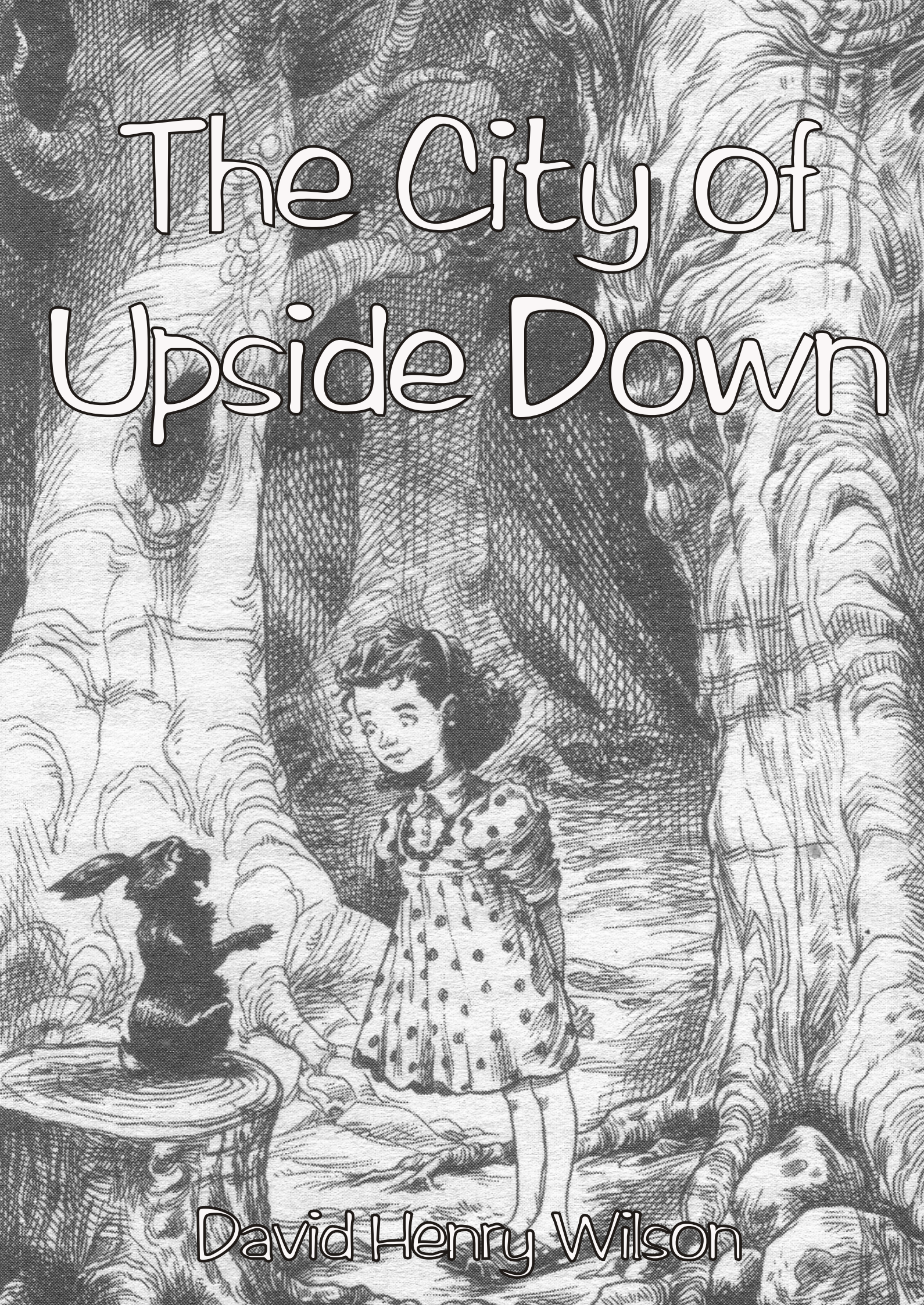


The City of Upside Down



David Henry Wilson

THE CITY OF UPSIDE DOWN

CHAPTER 1

What's Wrong?

"You want to know what's wrong with the world?" said the black rabbit. "I'll tell you. Rabbit pie. That's what's wrong with the world. If they passed a law forbidding rabbit pie, the world would be a safer, happier, healthier place."

"For rabbits," said Lorina.

"Of course for rabbits!" said the black rabbit. "What else do you make rabbit pie with?"

"I don't think that's what Mr Blair meant," said Lorina.

Mr Blair had set the class a project: to find out what was wrong with the world, and how to put it right. Now Lorina was heading through the forest towards the Castle, because she hoped that King Qasim would give her some advice. Not many months ago, she had helped the little green man to rescue his people and to regain the throne from his wicked brother Wasim. The black rabbit had once more met her on the way, and was hopping along the forest path just in front of her.

"That's because your Mr Blair doesn't know what it's like to be a rabbit," he said. "You humans only think about humans."

"That's not true," said Lorina. "We think about animals, too."

"Yes, you think about beating them, cheating them, and eating them."

Lorina had long since learnt that it was useless to argue with the black rabbit. Whatever she said was sure to be wrong, even if it was right.

"Anyway, you won't get any information from the Castle," he said.

"Why not?" asked Lorina.

"Because it isn't there," answered the black rabbit.

"What do you mean, it isn't there?" asked Lorina.

"What do you mean, what do I mean it isn't there? It isn't there means it isn't there. What else could it mean?"

"Well, why isn't it there?" asked Lorina.

"Because it's gone," answered the black rabbit. "Or most of it's gone."

"How can a castle 'go'?"

"All right, don't believe me. Call me a liar. I'll accept your apology afterwards."

They walked (Lorina) and bobbed (rabbit) in silence for a few minutes, and then Lorina asked:

"Where did it go to?"

"It didn't go anywhere," said the black rabbit. "You can go without going anywhere. Time goes by, black goes with white, the bell goes at ten, so the story goes, people go crazy, and things go bump in the night. But they're all still in the same place, aren't they?"

"So the Castle's still there?"

"How can it still be there if it's gone?"

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean."

The black rabbit was enjoying himself. He sat down for a moment and looked up at Lorina with an expression of long-eared disdain.

"What I mean," he said with weary patience, "is that the Castle is not there. It has gone. Or most of it has."

Lorina decided to change the line of questioning:

"Have the green people 'gone' as well?" she asked.

"In order for me to know that," said the rabbit, "I would need to go close enough to find out, wouldn't I?"

"Yes," said Lorina.

"And if I went close enough to find out," said the rabbit, "and I found out that they were there, they would also find out that I was here. And you know what that would lead to, don't you?"

"Rabbit pie," said Lorina.

"Correct," said the rabbit.

They had started walking again, and had now reached the edge of the forest, where there were scarcely any trees and the ground suddenly swept upwards into a steep hill. The black rabbit announced that he would go no further, and told Lorina that she should also turn round and go home.

"But of course you won't," he added, "because you think you know everything."

"No, I don't," said Lorina. "That's why I want to go to the Castle."

"But the Castle's gone," said the rabbit, "so what's the point of going there?"

On the first occasion when Lorina had met the black rabbit, he had told her that Qasim's people were horrible and disgusting, but he'd been wrong. So he could be wrong about the Castle too. But although it would be pointless to go to a Castle that wasn't there, it was equally pointless to suggest that the black rabbit could be wrong.

"Maybe I'll find some green people," she said.

"Horrible and disgusting creatures," said the rabbit. "Well, let me give you a word of advice. If somebody tells you what's wrong with the world and how to put it right, don't believe them."

"*You* told me what's wrong," said Lorina. "So should I not believe you?"

But the black rabbit had already bounded away into the undergrowth.

CHAPTER 2

Birds and Ants

Lorina's apprehension mounted with every step she took, and when she finally reached the top of the hill, she anxiously cast her eyes across the valley.

The black rabbit had been right. The Castle had gone. All she could see scattered over the top of Castle Hill were a few sections of wall, with the stump of a tower here, and a pile of stones there. The gate was still standing, but even at this distance she could see that there was no sign of life.

She made her way down the hill and across the valley. Once it had been bare and brown and thick with smoke, but now the air was clear and the ground was thick with weeds. Here she had first met the green people, who had been living and dying in their tiny tents. Tanga had run to greet her, and Birim her brother had shyly followed a few paces behind. No one came to greet Lorina now. The valley was as still as a graveyard.

Perhaps she should follow the black rabbit's advice and go home, for whatever had destroyed the Castle could destroy her as well. But she had to see these ruins for herself and search for clues as to what might have happened. She therefore climbed the hill, towards the great gate which – as she could now see – was hanging drunkenly from its torn hinges.

At waist height there was a doorbell, and even though the gate was open, Lorina stooped and pressed the bell. Surprisingly it was still working, but no doormouse came to answer it, and so she stepped through the archway into what had once been a courtyard flanked with tall buildings. Now it was a vast open space covered with rubble and broken walls.

"Oh!" said a squeaky voice, "it's you, is it?"

And out from a clump of weeds, nose and whiskers twitching like an any-moment-sneeze, came the doormouse.

Lorina let out a cry of joy, and knelt down beside the tiny creature.

"I s'pose I ought to ask yer wot yer want," said the doormouse, "but I won't cos I can't give it to yer anyway."

"What happened?" asked Lorina. "Who destroyed the Castle, and where are all the green people and the animals?"

"Old on, 'old on," said the doormouse. "I'm s'posed to ask the questions. Or am I? I dunno. I'm not sure if I've still got me job, yer see."

"Just tell me what happened," said Lorina gently.

"I dunno what 'appened!" said the doormouse. "We was all mindin' our own bus'ness an' livin' all right under the new gover'ment, when there was this message."

"Message?" repeated Lorina.

"This gold-faced bird rings the bell one day, an' gives me this piece o' paper. 'E says it's a message. That's wot started it all."

"What was in the message?"

"I dunno. It wasn't fer me, it was fer the King. I told this bird 'e'd 'ave ter get a permit ter send messages ter the King, an' 'e told me permit schmermit, if I didn't take it, 'e'd peck me into doormousse."

"What did you do?"

"I took it."

The King had ordered the doormouse to lock the gate, and had warned everyone that the Castle was going to be attacked.

"Then what happened?" asked Lorina.

"The Castle was attacked," said the doormouse. "Never known anyfink like it. These ants come in an' knocked the 'ole place down in no time."

"Ants?" cried Lorina. "Ants aren't big enough to knock down castles!"

"These was. Cos these was eleph-ants."

The doormouse went on to explain how flocks of gold-faced birds had stolen all the Castle's treasures, while the elephants had destroyed the buildings and squashed the animals.

"What about the green people?" asked Lorina.

"They was taken away," said the doormouse. "All in chains like they was a bunch o' daisies."

"How did you escape?" asked Lorina.

"All me life," said the doormouse, "I wished I was big an' strong. Lucky fer me I never got me wish. Me an' the fam'ly 'id in a corner, so they never seen us. If they 'ad, we'd 'ave bin as dead as a pig. I wish I 'adn't taken that message ter the King. Then it all might never 'ave 'appened."

"Yes it would," said Lorina. "I've read about things like this in the history books. They decide to capture your castle, and they send you a message to surrender because that would save them the trouble of fighting you. But they'll kill you whether you surrender or not."

"Yer mean it wasn't my fault?" asked the doormouse.

"No, of course it wasn't," said Lorina.

"Well, that's a relief," said the doormouse. "Mrs D give me a right rollickin'."

"You don't know where they took the green people, do you?"

"The King said the birds come from a place called The City."

"The black rabbit will know where that is. I must go there. Maybe I can help Qasim and all the others to escape."

Sadly Lorina said goodbye to the doormouse, took one last look at the ruins of the Castle, and then set off for the forest in search of the all-knowing black rabbit.

CHAPTER 3

The Mapeye

"There's no such place as The City," said the black rabbit, "and no such thing as gold-faced birds."

"There is and there are," said Lorina, "because the doormouse saw them."

"Have *you* seen them?"

"No."

"Nor have I, so that proves it."

"That proves nothing," said Lorina. "The fact that we haven't seen them doesn't mean they don't exist."

"A good argument," said the rabbit. "A very good argument. I've used it myself. But the fact that we haven't seen them doesn't mean that they do exist. Have you ever seen a ghost?"

"No."

"Or a creature from outer space, or a fairy or the man in the moon?"

"No."

"Do you believe in them?"

"I don't know," said Lorina.

"When will you believe in them?" asked the rabbit.

"When I see them, I suppose," said Lorina.

"Exactly!" said the rabbit.

"But if they didn't destroy the Castle, then what did?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, please."

"Then I'll tell you. Rabbit pie. That's what destroyed the Castle."

"How could rabbit pie destroy a castle?" laughed Lorina. "That's absurd."

"It may seem absurd to you," said the rabbit, "but green people eat rabbit pie, and anyone who eats rabbit pie deserves trouble, and trouble is what the green people got. Ergo rabbit pie destroyed the Castle."

"Whatawhatawhata load of rubbish!" cried a shrill voice from above.

Lorina and the rabbit both looked up, and above them, perched on a branch, was a black and white bird with a long tail.

"Afatafatafat lot you know!" chattered the bird. "I've seen The City, and it's thatathatahataway!"

The bird, which was a mapeye, flapped its wings towards an eastern hill.

"It's on the otherotherother side of the hill."

"Thank you," said Lorina.

"One moment," said the rabbit. "Are you referring to the town on the other side of that hill?"

"Yes," said the mapeye.

"Ah!" said the rabbit, "then you should have said so."

"Who should have said so?" asked Lorina.

