



Part One

*"Mirror, mirror, tell me
straight,
Am I the mistress of my fate?"*

*Of course the mirror didn't
answer. For it wasn't a magical
mirror, even though the young
girl who asked was indeed a
princess.*



*Ember stood in front of the tall and ornate mirror in her bedroom
and looked critically at her nose from the left side and then the
right. Despite what anyone else told her, she felt her nose was
simply too big. It was a royal nose obviously, and was supposed to
be notable, even prominent, but still it would have been just as*


regal if it were a little bit smaller. Thus annoyed at her nose and promising herself, once more, to get it fixed the moment she was old enough, she hurried downstairs.

Ember was late again for breakfast. And, as if to punish her nose for causing her delay, she pointed it haughtily at the servants she passed, as though daring them to make a comment.

“Even if it were twice as big,” she thought conceitedly “it would still be the prettiest nose in the kingdom!”



To say that life is what you make of it is correct, but not complete. Life is also what it makes of you. A major part of this is religion. Throughout history people have killed and died for the things they have believed in. Faith has written many of history's great love stories and some of its most horrendous scenes.



Another important aspect of life is sex, or to be more precise, our sexual hormones. Even the slightest imbalance of these creates a multitude of attitudes and needs, that all require satisfaction.

Sex and religion go to form the landscape of life.
The church had designed David's world.

David had been born into a strict and vibrant Catholic society, where the belief in Hell's fire was branded onto a child's soul along with the sign of the cross that was given at its christening. So for David there was no escape, getting divorced was his subscription fee to eternal damnation, even if he was technically not to blame. He had applied for it, and that was enough.

The truth was that his ex-wife had used the marriage as her ticket to the West and freedom. All her friends had done the same, except their husbands had known about the legal deception.

Ironically the Berlin Wall, the symbol of separation, fell in the

following year.

His wife, tactfully changed her plans in accordance.



*The*hing smiled at his reflection in the mirror that he had found some six months earlier. Someone had thrown it out because it was broken in nine pieces, giving a rather fractured view of the



world. Thing liked that. It normally stood in the corner of his room covered with a piece of old sackcloth, but not today, today was different. Today Thing wanted to make sure he looked his best, so he needed the mirror's help.

Thing of course, wasn't really his name, but it was the only name he'd ever known. Even Father Arhman, who had taken him in, had never called him by any other. For you see as a baby Thing had been left in a small wicker basket on the back pew of the church. And apart from a grubby white blanket and a rather sad note from his mother asking Father Arhman to take care of 'this thing,' there was nothing else. No name, no birth date, and no next of kin.

Naturally Father Arhman did his best to look after Thing and teach him everything a young boy needs to know, such as reading, writing and maths, but most of all, all about God and His angels. Unfortunately, though, Thing had been born both mentally and

physically deformed, making it difficult for him to understand and learn even the simplest tasks. He certainly did not understand why the other children always kicked and hit him. The games they played, running and hiding, always started out as so much fun, but sadly always ended with the other children being cruel to him. Many an evening Father Arhman would trudge down to the marketplace to untie him or find him crying in some small and dark alleyway.

Thing liked the angels though, and knew all about them, which surprised Father Arhman very much. And so, to motivate him in his other pursuits he would often talk to Thing about them, telling him that if he continued to be a good boy and do all his chores, then surely one day they would come for him. Why he even went so far as to say that the angels themselves would come to take him up to heaven to be with his mother. Thing liked this idea very much! He liked the idea of finally seeing his mother and often asked Father Arhman to tell him all about her, and would sit patiently on one of the many pews, staring up at the stained

glass windows where the angels waited, attentively listening as Father Arhman told him just how beautiful and kind she was. He even told Thing that her name was Mary. More important, though, and this was the part that Thing liked most of all, was that she loved him.



„No one in our family has ever been divorced.“ David’s father whispered at the reception, when it was his turn to congratulate the newlyweds. „Remember this.“

Since then these words had become a fanfare for his every sleepless night, heralding all the memories he had either overlooked or simply ignored.

It had all seemed so perfect too. David felt he had finally done

something right, something in accordance with his upbringing. It had been a white wedding - grand, soaked in tradition and romance, crowned with the blessings of the priest. The marriage, though, turned out to be less ostentatious and without penitence, when the end came.

They parted like cats, viciously, each trying to hurt the other.



Sitting at one of the large bay windows that looked out across her father's kingdom, Ember daydreamed lazily about how splendid the kingdom would be that she would be Queen of. From where she sat she could clearly see as far as the neighbouring kingdom some fifteen miles away. It also gave her a splendid view of the market place in the small village that had grown up and around the castle walls like a wild blackberry bush.

