

MACMILLAN READERS
PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

ROBERT CAMPBELL

Owl Hall

From an original idea by
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 **MACMILLAN**

Arrival

Kara leant her head against the car window and looked out at the other cars driving past on the motorway. Where had the cars been? Where were they going? Who were the people sitting inside them and what were they thinking?

Sometimes Mum passed the cars in front and Kara had time to look inside. Kara smiled at a man and woman having an argument in a black Ford. They were probably arguing about something stupid. It's strange, Kara thought. People always argue about things that are not important and then they don't talk about the things that *are* important. Why?

Then Mum drove faster and suddenly the man and woman were gone.

In the next car they passed, a couple were sitting in the front. They were not talking but they looked relaxed and happy together. Maybe they were listening to the radio. A young girl and boy were sitting in the back seat. The girl was asleep and the boy was playing a video game. They looked like a happy family, Kara thought. They were probably going home after a day at the beach or a visit to a castle.

Kara had started thinking about her own dad when Mum said, 'We won't be on the motorway much longer.'

'Is it far?' Martin asked, yawning¹ in the back seat.

Kara turned and looked into Martin's open mouth. She felt like she could see all the way down his throat to his stomach. It did not look very nice.

Kara looked at Mum. 'Why can't we go on a *real* holiday?' she asked.

'This *is* a real holiday,' Mum replied. 'You'll love it.'

Kara did not know where they were going for their holiday.

It was Mum's surprise. Five days ago she had suddenly decided that they were going away for a week. Kara had imagined² lying on a beach in Spain, dancing in the streets of Rio, shopping in New York. But when they drove past the airport, she realized³ that Mum had a different plan. Her mum's idea of a holiday was probably a week inside a caravan⁴ in a wet field outside a sad seaside town.

Kara's disappointment grew when they left the motorway and drove further into the countryside. They passed through a small town and some villages, but soon there were only fields around them and there were no other cars on the road. Then Mum stopped the car.

'Are we there?' Martin asked. 'I'm hungry.'

Kara looked out of the window but it was getting dark now and she could not see much. Mum took a map from under the seat and tried to find where they were.

'We're lost, aren't we?' Kara said.

'Not *very* lost,' Mum replied. But Kara did not believe her.

'Why don't you use your phone?' Kara said.

Mum smiled at Kara. 'Good idea,' Mum said. But as she took her phone from her bag her expression⁵ changed. 'Oh,' she said. 'There's no signal⁶.'

'I don't believe it!' Kara cried. Then she took out her own phone to check. Mum was right. They were miles from the nearest village and they could not phone anyone for help.

Suddenly Martin kicked⁷ the back of Kara's seat. Kara turned and gave her brother one of her *I'm-going-to-kill-you* looks. Martin smiled at his sister at the same time as Mum started the car.

'Let's go on,' Mum said. 'I'm sure we'll find a road sign or a house ... or a phone box.'

They drove slowly down the narrow⁸ country roads. For a few miles the car's headlights lit up⁹ the trees on both sides of the road. Then suddenly the trees disappeared and all they

could see was the road in front of them. It seemed to go on for miles and miles.

After twenty minutes they came to a crossroads¹⁰. Mum stopped the car and Kara looked for a road sign but she could not see one.

‘There *must* be a sign,’ Mum said nervously.

‘Maybe it fell over,’ said Kara. ‘I’ll look.’

Kara was pulling the car door handle¹¹ when suddenly the face of a large brown dog appeared at the window. It was showing its teeth and barking and growling¹². Its eyes were staring¹³ wildly at Kara and there was a red light flashing¹⁴ on its collar¹⁵. Kara quickly let go of the handle and felt her mum’s arms around her.

‘Max!’ shouted a voice from the darkness and a few seconds later a large man appeared. He pulled the dog away from the



car and looked in through the window. Then he said something that Kara could not hear.

Kara looked at her mum for permission to open the window. Mum nodded and Kara opened it a little. The man leant down so he was close to Kara.

'Don't worry – the dog won't hurt¹⁶ you,' the man said. 'Max loves people.'

Kara looked at the dog running in circles around the car, the red light flashing on his collar, and then she looked back at the man. He was about forty years old with black hair. He wore a black jacket and when he smiled Kara could see his perfect teeth. They were *too* perfect, she thought. Kara did not like the man with the perfect teeth.

'Are you lost?' the man asked.

'Yes, we are,' Mum replied. 'We're looking for –'

'Owl Hall?' the man said.

'That's right. How did you know?' asked Mum.

'It's the only place around here ...' the man replied. 'Apart from my house, of course. I'm Howard, by the way^P.'

Kara noticed that Mum seemed to relax when she heard the man's name. 'Hello, Howard. Nice to meet you,' she said.

'There was a sign here once,' said the man, pointing up the road, 'but it fell down in the storms last year. Go straight ahead and after 800 metres you'll see a turning to the left. Go down the road and you'll come to Owl Hall. Enjoy your stay.'

Mum thanked the man and they drove on. Kara looked back and watched him disappearing into the darkness. Soon the only thing she could see was the flashing red light on the dog's collar.

'There it is!' Mum said suddenly.

The car turned left and they drove down a bumpy¹⁷ track¹⁸, waking Martin up.

'Where are we?' Martin asked sleepily.

'We're here,' Mum said, looking at the wooden sign that hung next to a large metal gate. There was a picture of an owl on the sign and the name: 'Owl Hall'.

Mum smiled and turned to Kara. 'Please can you open the gate for me, darling?' she said.

'Why me?' Kara said as she got out of the car, closing the door loudly behind her. It was cold outside and very quiet. Kara looked around her but she could not see far in the darkness. As she walked towards the gate she heard an owl calling and the noise of something moving in the bushes¹⁹. Suddenly Kara thought she could feel someone or something watching her. 'It must be the owl,' she told herself as she reached the gate. Through the gate she could see the shapes of several small buildings and one large building. They had arrived but Kara did not know where they were. She only knew two things: the place was called Owl Hall and something did not feel right.

The gate creaked²⁰ loudly as Kara pushed it open. Then she turned and waved²¹ to Mum in the car. Mum drove through the gate with Martin smiling in the back seat, and parked in the driveway²² next to two other cars. As Kara was closing the gate, she thought she heard a voice whispering in her ear.

'Kara! Help me. Let me go!' the voice said.

But when Kara turned round, no one was there.