"You," said the rabbit. "Everyone knows about the town on the other side of the hill. But you were talking about The City. There's a big difference between a city and a town."

"What's the difference?" asked Lorina.

"Big," said the rabbit.

"Are the elephants and the gold-faced birds there?" asked Lorina.

"No," said the rabbit.

"Yes," said the mapeye.

"I'm off!" said the rabbit.

And away he scampered into the undergrowth.

"Is the City very far?" asked Lorina.

“Notatostatotatall,” said the mapeye, “come on, I’ll takeatakeatake you there.”

On the way, Lorina explained to the mapeye that she was going to look for the green people. He had actually seen them being taken in chains from the ruined Castle, but whether they had gone to the City he didn’t know.

From the top of the eastern hill, Lorina found herself looking down at a wide sprawl of tall chimneys and red roofs and grey buildings which stretched from one side of the valley to the other. The only break in this dense mass, cutting right through the centre and glinting in the sunlight, was a broad river with several bridges across it.

The mapeye flew down beside Lorina, and announced that as he preferred country life, this was as far as he would go. He wished her luck, and as he flew back towards the forest, Lorina made her way down the hill towards the seething expanse known to everyone (except the black rabbit) as The City.

CHAPTER 4

Treacle and Paper

The narrow pavements of the City streets were swarming with six-legged creatures who hurried and scurried in all directions at once. These were pedestri-ants. There was not much hurrying or scurrying in the roads, however, because they were choked with carts, coaches and carriages. To Lorina’s amazement, they were all drawn by little blue men – some in teams of two or even four – and sitting inside were various birds and insects and animals, like passengerbils, itinerats, travellamas, holiday macaws, explovers, hitch-hawkers, commuter swans, rockcoaches, refubees, tourmites and, strangest of all, horses. Back in Lorina’s village, it was horses that pulled men, not men who pulled horses.

“Excuse me!” she said to one of a team of four blue men. “Why are you pulling the horse?”

The little man looked at her in surprise.

“To get him to where he’s going,” he replied.

“Kindly watch out where you put
Your great big clumsy squashy foot!” squealed a tiny voice from down below.

“Sorry!” said Lorina, who had very nearly crushed a pedestri-ant. “I think I’d better walk in the road.”

She wended her way through the line of stationary coaches. Written on the side of one were the words:

EXPRESS TRAVEL. WE'RE THE BEST
AND FASTEST SERVICE IN THE WEST

The coach was stuck fast, and inside was a very angry monkey, who was beating his chest and shouting:

"If you don't hurry up, I'll mount an attack,
And give all you blocking blockheads a whack."

Lorina had heard of such monkey attacks. They were called gorilla warfare.

"Why don't you get out and walk?" she asked him.

The monkey shouted:
"Don't bother me with your stupid talk.
You think I've paid my fare to walk?"

"But you might get there quicker!" said Lorina.

"I'd get there if dumb folk like you
Would let bigwigs like me go through!"

Lorina shook her head and walked forward to talk to the little blue puller.

"Is it always like this?" she asked.

"Every day," replied the little blue man. "It's called a traffic treacle."

"Don't you mean a traffic jam?" asked Lorina.

"No," said the man. "This is much too sticky for jam."

Then he started to sing a song, and straight away the voices of other blue men along the treacled street joined in:

*"With a blue man and carriage you're someone
Who's got nothing left to prove.
As you sit there in state,
We'll make you feel great,
But just don't expect us to move."*

There was a loud chorus of laughter, accompanied by a honking of horns and a ringing of bells and a shouting of angry passengers' voices.

Lorina looked for elephants and gold-faced birds, but there were none to be seen. By now the bustle, heat, noise and smell of the street were making her feel

quite sick, and so she quickly asked the blue man if he could tell her where the green people were. He shook his head.

"I've been pulling coaches for ten years," he said, "and I've never seen any green people. Except occasionally if I start galloping. Go and ask at the paper office. They usually know where people are."

He gave Lorina directions, and she hurried away through the stationary traffic.

The wide square at the end of the road was also crowded with pedestrians who were moving, and with carriages which were not. On all four sides there were tall buildings, and in the middle was a strange dark object which towered high in the air. It consisted of a large black central block and a lot of bits and pieces that were sticking out at all angles. Some of these had holes in them. Lorina thought of the village square back home, which was peaceful and framed with trees, and had a beautiful stone fountain of animals and angels in the middle.

There was no time for her to gaze at this object, however, because she needed to find the paper office. It turned out to be a house with a lot of paper in front of it. Some was in neatly tied bundles, but there were also loose sheets, torn pieces, bundles that had come undone, and boxes and cartons and bins and sacks that were bursting full. A large sign over the door read: THE DAILY NEWT and underneath this, on the door itself, was the following notice:

*We always like to tell the truth
According to our views,
So let us have your stories
And we'll turn them into news.*

*Scandals and sensations
Are what we like the best.
Just let us have a fact or two
And we'll do all the rest.*

It was only now that Lorina realized what sort of paper this was.

There was no bell on the door, and so she pressed the handle and stepped inside. She found herself in a very large, very untidy, and very smoky room. There were cupboards, tables and papers everywhere, and the smoke was billowing out from under a desk at the far end. As she drew closer, she saw that the smoke came from a cigar, and behind the cigar lounged a smooth, sleek and slinky creature with darting eyes and a spotty skin. This was the newtpaper editor.

"Hello, stranger. Come on in.
Let us have your story.
Robbery, rape, sex or sin?"

Ghostly, ghastly, gory?"

"I haven't got a story," said Lorina. "I'd just like you to give me some information."

The newt blew a balloony cloud of smoke out of his cigar.

"Give you information?
And you've got no tale to tell?
We don't give information.
Information's what we sell!"

"I want to know where the green people are," persisted Lorina.

The newt's eyes darted dartily, and he took the cigar out of his mouth.

"Green people, eh? As in green beans,
Green fingers, green for go,
Greenfly, greenhouse, eat up your greens,
Green grow the rushes, oh?"

"Yes," said Lorina.

"Now do these people who are green
Have stalks instead of eyes?
And did they come in a machine
That flew down from the skies?"

Lorina had just started to tell him that the green people had come from the Castle when suddenly a little blue man with bright yellow eyes came rushing into the room.

"Accident, Mr Newt!" he cried.

The newt at once slithered out from under the desk.

"Can't talk now. Must go out.
Come with us to the scene.
Later we can talk about
These creatures that are green."

As they left the office, the yellow-eyed blue man stopped Lorina.

"One second, you should wear one of these."

He pinned a badge to Lorina's chest. On the badge was written the word: "Press".

"That makes me feel like a doorbell," said Lorina. "What happens if somebody does press?"

"Say ting-a-ling," answered the blue man.

The newt had dashed on ahead, and now turned to shout:

"Come on you two, don't natter!

Get a move on! Hurry! Run!

We've got no time to chatter!

We're missing all the fun!"

Waiting in the square was a tiny cart which the newt leapt into. It was too small for Lorina to sit in, and so as the blue man began to pull it along the pavement, she ran behind it.

The newt kept ringing a bell and shouting "Press! Press!" and so the thousands of pedestri-ants pressed aside to let them through. Some waved and shouted: "The *Daily Newt*!" and the newt waved back with a royal twitch of the front leg.

"Is it a very nasty accident?" Lorina called out to the little blue man.

"Ugh, I hope not," he cried. "I can't stand the sight of blood."

CHAPTER 5

The Accident

A small crowd of pedestri-ants and other animals had gathered at the side of the road, and nearby were a blue man and carriage. The blue man was still standing between the shafts, with his head hanging down.

"Say your piece! Tell your tale!

"The *Daily Newt* is on the trail!" shouted Mr Newt, and the crowd parted to let him through. Lorina and the yellow-eyed blue man followed.

Lying on the ground was an inf-ant pedestri-ant who was crying, and another ant – presumably the mother – stood next to her.

"Press!" shouted Mr Newt.

"Oh!" said the mother, and brushed her feelers gracefully with her front legs.

"What happened?"

"The man and carriage came through town,

"And knocked my little daughter down."

"Daughter's name?" asked Mr Newt.

"Antonia Junior," said the mother.

"And your name, dear lady?"

"Antonia Senior."

Mr Newt had taken out a pencil and pad, and spoke aloud as he wrote his notes:

"Lovely daughter... out in town...
Evil-looking blue man...
Deliberately knocked her down...
Typically human..."

He looked around.

"Did anyone witness the tragedy?"

"Peewit! Peewit!" cried a dark green crested bird from a nearby carriage. It was a peewitness.

"You saw that evil-looking man,
Running loose and wild,
Deliberately change his plan
To smash into the child?"

"Peewit!"

"Good. We always like to quote
From witnesses like you.
It adds a more official note,
So readers think it's true."

Now Mr Newt turned his attention to the weeping victim.

"How do you feel, Antonia?"

"Wah!" cried the baby ant.

"Would you say you were in absolute agony?"

"Wah!"

"Can you stand up?"

"Wah!"

Mr Newt flourished his pencil:

"Antonia could scarcely speak...
Bloody, bruised and battered...
Tried to stand... Much too weak...
Two left legs quite shattered."

Now he turned to the guilty man and carriage. Inside the carriage was a mare, and he asked her if she had seen what had happened.

"I'm afraid I was looking the other way,
"So to answer your question, I'll have to say Neigh."

Mr Newt stepped towards the unhappy-looking blue man.

"Your owner looked the other way.
These witnesses all heard her.
That makes the case as clear as day:
You're guilty of this murder."

"I didn't murder anyone!" moaned the blue man. "She just ran out in front of me..."

But already Mr Newt had turned away, and was addressing the mother:

"Who do you blame for this tragedy?" he asked.

"Well..."

"Thanks to that blue bloodstained beast
For life your daughter's scarred.
We'll have him taken to the east,
Straight to the knacker's yard."

He pointed his arm dramatically at the blue man, and the crowd cheered. Mr Newt held up a front leg for silence.

"This is no time to cheer, my friends.
Let's weep for grief and sorrow.
To find out how the story ends,
Get the *Daily Newt* tomorrow."

He motioned to Lorina and the yellow-eyed blue man to follow him to the cart, but Lorina stopped him.

"Wait a minute!" she said. "If little Antonia is so badly injured, shouldn't she go to hospital?"

"She should indeed. Indeed she should."

By all means take her there.
Of course, it won't do any good,
But that's not my affair."

Lorina insisted, and as the hospital was on the road back to the newspaper office, Mr Newt agreed to lead the way. Lorina carefully picked up the wailing infant and the grateful mother and placed them in the cart beside Mr Newt. Then she ran behind them as she had done before.

By the time the cart had reached the hospital, Mr Newt had composed his story. Puffing at a new cigar, he insisted on reading his masterpiece aloud:

"Tragedy on Main Street

*This is Antonia's tragic tale:
She'll never walk again.
Her story makes us weep and wail
And share her dreadful pain.*

*A devilish man of blue ran wild,
And no doubt thought it clever
To steer his coach and hit the child,
Thus maiming her for ever.*

*A key peewitress, stiff with fear,
Sat rooted in a trance.
'The coach smashed down the little dear.
She never had a chance.'*

*Antonia's mother, in despair,
Cried out: 'My daughter's lame!
Her legs are wrecked beyond repair.
The blue man is to blame!'*

*And nearby stood this evil force,
Who smiled with satisfaction.
There was no glimmer of remorse
To temper his vile action.*

*O gentle reader, all is fact.
Pray for Antonia's daughter.
We trust the Council soon will act
To end this needless slaughter."*

"It's not true!" cried Lorina. "That's not what happened!"

Mr Newt laughed.

"My dear, I couldn't care a hoot!
Oh innocence of youth!

Our readers buy the *Daily Newt*
For stories, not for truth!"

"That poor blue man could get knackered because of your story!" cried Lorina.

"Well if he is, no one will mind.
Blue pullers come and go.
Now these green folk you're trying to find –
Tell me all you know."

Lorina noticed the yellow-eyed blue man shudder at the newt's mention of blue pullers, and she had already decided not to say anything more about the green people. Since the newt had never heard of them, he certainly couldn't help her to find them. Besides, she had to get the injured ant into the hospital.

She took off her "Press" badge, and would have given it back to the yellow-eyed man, but gently he pushed her hand away and whispered:

"Keep it. You might need it. And when you've finished here, come back to the office. I'll wait for you. I may be able to help you."

"Thank you," whispered Lorina, and slipped the badge into her pocket.

Chapter 6

The Hospital

The hospital was a large grey building that stood behind iron railings, and as Lorina carried the two ants through the door, a long-eared, long-haired, long-faced receptionass looked up from behind a desk.

"Do you have a doctor's letter?" she asked.

"No," said Lorina. "Little Antonia's had a bad accident."

"If you want us to make her better,
You must bring a doctor's letter."

"But we need to *see* a doctor!" insisted Lorina.

"A doctor's letter's the condition,
If you want to gain admission."

"Then where will I find a doctor?"

"Here."

"Well how can we get a doctor's letter if the doctor is here and you won't let us in?"

"Make an appointment."

"Then please may we have an appointment?"

"Certainly."

The receptionass opened a large register, pulled out a pen, poised it above the register, and looked up at Lorina:

"First name, last name,
Future or past name,
Sisters and brothers,
Fathers and mothers,
Family diseases,
(Include coughs and wheezes),
Habits, addictions,
Previous convictions,
Lisp, stammer, stutter,
Margarine or butter,
Military rank,
Balance at the bank,
Limits of endurance,
Life and health insurance,
Hobbies and religions,
Cats, dogs or pigeons,
How often do you dream,
Are you what you seem,
Present mental state,
Do you believe in Fate..."

