

~ Pirita Wahlstedt-Niskanen ~

# Onni and the Spell of the Lappish Sorceress

Illustrations by Samuel Wahlstedt



# *Onni and the Spell of the Lappish Sorceress*



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*to Alma*

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Onni was looking through the window of his room as feather-light snowflakes kept floating to the ground outside. Soon it would be Christmas and now, if ever, was the time to spot an elf. Onni kept peering towards the sauna hut on the grounds, but he couldn't see an elf, nor were there any tracks in the snow. Lately, Onni had tried very hard to be a good boy. However, somehow things had kept going wrong and quarrels had broken out between Onni and his parents, or with his friends. At times his parents and teachers just had such silly demands that Onni simply could not accept them. Still, perhaps Onni should not have been having temper tantrums and throwing things around in frustration, the way he had. An elf must have spotted this and relayed it back to Santa Claus. There was nothing to be done about that anymore.







Onni sighed aloud as he gazed into the distance. Then, suddenly, his eyes opened wide: under the building canopy, barely visible, were two sizeable figures. As he took a closer look, each resembled a bird, but were rather odd-looking. They were like large owls, but with glossy, colourful feathers, shining in all colours of the rainbow against the cold, wintry night scene. The two birds stood still. Onni briefly admired them from the safety of his room, but then curiosity got the better of him. Onni carefully eased the front door open and tiptoed outside. He felt scared, but at the same time the two birds were too interesting to be marvelled at from inside the house. Onni crept closer to the birds, who, surprisingly, stayed still. Typically, as one knows, birds get scared and fly away when approached. Onni wondered if he could try and get even closer and then proceeded with gingerly steps right up to them.

– Might you be Onni, asked one of the birds as it turned towards him.

Onni got such a fright he felt like fainting on the spot. The bird spoke to him and even knew his name! Onni needed some time to calm himself before being able to respond or do anything else for that matter.

– Ye-yes, I am, he finally managed to utter, still scared.

– Come closer, we have something to tell you, the bird continued.



Onni hesitantly stepped closer to the birds. What on earth could these two talking birds have to share with him.

– Come now, bravely, I won't eat you, said the bird.

– Congratulations, you are the first one to dare come this close to us. Thus far, everyone has run away, including some grown-ups who were on our list, the bird told him.

On hearing the word list, Onni immediately thought about the one drawn up by elves and got a fright that some punishment would follow for not obeying his parents earlier. Onni kept listening to the birds with a distinct fear inside him.

– We needed to find someone brave and stubborn. In addition, the person had to be small enough – and clever. We got some good tips from the elves in the area, so we have already learnt quite a bit about you, how you have challenged your parents and teachers. One could think that with you, the requirements for braveness and stubbornness are met. Your size is a match and you're probably clever, too, – according to the elves at least.

– Oh, okay, replied Onni, fear still making his voice tremble.

– You don't need to be so modest. Believe me, those characteristics will be of use now, said one of the birds.

– You do believe in elves and Santa, asked the other.

– I do, confirmed Onni quietly.

– Very well, then. Sam si la Pom and the Wise elf are going to need your help.

– Oh, who, wondered Onni out loud.

– They’re both elves of Korvatunturi. You’ll get to meet them soon. At Korvatunturi, that is, continued the bird after noticing Onni shifting his gaze in wonderment.

– But we’ve completely forgotten to introduce ourselves! I am Helga and this is Olga, added the bird a bit louder.

– I’ll get straight to the point. The situation at Korvatunturi is alarming and we’ll need to have you with us to resolve the matter, said the bird who introduced herself as Helga.

– What sort of matter, wondered Onni, still frightened about what might follow.

– The elves could not tell us more so the Lappish Sorceress would not get wind of it. They’ve asked for someone suitable to be brought to Korvatunturi as soon as possible. It is a big ask, but we all trust that you will help us and we’ll offer you all our support, said Olga.

– Very well then, Onni accepted hesitantly, wondering at the same time whether this could be an opportunity for him to improve his standing on the elves’ list.

– Jolly good, let’s get going then, proceeded Helga.

– But how will I get there, wondered Onni.

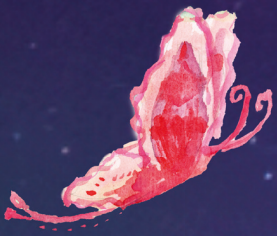




– Just climb on my back, answered Helga.

Helga turned her back towards Onni who carefully hopped on the back of the bird. This sort of ride was a first for Onni who was feeling slightly anxious. With great speed the pair climbed high into the sky and Onni's home below them seemed to be getting smaller and smaller. He held on tightly to Helga's soft feathers so he wouldn't fall off.

In a while, the weather cleared up and soon there were treeless fells and white landscapes visible ahead. They landed on one of the



**J**ust before Christmas two colourful owls appear on Onni's home yard. The birds ask Onni to follow them to Korvatunturi where his help would urgently be needed. Despite being afraid, Onni joins the owls. As they get to Korvatunturi, Onni learns that he is the only one to challenge the Lappish Sorceress and her wicked deeds in Santa's country. He will need to muster up all his courage to fight the magical powers of the witch.

**Pirita Wahlstedt-Niskanen** is a Jyväskylä-based author of children's books who has also studied writing at university. She has three children's titles published previously.

**Samuel Wahlstedt** is a sixth-former and a keen drawer who has attended a visual arts school from age 8.



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