

The Tales of **Olga** da Polga

Michael Bond

Author of A BEAR CALLED PADDINGTON



Illustrated by Hans Helweg



The Tales of Olga da Polga

By MICHAEL BOND

Illustrated by HANS HELWEG

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON

Atlanta

Dallas

Geneva, Illinois

Palo Alto

Princeton

Toronto

Acknowledgments

The Tales of Olga da Polga, by Michael Bond, copyright © 1971 by Michael Bond, illustrations copyright © 1971 by Hans Helweg. This edition is reprinted by arrangement with Macmillan Publishing Company, a division of Macmillan, Inc. and Penguin Books, Ltd.

Credits

Photography UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos: p. 120.

Copyright © 1989 by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of Houghton Mifflin Company unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address inquiries to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Company, One Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN: 0-395-45991-5

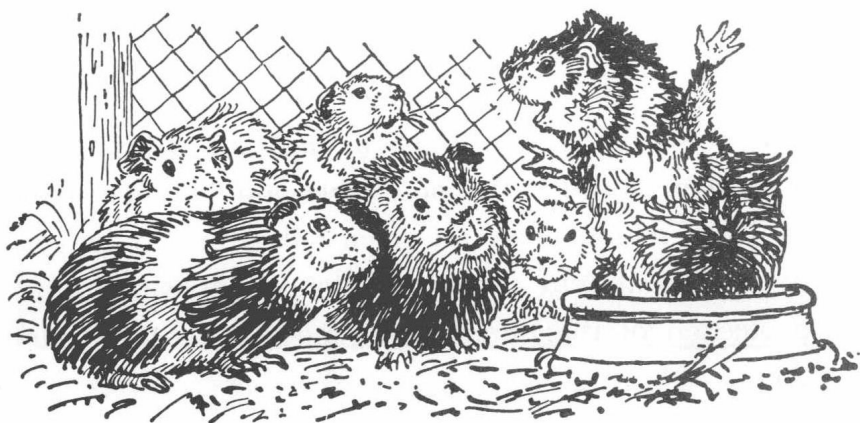
JKLMNQPQRST-B-99876543210

Many people long for excitement and adventure in their lives. They believe that an exciting, adventurous life can only be found away from home. So, they long to leave the town, city, state, or even the country where they grew up.

This is the story of Olga da Polga. She is a small furry animal known as a guinea pig. Olga has always longed to “go places.” She finally manages to do just that. Does she also find excitement and adventure?

Table of Contents

THE TALES OF OLGA DA POLGA by Michael Bond	5
About the Author and Artist	120
Glossary	122



1 • Olga Sets Out

From the very beginning there was not the slightest doubt that Olga da Polga was the sort of guinea pig who would go places.

There was a kind of charm about her, something in the set of her whiskers, an extra devil-may-care twirl to the rosettes in her brown and white fur, and a gleam in her eyes, which set her apart.

Even her name had an air of romance. How she had come by it was something of a mystery, and Olga herself told so many fanciful tales about moonlit nights, castles in the air, and fields awash with oats and beautiful princesses—each tale wilder than the one before—that none of the other guinea pigs in the pet shop knew what to believe.

However, everyone agreed that it suited her right to the very tips of her fourteen toes, and if some felt that it wouldn't come amiss if Olga was taken down a whisker or two it was noticeable none of them tried to do it, though many of them talked of the dangers of going out into the world alone, and without the protection of the humans who normally looked after them.



"You can't do without the *Sawdust People*," warned one old-stager known as Sale or Return, who'd lived in the shop for as long as anyone could remember and was always listened to with respect because he'd once been away for two whole days. "It's a cold, hard world outside."

But Olga would have none of it. "You can stay here if you like," she would announce, standing in the middle of the feeding bowl in order to address the others.

“But one of these days *I’m* going. Wheeeee! Just you wait. As soon as I see my chance I shall be away.”

Olga was never quite sure whether she really believed her words or not, but she liked the sound of them, and secretly she also rather enjoyed the effect they had on the others.

Each night, before she settled down in the straw, she would look at her reflection in the water bowl, puffing out her cheeks and preening herself so that she would look her best if any likely looking customers came along.

And then it happened.

Quite unexpectedly, and not at all in the way Olga had always pictured it.

There were no grand farewells.

There was no battle royal.

No wild dash for freedom.

There were no cheers whatsoever.

In fact it was all over in a flash.