She often whiled away the hours here, inventing names and making up conversation with the people she saw going about their daily business in the hustle and bustle of the village.

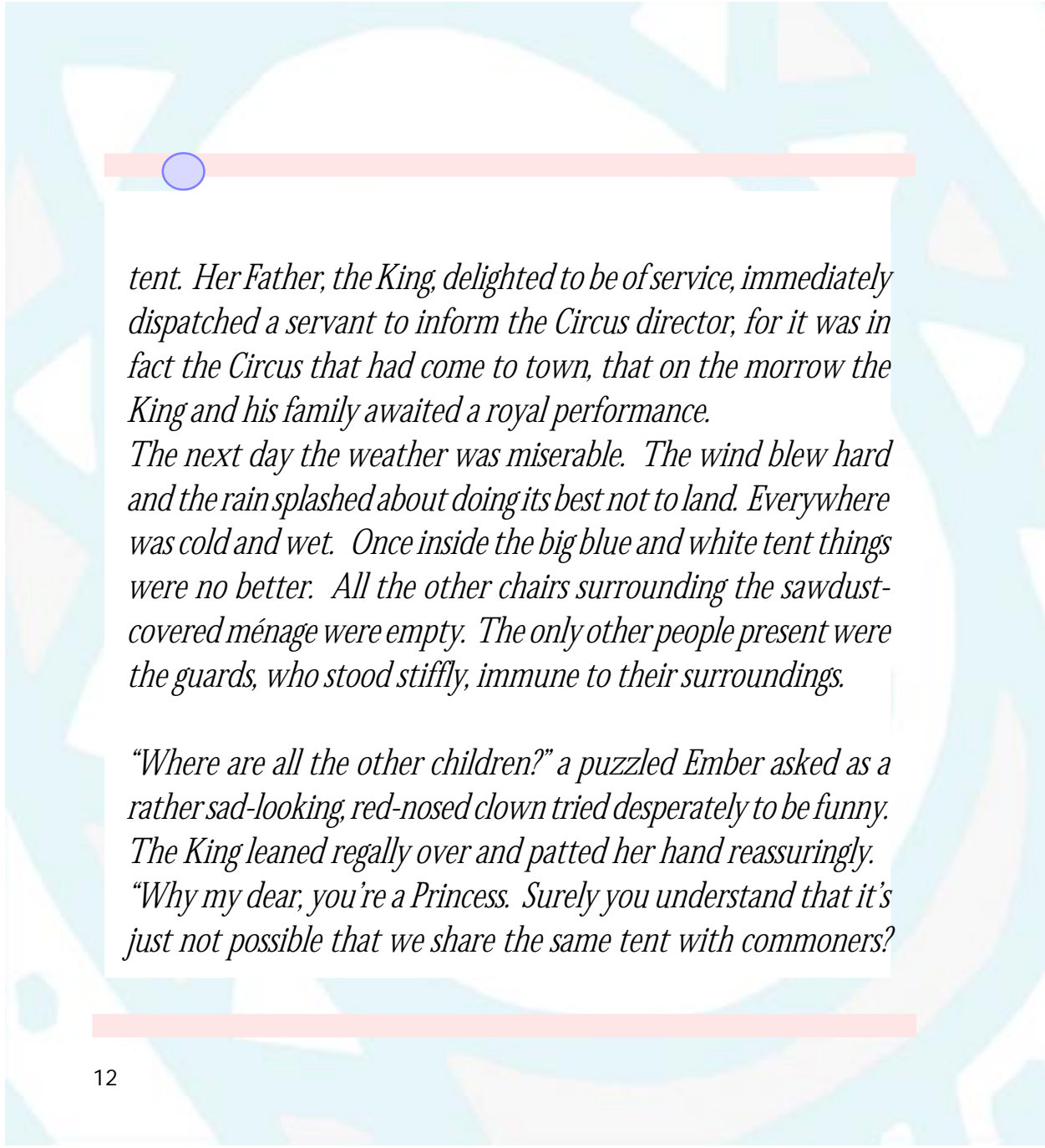


On this particular morning the sun was up nice and early, promising to be around all day. Ember could hear the pigeons cooing noisily on the rooftop, as if arguing over who should have the best spot in which to sunbathe. It was then that she noticed the convoy. A trail of seven brightly

painted wagons, each as colourful and heavily laden as the next. The village children, having also spotted the convoy, went rushing off to meet it. Ember wished she could rush out to meet it too, it looked like fun. But Ember knew better. Ember was well aware that Princesses don't rush about. Her mother was always telling her off even if she walked quickly. The rule was that everyone and everything rushed out and about for her.