"Stop! Stop!" cried Lorina, for she had noticed that little Antonia was no longer wah-ing but was now lying very still in her hand. "Can't you see that little Antonia may be dying?"

"Dying?" repeated the receptionass. "Then she won't need a doctor."

"Having trouble?"

The question came from a brown-coated, slightly hunched-up bird with a stethoscope round its neck. It was a ducktor.

"Are you a doctor?" asked Lorina.

"Quack!" replied the bird, because he was a quack ducktor.

"It's Antonia," said Lorina. "She's dying."

She lowered her hand so that the ducktor could have a proper look.

"No she isn't," said the bird.

"Yes she is," said Lorina.

"No she isn't," said the bird.

"She is," said Lorina. "I know she is!"

The bird stamped his foot.

"Don't argue with a ducktor! Accept what I have said.
Your little friend's not dying. Your little friend is dead."

Lorina looked closely, and saw that it was true. And she saw that the mother ant was already weeping tears of lamentation. The ducktor quacked scornfully:

"I see no point in weeping. That cannot bring her back.
So I'll have this little morsel for a quick quack of a snack."

Then the bird snatched and swallowed Antonia Junior with a single peck, after which he snatched and swallowed the grieving mother ant as well.

"You can't do that!" cried Lorina. "Doctors are supposed to cure their patients, not eat them!"

"Live ants, sick ants, dead ants. All tickly and nasty.
Only thing they're good for is making antipasti."

Then the ducktor waddled away, leaving Lorina gazing at her empty, antless hand.

"That'll be fifty goldies," said the receptionass.

"What?" said Lorina.

"It's fifty goldies for an examination," said the receptionass.

"Well I haven't got fifty goldies," said Lorina, "and I didn't have an examination."

"But the ants did," said the receptionass.

"Then get your fifty goldies from the ants," said Lorina.

And so saying, she left the hospital.

CHAPTER 7

Art and History

When Lorina returned to the square, she was surprised to see a group of ants clustered on the steps around the strange black block in the middle. A brown-coated creature with very long antennae and huge hind legs was jumping up and down as he addressed them, but Lorina was too far away to hear what he was saying.

The yellow-eyed blue man was waiting for her just inside the door of the newspaper office, and as soon as she entered, he took her arm and led her out again. She just had time to see a cloud of smoke billowing from under Mr Newt's desk.

"I'm glad you came," he said. "Let's go somewhere quiet where we can talk."

He took her across the square, and as the long-legged creature was still waving his antennae and jumping up and down, they stopped for a moment to listen to him.

"I love it, adore it, oh this is true art –
The form, the texture, the blibble.
Oh rhubarb and wondrous dabblediplop,
It's a glorious piece of sculpibble."

He was an art cricket, and he was talking to a class of art stud-ants.

"Excuse me," said Lorina, "but what is it?"

The cricket abruptly stopped leaping, waving and talking, and everybody turned to look at Lorina.

"What is what?" he asked.

"The thing you're talking about."

"What is it? What is it? Um... well now... what is it?"

"Yes. What's it supposed to be?"

"You mean what's the title? Um... let me see...
I did have it somewhere. Ah! 'The Dead Tree'."

"Oh!" said Lorina. "Well, a live tree would be much more beautiful."

The art cricket frowned, and flapped his antennae.

"A live tree, dear lady, will wither and fall,

But a sculpiboo tree will not change at all."

"A live tree would at least look like a tree," said Lorina, "and in any case this thing here is all dark and ugly."

One or two of the stud-ants murmured that the tree *didn't* really look like a tree, and it *was* rather dark and ugly.

"I'd prefer to be alive and beautiful for a short time," said Lorina, "than to be dead and ugly for a long time."

Quite a lot of the stud-ants said yes, and mhm, and it *would* be better to be alive and beautiful than dead and ugly.

The art cricket began to say something like "You mustn't blibble... expert... blobble... like me..." but the yellow-eyed man tugged at Lorina's sleeve.

"We haven't got time for blibbles and bobbles," he whispered.

They headed towards the other side of the square, and on the way they passed a fountain which Lorina hadn't noticed before. When she wanted to drink from it, she saw that there was no water.

"We only have water when it rains," explained the yellow-eyed man. "If it's not raining, we have what the Water Company calls a drought."

On the other side of the square was a building with a broad pillared entrance, which led to several rooms that contained nothing but white walls hung with pictures. They were not the sort of pictures that Lorina had seen (or drawn) at school, and if they hadn't been in frames, she wouldn't even have known that they were pictures at all. There were black blobs, white blobs, blobby blobs and bobbier blobs, stripes and squiggles of all colours, squares and circles of all sizes, and lots and lots of horrible messes.

No one else was in these rooms except for a few ants who were fast asleep. They were attend-ants.

"This is a good place to talk," said the yellow-eyed man, whose name was Matteus, "because no one ever comes here."

"What is it?" asked Lorina.

"It's called the Mum of Art."

"Don't you mean Museum of Art?" asked Lorina.

"It was once," said Matteus. "But now it's useless."

"This is a very strange city," said Lorina. "*Everything* seems to be useless. You have traffic that doesn't move, newspapers that tell lies, doctors that eat their patients, fountains without water..."

"I know," said Matteus. "The whole place is upside down. It used to be upside up when we blue people ran it, but then we discovered gold, and everyone went crazy. Blue people started killing each other, the animals took charge, and things went from blibbling bad to blobbling terrible."

Lorina remembered Mr Newt's report on the injured ant, and asked about the Council.

"All run by animals," said Matteus. "Each department has a manager, so we call it the Managerie. There's the Educat, the Water Boar, the Buildingo, and Wolfare and Horsepitals and the Culture Vulture. All of them totally useless."

But this was not what Matteus really wanted to talk about. He had overheard Mr Newt's remark about Lorina wanting to find the green people, and now he asked her to tell him the whole story. When she mentioned the golden-faced birds and elephants, he nodded vigorously.

"I think I know where they are," he said. "They've been taken to the mine. But it's a very dangerous place. People who enter there never come out again."

"Where is it?" asked Lorina.

"It's to the east. You have to cross the river and go through the Old City."

Lorina wanted to ask him a lot more questions about the City and, especially, the mine, but they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the art cricket and his class of stud-ants.

"The forms, the colours, note this curve
Blooping through the ugbob.
One feels the artist's spirit soar
To dizzying heights of dugdob."

He suddenly caught sight of Lorina, and did his own dizzying leap into the next room.

Matteus now had to hurry back to the newspaper office, and Lorina was anxious to get to the mine and find King Qasim and all her dear friends. As they left the Mum of Art, Matteus again warned her about the dangers of the mine, and told her to be very careful.

"Don't worry," said Lorina. "If I get into trouble, I'll try to bloop through the ugbob."

CHAPTER 8

The River

The river was filthy. Its brown waters carried along a sluggish flow of litter, junk and sewage, and at the point where Lorina was standing, there was a thick pipe discharging a dark blue liquid into the passing soup. The water was so dense and so dark that the blueness simply disappeared.

Lorina thought of the clear river that ran through her village, and of the lesson at school when Mr Blair had told them how important it was to have clean water.

Further along the bank stood a tall blue building which announced in bold gold letters that it was THE WATER COMPANY, and although Lorina was anxious to find the mine, she decided to complain to the Water Company first.

The large entrance hall was completely empty, but stuck on the wall was a large notice which said:

POLLUTION:	Water Foul	Room 101
SEWAGE:	Water Buffaloo	Room 102
LEISURE:	Water Beatles	Room 103
TRANSPORT:	Water Boatman	Room 104
COMPLAINTS:	Water Wastotime	Room 105
PAYMENTS (and truffles)	Water Boar	Room 106

The hall narrowed into a long corridor, and so Lorina walked to the first door, Room 101, and knocked.

"Come in!" hissed a harsh voice, and when Lorina opened the door, she found herself confronted by a beautiful white bird, which twisted its long neck round to look at her.

"Yesss?" hissed the bird.

"I've come to tell you that the river is polluted," said Lorina.

"I know. I sssimply can't go near it.
Sssomebody shshshould try and clear it.
Sssewage. Nothing I can do.
You'll have to see the buffaloo."

So Lorina went to the next office, Room 102, and knocked on the door.

"Come in!" bellowed a deep bass voice, and when Lorina opened the door, she found herself confronted with a nasty smell, and a shaggy-haired, bull-like animal with long curved horns.

"I've come to tell you that there's a lot of sewage in the river," she said.

"There's plenty in my office too,
So what am I supposed to do?
Young lady, my advice to you
Is learn to love the smell of poo."

Lorina quickly shut the door, and went to the next office, Room 103. From inside, she could hear the sound of little voices, and when she opened the door, she saw four long-haired insects gathered round a lollipop, and happily singing a song about far-away troubles.

They took no notice at all of Lorina, and so she left them to their far-away troubles, and went to the next office, Room 104.

On the door was a notice which said:

TRANSPORT
WATER BOATMAN
Rowed away

Room 105 also had a notice on the door, which simply said:

COMPLAINTS
CLOSED (for ever)

And so Lorina arrived at Room 106. Although "PAYMENTS (and truffles)" were not the reason for her visit, she remembered Matteus mentioning the Water Boar as one of the Council's managers, so perhaps he would be able to do something about the polluted river. She knocked at the door.

"Come in!" grunted a grumpy voice, and in went Lorina.

Sitting at a desk, counting gold pieces with one trotter and munching truffles with the other, was a large tusky pig.

"If you've brought truffles or gold, then stay,
But if you haven't, go away."

He did not even look at Lorina.

"I've come to tell you," said Lorina, "that the river is polluted."

"Pollution here, pollution there,
And frankly, madam, I don't care."

"Well you *should* care!" said Lorina. "A polluted river's bad for everybody. You can't drink the water..."

"Department of Food!"

"...it spreads diseases..."

"Department of Health!"

"...fish can't live in it..."

"Department of Fish!"

"...and it's costing you a lot of gold."

"Department of... GOLD?... Tell me more.
Come in, my dear, and close the door."

Lorina closed the door behind her.

"At the moment," she said, "the City only has water when it rains."

"True," said the boar.

"But if you cleaned up the river, there would be water all the time."

"Also true," said the boar.

"And if there was water all the time, you would earn more gold."

"How?" asked the boar.

"Because you would have more water to sell," said Lorina.

The boar gave a snuffle and munched a truffle.

"We sell them rain, which we get free,
So profit's a hundred per cent, you see.
It costs us nothing to deliver,
Whereas your plan to sell the river,
Tempted though I am to back it,
Could end up costing us a packet."

"It wouldn't cost you anything to forbid rubbish being thrown in the river,"
said Lorina.

"How would we do that?"

"Put up a notice saying 'Do not throw rubbish in the river'."

"Do you know what would happen to the notice?"

"No."

"It would be thrown in the river."

"Then the Council must pass a law," she said.

To her surprise, the Water Boar thought that was a good idea. He suggested that it might help if Lorina had a chat with the Councillor for Current Affairs.

"Where will I find him?" she asked.

"Here," said the boar. "You're looking at him. Now, what is it you want?"

"You know very well what I want!" she cried

"Perhaps you're referring to your proposal
To ban the river for waste disposal.
The idea, of course, is quite absurd.
Craziest thing I've ever heard."

"But you said it was a *good* idea!" she cried.

"That was the Water Company's view.
Officials there don't have a clue.
If the river's made no-throw,
Where will all the rubbish go?"

"We learnt at school that most rubbish can be recycled," said Lorina.

"And at your school were you not told
Recycling costs a lot of gold?"

"But throwing things away is wasteful, and dirty water is a bad thing, and people falling ill and dying also costs a lot of gold..."

"True. But not my gold. As I judge it,
That's off someone else's budget."

"Well there are more important things anyway than gold!" cried Lorina.

"Aaargh! Heugh! Hoink hoink hoink!"

The boar's eyes bulged, his truffles and gold coins leapt in the air, and his tusks whirled round in a complete circle. It took three minutes and forty-five seconds before at last he was able to speak again:

"More important things than gold?!
Enough to give me a heart attack!
Skedaddle, go away, vamoose,
Get out and don't come back!"

He was so angry that he even changed his rhyme scheme.

Lorina ran out of Room 106, down the long corridor, and out of the Water Company building. It was, she thought, a great deal easier to find out what was wrong with things than to put them right.

CHAPTER 9

The Old City

The streets of the Old City were even narrower than those of the new one, but here Lorina came across very few animals and even fewer carriages. An occasional pedestri-ant scurried along the road; one or two asked Lorina for gold (they were mendic-ants), and some were either wandering aimlessly, or were lying in doorways (they were vagr-ants). All of them hurriedly got out of the way when a long-eared, long-snouted creature came staggering down the road, singing at the top of its voice. It was a drunkaardvark. Further on, Lorina saw a very tall animal with a long neck, busily drawing pictures on walls. That was a giraffiti artist.

Lorina had just entered a rather dark alley when she suddenly felt a sharp stabbing pain at her waist. She looked down, and saw a tiny red-breasted bird pecking away at her dress.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

The bird gave her another vicious peck.

"Give us yer gold, yer watch, yer ring,
Yer bag, yer purse, yer everyfing!"

It was a robbin trying to peck her pocket.

"I haven't got anything to give you," said Lorina.

It was true. She had nothing of any value on her.

"Jus' my luck. It's so unfair!
You sure you ain't got nuffin' there?"

"You can see for yourself what I've got," said Lorina.

The robbin did see. And what Lorina had got was not a lot.

"'Appens ter me all the time.
I goes an' plans the perfect crime,

Quietly does me pocket-pickin'
An' finds there's nuffin' there worth nickin'."