One morning, just as Olga was in the middle of her breakfast, a shadow fell across the cage and she looked up and saw a row of faces outside staring in at her.

There was the Sawdust Person she knew as the owner of the pet shop; a man she had never seen before; and a small girl.

It was the girl who caught Olga’s gaze as she looked

up from the feeding bowl, and as their eyes met a finger came through the bars.

"That's the one," the girl said. "The one with the cheeky look and the oats sticking to her whiskers."

The door in the roof of the cage clanged open and a rough, hairy hand descended.

"She's yours for twenty-two and a half new pence,"¹ said the gruff voice of the pet-shop owner, grabbing hold of Olga. "To tell the truth I shan't be sorry to see the back of her. She's been a bit of a troublemaker ever since she came in."



Olga gave a squeak of outrage and alarm, and as she disappeared from view, kicking and struggling, some of the older guinea pigs nodded their heads wisely with an "I told you so" expression on their faces.

But many of the younger ones looked rather envi-

¹ pence: British coins.

ous, for when your world is only two foot square almost anything else promises to be more exciting. Some of them were put off their food for the rest of the morning.

But if the other inhabitants of the pet shop wondered what was going on when Olga da Polga suddenly disappeared from view, Olga herself was in a dreadful state.

She didn't mind standing on an open and friendly hand once in a while, but it was quite a different matter being grabbed hold of and plonked—there was no other word for it—*plonked* into a cardboard box without so much as a by-your-leave.

Straight after a large breakfast too!

Her heart was beating like a tom-tom. Her dignity was shattered, her fur ruffled beyond description.

To cap it all she felt sick.

She had also made an important discovery. Going places when you know where you are going is one thing, but when you don't know it's quite a different matter.

For a moment or two she lay where she had landed, hardly daring to breathe. But after a while, opening first one eye and then the other, she cautiously took in her new surroundings.

It was dark, but there was a friendly smell of fresh

sawdust, and through a hole just above her head there came a shaft of light and a cooling draught of fresh air.

Olga had just begun to tell herself that perhaps things weren't so bad after all when, without any warning whatsoever, the box rose into the air and began jiggling up and down in a most alarming manner.

And as it tipped first one way and then another Olga began to wish she hadn't been so boastful in the past in case it was some kind of punishment. Old Sale or Return had often gone on about the way humans behaved and how strict they could be. Olga had always thought it was sour grapes² because he'd been "returned" by one, but now she wasn't quite so sure.

There was worse to follow, for just as she was in the middle of trying to work out how many times she *had* actually boasted or told a story which wasn't exactly "true," the jiggling stopped; there was a roar, and a strange tickling began to run through her body, starting in her toes and ending where her tail would have been had she owned one.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she wailed. "Whatever's happening now?"

And then in a flash it came to her.

The noise, the tickling, the feeling that she was going somewhere even though she herself wasn't moving . . . it could only mean one thing.

² *sour grapes*: criticizing something you can't have or someone you are angry at.



“A motor car!” she exclaimed, jumping up and down with excitement. “I’m in a motor car!”

Olga knew all about motor cars because she’d seen them through the pet shop window, but never in her wildest dreams had she ever pictured herself *riding* in one.

Gathering her courage in both paws she clambered up the side of the box and by standing on tiptoe managed to peer through the hole above her head.

Of the houses and shops she’d grown up with there was no sign. Instead, all she could see was green countryside, miles and miles of it.

Fields, hedges, trees, banks covered with luscious-looking dandelions and thick, mouth-watering grass, all flashed past with the speed of the wind.

“If this is the outside world I’ve heard so much about,” decided Olga, “I think I shall like it. It’s much, much better than a stuffy, crowded old pet shop.”

Then she pricked up her ears, for above the noise of the engine she caught the sound of voices. First a deep one, then another, much younger, which she recognized as belonging to the little girl who'd picked her out from among all the others.

"You'll have to look after her, Karen," said the deep voice. "Come rain or shine. No excuses."

"I promise." The second voice paused for a moment and then went on. "I do hope she likes her new home."

"She'd better," came the reply. "It cost me enough to build. What with the wood and the roofing felt, glass for the bedroom window, wire netting for the door, legs to keep her away from Noel . . ."

As the man's voice droned on Olga sank back onto the floor, hardly daring to believe her ears. "I'm going to stay with some Sawdust People," she breathed. "All by myself!

