am doing unlike Chuck over there." Felix sighed and watched Chuck swing to a thin branch that broke the minute he touched it. "So yeah. But it looks like you might be taking my place. To start off with, what is your name, please?" Ava looked at Felix and Chuck still unable to believe that a cheetah was trying to have a conversation with her. She rubbed her eyes and pinched her arm to make sure she wasn't dreaming. "Uh- umm- uh- yeah- so- uh- my- my name is Ava. Ava- yeah- that- that's my name." Ava tried talking normally but it was hard because she couldn't bring herself together. "Great, thank you Ava. I have a few more questions for you and I need to tell you a few things and Chuck might want to talk to you or ask you questions too. Is that ok with you?" Felix looked at Ava not caring what Chuck did any more. Ava looked around to make sure there was no one with a camera or something playing around with her. But no one came to view. "Yeah, that- that's fine with me," Ava said still not quite bringing herself together. "Great, thanks Ava. So, my first question is, how old are you and what age will you be by the end of the year?" "I am currently twelve and I will be thirteen in November." Ava replied now able to keep her cool. "Ok that is great. That means we will get plenty of years with you. I do have another question but that will come later. So, obviously you know me, Felix. I am basically the leader of this forest and by the way, it is a big forest. Chuck is my little helper but me and Chuck will be helping you when you become our leader. You can turn into an animal, but I don't know what one yet and without knowing what animal, I don't know how you can turn into that animal but turning back is the same for all of us, and yes, we all can turn human, but we don't like too. This isn't a secret but if you decide to tell people about us and hunters come for us, it is your priority to protect us. You are now very strong and good at gymnastics so you will be able to defend us better. We will also play with you and protect you from any dangers. Now, what is your favorite animal?" Felix basically had a whole speech prepared for this moment and made it seem as though she had been practicing it for years. Ava had a minute to process everything that Felix had just said in her head before replying, "Wolf. My favorite animal is a wolf." Ava said without

hesitation. Again, she checked for anyone who could be playing a joke on her. And again, no one. "Ok, I now know what animal you can turn into. You need to howl like a wolf and mid-way through the howl you will turn into a wolf. To turn back you simply jump as high as you can and shout out your animal. No one will hear you shout the animal even us. Try it!" Felix was very enthusiastic about it so Ava thought she would give it a try and if it didn't work then she would just look like a fool. "Ok, are you sure about this? I don't want to look like a fool unless I am with my friends." Ava didn't like the sound of being a fool at all, but she decided to lie a little so that she wouldn't look like a scaredy cat. "Of course, I am sure! I have shown many of the animals in this forest to do it. Give it a try, it's not that scary." Felix kept on looking at the child waiting to see what her response would be. "Fine, but if it doesn't work, I'm not being your leader," Ava liked her deal until Felix said, "You don't have a choice. Either way you will have to be our leader. Whether you want to or not. But you can say that you won't act like our leader." "Ok, here goes nothing. Aaawwoooooooooooooo." Once Ava had gotten to the woo bit she turned into a wolf and shock smacked her in the face. Felix smiled and waited for Ava to turn back. After a few seconds of being completely amazed, Ava jumped up as high as she could and shouted as loud as she could, "Wolf!" Of course, no one heard her yell it, not even Felix and Chuck, but she still turned back.

"Ok, that is all from me. Chuck, do you have anything to tell or ask Ava?" Felix turned to face Chuck and waited for a response from the swinging monkey. "No, she can go home now and eat a donut." Chuck replied only stopping for about two seconds. "Ok, well Chuck has nothing to ask or tell you, so I suggest you run home before your mother realizes you are out of bed and had no sleep whatsoever." Felix looked back at Ava and went back to ignoring Chuck. "Good idea," Ava giggled and ran back, easily finding her way home now. She opened the front door as quietly as she could and tiptoed back to her room. When she realized her mum was just about to go into her room she thought quickly... "Hey mum. You want something?" Ava said acting as she had been in her room for the whole night. "Yeah, where were you just a second ago?" Alexa asked her. "Oh, I've just come back from the kitchen. I needed to go to the loo and then I needed a drink." Ava lied and she did so smoothly.

*A few years later....*

Ava slipped off her bed and let her slippers eat her feet. She waddled downstairs where she found her mum and her cousin Clyde. "Auntie Alexa! Ava is awake." Clyde shouted at the top of his lungs even though Alexa was stood right next to him. "Thanks Clyde." Alexa answered turning to her daughter. "Ava, happy birthday! It is your twentieth birthday today so I thought I would get you the best possible present. You know how you have been really wanting to own your own animal rescue and care centre?" Alexa spoke very quickly, and Ava could only just make out what she was saying. "Yes?" Ava said suddenly a lot more excited. "Well, I got you a building with plenty of land and even a bunch of different types of water habitats. Let me explain a little more. Outside you can keep all the animals you want. The different types of waters are for animals like dolphins, crocodiles and alligators. Inside you have a lot and I mean a lot of rooms and they are all quite big, so seeming as I have been planning this since you were twelve, I thought you could have two or three breeding rooms where you take animals that are going extinct, in this country or the whole world, to breed so they can hopefully stay here for longer. You could have a normal veterinary where you help people's pets, and you can go to places like zoos and help them with any animals

or something. You can have a vegan restaurant, a reception and two or three staff rooms. That could be downstairs and upstairs you could have a museum based on animals' evolution and extinction through the years and as well as all of this, you could have it as a zoo where people can come in and pet, look at and feed the animals. There is also enough room outside to have a small park for kids." Alexa said still talking fast. "Mum! I can't believe you planned all of that and bought me the place. Thank you. But you have to help me get everything set up and all the workers I need and the animals in there." Ava couldn't be any happier. This had been her dream for her entire life. "No problem, also I forgot but there is another building there where you could have a hotel. Oh, and breakfast is on the table." Alexa walked into the kitchen. Ava was so excited that she wanted to get started as soon as possible.

The next day, Ava and Alexa made their way up to the piece of land they now owned and got straight to work. After sixteen months, Ava had the perfect animal rescue and care centre. It was exactly how she imagined it and exactly how Alexa said she had planned it. It was called Ava's Animal Centre. Once Ava opened the centre, not many people came for the first few days. But after two weeks she was super busy, and everybody loved it there.

One year later, Ava got a phone call from the reception. She walked through the main entrance doors and there stood Sam. Ava couldn't believe her eyes. "Dad?" she asked suddenly feeling emotional. "Hi Ava. I am sorry I didn't get to watch you grow up like most dads get too. Trust me, it has broken me. But all I can say now that I am standing in Ava's Animal Centre, is I am so proud of you, and I don't know how you did it." Sam felt a tear run down his cheek and he walked towards his daughter. Ava hugged him as tight as possible. "Well, dad. Someone told me when I was twelve just before he left me to save the country, never give up. Never give up on yourself, never give up on me and never give up on your dreams. If you give up, you will lose everything." Ava felt a tear run down her face as well. "I love you dad. Not having you here has hurt but the memory of you has kept me going. Thank you."

Ava's Animal Centre ended up being a blast over the next couple of years. It was all over the radio and the internet and had 5 stars. Celebrities had gone there, and Ava ended up being a role model to many people. Sam watched her run around the animals and could never be prouder. Then one day he sadly passed away from old injuries. Then shortly after Alexa fell ill. Soon she passed away too. Ava was heartbroken but never stopped. She kept going only for her mother and father. People used to think she was such a nerd when she would only talk about animals but now everyone called her unstoppable and the animal whisperer. Ava liked how people loved her work so much and she knew that her biggest fans were always watching her from above.