

Winnie is Rescued from the Spaceship

By Liz Pitman



Illustrated by Jim Torrance

After their adventure with the map, Wallace, Wanda and Winnie Woodlouse passed their days peacefully under the trees, munching wood, playing sticky legs and generally keeping out of trouble (well, mostly). The summer days were very hot and bright so they also spent a lot of time hiding under stones and things to keep cool.

The children's parents, Wendy and William, had kept a close eye on them after the scare when they thought they had lost their children, but now that was almost forgotten and they were quite relaxed. That is until they heard a great shriek from outside.

They ran out to see Wallace and Wanda running as fast as all of their legs could carry them towards their home.

"Mummy! Daddy! Help!" they cried together, "Winnie's been swallowed up by a spaceship!"



Everyone was used to Wallace's tall tales of huge flying saucers and ferocious alien invaders, so they usually ignored them. This time, though, the thought that dear little Winnie might be in danger made both parents jump up in alarm. With both Wallace and Wanda talking as quickly and as loudly as they could, though, it was hard to know what had really happened.

"One at a time," shouted William, quite loudly so that he could make himself heard.

"Now Wallace, slowly and quietly, tell me what has happened."

"We were playing underneath the gorse bushes, near to the cricket ground. Wanda had sat on a gorse thorn and had made the funniest squeaking sound and we both laughed at the noise she had made and we were laughing so hard that we didn't notice that Winnie had strayed away a bit 'cause there was something shining under the gorse a bit further on and she'd gone to see what it was and then we followed her to have a look too and by the time we got there she was up close to it and was peering inside and we called her to be careful but she didn't listen and crawled inside and then it was too late and it had swallowed her up and we could hear her screaming inside but I said to Wanda that it was too dangerous to try and help her ourselves so we came for help instead." Wallace was breathless by the time he finished and Wanda was crying.

"What was it like, this space ship?" Wendy asked as calmly as she could, even though she was very worried indeed.

"Oh! It was big and round and shiny and painted red and it had alien writing on," replied Wallace, his eyes as big and round and shiny as the space ship he described. Wanda's were just red.

"I see," nodded William, "one of *those* space ships. You were both quite right to come and get us. I think we'll need more help than just us, though. Wendy, you go with the children to comfort Winnie and I'll go and see who I can find to help."

So, while William disappeared into the trees, Wendy, Wallace and Wanda hurried off to the space ship. It hadn't moved since the children had last seen it, to the relief of Wallace who was convinced it would have been well on its way to a distant galaxy by now. No sound came from it, except for the same sort of squeaky noise that Winnie always made when she got stuck upside down while playing sticky legs.

They looked at the spaceship as it lay there, glistening in a ray of sun that had managed to penetrate the gorse. As Wallace had said, it was big. Compared to a woodlouse, it was very big indeed. It was made of metal, which shone, just as Wallace had said. And it was painted red, with the letters C O K E on its side.

Wendy called to Winnie to let her know that she was there, and that help was on its way. She then turned to the other two little woodlice.

"I know it looks a bit like a big spaceship but it's not," explained

Wendy. "It's one of those things humans call cans. Some of them play with them then throw them on the ground and a while later other humans usually come and pick them up. They do it with all sorts of other things, for example, glass things called bottles and shiny paper like things called crisp bags. All of these human things are very, very dangerous and you must promise me never to go near any of them again.



Uncle Windsor once got trapped in one of those bottle things for two days and it took hundreds of us to get him out."

As Wendy finished her cautionary tale, they heard the sound of approaching feet, and lots of them.

"Here's Daddy," exclaimed Wanda, "and Major Marchwell."

The Major headed a multitude of ants from his own 1st Armoured Division (Red) of the Cholesbury Light Infantry Ants and also from the 7th Hawridge Engineers.

"Company, halt!" At Major Marchwell's command, the ants stopped in perfect alignment.

In silence and while the others waited with baited breath, Major Marchwell paced slowly round the can, twirling his moustache with great concentration. "Hmmm," he said every so often, and continued pacing. Everyone was dying to know what the rescue plan would be but no one wanted to interrupt his deep thought.

Eventually, the plan was revealed.