"Crime doesn't pay," said Lorina.

"Not fer me it don't," said the robbin.

Lorina asked him for directions to the mine, and he let out a loud whistle.

"If yer go there, yer'll disappear.
Yer better off ter get robbed 'ere."

Nevertheless, he told her where to go, and before he flew off, she asked him what was wrong with the world.

"Too many empty pockets," he said.

The route he had given her brought her suddenly to a large square, and although there were no trees in it, dead or alive, the sun shone down from a wide expanse of blue sky to make it seem bright and cheerful. But this was not what caught Lorina's eye. Over on the other side of the square was a magnificent building. It had a huge carved doorway, on both sides of which were massive towers full of stone figures and beautiful patterns. She had seen such buildings in books, and she knew it was a church of some kind, but it was ten times bigger and grander than the church they had back in the village. She walked across the square.

Like the gate to the Castle, the church had a huge wooden door in which was set a smaller one that she could pass through. This she did, and found herself in a great hall with pillars and galleries all around. The ceiling was lofty and had painted rafters, and the floor was of stone inlaid with coloured patterns. Rows and rows of wooden seats stretched out in front of her, but they were all empty.

Suddenly there was a pattering, and several whiskery little animals came running towards her.

"Give us some gold, give us some gold,
We're poor and hungry, weak and cold."

They were church mice.

"I'm sorry," said Lorina, "but I haven't got anything to give you."

At once they scampered away, squeaking and giggling. Maybe they were not as poor as they seemed.

Lorina walked slowly up the centre aisle, and her eyes became fixed on an extraordinary scene that lit up the far end of the church. At first she wondered if it was a gigantic version of the paintings she had seen with Matteus, but then she

realized that it was a collection of objects. They filled the apse from top to bottom. She saw test-tubes, beakers, ropes, mirrors, cups, plates, pulleys, bricks, boards, hammers, spears, tables, chairs, cupboards, machines, blankets, cushions, jackets, dresses, books...

They all seemed to be suspended in mid-air, and yet slowly, slowly, they were moving – some upwards, some downwards. As she drew nearer, Lorina saw that they were attached to a massive glass wheel which was revolving inch by gentle inch.

Suddenly a deep voice resounded all round the church:

“Let us pray.
Almighty wheel, in adoration
We kneel down and worship thee,
For with thy acts of blind creation
Thou hast made all things to be.”

Lorina looked round to find out where the voice had come from, but there was no one.

“What do you mean?” she called out. “Why are you praying to a wheel?”

There was no reply.

“Is there anyone there?” she asked.

“Ahem!” said the voice. “Here beginneth the lesson for today: When we look to the individuals of the same variety or subvariety of our older cultivated plants and animals, one of the first points which strikes us is that they generally differ more from each other than do the individuals of any one species...”

“Stop!” cried Lorina. “I don’t know what you’re talking about! Come out, wherever you are! I want to talk to you!”

There was another silence.

“Come on!” said Lorina.

“You’re not supposed to talk to me,” said the voice.

“Why not?” asked Lorina.

“Because I’m an authority. You’re just supposed to listen.”

Although the voice was coming from all sides, Lorina had noticed a screen over to the left of the apse, and she thought she saw something move. Quickly she walked across to it, and peeped into the gap between it and the wall.

She found herself looking straight into the eyes of a large monkey dressed in a long white robe.

"Who are you?" asked Lorina.

"I'm the Primate of All the City," replied the monkey.

"Well why are you praying to the wheel?"

"Look, I'm extremely busy.
I'm doing my research.
I've got no time to chat with you,
So kindly leave the church."

"I want to know why you were praying to a wheel," said Lorina again.

"In church you don't ask questions.
In church you have to kneel
And thank your Maker, and we know
Our Maker is the wheel."

"How can a wheel have made us?"

"You see those objects hanging there?
Well, as the wheel revolves,
We've proven scientifically
Each one of them evolves."

"Nonsense," said Lorina.

"I beg your pardon?" said the monkey.

"No wheel ever wrote a book," said Lorina. "Or made a cupboard or a spear or a jacket."

"It is a fact that given time –
All scientists agree –
A wheel can make all things that are,
Including you and me."

"Well I don't believe it," said Lorina.

"How can you not believe a fact?" asked the monkey.

"Just because you *say* it's a fact," said Lorina, "doesn't mean that it *is* a fact. How do you *know* it's a fact?"

She was beginning to wonder whether she was turning into the black rabbit. The monkey scratched his head, looked up, looked down, and then said:

“Um.”

“That’s not much of an answer,” said Lorina.

“Everybody agrees that it’s a fact,” said the Primate of All the City.

“I don’t,” said Lorina. “Have any of these everybodies ever *seen* the wheel write a book?”

“Ah!” said the monkey, gaining visibly in confidence.

“No one’s seen it write a book,
But the book, we know, is real.
So since it’s there, it must have been
Written by the wheel.”

“It could have been written by someone else who put it there.”

“Someone else? Some mystic force
Performing mystic acts?
We do not deal in could-have-beens,
We only deal in facts.”

It was clear to Lorina that the monkey had made up his mind, which made him more of a black rabbit than she was. In any case, she had another question to ask.

“But I’m very busy!” complained the monkey.

“Just one question, and then I’ll go away,” said Lorina.

“Well only if you promise!
Your questions make me queasy.
And I’m only going to answer
On condition that it’s easy.”

“What is wrong with the world?” asked Lorina.

“False beliefs are what is wrong –
The lies that people tell.
Once they’ve learnt to love the wheel,
You’ll see, all will be well.”

And so saying, he pushed past her, and disappeared into the shadows of the church.

CHAPTER 10

The Mine

Lorina stood on a hilltop outside the city, and gazed down on a vast expanse of clanking machinery, rocks, buildings, tunnels and channels. She could see lumbering elephants pulling wagons, and tiny human figures scurrying here and there like the pedestri-ants in the City. The mine covered the whole valley, and its tall chimneys sent clouds of dark smoke up into the blue sky.

Lorina knew that her friends were there somewhere. The question would be how to reach them, and then how to rescue them.

She set off down the hill, her fingers clenched round the small object which she hoped might win her both entry and safety.

There was a tall wire fence round the mine, and a flock of gold-faced birds were strutting around inside the gate, chattering away nonstop. They were minah birds. As soon as they saw Lorina, there was a loud chorus:

“Yah... cor... wot a sight...
Enuff ter make yer die of fright...
Look at its 'air... Look at its face...
Musta come from outer space...
Two, four, six, eight,
Don't let monsters through the gate...”

“I want to see some people in the mine,” said Lorina.

“You gorra permit?” asked the nearest bird.

“No.”

“Gerrou... gerroff... yer can't come in...
Send 'er ter the loony bin...
Got no permit... (oohs and aahs)...
Tell 'er ter go back ter Mars...”

“I'm from the *Daily Newt*,” said Lorina, and showed them the badge Matteus had given her. The chorus died down, and the birds crowded round to look at the badge through the fence.

“Nuffin' against the media.
“Me mates an' me all readya,” said one bird.

“Don't wanna mess wiv the *Daily Newt*,
“An' anyway, she looks quite cute,” said another.

“I've come to do an article on the green people,” said Lorina.

"P'raps we made a little error.
Someone take 'er ter the Terror," said another bird.

Lorina didn't much like the sound of the Terror, but the birds now opened the gates, and one of them told her to go with him. On the way, in the friendliest tones, he told her how much he enjoyed reading the *Daily Newt*, what a great paper it was, and how he would love to have an article written about him.

"Me an' my mate,
We guard the gate.
It's pretty 'ard
Ter be a guard,
But I'm quite tough.
I does me stuff."

"I'll see what I can do," said Lorina.

The guard took her to a large, plush office, where she found herself in the presence of a short, squat, dark creature, with a powerful chest and shoulders and a nasty expression on his face. He was the Pit Bull Terror. He sat importantly behind a mahogany desk in a chair that was far too big for him, and he glared fiercely as the minah bird explained why Lorina had come. Then the fierce glare painfully gave way to a welcoming smile that was as warm as a frozen stone in the middle of an iceberg.

"How awfully, wonderfully, terribly, marvellously, splendidly nice to meet you.

I am simply appalled that I just wasn't called to come to the gate to greet you."

He motioned to Lorina to sit down, and she perched on the little chair while the Terror rang a tiny golden bell. Immediately a small dog with white hair and a pink bow round her neck came busily into the office from an adjoining room. She was the Terror's secreterrier.

"What can we get you after your journey? A whisky, beer or shandy?
Vodka? Perry? Champagne? Sherry? Chianti, rum, or brandy?"

"A fruit juice, please," said Lorina.

"Of course," said the Terror, and nodded to the secreterrier, who bustled out again.

"The *Daily Newt's* a wonderful paper for news and art and sport,
But I just can't see why greens should be a subject for report."

Lorina took a deep breath.

"Mr Newt thinks the public will be interested in their story. Their king is a personal friend of his, and we understand that your birds and elephants destroyed the green people's castle and brought them all here in chains."

The secreterrier entered with a glass of apple juice, and Lorina thanked her. Meanwhile, the Terror was biting the tops off a bunch of carnations (which the secreterrier replaced with a bunch of delphiniums).

"The story you've told us is really amazing, but none of the details are true. No castle's destroyed, and we always avoid any violence whatever we do."

"But the green people are here, aren't they?"

"I don't recall seeing any green people..."

"Mr Newt says he has definite proof that they're here, and that's why he sent me."

The Terror looked inquiringly at the secreterrier.

"Miss Wuffwuff, do we have a file on any green people?"

"Yes, sir."

She went out to fetch it, and the Terror smiled smilelessly at Lorina.

"Mr Newt is never wrong, eh?"

The smileless smile gave way to a laughless laugh.

Miss Wuffwuff returned with a file, which she had opened at the appropriate page. She laid it down in front of the Terror, who studied it carefully.

"The green people lost their homes in a storm – a pitiful situation. In order to save them, it seems that we gave them jobs and accommodation."

He closed the book with a tiny explosion.

"So there's the true story, quite different from yours – no cruelty, chains or barbarity.

A very clear sign that here in the mine we are filled with a spirit of charity."

"I should like to see King Qasim," said Lorina.

"That won't be possible," said the Terror.

"Why not?" asked Lorina.

"Why not indeed?" responded the Terror, looking towards the secreterrier.

"They're on a special assignment, sir," said Miss Wuffwuff.

"Of course, a special assignment, and alas they're gone all day.
What a terrible shame! I feel almost to blame, knowing you've come all this way."

"That's all right," said Lorina. "I'll wait till they come back."

The Terror looked at the secreterrier, looked at Lorina, looked up, looked down, and took a decision.

"Miss Wuffwuff," he said, "entertain our visitor."

He smiled with charmless charm at Lorina, and left the office. The secreterrier at once stood beside Lorina's chair and looked up at her.

"Lovely weather we're having –
So mild for the time of year.
I hope you like your apple juice
Cloudy rather than clear."

"Yes, thank you," said Lorina.

"Of course we know the weather can change.
Your hair is very nice.
Oh yes indeed, the sunny spell
Could turn to snow and ice."

Through the window, Lorina saw the Terror talking earnestly with a minah bird. He was frowning and jabbing the air with his front leg. Suddenly he looked in Lorina's direction, saw her face, and led the minah bird out of her vision. Meanwhile, Miss Wuffwuff continued to entertain the visitor:

"What a lovely dress you're wearing.
Winter can be so sad.
And if you're a reporter,
Where's your pen and pad?"

It was a moment before Lorina realized the secreterrier had asked her a question.

"Oh!" she said. "I don't need one. I have a very good memory."

The Terror returned. His fierce frown had been replaced by his graciously graceless smile.

"You'll have your story, all is well, don't worry about a thing.
I've arranged for you to interview our mutual friend the King."

Chapter 11

The Interview

Qasim, King of the Green People, was dressed in a smart black tunic and trousers. His tiny figure stood as erect as ever, but his face was strained and tired.

“Ah, Qasim!” boomed the Terror, getting up from his chair and walking across to shake the King’s hand.

“How splendidly, marvellously, terribly, wonderfully, awfully nice to meet you.

Mr Newt, your old friend, wants an article penned to report on how well we treat you.”

Qasim looked directly into Lorina’s eyes, but gave not a flicker of recognition.

“I’ll leave you alone with this charming young lady your old friend decided to send you.

If you need anything, ring this bell ting-a-ling, and Miss Wuffwuff will come to attend you.”

He motioned to Miss Wuffwuff to return to her office, but as they both left, she whispered something to him which Lorina could not hear.

“Ah!” said the Terror, “I’ll see to it.”

And then they were gone, and Lorina rose from her chair to embrace Qasim, but before she could do so, he stepped away from her.

“How is Mr Newt?” he asked in his deep, resonant voice.

Lorina was surprised at the question.

“He’s very well,” she said, “but...”

“There’s no need for him to worry about us,” said Qasim. “We’re fine. We’ve been very lucky to find work here.”

“What happened?” asked Lorina.

“There was a terrible storm,” said Qasim, “and our castle was destroyed. We came here, and the authorities took us in. We’ve been extremely well treated.”

“That’s not what the doormouse told me!” said Lorina.

"I don't know what stories you've been told," said Qasim, "but this is the truth."

"And Tanga and Birim...?"

"They're well. We're all well. Tell Mr Newt that there is no story here. We were homeless, and the mine-owners gave us a home. I don't know why you were sent here, but believe me, there is nothing more to tell."

Lorina frowned. She tried to move closer to Qasim, but once again he stepped away.

