



I am a good boy.

Ways in which I am a good boy include:

1. Sitting.
2. Not freaking out when I see next door's cat.
3. Eating toast very gently from your hand even though I am excited by the toast.
5. When you accidentally throw a stick I will bring it back to you and if you throw it again I will go and get it for you again because everyone makes mistakes sometimes.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OPIE CLOSED THE FRONT DOOR, LEANED AGAINST IT AND fought the urge to scream with excitement. She felt her cheeks. They were bright red and she couldn't stop smiling.

She'd read that dog's mind. She'd definitely read his mind!

She wasn't an insect mind-reader. She was an *animal* mind-reader.

Mulaki had driven off before Opie'd had a chance to tell her. She didn't know how to get hold of her now. Surely an animal mind-reader could join The Resistance?

That was all Opie wanted now. To join The Resistance, to save her school and also, let's be honest, be part of a cool gang of superheroes. Jackson would definitely want to be best friends then.

Opie smiled, enjoying a very petty daydream where Cillian finally invited her to his birthday party and she couldn't go because she was working with The Resistance and he spent his whole birthday listening to Jackson wondering what Opie was up to.

"How was the special school for kids who prefer kids to books?" Harvey called from the living room. His memory was back to normal.

"It . . . was fine," Opie said slowly. She wasn't used to lying to her parents and was not very good at it. "They said I was very clever."

"Well, duh, yeah you are," said Harvey comfortably.

"Opie, are you all right? You're talking like a robot," Violet said, concerned.

"I'll . . . get a glass of water," Opie said and scurried into the kitchen.

"Can I have an ice lolly while you're there?" Harvey called.

"Dad! You are living off ice lollies. You'll have a stick running through you soon."

Harvey made a joke about it poking out of his bum, which no one needed or enjoyed.

Opie took her parents an ice lolly each and headed to bed, exhausted from her strange day. It was only early evening, so she lay on top of her covers, fully dressed and reading a book. As it got darker outside, she had to flick on her bedside reading light to see her book – and she started to hear familiar voices.

Where aaaaare yoooooooo
I'm coming to get yooooooo.
Come out to play . . . I'm hungry.

But this time, rather than shivering with fear, Opie sat up in bed, thinking.



She jumped out of bed, hurried lightly downstairs, past her parents watching TV and sneaked out of the back door.

Opie stood outside the block of flats with a huge smile on her face and stared up into the oak trees behind them. There was silence. Then something up there shifted its weight, causing the leaves to rustle.

Opie clapped her hands and said one word aloud to herself.

“Owls.”

Above her head, a branch trembled as an owl launched itself into the air. She heard familiar panicking thoughts down by her feet.

The owls were hunting.



Opie turned on her heel and raced to the kitchen, where she sifted through the recycling bin at top speed until she found everything she needed. After a bit of hasty cutting and sticking at the kitchen counter, she headed back out, cradling a pile of plastic.

“Everything all right?” Harvey asked, but Opie was already outside again.

On her hands and knees on the grass, Opie gently filled an empty biscuit box with stones, making it heavy. Then she half-buried the small plastic triangle from inside a chocolate box, leaving a tiny gap at the top. She scrabbled at it, making claw hands like an owl, pleased to find she couldn’t lift it.

Opie stood back and examined her work. She had studded the ground outside the flat with tiny hiding places made of plastic containers from the kitchen bin.

The sun had set but the ground and buildings still hummed with heat. Opie was *really* ready for bed now. She hoped her efforts out here would give her a good night’s sleep for once.

Back upstairs, Opie stood by her window. She

hadn't dared to open them for days, but now she would. The glass still felt warm to her touch as she opened the windows wide. The fresh air poured into her bedroom, bringing in a honeysuckle smell.

Almost immediately the voices began, clearer than ever. They weren't as scary now she knew she was hearing mice. Mice who would hopefully be saved from a sudden, crunchy death.

Run run run hide scared tired keep running
can't keep running. Scared scared scar- 0000!

A mouse, fleeing for its life, had found one of the hiding places and escaped an owl's clutches.

Hehehe. Hiding.

The little voice in her head sounded smug.

Hehehe.

Safe.

Shush.

Fury filled Opie's mind as an owl rose into the air, beating big silent wings. He'd lost his meal.

Opie smiled blissfully, and closed her eyes. If she concentrated hard, she could actually see what the mouse was seeing: the inside of an empty Jaffa Cake box, the bottom covered in stones. The mouse picked one up and turned it over, huge in his little paws, still warm from the sun.

There was a scrabbling noise as the owl landed and made a second attempt. It tried to grab hold of the box with its claws and tip the mouse out. But Opie had thought of that. The stones made it too heavy and the plastic was too smooth to get a grip.

Opie's eyes opened again. She listened to the rasping voice in her head complaining bitterly about the unfairness of life.

She took three bowls of nuts and crisps outside, as a consolation prize for the hunters, hoping they were a good substitute for mice. In the tree an owl sat and sulked, preening his feathers while Opie laid out a picnic on the grass for him.

Three floors up, one of her neighbours opened his

window and stared out at what Opie was up to. “Oh. Kaaay,” he said, in the flat tone of a man who had work in the morning and didn’t have time for this. He shut the window and turned off his light.



Like, I'm not being funny or nothing. But I thought we had a good relationship. He's got his allotment to take care of, I've got all the mud-eating ... I'm very into that.

We don't chat much but I thought we were cordial.

Then one day, out of the blue, he wallops his spade down on me! Cuts me in two!

I'm literally like an inch shorter and, not being funny, but I need that inch for work. My wife said it was nothing personal. I said it may be nothing personal, Harriet, but it certainly wasn't polite!

