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Endangered

by Eliot Schrefer

PART ONE: Otto

ONE

It is summer vacation in the United States. Fourteen-year-old Sophie flies to the Congo, to stay with her mother.

Sophie's parents are divorced. When they divorced, Sophie went to live with her white American father in Florida, and visits her black Congolese mother in Africa each
Summer. Sophie's mother lives in the Congo because her job is to save and care for bonobos. It is dangerous in the city. On her way from the airport to her mother's house, Sophie sees a poor man trying to sell a baby bonobo. She feels sorry for the animal and buys him with her own money. Back in the jeep, she sees that the bonobo is very skinny, sick, and is missing two fingers.
Sophie arrives at her mother's home for the bonobos.
The animal doctor sees the baby bonobo and checks him.
He needs water very badly. Sophie gives the baby bonobo a bath because he is very dirty. The bonobo loves Sophie touching and hugging him. Sophie's mother comes in. She looks at the baby bonobo and tells Sophie that buying the bonobo was a dangerous thing. She and Sophie decide to stay in the nursery that night.
to take care of the baby. Sophie video chats with her dad in the United States. She decides to name the baby bonobo Otto (which means "eight") because he only has 8 fingers. Sophie tries to give Otto milk all night.
The animal shelter has three parts: the main building with offices and clinic, the nursery for baby bonobos with a small fenced yard, and a large jungle area with trees, river, and many plants and animals. This large area has an electric fence around it. In the morning, Sophie goes to the nursery and sees the "mother caregivers" for the other bonobo babies. Sophie wants to get some advice from the smart caregivers to
help Otto drink. Sophie takes Otto to her mother's office and her Mom says to try flat soda for Otto to drink. He likes it!
Sophie used to love living in the Congo, but now she sees the dangers and poverty there. She still likes to visit her mother, but is glad she does not live there all year. Otto is slowly getting well. He and Sophie spend all their time together. Otto finally smiles and laughs. Although Sophie thinks the animal care workers do not like her, they make her a special, "American-style" meal. One day, the poor man who
sold Otto to Sophie comes to the animal shelter to sell more baby bonobos. Sophie is angry at him and her mother is very upset. Sophie understands that she was wrong to buy Otto from that man. She feels sad because she made her mother disappointed.
The next morning, Sophie's mother prepares to bring some grown bonobos to a safe jungle area. Sophie is sad that her mother has to leave before the summer is over. Sophie tells her mother that she loves her. Sophie worries about her mother on the long trip to the jungle. The Congo is becoming more dangerous.
Paragraph beginning with: Otto is learning to be a skilled climber. He and...
are trying to take over. Everyone is in danger.

Sophie thinks about her mother and worries again. Cell phone and internet service is down. All the workers need to stay at the animal shelter for the night. They hear on the radio that American citizens can leave on United Nation airplanes. Sophie can leave the country. She does not think Otto will live if she leaves him to go back to the United States.
The van from the United Nations comes to take Sophie safely back to the United States. She asks if Otto can come with them. They answer, "No." It is hard to pull Otto off of Sophie, but the adults take him away, crying. Sophie is so worried about Otto that she jumps out of the van, picks him up and runs into the large jungle area with the electric fence around it. In her hurry,
she drops her suitcase filled with food and clothes.
Sophie climbs a tree to see if the van has left. No one is following her. From the tree top, she sees a nearby village on fire and many villagers have been killed. Sophie tries to warn the adults about the danger from the bad soldiers, but they are already at the animal shelter, killing her friends.

To stay safe from the bad soldiers, Sophie goes
deeper into the jungle. She and Otto have to help each other stay alive.
Some teenager bonobos come over to Sophie and Otto.

They are curious, but do not hurt them. More bonobos come and let Sophie know who is boss in the large area (not Sophie!). Sophie is getting very hungry and thirsty. They find a pond and drink some of the water.
Ten

Sophie decides to take a risk and go out of the safe, electric yard to get her suitcase. She sees another baby bonobo and takes her into the large area with her, Otto, and her suitcase. The bad soldiers hear them but cannot get past the electric fence.
Eleven

Sophie and Otto feel better after they eat some food from the suitcase. Otto and the other baby bonobo, Songololo, start playing with each other. Sophie has to find a way to get along with the other adult bonobos in the large area, especially the angry queen of the bonobos. She reads a notebook from one of the bonobo caregivers and learns more about her bonobo "neighbors".
When it starts to rain, Sophie watches the bonobos. They make swings from leaves between branches of the trees. Sophie tries to make one, but can't. A friendly bonobo comes over and makes a leaf swing for Sophie and Otto. They don't have to sleep in a puddle on the ground. At night, the bonobo queen knocks Sophie and Otto out of their swing two times. They are bruised in the morning and then it starts to
rain again. Some of the bonobos become friendlier with Sophie and Otto, but not the queen.
Each day Sophie climbs a tree to see if the bad soldiers are still there. She thinks about her parents and how she might get rescued some day.