"It was pleasant to meet you," he said. "Give my kindest regards to Mr Newt."

"I don't understand," said Lorina.

"What is there to understand?" asked Qasim. "There is no story, and so there is nothing to understand. Go back to Mr Newt and tell him not to worry."

He went to the door of the office and opened it.

"We have finished," he said.

A minah bird who was standing outside took him away. Lorina watched him through the window. As he passed, he glanced up at her and shook his head. Then he was gone.

"All right?" asked the secreterrier, re-entering the office. At the same moment, the Terror returned.

"Got your story?" he asked.

"He just confirmed what you told me," said Lorina.

"Of course he confirmed it. The truth is the truth, and only an untruth's untrue.

And talking of that, we must now have a chat, as there's questions I'd like to ask you."

Lorina sat down, and the secreterrier stood beside her as the Terror took his place behind his desk.

"How long have you worked for Mr Newt?"

"Not long. This is my first story."

"And where do you come from?"

"The village."

"Which village?"

"It's far away, to the west."

"To the west of where? The Castle?"

"Yes."

"What brought you to The City?"

"I wanted to find work."

"And Mr Newt gave you a job?"

"Yes."

The Terror bit the tops off the bunch of delphiniums (which Miss Wuffwuff replaced with a bunch of antirrhinums) and glared straight into Lorina's eyes.

"What is the name of my secreterrier?" he asked.

"Miss Wuffwuff."

"How did the green people lose their castle?"

"In a storm."

"What drinks did I offer you?"

Lorina hesitated. She remembered some, but there were others that she had never heard of.

"And might there not be things in the mine that you've never heard of?" asked the Terror.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lorina.

"Then wouldn't it help you to write such things down, to record all the facts and the quotes?"

And yet it is clear that you've come along here with no pencil or pad to take notes.

A messenger's gone to your friend Mr Newt to ask if things are as you state.

Upon his return I've no doubt we shall learn the whole truth. Have some juice while we wait."

Chapter 12

On the Parade Ground

There was a good deal of silent activity in the office. The Terror was biting the heads off the antirrhinums (which the secreterrier replaced with a cyclamen), while Lorina was sipping her apple juice, and wondering what would happen when the messenger returned.

She did not have long to wait. With a flapping of wings and an “Ouf!” as he landed outside the office, a minah bird arrived and entered, puffing and blowing.

“I seen Mr Newt –
Never sent no recruit –
Never ’eard of no King –
Sez ’e don’t know a fing.”

The Terror dismissed the minah bird, and turned his blaze of a gaze full on Lorina.

“Now this is a shameful and shocking affair that does you no credit, I fear. Since you’ve made such a blunder, one can’t help but wonder just what you are doing here.”

“I told Mr Newt about the green people,” said Lorina. “He was interested, so I thought that if I wrote the story, he might give me a job.”

“But there is no assignment, he’s heard of no king, and the story you’ve told is absurd.

Now once you have lied, I have to confide, one ends up not believing a word.”

“The badge proves I’m telling the truth,” said Lorina.

“Badge or no badge, Mr Newt doesn’t care, and you’ve no chance of being recruited.

He won’t interfere if you now disappear, so we’ll just have you executed.”

The secreterrier had a different proposal:

“Excuse me, sir, it seems a waste
To have this creature dead.
She’s very big and very strong,
So let her work instead.”

“Splendid idea! She wanted to be with the greens – with the greens she’ll remain.

She can eat with ’em, sleep with ’em, laugh with ’em, weep with ’em, and never be heard of again.”

Thereupon, he summoned two gold-faced guards, who pecked Lorina all the way out of the office.

* * *

The mineworkers lived in wooden huts, the roofs of which were covered with minah birds' nests. The noise of the birds' chatter was almost deafening. The workers themselves were of many different colours – grey, orange, purple, pink – with each colour group living in its own hut, but they were all as small as Matteus and the blue men. They were dressed alike in black overalls, mostly torn and stained – in contrast to the neat tunic and trousers that Qasim had worn for the interview.

Despite the fact that she was now a prisoner, Lorina was eager to see the green people again. She wondered, though, if they would recognize her, since Qasim had failed to do so.

They did recognize her. No sooner had the minah birds closed the hut door behind her than Qasim himself rushed towards her, his tired face smoothing out into the broadest and whitest of smiles. He threw his arms around her, and the rest followed, with little Tanga holding on to her throughout all the other embraces. Even Birim, her brother, who had always been so shy, came to be hugged and kissed. Only Wasim, Qasim's wicked brother who had usurped the throne and whom Lorina had deposed, sat quietly in a corner and refused to greet her. She noticed that he had grown his beard again.

"Won't you say hello to me, Wasim?" she asked.

"llo," mumbled Wasim.

Qasim now told Lorina the whole story of how flocks of minah birds and a herd of elephants had destroyed the castle, killed the animals, and taken himself and his people in chains to the mine.

"Many of us have died here," he said. "The mine-owners have made us into slaves, and the weaker ones perish. Even the children must work, crawling through the crevices."

"Why did you pretend not to know me?" asked Lorina.

"They said they would kill us all if I gave you the slightest hint of the truth. The door to the secreterrier's office was open, and she was watching us. I had to lie. It was not easy."

Lorina then told her own story, from Mr Blair's new project right up until the moment she had entered the hut.

"I'd hoped to rescue you," she said. "Now I need to be rescued myself."

"There is no escape from the mine," said Qasim. "The guards are everywhere."

"Perhaps we could dig a tunnel," suggested Lorina.

"The huts are built on rock," said Qasim.

"But there must be tunnels in the mine."

"Blasted out with explosives. They only tunnel into more rock. And further and deeper they go, Lorina, further and deeper. Not only is there no escape through their tunnels, but one day they will blast so far and so deep that the foundations of their city will crumble. All for gold."

"Is this what's wrong with the world?" Lorina asked. "Love of gold?"

"It's one of many things," said Qasim.

Tanga brought Lorina a set of black overalls, but they were far too small.

"You'll have to wear your own clothes," said Tanga. "And our beds will be too small for you too."

The hut was in two sections, divided by a black curtain. The women and girls were at the far end from the door, and the men and boys had the front section. There were rows of simple beds with their heads against the walls, and the green women cleared a space where they laid two mattresses end to end so that Lorina would be able to stretch out.

She thought longingly of her clean and comfortable bed at home, and wondered what her parents would do when she failed to come home. She must escape soon, for her family's sake as well as for the green people.

There was the sound of an elephant trumpeting.

"Here," said Tanga, and gave Lorina a metal dish and spoon. "It's suppertime."

The miners' huts radiated out from a central parade ground, on which grey-skinned women were handing out bread and serving soup from huge pots lined up on trestles. Lorina and Tanga took their places in the queue, and then carried their bread and soup to one side of the square. It was a fine evening, and the setting sun stained the western sky dark red. On all sides men, women and children of all colours, dressed in ragged black overalls, sank to the ground and ate their food amid the clinking of spoons and a low buzz of subdued conversation that was almost drowned by the chatter of the minah birds. These gold-faced guards were everywhere, and it occurred to Lorina that in their own way they were as much prisoners as the mineworkers.

Suddenly a tiny orange child darted away from her group and ran towards Lorina. The mother quickly came in pursuit of her, but she was not quick enough,

and before the child was even halfway across the parade ground, one of the guards had flown at her and pecked her in the bottom.

“Go back to yer group
An’ eat yer soup,
Or I’ll ’ave yer made
Into marmalade.”

At once there was a loud chorus from the rest of the minah birds:

“Wot’s she taste like... One more peck...
Bite ’er ears... nose... chest... leg... neck...
’Ave a go, mate... Don’t be shy...
Let’s ’ave orange peckan pie...
One, two, free, four,
Peck a bit an ’peck some more.”

The mother picked up the screaming child and ran back to her people.

Tanga whispered to Lorina: “We’re not allowed to leave our groups.”

From the corner where the orange people were sitting, there suddenly came a low and gentle sound that slowly grew in volume as more voices joined in. The people were humming. And the melody they hummed was like a sweet breeze that calmed and cooled and filled the air with a strange feeling which Lorina could not quite identify. Even the minah birds stopped chattering.

Then a girl’s voice began to sing – high, clear, soaring like the birds of Lorina’s village:

*We are free now, and our chains have turned to threads of silk,
Free now, for the iron gates have opened wide,
Let us go now, go to where the fields are green and fertile,
Go now, go, and faith will be our guide.*

*Oh my father’s house stands high upon the hill,
And my mother sings and puts flowers in her hair,
And my brothers and sisters all rejoice upon my coming,
For the night has ended and the day is fair.*

*We are free now, as the white clouds in the summer sky,
Free now, as waves that dance upon the sand,
Let us go now, go to where the world will weep no longer,
And where life and love are walking hand in hand.*

And as the people went on humming, Lorina suddenly knew what had entered into her: it was the feeling of hope.

Chapter 13

Dreams

That night Lorina had a dream. She was at the Mum of Art, but the pictures on the walls were different. They were all portraits of the same person. She could not see clearly who it was, but the face was wonderfully illuminated, and even though the paintings were almost identical, she found something new in each one of them, and was filled with joy.

"The picture paints the artist," said someone beside her.

She could not see him clearly either, but she felt at ease with him, and asked him what was wrong with the world.

"People do not see the true picture," he said.

"Shall I bring them here?" asked Lorina.

"They don't want to see it," he said. "And that is what is wrong with the world."

Lorina awoke. The hut was in darkness, and the only sounds were of the green people breathing or snoring.

She wished she had been able to identify the face in the pictures and the man who had shown them to her. She would also have liked to ask Qasim the meaning of her dream, for she was sure he would understand it, but Qasim had to rest. They all had to rest.

When Lorina slept again, her dream changed. Now she was in the hospital. There were ants scurrying everywhere, and the ducktor was chasing them and eating those he caught.

"Save me! Save me!" cried one of the ants, scooting round Lorina.

"You're supposed to treat them, not eat them!" Lorina said to the ducktor.

"Why? They're only pati-ants," quacked the ducktor.

Then as Lorina watched, suddenly the ants grew bigger and the duck grew smaller, and instead of the duck chasing the ants, it was the ants chasing the duck.

"Save me! Save me!" cried the duck.

"You mustn't eat him!" Lorina said to the ants.

"Why not?" replied one. "He'll make a quacking good meal."

When Lorina woke again, light was streaming through the window near her, and an elephant was trumpeting. Tanga moaned from the next bed. Up on the roof there was a loud chorus of minah bird chatter:

"Mornin' ... Mornin' ... Slept orl right? ...
Dreamt I was awake orl night ...
Luvley day ... Might be fer some ...
Ouch, me left wing's gone orl numb ...
Wake the workers ... Me? No way,
It's me wot dunnit yesterday ..."

A new bird must have arrived, because suddenly the chorus changed to:

"Wotchoo doin' on our roof? ...
Mess yer own nest ... silly goof ...
Oh ... orl right then ... Sorry mate ...
No offence ... we'll tell 'er straight."

A moment later the door to the hut was flung open, and a minah bird came strutting through.

"Wakey, wakey, rise an' shine!
Get yer bodies down the mine!"

He stopped at Lorina's bed.

"Get dressed quick, and come wi' me.
There's somebody yer got ter see."

Tanga squealed, and ran towards Lorina, but the minah bird pecked her away. At once she rushed into the men's section.

"Where am I going?" asked Lorina.

"Wi' me," said the bird.

Lorina quickly put on her clothes.

"Where are you taking her?" asked the deep voice of Qasim.

Tanga stood behind him, wide-eyed and frightened.

Such was Qasim's presence and authority that the minah bird stood to attention.

"The Pit Bull," he said.

"Don't worry," said Lorina. "I'll be all right."

And as she passed Qasim, she whispered: "I'll find a way to rescue you."

The green people stood beside their beds as she passed through the hut, following the minah bird. They watched her go, and some shook their heads, but Lorina herself was strangely unafraid. She was not even thinking about the Terror. She was trying to understand her dreams: whose was the face in the paintings, and why had the ants and the duck changed places?

She was still puzzling over these questions when she realized that she was not being taken to the Terror's office at all. She was heading towards the elephant house.

Chapter 14

The Arrangement

The elephant house was the biggest building in the mine, and the office that Lorina now found herself in was about the size of her village church. In front of her stood the mightiest of beasts, with ears that flapped like sails and tusks that stuck out like the shafts of a great carriage. On his chest were rows and rows of medals.

"Good morning, it's lovely to see you again, and I hope that you had a good night.

The General and I can scarcely deny we were worried. We hope you're all right."

Lorina had not even noticed the Terror, for he was just a tiny speck in the shadow of the elephant.

"This is General Rumbo, elefantry, the finest of fighting machines.

You'll have guessed now, of course, that he led the tusk force which captured your dear friends, the greens."

"How do you do?" said Lorina.

"Um... how do I do what?" asked the General.

"I'm pleased to meet you," said Lorina.

"Oh, that's nice. How do I do?

Yeah, I'm pleased to meet you too."

"No you're not," snapped the Terror. "She's your enemy."

"Oh... um... well... sorry. I just forgot.

So, pleased to meet you. No, I'm not."

The Terror looked at Lorina and shook his head.

"He was under instructions to fill you with fear by standing there being large, But he's blessed, as you see, with the brain of a pea. He can only respond to 'Charge!'

Now for breakfast we offer you bacon and eggs, kippers, haddock, black pudding, mixed grill,

Cereals, cheese, different coffees and teas, fruit juice – whatever you will."

Lorina asked for orange juice, and the minah bird was dispatched to bring it. The Terror had still not finished, however.