"And in a waterproof house with a bedroom," she added dreamily, "on *legs*."

"Why, I must be going to live in a palace. I really must!"

2 • The Naming of Olga da Polga



If Olga da Polga's new home wasn't exactly a palace it certainly seemed like it, and it was definitely the nearest she was ever likely to get to one.

After the cramped and crowded conditions in the pet shop it was like entering a different world.

The hutch was large and airy and it was divided into two halves. Both floors were neatly covered with sawdust and the rooms were separated by a wall which had a hole cut in the middle so that she could easily pass between the two.

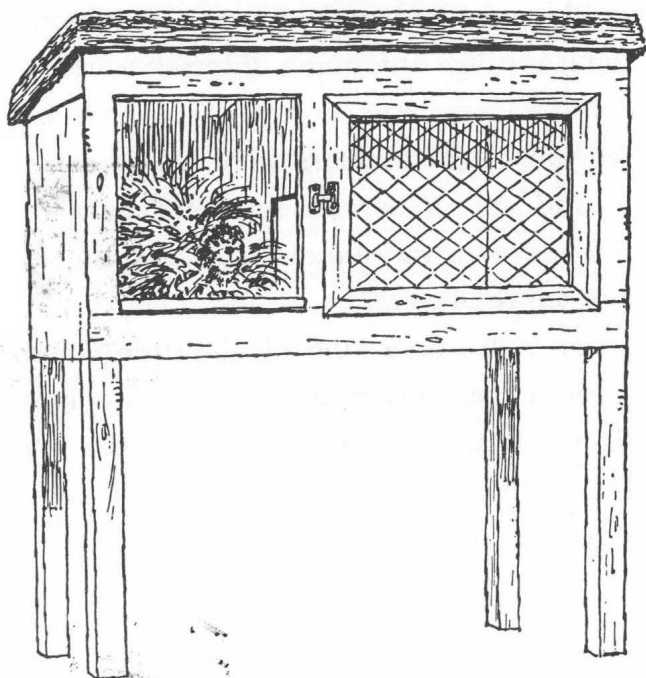
The first half was a kind of all-purpose room; part dining room, part playroom; with a wire mesh door, a small ash branch in one corner so that she could keep her teeth nice and sharp, and two heavy bowls—one marked OATS and the other marked WATER.

Olga tried out both before turning her attention to the second room. This turned out to be even more exciting than the first, for it not only had a *glass window* to keep out the weather but there was a large, inviting mound of fresh-smelling hay as well.

Olga spent some time pressing the hay flat so that she would have somewhere comfortable to sleep without being too hot, and then she settled down to think things over.

Really, all things considered, life had taken a very pleasant turn.

The sun was shining. The birds were chirping. Even the noises seemed friendly; the clinkings, singing, and



occasional humming sounds from somewhere inside the big house as Mr. and Mrs. Sawdust—which was what Olga had decided to call them—went about their work.

Every so often there was a reassuring murmur of voices outside as one or other of the family peered through the glass to make certain she was all right.

First came Mr. Sawdust, then Mrs. Sawdust, then some other people called “neighbors” and they all had a friendly word or two to say to her.

Finally Karen Sawdust herself arrived with an enormous pile of grass, a bunch of dandelions, and a large juicy carrot neatly sliced down the center, which she placed temptingly alongside the feeding bowl.

“We’re going to choose a name for you now,” she announced, as Olga stirred herself and came out of the bedroom to sample these new delicacies. “And we have to make sure it’s right because tomorrow Daddy’s going to paint it over your front door. There’ll be no changing it once that’s done.”

Olga nibbled away, half listening, half in a world of her own.

“Daddy fancies Greta and Mummy’s rather keen on Gerda, but I’m not sure. They don’t sound *special* enough to me.” Karen Sawdust put her face against the door as she turned to go. “I do wish you could tell us what *you* would like for a name.”

"Greta? ... Gerda? ... *Painted on my front door?*"
Olga's world suddenly turned upside down.

She paused, a carefully folded piece of grass half in, half out of her mouth, hardly able to believe her ears.

"But I'm Olga da Polga," she wailed, addressing the empty air. "I've always been Olga da Polga. I can't change now—I really can't." That night, long after



darkness fell and everyone else had gone to bed, Olga was still wide awake and deep in thought.

"I suppose," she said to herself, for what seemed like the hundredth time, "I suppose I ought to be counting