Sophie gets to know the different bonobos and starts to feel more safe and comfortable in the electric area. One day, though, she sees that the power in the fence is off!
Sophie decides she and Otto need to escape at sunrise before the bad soldiers know the electric fence is not working. She tries to leave quietly with Otto, but other bonobos follow her and wake up the bad soldiers. The bad soldiers shoot one of the bonobos, but Sophie, Otto and the others run away. They find some food in the jungle and sleep.
One bad soldier from the group finds their hiding place and tries to shoot the bonobos to eat them. A brave old bonobo saves the group by scaring the soldier away. Sophie keeps going toward the big city to find help. The bonobo group follows her.
SIXTEEN

Sophie and the bonobos reach the edge of the jungle. They come to a manioc farm, but no farmers are there. She puts some manioc in her bag for later. She can eat the leaves raw and cook the roots. Sophie decides that the farm and empty village are a good place to leave the bonobos (except for Otto). She uses the sleeping pills from her suitcase to make the bonobos sleep. She and Otto can
get away and travel towards the big city. Sophie meets a kind man with a group of hungry and sick boys. The man is their teacher and they live at his school. Otto makes the boys laugh. They stay and rest for four days. The teacher gives Sophie a small motor bike when she leaves.
Sophie rides the bike towards the river. She gets stopped by many people trying to get to the airport. A woman helps her find her way to the United Nations camp. They give her a letter from her mother. The good camp soldier tries to help Sophie. He tells her she must give up Otto. Sophie and Otto leave the United Nations camp to try to find her mother.
Sophie and Otto head toward the river. She has to cross some low water first, but Otto uses the trees as a bridge. They reach a small island before night and fall asleep. In the morning, Sophie has an itchy rash and bugs on her. At daylight she finishes the trip to the river. She and Otto wait for the right fisherman going up stream. An old fisherman will take her with him for money.
Sophie does not have money, but she gives him her necklace. They start paddling up the river. It is hard work.
The old fisherman trades soap for food as he paddles up the river. He stops the canoe near the city of Mbandaka and drops Sophie and Otto off on the shore. Sophie promises to send the money to his village after she finds her mother.
Sophie shares her water with some friendly girls.

They give her directions to her mother's town.

They follow a trail through the jungle. Sophie is very tired and misses her mother. At night, hundreds of caterpillars fall from the trees. Otto eats them up and Sophie even eats some!
When Sophie wakes up, Otto is not with her. She calls his name, but he does not answer. She is afraid that he is hurt. She looks for him in the jungle and finds him tied between two trees. He is caught in a trap. Two bad soldiers come to the trap. Sophie hides. The girl soldier climbs the tree and cuts Otto down. The bad soldiers take Otto to the city. Sophie quietly follows.
In the leader's house, Sophie sees that Otto is not hurt. The leader speaks in a different language and is drunk. He looks young and scary. Sophie discovers that he speaks French, like she does. She gets him talking so he won't think of hurting her or Otto. The young soldier wants to keep Otto, but Sophie shows him that she has power over Otto. She tells him that Otto's power can help him.
be a stronger leader if he lets them go.
The young soldier falls asleep and Sophie and Otto escape.
It is hard for Sophie to travel through the city in the dark. She follows a path toward her mother's town, passing many sad sights. Otto is sick and both he and Sophie really need water and food. Finally they come to a village and a friendly mother gives them water and food. Sophie asks if anyone knows her mother. They take her to a house, and there she is!! Sophie and her mother
are so surprised and very happy.
Sophie and her mother hug for a long time.

Sophie tells her mother the long story of her trip to find her. It is still very dangerous to travel, so Sophie and Otto stay in the town with her mother. Everyone gets healthy and stronger.

After a month, the phone works and Sophie's father calls. He has flown to the Congo and wants them to come home.
They are picked up at the airport by Sophie's father and they drive to the animal shelter. Two of the workers are still alive as well as one bonobo. They started building their home and the animal shelter again.
Sophie takes her mother and Otto to the empty village and manioc farm where she had left the other bonobos. One adult, one child and one baby bonobo come out of the jungle. They are alive and healthy. Sophie and her mother take them back to the animal shelter. Sophie stays in the Congo to help her mother get the animal shelter going again. She gets a call from the country's leader who has
found eighteen bonobos needing a home. They take them to the animal shelter.
Sophie stays in the Congo for high school and then goes to college in the United States. She meets and gets engaged to an African man at college. After graduation, they come to live in the Congo. When Sophie comes back, she wants to see the bonobos that are ready to go to the safe jungle area. Otto has been there for several years and Sophie
wants to find him. When she does, he has a family. They are so happy to see each other. Sophie saved Otto's life and Otto saved Sophie's.