Ember though, just like the village children she saw, was intrigued as she sat and watched the convoy make its way slowly up the main street towards the village green, where it stopped. The drivers then immediately began to unload their carts, putting up a large blue and white tent amid the excited shouts and whistles of the children who pointed at each and every new thing that was unloaded.

The following morning at breakfast Ember asked her father if she could go and see what all the commotion was about. She wanted to know what was inside the large blue and white striped



tent. Her Father, the King, delighted to be of service, immediately dispatched a servant to inform the Circus director, for it was in fact the Circus that had come to town, that on the morrow the King and his family awaited a royal performance.

The next day the weather was miserable. The wind blew hard and the rain splashed about doing its best not to land. Everywhere was cold and wet. Once inside the big blue and white tent things were no better. All the other chairs surrounding the sawdust-covered ménage were empty. The only other people present were the guards, who stood stiffly, immune to their surroundings.

“Where are all the other children?” a puzzled Ember asked as a rather sad-looking, red-nosed clown tried desperately to be funny. The King leaned regally over and patted her hand reassuringly.

“Why my dear, you’re a Princess. Surely you understand that it’s just not possible that we share the same tent with commoners?”

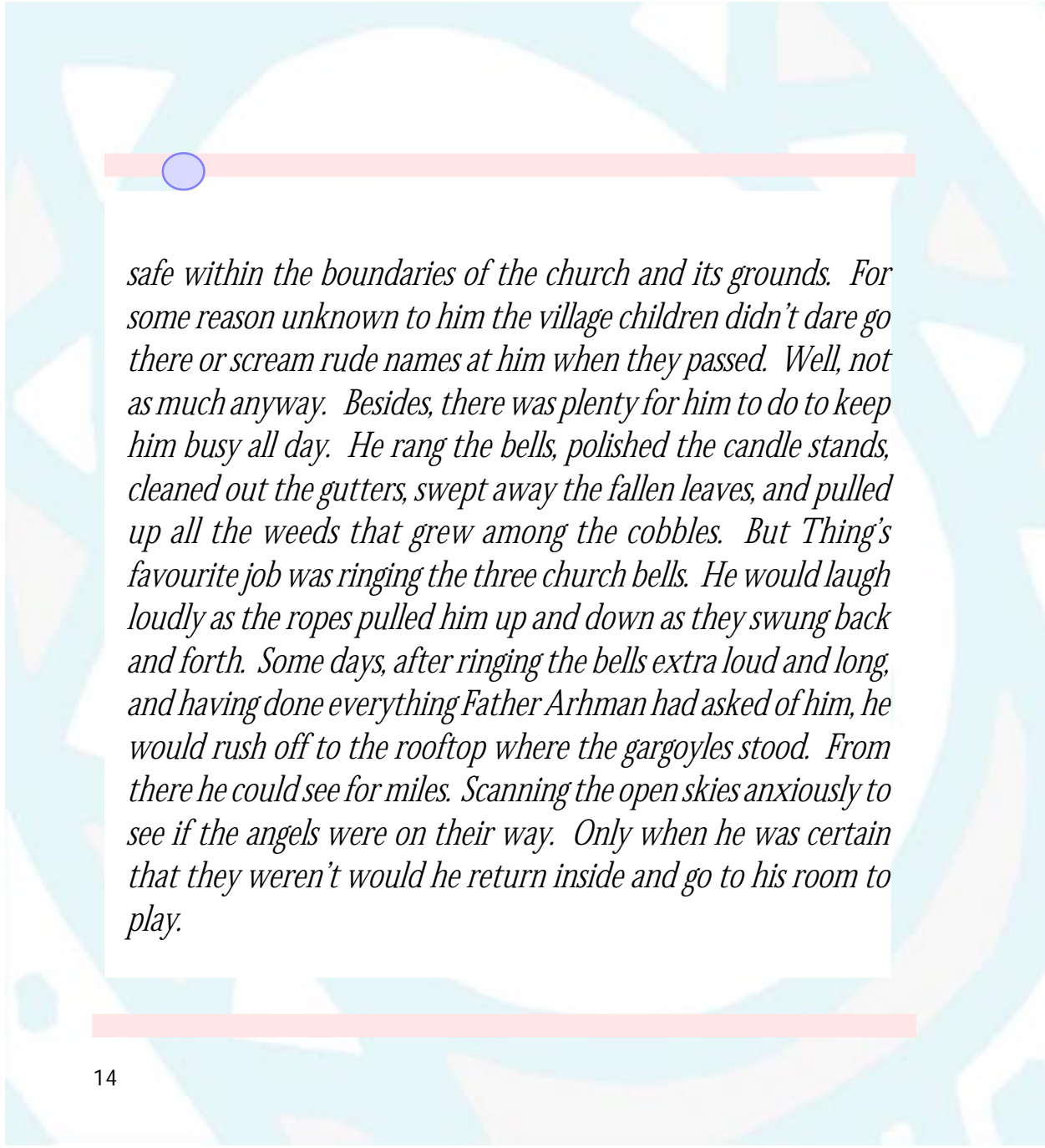
What on earth would the neighbouring King and Queen think of us?"