"Right, men," the Major announced. "I want you to come forwards in formation. I want a row of 25 ants to line up underneath the can, pushing it up as high as possible. The next 25 will then come and stand on their

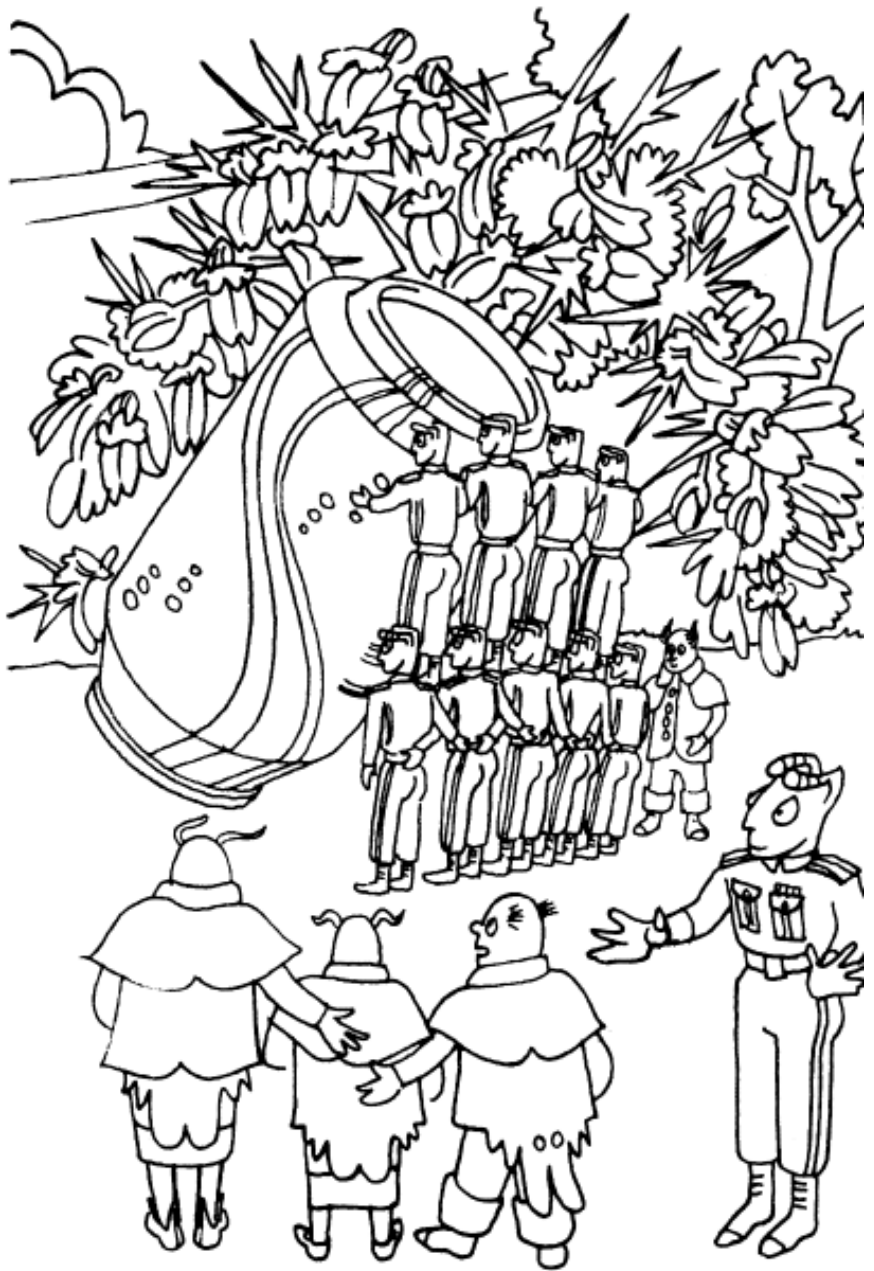


shoulders and push the can higher. We will carry on building a wall of ants pushing the can higher and higher until it is upright. Little Winnie will then have to find the hole in the can underneath her and burrow her way out. Everyone else stand clear in case the can topples over."

Wendy explained very carefully to Winnie what would happen and what she had to do, then the rescue began.

Very slowly, the lines and lines of 25 ants stepped onto their colleagues shoulders, pushing the tin higher and higher. Wallace had heard that ants were very strong but he didn't think they could be as strong as this. It was truly amazing. Finally, as Major Marchwell had predicted, the can was pushed upright, with its hole now on the ground. All they could now do was wait and hope that Winnie had understood what she had to do.

They waited.
And they waited.
And they waited.
And they waited.



And they.... hang on, there was a sound. A sort of scratching sound. Despite the Major's warning to keep clear, Wendy and William rushed forwards and started digging near to where the sound was coming from. In no time at all, a little head appeared - Winnie's little head. It was rather dusty from digging and rather tear stained from crying but otherwise it was unhurt - nothing that a big long hug from Wendy couldn't put right.

The children stayed away from the gorse bushes for a little while after that and next time they went the can had gone. And they were always careful to stay away from human things in the future.