"Now of course you are wondering what's going on, and the truth is there's been a mistake.

I knew things were wrong, and indeed all night long I lay in my bed wide awake.

Then this morning a message arrived from the newt, demanding that you be set free.

What you told us is true, which is lovely for you, but is rather a problem for me."

The minah bird returned with Lorina's orange juice, which she sipped as the Terror resumed his explanation:

"We really don't want to offend Mr Newt, but you now have some information,

On things you've been shown, and if it were known, it could damage our reputation.

Our image has always been clean, fine and fair. We are Guardians of The City.

If someone like you gave a different view, it would be – let us say – such a pity."

"You're not clean or fine or fair," said Lorina. "You go round destroying castles and making people into slaves. That's wicked! General Rumbo, you should be ashamed of yourself."

"Should I? Sorry. What have I done?

I was only having a bit of fun."

The Terror shook his head again.

"You Dumbo, Rumbo, hold your tongue and give your brain a rest.

Just look impressive, fierce, aggressive. I'll deal with our guest."

"Your guest," said Lorina, "is going to tell the truth. The green people have lost everything, thanks to you."

“Deeply distressing, tragically true, and my heart breaks, as everyone knows. But the fact is, of course, that without our work force, the whole operation would close.

Now let us consider the problem with which at this moment we’re all so concerned.

If you’re to survive and your friends stay alive, Mr Newt must not know what you’ve learned.”

“I shall tell him the truth about you and about the mine.”

“No, you will tell him how greatly impressed you have been with the way things are done,

And the workers are fine, and indeed the whole mine couldn’t possibly be better run.”

“What will happen if I don’t tell him that?”

“The green folk will die in a mining disaster, perhaps caused by technical trouble.

And our mighty friend there will turn Newtpaper Square into a large pile of rubble.”

“If you want people to think you’re good,” said Lorina, “why don’t you behave properly? Why don’t you treat people nicely instead of...”

“Our image, my dear, is merely a matter of keeping up an appearance.

It’s a method by which we and others grow rich with minimum interference.

Now either we’ll kill you and tell Mr Newt that you left without saying goodbye,

Or you’re free as a bird, but don’t break your word, or you and your friends will all die.”

Reluctantly Lorina gave her word that she would lie to Mr Newt. She asked to see the green people again, to reassure them that she was safe, but the Terror refused. Mr Newt had been kept waiting long enough, he said, and besides, the mine would not profit from such sentimentality.

Lorina said goodbye to General Rumbo, who waved to her with his trunk.

“Goodbye, thank you for your visit.

Nice to know you. Maybe. Is it?”

Lorina followed the Terror back to his office. Outside the door stood a large cart bearing the letters *The Daily Newt*, and standing between the shafts, with his head bowed, was a blue man with bright yellow eyes.

Chapter 15

The Blue Puller

Lorina climbed into the cart, and the Terror bade her a lovelessly loving farewell:

“It’s been a great pleasure to welcome you here. It’s a shame that your stay was so short.

Come and see us again for a glass of champagne, and please write a gentle report.”

He nodded meaningfully at Lorina, and bit the heads off a dozen nearby daffodils. (Miss Wuffwuff rushed out of the office and planted a dozen new bulbs.)

Matteus heaved the cart into motion, the guards opened the gate, and Lorina found herself moving slowly away from danger.

As soon as they were out of sight of the guards, Matteus stopped and lowered the cart. Then he let out a loud bellow which sounded something like “Yee hah!”

“Are you all right?” asked Lorina.

“I am now,” said Matteus. “But I’ve never been so scared in all my life. I was trembling so much, I thought my legs would drop off.”

“Thank you for rescuing me,” said Lorina. “Why did Mr Newt change his mind?”

“He didn’t,” said Matteus. “I was in the office when the minah bird came, and I guessed you were in trouble. So I forged a letter and pretended Mr Newt had sent me with it. Do you want to hear what I wrote?”

He had kept a rough copy of the letter, and so he now sat in the cart with Lorina and read it to her:

To Whom It May Concern

*Dear Sir, you sent a messenger
To ask about Lorina.
Being distracted at the time,
I forgot that I had seen her.*

*I do recall her coming to me,
Mentioning the King,
But maybe told your messenger
I didn’t know a thing.*

*In fact I'm waiting anxiously
To publish her report.
Please send her with my driver.
I count on your support.
Sincerely,
Mr Newt.*

"That's brilliant!" said Lorina.

"I was up half the night writing it. My wife wasn't too pleased! If I had to speak animal language for a living, I'd die of silence."

"Thank you again," said Lorina. "But you risked your life for me!"

"I know," said Matteus. "I must be crazy."

Now they went together through the narrow streets of the Old City, with Lorina helping Matteus to pull the cart. As they walked, she told him everything she had seen and learnt in the mine, and he asked her several questions. When she had finished, he nodded sadly.

"Your King Qasim is right," he said. "We're all going to disappear in a cloud of gold dust."

Then he told Lorina about a group of blue people who like himself hated the new City, and wanted to cure it of gold fever. Through working for Mr Newt, he came into contact with many such people, and they had formed a secret society called The Sorrows.

"Why do you call yourselves The Sorrows?" asked Lorina.

"The name is taken from lines written by our leader, Elemon:
*'There shall be songs of joy to break the silence of our sorrows,
for night must always yield its power to day.'*"

It reminded Lorina of the song she had heard in the parade ground. But it also reminded her of the task she had been set. She had promised to write a favourable report on the mine, but even if she wrote it, would Mr Newt publish it?

"Of course he will," said Matteus. "Gold news sells copies, and the mine is gold."

"But I shall have to tell lies."

"That never worried Mr Newt."

"And what about animal language? I can't write it."

“They understand our language, just as we understand theirs. It’s not a problem, Lorina. Besides, this article might help us to rescue your friends, so you must write it.”

Matteus gave Lorina pencil and paper, and made her sit in the cart and write, while he pulled her along through the ever noisier, ever denser streets. This is the report that Lorina wrote:

A VISIT TO THE MINE

When I arrived, I was greeted by a group of friendly minah birds, one of whom escorted me to the Pit Bull’s office. There I was welcomed warmly and charmingly by the Pit Bull himself, who is known affectionately by the staff as The Terror. His highly efficient secreterrier Miss Wuffwuff brought me refreshments. Then I was taken to see one of the huts the miners live in. These miners were green people whose castle had been destroyed in a storm. The mine-owners had kindly given them all homes and jobs.

The hut was very comfortable, and the green people were grateful to the mine-owners for helping them. They enjoyed the work they were doing in the clean, modern mineshafts.

We were given a tasty meal, which we ate outside in the evening sunshine, and everybody seemed very happy. The workers get on well with the guards, who make sure the mine is safe, and the different coloured workers also get on nicely together. They sang songs.

I spent the night in the green people’s home, and slept well. In the morning a minah bird came round and gently woke us. While the miners prepared for their day’s work, I had breakfast with the Pit Bull and General Rumbo, the highly intelligent commander of the elefantry. They both enjoy helping the people they look after, and I would like to end my report with the words of the Pit Bull himself:

“We don’t run the mine so that we may be rich. Dear me no, that is not what we’re there for.

The truth must be told. We don’t want the gold. It’s only the people we care for.”

It took Lorina a long time to compose the “words of the Pit Bull”, but when she read the article out to Matteus, he said it was brilliant, and the last two lines were a master stroke. He wanted only one change – a single line to be added right at the end. It was:

On my next visit I hope to report on the work done by the minah birds and the elephants.

By now they had at last reached Newspaper Square.

“Would you like to meet The Sorrows?” asked Matteus.

"Yes, please," said Lorina.

"Then come back here in an hour. By the way, you might need these. My wife made them before I left home this morning."

He handed Lorina a packet, and then hurried off to give her article to Mr Newt.

Chapter 16

The Squarrows

Lorina sat on a bench in the square, and watched the traffic and the crowds of big and little creatures. The sun was hot now, and she felt and smelt the dirty heaviness of the air. For a moment she thought of going home, but if she did that, she would always be haunted by the fate of the green people. Matteus had said she might save them, and so perhaps The Sorrows would find a way.

She unwrapped the packet that Matteus had given her. It contained some cheese and salad sandwiches, and suddenly she felt hungry. She was glad the sandwiches were not meat, because then she could not have eaten them.

"Scuse me!" said a high-pitched voice.

Lorina looked around.

"Ow about a bite to eat?
I'm right down 'ere, miss, by yer feet."

And down at Lorina's feet stood a tiny brown bird with bright eyes and head cocked to one side.

"Hello," said Lorina.

"Allo," said the bird, "an' wot about it?"

"What about what?" asked Lorina.

"A chunk o' sanwidge if yer please.
I likes a bit o' bread an' cheese."

"Yes, of course," said Lorina, and offered him a large piece.

"Just break that up, Miss, if yer will,
Cos smaller pieces fit the bill."

Lorina broke the chunk into smaller pieces.

"You're a sparrow, aren't you?" she said.

"Well no, I used ter be a sparrer,
But livin' 'ere I'm now a squarrier."

He set to work on the crumbs of bread and cheese.

"I thought sparrows – sorry, squarrows – lived on seeds," said Lorina.

"Until I come 'ere so did I.
If yer live on seeds 'ere, though, yer'll die."

The squarrow was right. There were no plants or flowers or trees in sight, apart from the dead tree statue, and that was certainly seedless.

"Why do you live here then?" asked Lorina.

"Biggest mistake in all me life.
Saw the advert. Told me wife:
Good address fer us ter stay –
Square meal laid on every day.
Shouldn't be no trouble there,
Cos ev'ryfink is fair and square.
Wot a blunder! Wot a boob!
Now we're goin' down the tube."

"Is 'e moanin' again?" said another high-pitched voice from behind Lorina's shoulder.

She turned her head, and found herself looking at another squarrow which had perched on the back of the bench.

"Just ignore ole Mister Glum,
An' can yer spare anuvver crumb?"

Lorina broke off some more bread and cheese, and the second squarrow flew onto her hand as she held it out. Meanwhile, the first squarrow was still moaning:

"Before I come 'ere I was plump,
But I'm 'alf starvin' in this dump."

"You're arf starvin'? That's a laugh,
Cos you should see yer uvver 'alf."

The second squarrow then told the first squarrow off for not calling all the other squarrows to the feast. He (or she) gave a loud whistle, and in no time at all, there were more than a dozen squarrows at Lorina's feet, all looking up

expectantly as she broke the sandwiches for them. When she threw the crumbs, some squarrows would scamper after them, some would wait for the next throw, some would fly up on the bench, and some would hang back shyly. She made sure that the shy ones had as much to eat as the bold ones.

They all seemed to be talking as they ate:

"Nice of 'er ter feed us...
Lucky fer us she come...
Best meal I've 'ad since suppertime...
'Ere gerroff, that's my crumb...
I wish she 'ad some bacon...
I wish you wouldn't push...
Some squarrers got no manners...
You was brought up in a bush...
Keep it comin', lady –
It's my birfday... No it ain't...
Not fair, you've 'ad much more than me...
Then send in a complaint...
She said to 'im an' I said to 'er...
She just goes on and on...
I want some more... gimme some more...
There ain't none. It's all gone."

And all gone it was.

"Sorry, everybody," said Lorina.

Some of the birds flew off at once, but two or three stayed just to say thank you. Lorina couldn't tell if either the first or second squarrow was among them, because they all looked alike to her. But she knew they were not alike.

"Do you have a name?" she asked the last of the birds.

"Yeah." said the bird.

"What is it?" asked Lorina.

"Squarrer," said the squarrow.

Chapter 17

The Sorrows

Matteus came out of the Newtpaper building, and as soon as he saw Lorina, he waved and hurried towards her. He was holding a copy of the *Daily Newt*, and he showed Lorina her article, which was on the front page.

"Mr Newt was impressed," he said. "Lit a new cigar in your honour, and nearly suffocated himself. Right, let's go and meet the Sorrows."

Once more he took her across the square to the Mum of Art.

They passed through the entrance, and Lorina found herself looking out for the painted face she had seen in her dream, but the pictures were the same blobs and stripes and squiggles as before.

Two blue men were standing before a wooden door, and they greeted Matteus respectfully before allowing him and Lorina to pass through. They entered a small chamber in which about twenty blue men and women were sitting round a long table. Among them she at once noticed a man with flowing grey hair and yellow eyes like Matteus's.

"This is Elemon, our leader," said Matteus. "He's also my father."

"We are honoured to have you with us," said Elemon, taking Lorina by the hand. "My son has told me all about your kindness and your bravery."

His soft and gentle voice was that of the man who had accompanied her in her dream.

Matteus now presented Lorina to the other Sorrows, who included his wife Miralda, a tiny, very pretty blue lady. Lorina thanked her for the cheese and salad sandwiches, but did not mention that the squarrows had eaten them all.

Elemon pointed to two empty chairs, and when Lorina and Matteus had sat down, he addressed the Sorrows:

"Our City groans beneath the burden of golden greed and leaden poverty. Our river is bitter, our air is thick, and those who rule despise us, oppress us and dispense with us like old papers. We are alive, and yet we scarcely know we live. And when we die, there is no flicker of change except the end of pain. Is not this true? There is a time for labour and a time for rest. There is a time for sorrow and a time for joy. And should we labour and sorrow endlessly until the sudden fire of disease, the choking, the last riddance? Have we not the right to rest, to rejoice, and to breathe sweetly? I am old now, but my son is young, and his children must grow to love life. Now hear him, for the children's sake and for the sake of a world to be cherished."