But this was not how Ember had wanted to attend the Circus. She had wanted to be there when it was crowded and the tent rang with the sound of stamping feet and laughter. She had wanted to be there when it was fun.

Of course Ember knew better than to argue with her Father, (he was after all the King,) So that was the end of that. At least she knew now what went on inside the big blue and white tent.

When the royal performance was finally over, a relief to everyone, royal and artistic alike, and Ember was safe within the castle walls, a large and boisterous crowd gathered outside the Circus tent once more. And soon enough the sound of laughter and stamping of feet could be heard...

...Thing knew better than to go into the village if it wasn't necessary. It was one of the first things he'd learnt. He was only




safe within the boundaries of the church and its grounds. For some reason unknown to him the village children didn't dare go there or scream rude names at him when they passed. Well, not as much anyway. Besides, there was plenty for him to do to keep him busy all day. He rang the bells, polished the candle stands, cleaned out the gutters, swept away the fallen leaves, and pulled up all the weeds that grew among the cobbles. But Thing's favourite job was ringing the three church bells. He would laugh loudly as the ropes pulled him up and down as they swung back and forth. Some days, after ringing the bells extra loud and long, and having done everything Father Arhman had asked of him, he would rush off to the rooftop where the gargoyles stood. From there he could see for miles. Scanning the open skies anxiously to see if the angels were on their way. Only when he was certain that they weren't would he return inside and go to his room to play.

Today, though, was different. Today Thing was going outside. There was something he had to do. Someone he wanted to see. He looked at himself in the mirror once more and smiled at his own reflection. Then, just in case he had been mistaken about the angels, he looked out of the small narrow slit of a window in his room to make sure. On seeing no angels however, and with another broad grin, he happily brushed his hair, not knowing, all the wrong way. He was ready to go out.



David lay awake on his bed staring into the dark. Thoughts, like uninvited guests insisting on being entertained, poured themselves another drink. It was going to be a long night.

Turning on the light, David caught a glimpse of his own reflection



in the mirror and, although he was very tired and his skin looked pale from lack of sleep, he liked what he saw. Time had been good to him. He still had all his hair. His eyes were as dark brown as in his youth, and there was only the slightest touch of 'hang-jaw'.

If only his family had been so kind.

His parents, on receiving the news of his impending divorce, chose to disown him with a short but polite note. David had smiled with resignation when he had read the letter. To think this was all it took to wipe away thirty years of care.

His brothers and sisters were obedient and attentive to their parents' wishes. They didn't even write in explanation.

David looked again at himself in the mirror; he looked so very much like his father. Why did he feel the need to make this old man proud of him? He had done nothing wrong, and yet the sense of failure was there like the bloodstain of Duncan on the

hand of Macbeth.

He began to drink in an attempt to forget but this only removed the present and not the past. Something else would have to be done to cut out this feeling of guilt, something more physical. He went to see a doctor.



Ember sat in her room and tapped so hard on the tabletop that she hurt the end of her fingers. She was still annoyed about her visit to the Circus. It simply wasn't fair! Why couldn't she attend with the other children? Oh, she understood all about decorum, and how she had a certain royal responsibility to behave regally, but still, where was the fun in going to the Circus alone? Where was the fun in going anywhere alone? She suddenly felt like she was always alone. Who did she actually have to play with? Horse riding and hunting were all very fine and everything, but

what was that game she saw the children playing down in the village? The game where one of them was blindfolded and then turned around three times? She knew it was three times because she had watched the children play it often enough and carefully counted each turn.

What was so special about three times?

There were so many things Ember didn't know. But there was one thing she did know, and that was that the fun of going to the Circus was not going alone. This made her angry.



Again she was being denied having fun simply because she was a princess. And it really didn't help when the following morning she accidentally overheard the servants say that the next day was to be the last performance. Why, who knew when it would return again, if at all!

If only she weren't a princess. Even if it were just for one day! The very thought made her giddy. Her mind raced off into a thousand different adventures as she thought of all the fun she could have and all the things she could do.

