

OLIVER GOES EXPLORING

(Ages 4 to 8)

by Nancy Leake

Oliver is a very small spider. He lives in a garage and has become friends with Gus, a much larger spider. Gus is larger because he spun his web near the birdseed container. Lots of tiny gnats and flies are drawn to the seeds so Gus always has more than enough to eat. Oliver, however, has to work at it to catch enough to eat. Sometimes Oliver has to ask Gus to share his food. Oliver has been too busy exploring and hasn't stopped to spin a web.

“Hey Gus, do you have any spare gnats? All the exploring I did today made me extra hungry.”

“Sheesh! What do you think I am, a cafeteria?”

“No, but you always have so much that you can't eat it all.”

“If you would settle down in one spot and spin a web you would catch plenty too.”

“But I have so much to explore that I don't have time to spin a web.”

“Someday you are going to get into trouble doing all that exploring instead of spinning your web like all spiders do.”

Life went on in the garage as usual. Mr. or Mrs. Carson came out each day to get birdseed to fill the bird feeder. Their son, Timmy was in and out of the garage often getting balls or skates or his wagon.

One day Oliver decided to climb up on Timmy's bike to have a look around. It was a long climb for a small spider but he finally made it all the way up to the seat.

“Hey Gus! Look at me! I’m the “king of the mountain!”

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“Yeah, yeah, don’t bother me kid, I’m busy collecting the catch of the day”

Just then Timmy came into the garage for his bike. He had asked permission to ride down the street to his friend’s house. Oliver didn’t have time to climb down so he crawled under the seat and hung on. Gus saw what was happening and hollered, “Hang on tight Oliver and stay hidden!”

Timmy peddled to his friend’s house. The boys loved to play and spent many afternoons together. To Oliver it seemed like the boys were playing forever so he decided to explore the flowers near where Timmy had parked his bike. He climbed down and crept over to a flower bed where several butterflies were flitting around. Oh! How Oliver wanted to join the fun but each time he got near them, they flew away. Oliver got distracted by a few bees gathering nectar. By the time he got back to where Timmy had left the bike, it was gone!

“Oh no, the bike was here just a little while ago, how am I going to get home?” cried Oliver.

He heard the mailman’s truck coming and decided the mail box might be a good place to wait for Timmy to return. It was a long crawl for such a little creature and Oliver was worn out by the time he got there. He was so tired in fact, that he curled up in a clump of grass at the base of the pole and fell asleep. When he woke up it was dark out and he was frightened and lonely. Soon he saw a big fat toad hop by and he called out, “Mr. Toad, I need to go home, do you know where Timmy lives?”

“I think he lives a couple of houses down the road. I’m going that way so hop on.”

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Oliver was thankful for the ride but with all that hopping it was just too hard to hang on and soon he fell off. Mr. Toad never even noticed. He just kept hopping on his way. Oliver was shaking his head, trying to recover from all that bouncing. Suddenly he heard a rustling in the grass so he climbed as quickly as he could up a tall weed, holding his breath so he wouldn't make a sound. Oliver watched as a large snake slithered by and that is when he decided to spend the rest of the night at the top of that weed!

The sun came up in the morning, waking Oliver. He was stretching and getting ready to climb down from his tall weed bed when he saw a bird swooping down, aimed right at him! There was no time to think...he jumped off the weed, hit the ground and rolled up against something hard. The bird saw where Oliver landed and was hungry for breakfast so it flew down to gobble him up! Oliver realized he had rolled up against a discarded soda can so he quickly dashed into the opening just as the bird's beak thudded against the can. Poor Oliver crouched in the far corner shivering with fright until the bird gave up and flew away. All Oliver could think of was his safe home in Timmy's garage and the extra gnats that Gus had always shared with him. He missed his home and his friend. How he wished he would have taken Gus' advice and made his own safe, little spot in the garage and spun a web and been content. But, now he was lost, scared and hungry. Oliver heard a sniffing sound and peeked out to see a friendly looking dog snooping along the side of the can.

“Oh Mr. Dog, I need to go to Timmy's house, can I ride there on your back?”

“I know where he lives but I don’t want a spider on my back so you can hang on to the tip of my tail if you want to.”

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Oliver ran over, grabbed the dog’s tail and they started off down the street. Unfortunately, Mrs. McAllister’s cat had come walking around the corner of the house. Mr. Dog spied him and took off! Oliver lost his grip on Mr. Dog’s tail, tumbling end over end at the side of the road. Two of Oliver’s eight legs were bruised and sore and he had a bump on his head. To make matters worse, it started to rain! Oliver limped along until he came to a paper cup lying in the grass alongside an empty potato chip bag. Spiders don’t eat potato chips but Oliver was so hungry, he pulled a few crumbs into the paper cup and ate them. At least he had something in his stomach and could stay dry inside the paper cup.

Meanwhile, back at the garage, Gus was beside himself with worry! “Oliver has been gone a long time and I’m very worried about him.” Gus said to Timmy’s cat, Furball. “Would you please go out looking for him?”

“Where do you think I should look?” asked Furball while scratching his ear.

“He rode away with Timmy to play with his friend so he has to be somewhere between here and there.”

Furball stretched, licked his paw and washed his face. Then he started off to find Oliver. He didn’t like getting his feet or coat wet from the tall grass and weeds along the way but he kept thinking of Oliver out there alone and kept going.

The pitter patter of rain drops on the paper cup had lulled Oliver to sleep. Soon he woke up because his paper cup house was rocking back and forth. A brisk wind had come up, carrying the potato chip bag away and lifting Oliver's cup, taking it skipping along over the grass and

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weeds. Suddenly the cup slammed down on the ground and Oliver went bouncing around inside. When he finally stopped rolling, he glanced at the opening and saw one huge green eye looking in! Oliver was sure this was the end of him. His last thoughts were of Gus and the garage they had shared for so long. He wished he had listened to Gus and done what he was supposed to do instead of playing and exploring all the time.

"Oliver, is that you in there?"

"Wha-what? Who knows my name?" stuttered Oliver.

"It's me, Furball. Gus sent me to find you and bring you home."

"Oh Furball, I've never been so happy to see anyone in my whole life!"

"Come on out, climb up between my ears and let's get back home before it rains again."

When they got back, Oliver thanked Furball and Gus and filled his belly with gnats that Gus offered him. Then Oliver gave Gus a big hug.

"Sheesh, kid! You don't have to smother me!"

Oliver walked over to a nice little spot in the corner and began spinning a web. Both Gus and Furball watched with pride as Oliver's web grew. They knew that he had learned his lesson well.