He sat down. The hushed listeners remained motionless and attentive, as if his words were still filling the air, and although he was a much older man, there was something about Elemon that reminded Lorina of Qasim. Suddenly, just for a moment, she thought she had understood her two dreams. But then the understanding was gone.

Now Matteus rose to speak:

“My father’s the master talker in our family, and I’m not much good with words. All I can tell you is that things can’t go on as they are. We’ve always been too few and too weak to act, but now things have changed. Now we’ve got allies. And lots of them – enough to take over the mine and the City itself.”

“Who are these allies?” asked one of the blue men.

“The miners,” said Matteus.

The listeners gasped, and so too did Lorina.

“But the miners are slaves!” she exclaimed. “They could never defeat the Pit Bull and the elephants and the minah birds.”

“No,” said Matteus. “The miners will help us to secure the mine and the City once we’ve taken command. But only one person can capture the mine itself.”

“Who?”

“You, Lorina.”

Then he explained his plan in great detail, and everyone listened in total silence. When he had finished, all eyes turned to Lorina.

“Supposing they won’t let me into the mine?” she asked.

“Do you remember the line I asked you to add to your article?”

“About reporting on the work of the minah birds and the elephants?”

Matteus nodded and smiled.

“A messenger bird went to the mine with our new edition. The Pit Bull was delighted with your report. He’s given permission for you to return.”

“You must understand, Lorina...” It was Elemon who now spoke... “that you are free. We have no right to ask anything of you. Your words and your deeds have told us who you are – for it is said that the picture paints the artist – but our cause is not your cause, and your life is not ours to risk. You must consider the danger before you make your decision.”

“I’ve made my decision,” said Lorina. “I shall go back to the mine.”

All the blue men and women burst into applause, Matteus gave her a kiss and Matteus’s wife gave her a jam and banana sandwich.

Chapter 18

Return to the Mine

“What a dazzling, diamond-like piece of sheer prose! What a vividly sensitive text!

And I hear with delight you’ve decided to write on the guards and the elephants next.

The finest of staff, as I’m sure you’ll agree, and we’re all of us deep in their debt.

When you start this great task, you need only ask, and whatever you want you will get.”

“Then I’d like to see the green people,” said Lorina.

“They’re at work in those splendidly clean, modern shafts you described in such masterly mode.

But I’ll make sure you hear just as soon as our dear friends are back in their comfy abode.”

The warm and charming Pit Bull now had his highly efficient secreterrier Miss Wuffwuff bring in refreshments, and then he insisted on Lorina interviewing him on the subject of the work done by the minah birds and the elephants.

“They’re in charge of protecting The City and mine. Security’s what it’s about. Their task is immense. They’re our only defence against dangers within and without.”

“Were the green people a danger when you destroyed their castle and made them into slaves?” asked Lorina.

The Terror laughed and bit the heads off a cyclamen (which Miss Wuffwuff replaced with a geranium.)

“You must keep a sense of proportion, my dear. These creatures are not like us.

They’re no loss if we lose them, unless we can use them. There’s really no need for a fuss.”

“They’re not creatures!” cried Lorina angrily. “They’re people and you have no right to...”

But then she remembered why she was here.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to shout.”

She now wanted to interview General Rumbo, and the Terror gave Miss Wuffwuff the task of escorting her. On the way, Lorina asked her where she, the

Pit Bull and the other administrative staff lived. The secreterrier pointed out a cluster of houses on a wooded slope to the west. The Pit Bull's was a large white one.

Next Lorina wanted to know all about the minah birds' routine. Did they work in shifts? How many of them were on night duty? When did they eat, sleep, change the guard at the gates?

She had to be careful with her questions, for she knew that Miss Wuffwuff was a dangerous companion. She must never suspect what Lorina was really looking for. The secreterrier answered the questions quite openly. The minah birds worked the same hours as the miners they were guarding, and they took it in turns to do night duty – one flock would guard the gate, another the entrance to the mine itself, and a third the administrators' houses. The rest, as Lorina had seen, would sleep on the roofs of the miners' huts.

As for meals, the minah birds and elephants ate at the same time, except for the guards who were on duty. They ate later, when they had been relieved. Birds ate in the refectory, and elephants ate in their own house.

"Do you eat in the refectory too?" asked Lorina.

"Never! Executives don't mix
With servants of the mine.
Important staff such as myself
Go to our homes to dine."

They had now reached the elephant house, and although the ordinary rank-and-file elephants were out pulling heavy loads, the great General Rumbo was sitting in his office practising his trumpet. When he saw Lorina and the secreterrier, he stopped.

"Oh! Ah! Fancy seeing you!
Welcome back. How do I do?
Nice to see you. No, it's not.
You're the enemy. I forgot."

Miss Wuffwuff explained very slowly to the General that Lorina was now a friend, and had come to interview him on behalf of the *Daily Newt*. The General liked the idea of appearing in the *Daily Newt*, and he didn't mind Lorina asking questions, so long as Miss Wuffwuff answered them for him.

The first question was so easy, however, that he answered it himself. Lorina wanted to know if the other elephants always obeyed him.

"Yeah! When I tell 'em to jump, they jump.
If they didn't obey me, I'd give 'em a thump."

Next Lorina asked him if it had been his decision to destroy the greens' castle, but Miss Wuffwuff immediately intervened to say that the greens' castle had been destroyed by a storm. General Rumbo looked surprised.

"Was it? I thought..."

"Yes, it was," snapped the secreterrier. "And please don't think."

"Does anyone ever give *you* orders?" Lorina asked him.

The General looked inquiringly at Miss Wuffwuff. She nodded, and so he answered:

"The Pit Bull sometimes lets me know
What to do and where to go,
But no one orders me around
Cos I'm the boss in this compound."

Lorina had already got the information that she needed, but she asked a few more questions, and assured the General that she would say wonderful things about him in her article because she wanted to be good friends with such a mighty leader.

"Mighty? Yeah! Thanks very much.
Mighty! Yeah, well, keep in touch."

Next Lorina asked to see the refectory. This was joined directly to the elephant house, so that food could be passed straight through from the kitchens. The kitchen workers were all tiny grey-skinned men and women, but the cooks were birds with red floppy hats and sharp claws. They were coococks. Miss Wuffwuff told them why Lorina had come, and they were all delighted to explain what they were doodle-doing.

Lorina insisted on tasting the food that they were preparing, and she was particularly keen on their cream of asparagus soup. She had several spoonfuls of this, and said it was delicious.

The coococks were delighted.

"Come and taste my noodles, do..."
"You must taste my stroodles too..."

Lorina tasted everything, and then she tasted everything again, and congratulated the coococks on their splendid cuisine.

"You really have something to crow about," she said.

She also saw the vat of thin potato-peel soup being prepared for the mineworkers, but she did not ask to try that.

On leaving the refectory, Lorina asked Miss Wuffwuff more questions about the administrators who lived on the hill. She learnt that like the Pit Bull and Miss Wuffwuff herself, they were all dogs. The pointer told the mineworkers where to go, the whippet made them go there, the golden retriever made sure no gold got lost, the St Bernard rescued any that did, the boxer put it all in crates, and the sheepdog organized the sheepments. There was also a watchdog in charge of time-keeping, a chow in charge of food, a lapdog in charge of drink, and a collie in charge of flowers.

Lorina now had all the information that she needed, but she told Miss Wuffwuff that she would like to spend the night on duty with the minah birds, in order to see for herself what their life was like. In the meantime, she would go and sit in the green people's hut and begin work on her article while she waited for them to return.

The secreterrier's response was not quite what Lorina had expected:

"I think you're planning something bad,
Though what I do not know.
You'll have to show us your report
Before we let you go."

"I'm not planning anything bad," said Lorina, "and I'll bring my report to your office as soon as it's finished."

What Lorina was planning was certainly not bad. And if the plan was successful, she would not be writing a report, Miss Wuffwuff would not be in her office, and the mine would be in the hands of the Sorrows and the slaves.

Chapter 19

The Revolution

When the green people returned from work, they were overjoyed to find Lorina waiting for them in their hut. They had feared the worst when she had been taken away by the minah bird, and now there was great excitement as she explained to them in a whisper what was about to happen. Even Wasim joined in, and approved enthusiastically of the plan.

As the sun began to set, the mineworkers were summoned to their evening meal outside on the parade ground. Everything seemed normal, for only Lorina and the green people knew what was going to happen. Nevertheless, Lorina's heart jumped when a minah bird suddenly flew down beside her.

"Dear oh dear oh dear,
What are you doin' 'ere?"

This ain't no place ter be.
You come an' eat wiv me!"

"I'll come and eat with you afterwards," said Lorina. "But I need to know what these slaves are really like."

"They're 'orrible. A smelly mob.
I'm glad I 'aven't got your job!"

Only when the evening meal was finished, and the mineworkers were pecked back to their huts, did Lorina part company with them. Now she had to go with the guards to the refectory, where the first sitting had just ended. Some of the birds had already gone to their night-duty posts, and others were wandering around outside the refectory, chatting in the warm evening air.

Nothing was wrong. Nothing was meant to be wrong. But all the same, the normality of the scene made Lorina afraid. Perhaps everything would remain like this, and she would have to go back to the green people and tell them she had failed.

The minah bird that had spoken to her before flew onto her shoulder.

"Don't stand 'ere gettin' thinner.
Come an' 'ave yer dinner."

He stayed with Lorina as they went into the refectory and sat down at one of the long tables. Flocks of birds were already there, busily slurping their cream of asparagus soup.

"Cor, delishus...
'Ighly nootrishus..."

Lorina, however, said that she had already had some, and so she would wait for the second course.

The noodles were greeted with as much enthusiasm as the soup:

"My fav'rite meal just 'as ter
Be a plate o' pasta!"

And when it came to the apple strudel, the minah birds became simply ecstatic:

"Me first choice o' food'll
Always be strudel!"

As the meal drew to a close, Lorina was faced with a new problem. Somehow she must keep the minah birds inside the refectory. Otherwise they would see their colleagues outside and raise the alarm. She therefore rose to her feet and

told them that she would like to sing them a song. This announcement was greeted with a cheer, and the birds sat back and listened as she sang.

*Where are the children, the children, the children,
Where are the children this bright summer's day?
Gone to the meadows, the meadows, the meadows,
The children have gone to the meadows to play.*

*The meadows are burning, are burning, are burning,
The meadows are burning this bright summer's day.
Then who'll save the children, the children, the children,
Then who'll save the children who went there to play?*

*The children are safe from the fire in the meadows,
The children are safe on this bright summer's day.
Before the fire started and burnt all the meadows,
The children, the children were taken away.*

*O who took the children, the children, the children,
O who took the children this bright summer's day?
Why, the birds who started the fire in the meadows,
The birds in the meadows took them away.*

*O who are the birds that set fire to the meadows
And took all our children this bright summer's day?
The birds with gold faces set fire to the meadows
And took all our children, our children away.*

*O when shall we see them, our beautiful children,
O when shall we see our children, I pray?
We'll see them again when the birds with gold faces,
The birds with gold faces are taken away.*

As she sang, she saw with relief that the birds with gold faces began to yawn, and then to droop, and then to flop down. By the time she had sung the last verse, the birds with gold faces were indeed ready to be taken away, for the phials that she had secretly emptied into all the vats of asparagus soup had done their work. The coococks were also asleep, but the grey-skinned people who had served the meals were wide-eyed and unsure.

Quickly, Lorina gave them instructions: each was to run to a different hut and alert the people there. Soon they would all be free, but they must hurry.

She herself ran through to the elephant house, but even from the kitchen she could hear the snores as the great beasts rumbled round their dreams. General Rumbo was rumbling loudest of all, and his medals bounced up and down on his great chest.

Outside the refectory, the ground was covered with sleeping minah birds, and Lorina was careful not to tread on them as she ran to the gates of the mine. Outside stood Elemon, Matteus and all the Sorrows. Lorina opened the gates.

"It's worked!" she said breathlessly, and Matteus hugged her with joy and relief.

"You are the bravest of the brave," said Elemon.

They began swiftly to pick up the sleeping birds and carry them to the refectory. The mineworkers were already doing the same, with green, grey, orange, purple, pink people side by side and laughing together as they worked. Qasim was inside the refectory, directing the laying-down of the birds, and when he saw Lorina, he ran towards her, and he too embraced her.

"You have saved us again," he said. "Shall we ever be able to repay you?"

Lorina introduced him to Elemon and Matteus, but there was little time for celebration.

"It's not over yet," said Lorina. "You must take some men to the houses on the wooded slope. The Pit Bull and other administrators live there, and they won't be asleep."

The blue people had brought nets with them in order to capture the Pit Bull and other animals, but it was decided that Qasim, the King of the Green People, should lead the force. Small groups would take each house simultaneously, with strict instructions to avoid shedding blood. Every occupant must be captured and brought back to the refectory alive and unharmed.

Lorina herself returned to the elephant house in order to be present when General Rumbo woke up. Meanwhile, Elemon, Matteus and the Sorrows were to gather all the remaining mineworkers together and instruct them on the next phase of the plan. For the conquest of the mine was to be only the beginning of the revolution.

Chapter 20

The Revolution (continued)

"Ouf... ah... where have I gone?...
What's the time?... What's going on?
Grunt... snort... oh, it's you.
What a night! How do I do?"

General Rumbo was feeling confused. He'd certainly had a good sleep, but he still felt dozy, and when he looked out of the window, it was dark, and there was this... what was she?... reporter from the *Daily Newt* standing in front of him...

"I've got some wonderful news for you, General Rumbo," she said.

"Eh? Hm? News?"

"I want you to tell all the elephants that today's a holiday. They don't have to go to work."