But she was a princess, and there was simply nothing she could do about it.

Well... nothing she could do about it.





Two weeks later David was lying on the operating table counting backwards from ten. Comforted by the thought that when he next awoke he would be physically and irrevocably changed, he let go and slipped into the induced sleep.

When he awoke, like a caterpillar transformed, he studied himself and the doctor's work. It certainly didn't look beautiful. He was technically a virgin again. He felt reborn. Not like a Christian though, through baptism, but like a Jew, through circumcision.

He was finally free of his wife.

Lying there in pain, he smiled and then laughed. Life was about to begin again.



With a headscarf firmly but carefully wrapped around his face, revealing only his eyes, and wearing a long and oversized black cloak which covered the rest of him, Thing was ready to go out. Dressed this way he almost passed unnoticed. The villagers had grown accustomed to seeing him like this. Of course every once in awhile a few of the

younger children would follow him and mimic his walk while calling him names, but ever since he had beaten the tall boy with the thick neck and close-together eyes they tended to keep a safe distance.

Thing hadn't meant to hurt him, but he had lost his temper. The



boy had said Father Arhman was stupid for taking care of him. This had made Thing really angry.

Father Arhman was not stupid. Why, Father Arhman knew all about everything! This boy had no right to say such things. He was stupid! And so, in his rage, Thing had hit him, hard, very hard.

*He
and nose in
to say, Father
taught Thing
wrong to hit
still... The
right to say*




*broke his jaw
fact. Needless
Arhman had
that it was
people, but
boy had no
such things.*

“Follow this book, Thing, and surely you will go to Heaven,” Father Arhman would often say, waving in the air the small black book that he always carried with him. And, although Thing couldn’t read or write, he knew it was true because Father Arhman said so.



Karenina stared out of her bedroom window at the snow-covered playground. It all seemed so grey, even the snow somehow managed to look grey. Perhaps it was the towering concrete blocks that drew the horizon like a smudged pencil line, within which lived hundreds of people all with the same furniture, the same wallpaper and the same view. Or maybe it was the greyiness of the sky caused by the nearby factory that pumped out its harmful fumes day and night. No one complained, though - there were worse places to live than this.



Or perhaps it was the continual crying of her newborn baby daughter, permanently reminding her she was too young to be a mother.

Karenina and her parents had lived a relatively good life under the Communist regime. Her mother had been a secretary in the local government offices, and her father had built and repaired military planes. She had attended university.

She had wanted to study architecture. She had wanted many things. The one thing she got was pregnant. The father of the child, also a student at the university, was quick to tell her not to waste her time with ideas of a family or even a relationship. Surely she wasn't foolish enough to think it had been love? Besides, it would be imprudent to make such a commitment now, now that the world was so radically changing.

And it was true; the world did seem to be changing. As if overnight Communism had disappeared. Russia as Karenina knew it suddenly no longer existed. It had broken up into several

rebel states, all claiming independence.

With it came mass unemployment. Her mother was one of the first to go, redundant without pay. Shortly after which her father lost his job. Now with no income and little chance for that to change, for those who had worked for the state were no longer wanted, they, like many other middle-class families, began to sell their personal belongings to make money.

A huge black market opened, like a hungry wolf waiting to swallow everything the starving rich could throw at it. It became the governing power and the door to the West.

Karenina began to hear about people who, with a little of its help, had made it there. It was expensive but not unaffordable. These people were apparently now driving around in a Mercedes.

This was what Karenina wanted.

She was tired of the greyness and standing in queues. She was tired of the cold war monuments staring down at her like huge gravestones of the past.

She knew she'd have to be quiet about it as the KGB, although

officially gone, still held the people in its grip. Tales about whole families being dragged out of their beds in the middle of the night, never to be seen again, kept people quiet.

But the more she thought about it and the more she watched the chimneys bellowing out their greyness, and the more she stood in line for simply something to eat, the more she knew she would take that risk.

She was young, she was attractive, she had something to sell.



You must stay within the church grounds, Thing,” Father Arhman had said that evening as they had walked down the darkening streets back towards the church. “I won’t always be able to save you. This time yes, but a day will come when they will not listen to me.”

The large corrugated iron gates of the churchyard squeaked loudly as they closed behind them.

In the fading light Thing noticed tears in Father Arhman's eyes, this confused him very much.

PART TWO

It had been hard enough getting a pumpkin, and as for the mice... well, a hamster would just have to do! There had simply been no way that Ember could persuade her mother to let her have mice. The cat had been the easiest, as there were many strays roaming the castle grounds, one less would not be noticed. But still, the darn thing had put up a fight and scratched her viciously on the arm.