I feel very let down by him actually. Soon as I find my inch, Harriet and me, we're off and looking for a less violent place to work.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

OPIE SIGHED. SHE COULD STILL HEAR THAT WORM whingeing about the Decline of Good Manners. He was unbearably dull. Was this life as an animal mind reader? She must be literally the least exciting superhero in the world.

Opie was spending Sunday on the grass outside the flat, practising isolating her own thoughts from the animal ones that popped into her head. She needed a human mind reader to practise on, but didn't want The Resistance to know her plan until she'd perfected it. Opie hated failing at things.

She had been thinking . . . The animal mind-reading was cool but she didn't know how The Resistance would feel about it. She had a nasty feeling that Xu would still find it funny and hardly a promotion from insects.

BUT Mulaki had definitely said that if Varling's men couldn't read Opie's mind, that would be useful to The Resistance. So that's what Opie was going to do. If the only way into the gang was to be BLANK GIRL, CAPTAIN VOID HEAD, then that is what Opie would do.

She was practising by pushing animal thoughts out of her head. Above her was a tree full of little birds thinking panicky thoughts and never once finishing a sentence. Underneath her, worms were complaining, drearily and pedantically. And she was concentrating on pushing them all out of her head until it was blissfully quiet.

She was getting there. Bit by bit. She imagined inflating a balloon in her head, then blowing it up slowly and pushing everything out of her brain. It was very relaxing.

In the distance Opie could hear boys whooping. The whooping got louder and she peeked out from beneath her fringe to see that it was Jackson. With Cillian, of course.

Jackson and Cillian cycled towards her on brand new bikes.

“Wanna watch us do stunts?” Jackson asked, bouncing on his back wheel.

It was more interesting than the worm, so Opie said, “Sure!”



Jackson and Cillian bounced on their back wheels, whooping encouragingly at each other. Opie waited for them to start doing their stunts. They looked expectantly at her.

“Oh,” she said. “This is it?”

Cillian stopped bouncing and dropped one foot to the floor. He was scathing. “I’m sorry, could you do it, Dopey?”

“Probably yes, with like ten minutes’ practice,” Opie said.

“Wow. Rude. So rude.”

Cillian was ready to leave, but Jackson wasn’t offended. He stopped bouncing too.

“It *feels* impressive when you’re doing it!” he panted. “What are you doing anyway?”

“Hanging out with her friends. Can’t you see?” said Cillian, gesturing at the empty patch of grass.

“Um, actually,” said Opie, delighted that, for once, she got to surprise Cillian by being cool and interesting. She tucked her fringe behind her ears and told them everything. The voices at night, her ability to read animal minds, The Resistance (she showed them the Resistance symbol) and Varling’s plans to empty their school and buy it and how The Resistance wanted her help except, um, well . . . she wasn’t sure if they wanted her any more because they thought she could

only read insect minds, but in fact she could read all animals' minds, which was probably more useful? And she was discovering she had some pretty sweet skills, including the ability to keep mind readers out of her head.

“And, and . . . no, that’s it, that’s everything,” she said, dry-mouthed after talking at them for five solid minutes.

“Wow!” Jackson breathed, gazing at Opie like she was magic.

Cillian hated this. “That sounds great, Dopey, and not at all completely made up!” he breathed in a similar voice to Jackson.

“I’ll prove it,” Opie shrugged, feeling bold.

“What’s that ladybird thinking?” Cillian demanded, pointing at a ladybird.

Opie hesitated. “That’s actually a bad example because she’s asleep.”

The three of them bent down and stared at the ladybird who was sitting very still on a sunny leaf.

“That’s convenient,” Cillian said sweetly.

Even Jackson looked doubtful. “It’s a cool story,

Opie,” he said kindly. “It’s still a skill to tell good stories.”

“No, wait,” Opie said, getting flustered. She leaned closer towards the ladybird.

OPIE

Excuse me. Um. Excuse me?

Cillian yawned. “Sorry,” he said when Opie looked



around. “Was I harshing your psychic vibes?”

Irritated, Opie turned back to the ladybird.

OPIE

Oi!

LADYBIRD

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

The ladybird opened her wings and fluttered about in a panic.

OPIE

Sorry sorry sorry! I just wanted to talk.

LADYBIRD

I was SLEEPING!

OPIE

Sorry!

LADYBIRD

I don't care if you're sorry. Don't go around shouting at folks while they're asleep and then you won't have anything to apologise for!

OPIE

Yeah, no, that's a really good point, sorry.

The ladybird flew away, fluttering her wings with tiny fury.

LADYBIRD

... Flipping maniac.

Opie turned to Cillian and Jackson.

"What did she say?" Jackson asked.

"She . . . said she was sleeping . . ." Opie said.

"Well, sure, that makes sense," said Jackson.

"That's me one hundred per cent convinced," said Cillian. "But for a bonus point. What's that dog thinking?" He pointed at a dog with its head hanging out of a car window. The car was travelling fast on a road twenty feet from the three of them.

Opie felt helpless. "That dog's too far away and travelling too fast!"

"Probably thinking WEEEEEEEEEEEE!! Isn't he,

Opie?” said Jackson, trying to help but making her sound bonkers.

Opie nodded. “I mean, yeah? Very probably.”

“Oh! I know an animal you can talk to!” Jackson said. “My aunt has a budgie! Let’s go now, she won’t mind!”

Jackson grabbed Opie by the hand and pulled her to her feet. They headed off, wheeling his bike. Cillian was forced to follow behind, furious.

Jackson was full of ideas for what they could do with Opie’s new skill. “We must turn this into a business! I’d be your manager, you’re the ‘talent’ . . .”

“What am I?” Cillian grouched, hurrying to catch up.

“Security. Or publicity, whatever,” said Jackson over his shoulder in an offhand tone which Cillian hated and Opie loved.