"Eh? Hm? Holiday?"

"And you won't have to take orders from the Pit Bull any more."

"Eh? Hm? Orders? Pit Bull?"

Very, very, VERY slowly Lorina explained that the mine had been taken over by new owners, and they wanted General Rumbo and his elephants to work less hard and eat more food and drink more drink, and today they were to do no work at all but were to stay in their house and have a good rest.

"Isn't that wonderful?" she said.

"Well... um... yeah... it is, I think...
Eat more food and drink more drink...
Do less work... No work today...
Yeah, we can live with that, I'd say."

It was still night, and so Lorina told General Rumbo to order his elephants to go back to sleep, and then he should go back to sleep himself. General Rumbo reckoned he could live with that as well.

Lorina returned to the refectory, where all the sleeping minah birds had now been collected. Just as she came through from the kitchen, the green people brought in the Pit Bull, Miss Wuffwuff and various other dogs, all tightly wrapped in nets.

The Pit Bull was trying in vain to bite through his net, to bite the hands of the green men holding the net, and to bite the heads off a hundred imaginary tulips.

"This is a scandal, an outrageous plot. If you don't let me go you'll get hurt. I'll make your legs stumps, and I'll chew up your rumps, and I'll bite off your heads for dessert."

"We found a whole lot of gold bars in his house," said an orange man. "He called them pit bullion."

"What are we going to do with all these birds and animals?" asked a grey-skinned man.

"We should get rid of them," said a blue man.

"No," said Qasim. "That would make us the same as them."

Elemon and Matteus agreed with Qasim, and gave orders that the prisoners should be left under guard in the refectory, for it was now time to put the second phase of the plan into operation. Once more the mineworkers were split up into detachments, each one with a particular target. Matteus had made a list of all Council offices in the City, and one of the Sorrows would act as guide for each detachment. When the Educat and the Water Boar and the Buildingo and all the other useless councillors came to do their usual nothing the next morning, they would find their offices occupied and would be sent home.

Lorina was to accompany Matteus to the *Daily Newt*. She would write a report on the revolution, so that all the inhabitants would know that the City now had a new government.

There were many questions Lorina had to ask Matteus, but as the hours of the night passed, and the Sorrows and the mineworkers took control of the City, she gathered together all the answers.

When the sun rose in the morning, the streets began to fill once more with animals and birds and insects and coaches and blue pullers, all attending to their daily business as usual. Only when they bought a special and truly sensational edition of the *Daily Newt* did they learn what had happened during the night. Then the City was abuzz with excited voices. Nobody quite knew what it all meant. An ostrich thought he would get richer, a poorcupine thought he would get poorer, a reindeer thought things might get deerer, a chipmunk hoped they would get chipper, a yak began to gossip, a bumble-bee became incoherent, a drone delivered a boring speech, and a husky lost his voice.

Lorina saw a team of blue men pulling a coach with a horse in it. As soon as they heard the news, they let go of the shafts and shouted: "We're free!" Then the horse stuck his neck out of the window, and asked who was going to pull his coach. "Pull it yourself!" shouted the blue men, and so the horse got out and the blue men climbed in. Lorina asked the horse how it felt to pull a coach. The horse looked at her with shining eyes:

"Ah, my dear, if only you knew!
It's what I've always wanted to do!"

This is the article which Lorina wrote, and which the citizens read with such amazement:

THE CITY IS FREE

Last night, a group of blue people, led by Elemon and his son Matteus, freed the City from the uncaring Council and the greedy mine-owners.

The mine will now be closed until it has been made safe. The people who have been forced to work there as slaves have also been set free, and they may go home if they want to.

The gold which the mine-owners stole for themselves will be used for the benefit of the whole City.

The poisoned river will be cleaned, no one will be allowed to throw rubbish in it, and the new water company will bring clean water to every home.

The hospital will treat sick citizens properly.

The Old City will be rebuilt. Streets will be divided into traffic zones and pedestrian zones, and they will be cleaned regularly.

All these improvements will create jobs for people and animals.

The new Council will make the City a safer, healthier, happier place for all creatures.

Buy the Daily Newt for all the latest news.

Lorina hadn't written the last line. Mr Newt had slipped it in without telling anybody.

Chapter 21

Another Revolution

"This is our time!" cried Wasim. "The City took everything from us, destroyed our castle, our homes, our families. Then they sent us down the mines as slaves, and made us work, live and die in them. Now we have the chance to be masters. Why waste it? We are in control of The City and the mine. Let us stay in control!"

Lorina and Matteus had returned to the mine, and now they were standing with Elemon and a group of blue people on one side of the parade ground. A multicoloured crowd of freed mineworkers had assembled there, and they were cheering Wasim.

Qasim, King of the Green People, strove to quieten them.

"No!" he cried. "That is not the way to restore our lives. We are not city people. Let us go back to our homes, rebuild them, and live at peace with our neighbours. If we enslave the other citizens, we become them, and they become

us, and one day they will rise and overthrow us just as we have overthrown them.”

“If we leave here now,” shouted Wasim, “what is to stop city beasts from capturing us and enslaving us again?”

The crowd roared support for this question.

“We will stop them!” cried Elemon, and heads turned towards the new voice. “The City is now in our care, and we want a fair, just world. Why else would we have set you free?”

“You blue people set us free,” argued Wasim, “so that we could help you to overthrow the Council. Now that you have power, you want to be rid of us in order to keep the power to yourselves. But we won’t let you. This is our city now, and our mine, and we shall keep them and enjoy the wealth for which so many of our people have died.”

Yet again the crowd roared their approval.

Elemon turned to Lorina: “We are in danger of losing everything we have fought for. Will you help us again?”

“What can I do?” asked Lorina.

“Open their eyes to the true picture.”

Once more Lorina was hearing the voice from her dream.

“Listen to me!” she cried, and the excited crowd slowly fell silent, for they all knew the part that Lorina had played in setting them free.

“My schoolteacher has set us a project,” she began. “We have to find out what’s wrong with the world, and how it can be put right. I keep discovering lots of different things that are wrong with the world, but Elemon wants to make The City a clean and beautiful place. I think that’s right. Qasim wants to take the green people back home to rebuild the Castle. That’s right too. But Wasim is promising you wealth and power. He wants you to be masters of The City so that you can take revenge, and make others suffer. I think that’s wrong. Wasim was once King of the Green People. Was he a good King?”

The question sent a hum of recognition through the green people in the crowd. Wasim had not been a good king.

“If you listen to her, you’re fools!” cried Wasim. “The City is within our grasp. If we let it go now, we’ll never have another chance!”

“Another chance to do what, Wasim?”

It was Elemon who asked this question.

"To have dominion over The City!" cried Wasim.

"No one should have dominion over anyone," answered Elemon. "We must all live in peace together, because we are all images painted by the same brush."

"What images? What brush?" shouted Wasim. "I'm talking about life, not about images!"

"So am I," said Elemon.

Lorina had understood it all now – her dreams, what was wrong with the world, and how to put it right.

"I wish," she said, "you would sing the song you sang once about going home."

She remembered the melody, and began to hum it. Then a few people joined in, followed by more, and suddenly from the heart of the crowd came the clear high voice that had sung before. This time Lorina saw her: a tiny orange girl, as fragile as a twig. She was looking straight at Lorina, and her voice soared, taking hearts and souls with it into the heights. When she came to the last verse, all the people sang with her:

*We are free now, as the white clouds in the summer sky,
Free now, as waves that dance upon the sand.
Let us go now, go to where the world will weep no longer,
And where life and love are walking hand in hand.*

"Let's go home," said Qasim.

"Yes!" cried the green and grey and purple and orange people. "Let's go home!"

Qasim came across the parade ground to Lorina.

"Will you come with us?" he asked, but she shook her head.

"I have to go home too," she said. "My parents will be worried about me, and besides I have to write my school project."

Matteus looked sad.

"I would also like you to stay and help us," he said.

"You know what to do," said Lorina, "and you can do it without me."

Suddenly, from the refectory there was a screeching chorus of high-pitched voices. The minah birds had woken up.

“Wot’s goin’ on?... Open the door...
Open the winder... open the floor...
Why are we ’ere?... Wot a farce –
’E wants ter start a philoserphy class...
I never did like ’sparagus soup...
Watch out where you drop yer poop...”

Then came a loud bellow from the Pit Bull Terror:

“You idiot birds, will you lift off this net! Stop your chatter and get the work done!

If you don’t let me out, I’ll rage and I’ll shout, and I’ll bite off your heads one by one!”

This was greeted by another chorus from the minah birds:

“I ain’t no idiot... No, nor are we...
So oo is an idiot?... Dah, must be me...
He’ll bite off our ’eads... wot a ’orrible threat...
We’re better off leavin’ ’im under the net...
Give us a bite then, if yer know ’ow...
Yeah, so oo looks an idiot now?”

Lorina wondered what would happen to all the minah birds, and Elemon said he would consult with them about their future.

“They’re very good at pecking,” said Lorina, “so maybe they’ll peck the gold from the rock.”

She also thought that Miss Wuffwuff would make a good gardener, and perhaps the Pit Bull could be her assistant and bite the heads off the weeds and dead flowers.

There were lots of other decisions to be made. General Rumbo would need to be consulted about the elephants’ work, Mr Newt would have to promise to tell the truth, the ducktor must treat not eat, and someone suggested (it may have been Lorina herself) that a live tree should be planted in Newtpaper Square, to take the place of the dead one.

Meanwhile, the green people prepared for their homeward journey. Elemon gave orders for ten carts to be loaded with chests of gold, which the green people could use to buy materials for their castle. Even Wasim’s eyes regained some light at the sight of the gold.

The people who wanted to go back to their homes in the north, south and east were also given gold. Many, however, decided to stay, for they had been

taken away from poor lands and thought they would lead happier lives in the New City.

There were now many goodbyes, and many tears of joy and of sadness. Lorina was to accompany the green people part of the way, and so her goodbyes were to the other freed slaves and to the Sorrows.

Elemon embraced her, and wished her happiness. Then Matteus embraced her, and thanked her for saving The City. And finally Miralda embraced her and pressed a small packet into her hand.

“For your journey,” she said. “Egg and tomato.”

Chapter 22

Going Home

“Well,” asked the black rabbit, “did you find out what’s wrong with the world and how to put it right?”

“I think so,” said Lorina.

“Thinking’s not good enough,” said the black rabbit. “You’ve got to know before you act. So tell me, how do you propose to rid the world of rabbit pie?”

“I don’t think rabbit pie’s what’s wrong with the world.”

“You what? Did my ears deceive me? Say that again. No, don’t say that again! I can’t believe it! I can’t bear it! I can’t understand it!”

“Rabbit pie,” said Lorina, “doesn’t affect the whole world. It only affects rabbits.”

“Only?” cried the black rabbit. “Did you say ‘only’?”

“Just as roast beef only affects cows and roast pork only affects pigs.”

“Rabbits are more important than cows and pigs.”

“Only to rabbits.”

“What’s all this only, only, only business?” snapped the black rabbit.

“Listen and I’ll tell you,” said Lorina. “Rabbits are important to rabbits, cows are important to cows, and pigs are important to pigs.”

“Yes, yes,” said the black rabbit, “and ants are important to ants and a cabbage is important to a cabbage...”

"Exactly," said Lorina. "We're all important to ourselves. And that's what's wrong with the world."

"What do you mean?"

"If a rabbit-pie eater remembered that you're just as important to you as he is to him, then he wouldn't eat rabbit-pie, would he?"

The black rabbit stopped in mid-hop, and sat on the path looking up at Lorina.

"That's all very well," he said, "but if a cabbage is important to a cabbage, then I can't eat it, can I, and so I'll starve to death."

"Vegetables don't think or have feelings," said Lorina.

"How do you know?" asked the black rabbit. "Just because you can't talk to a cabbage, it doesn't mean a cabbage can't talk to a cabbage."

"Well, we have to eat," said Lorina, "so we shall have to assume that cabbages can't think or feel."

"Ugh," said the black rabbit, "tigers have to eat as well, so why shouldn't tigers assume that rabbits can't think or feel, eh?"

"Then we'll have to teach them," said Lorina. "In any case, I wasn't thinking of tigers, I was thinking of people."

"Good," said the black rabbit. "So let's get rid of all the people."

"That might put the world right for rabbits," said Lorina, "but not for people. What we have to do is walk hand in hand..."

"I haven't got hands!"

"Well, hand in paw..."

"Try walking hand in paw with a hungry tiger!"

By now they had reached the edge of the forest. Lorina invited the black rabbit home for a glass of tomato juice, but he declined the offer. A glass of tomato juice, he said, would be a nice hors d'oeuvre, but he suspected that he would end up as the main dish.

"Of course you wouldn't!" said Lorina. "We never eat meat."

"I'll bet your neighbours do," said the black rabbit.

It was true. The neighbours did eat meat. Lorina could never win an argument with the black rabbit, even when he was wrong, but this time he was right.

"I'm always right," said the black rabbit. "If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here now. And if you'll take my advice, you'll go home and tell the world to stop eating rabbit pie."

So saying, he bounded off into the forest, leaving Lorina to hurry home alone in the red glow of the setting sun. She knew her parents and sister would be very worried, and in fact no sooner had she begun to run down the path that led to the village than she heard voices calling her name. She shouted and waved, and a great cheer rang out as searchers came from all sides to greet her.

There would be many questions for her to answer, and there would be tears as well as smiles, and rebukes as well as relief, but in the end all that mattered was that she was home safely. She said she had got lost in the forest and had slept in a hut. The last part was true, and nobody would have believed her if she had told them the rest of her story.

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