"I mean, is this really necessary?" Ember asked, as she laid the pumpkin, the hamster and the screaming cat down in front of her fairy godmother. "Next you'll be telling me I have to be back before midnight."



"Not quite, but there is one small and very important thing you have to pay attention to. You have to be kind to everyone you meet. Everyone. Otherwise the spell cannot be reversed and you

will have to spend the rest of your life as a gypsy. So, are you quite sure you want to do this?"


Even though Ember knew nothing of the village children's lives, other than the laughing and fun that she saw and imagined during the day, she was certain.

"Yes!" she said, and with that the magical spell was cast.

"You have exactly one month," said her fairy godmother. "No one will notice that you are missing, in fact no one will notice anything different at all, not even the king. Now run along and have fun at the circus. That is where you want to go, isn't it?"

And so it was that the now gypsy Ember, in her newly made cat cart, towed by a rather bad-tempered donkey-hamster, and with her pumpkin artefacts, set out to have all the fun she felt she had been missing.





Ever since man created his first god, he has struggled to find the meaning of life. This has led to life being compared to a box of chocolates, a plate of spaghetti, and the deep end of the swimming pool. But never to a lemon, when in fact the concept of the lemon is the closest because the only true way of knowing what 'sour' tastes like is to try it. Therein lies the answer; life is there to be experienced.

Which leaves us with the other question, did life therefore actually only start when Eve bit into the apple?

In a large, rundown house that smelled of worn socks and cigarette ash, Karenina lay on the single bed in the single room she and her daughter had been allocated. Officially registered as Jews, Germany had welcomed them with open arms and a pen.

Outside the wind blew cold, and the rain fell in a thin and never changing drizzle, writing the mood. A street lamp shone through the smoke-stained curtains of the room like a jaundiced moon.

In the next room a man and a woman were arguing

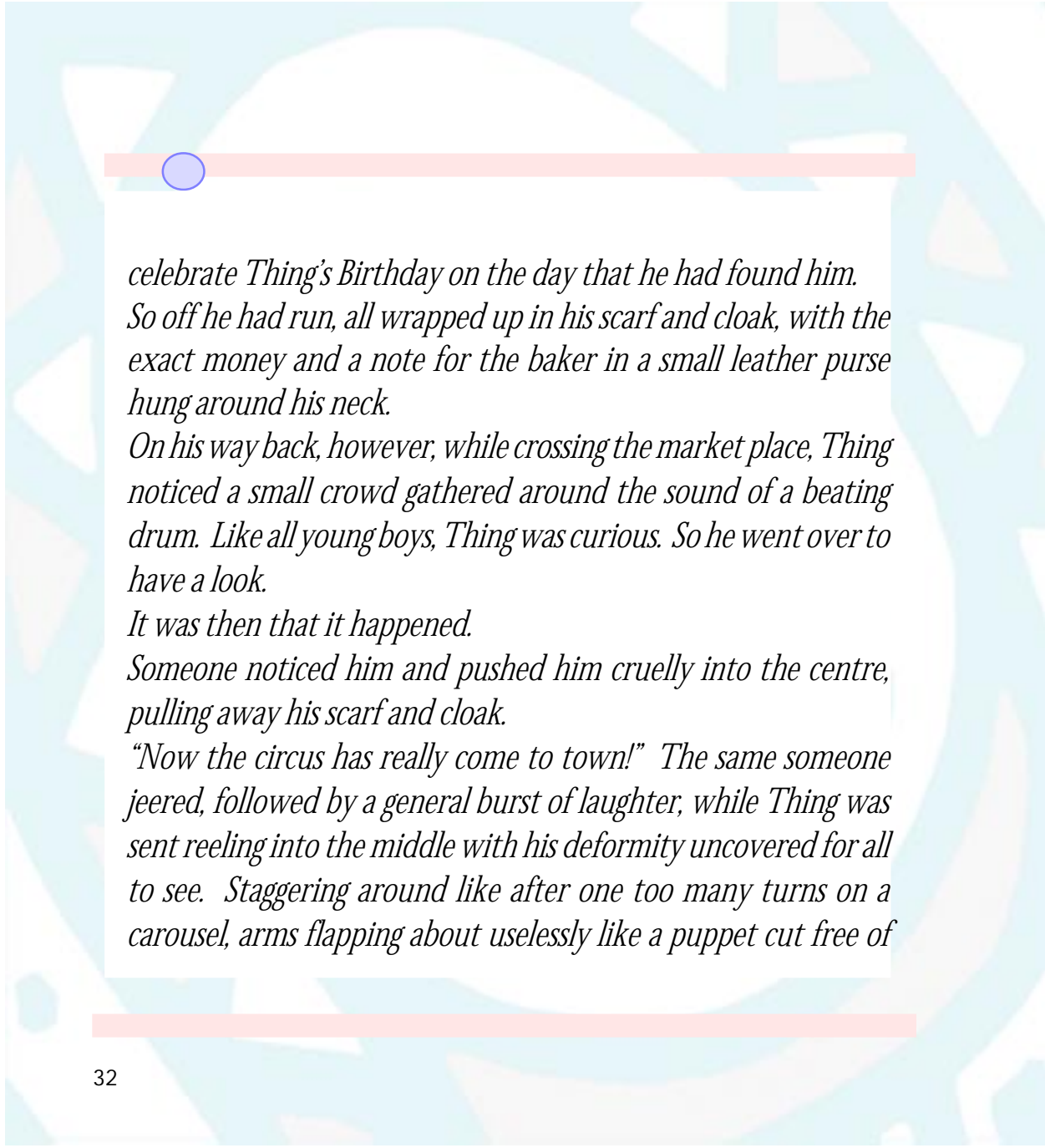
„At least they have each other,“ Karenina thought despondently, and she held Ninotschka close for comfort. It was going to be another trying night.

In another part of town David was trying to forget. In the morning he would hardly remember where, when, or with whom he had been.



It was still far too early for anyone to be in the market place and that was how Thing preferred it. Whenever he had to go there he liked to go early, before the streets got crowded. Today, though, he didn't care. He would wait as long as necessary.

It had all begun some six weeks earlier when he had gone out to get some flour. Father Arhman was going to help him bake a cake. A birthday cake. Thing's birthday cake. Father Arhman liked to



celebrate Thing's Birthday on the day that he had found him. So off he had run, all wrapped up in his scarf and cloak, with the exact money and a note for the baker in a small leather purse hung around his neck.

On his way back, however, while crossing the market place, Thing noticed a small crowd gathered around the sound of a beating drum. Like all young boys, Thing was curious. So he went over to have a look.

It was then that it happened.

Someone noticed him and pushed him cruelly into the centre, pulling away his scarf and cloak.

"Now the circus has really come to town!" The same someone jeered, followed by a general burst of laughter, while Thing was sent reeling into the middle with his deformity uncovered for all to see. Staggering around like after one too many turns on a carousel, arms flapping about uselessly like a puppet cut free of

its strings. Thing desperately tried to right himself, to stop himself from falling, he failed. And crashed headlong into the person who was beating the drum and then headfirst against the hard cold floor, which ripped triumphantly at his face.

This only incited another burst of laughter from the crowd. He could feel the blood stinging his eyes. He was also aware of someone approaching.

Cowering instinctively, he lifted his arm to protect his bleeding face.

“S s s sor’y.” He muttered pathetically. He wasn’t to blame, but that had never interested anyone before.

“Beat him, miss’s!” The crowd called maliciously. “Beat him like the idiot he is!”

And Ember raised her hand to do just that.

“Oh you st... you cl...” she stuttered after having almost been knocked over, but stopped herself just in time, remembering what her fairy-godmother had said. Instead she removed a small white

handkerchief and, bending down, began to wipe away the blood from Thing's face.

"It's okay," She said, trying to sound caring. "No one is going to beat you."

Thing could not move. He simply stared blankly at the two white doves which were now perched on a nearby rooftop. They had magically flown out of the white handkerchief she was now using to clean his bloodied face.

"Oh them," she said, following the path of his gaze. "Don't worry about them. They'll come down when they're hungry." Still Thing didn't move.



The small white hand that was stretched out towards him held his gaze. He could not believe what was happening. Very rarely did anyone other than Father Arhman speak to him, and definitely not anyone as beautiful and with such tender tones! Suddenly it dawned on him. She was an angel. The angels Father Arhman had so often talked about had finally come for him. Tears filled his large and swollen eyes.

For a moment it looked as if the crowd was going to laugh again but, seeing the strange expression on Thing's face, they decided it probably wasn't a good idea. In fact it probably wasn't a good idea to hang around much longer either. So the crowd, like one body, suddenly remembered it had come to the market place to buy things and began to disband.

Ember, seeing the crowd disperse quickly, set about collecting for her abruptly ended show. Then, helping Thing back to his feet, she also hurried off, leaving a very puzzled and bewildered Thing



alone in the market place, clutching the bloody handkerchief tightly.

The following day Thing asked Father Arhman if he could have a penny.

“A penny?” he asked, somewhat surprised at Thing’s unusual request, for he was certain Thing didn’t understand what money was for.

“What do you need it for, Thing?” he asked with a smile.

“Ang’l,” was his monosyllabic reply. He wanted to give it to his angel like he had seen the other people do. She had curtsied, smiled and thanked each and every one of them. Thing wanted his angel to also smile for him.

Father Arhman, thinking that Thing wanted to put the penny in one of the many collection boxes around the church, smiled and gently patted Thing’s outstretched hand as he gave him the penny. He knew how important the angels were to him.




With a new haircut and wearing a black Afghan fur coat, Karenina was ready to go out for the night. She had asked the elderly Russian woman who lived three doors down if she would baby-sit Ninotschka for the evening. She needed a break from being a mother. She wanted to feel wanted by someone older than four. So, all dressed up and feeling good, she was ready for anything.

Anything came in the form of a happy, but drunk, David. With English as common ground, they spent the evening chatting and flirting as much as their few shared words would allow. They agreed to meet again.

That had been three weeks ago, and Ninotschka was once again with her new “Babushka” and Karenina was with David.

Parking the car outside the asylum-home, David waited to be



invited in. He kissed her passionately. He knew she wanted him, she purred like a cat beneath his touch. But it was a quarter after nine, and the house rules allowed no visitors on the premises after nine. He didn't really like the idea of taking her back to his place, even though he lived nearby. Taking her back meant she could call. David liked to be the one who called, and only when he wished. David had no such wishes tonight.

So it was that in the end they got to know each other on the back seat of his old Volkswagen. The very same car that a few days earlier had seemed like the magical sleigh of Father Christmas in the eyes of four year old Ninotschka.



***T**hing waited most of the morning, ignoring the surprised looks,*

the whispering and pointing from the passers-by, until Ember finally showed up. She wore a long, flowing red dress with many different wild flowers in her hair.

For a moment she looked annoyed when she saw him; then she thought better of it and straightened her knotted face.

Thing smiled naively and jumped to his feet to meet her. Ember forced another smile.

“You’ve come to watch my show again, have you?” she asked as she began to unload her small cart, but before she could say another word, Thing began to unload the cart for her. Thing, sitting on the cobbled floor in front of her with a permanent grin on his face and with childlike



enthusiasm, watched transfixed as she sang and danced. He clapped loudly at each and every new trick she performed. When she was finished and began to collect for her performance he jumped up and excitedly gave her his penny.

Thing knew all about collecting money, Father Arhman did it at every service. It was normal, therefore, that his angel did the same.



The rain had been falling sideways all day, first to the left and then to the right, as if the driving wind could not decide whether it was going to or coming from the north.

David and Karenina spent the evening in whispers and embraces in a quiet corner of a small Greek restaurant. She told him all about her flight, Ninotschka's father, and just how awful things were. He told her of his divorce and how awful his ex-wife had

been. Karenina also told him how Ninotschka awoke each night frightened and crying. She had done her best to protect her from the dangers of their escape, but she had been useless against the pain and sorrow Ninotschka felt on leaving all her friends and toys behind. It was beginning to show.

Two days after this conversation David turned up with his car completely filled with cuddly toys of all shapes and sizes. Ninotschka was in her pyjamas in the bathroom, brushing her teeth and getting ready for bed, when her mother came in, smiling, happy for her.

“Get dressed and come downstairs,” she said and gave Ninotschka a loving hug. „I have a surprise for you!“

Three minutes later, tucked safely behind her mother’s skirt, Ninotschka stood in front of David’s open car boot. Her eyes raced between the boot and her mother; there were just so many toys!

The following morning Thing asked Father Arhman again for a penny. And again, with a smile and a gentle pat of reassurance, he gave it. By the end of the week, however, Father Arhman's curiosity had been awakened. Thing wasn't putting the money in any of the boxes. He was going outside... actually giving it to someone.



Father Arhman wanted to know whom. So it was that the following morning, as Thing prepared to go out again, Father Arhman went up to the rooftop. There he had a perfect view over the whole village. And unknown to Thing, he could follow him and find out just what he was getting up to and where the pennies were going.



The tide turned. The river estuaries all ran dry. The ocean sucked back all the water into the sea. It wasn't forever of course, just for the night, in the morning the tide and all its water would return. But sometimes the night can be so dark, so black, without any stars or moon that it seems as though it will last forever. People feel the same when that first rush of blood called love appears.

Karenina had found someone she thought of as special. Someone who had not only helped her through the German bureaucracy but also helped her find an apartment and out of the asylum-home.

She found someone she wanted to be with.

As for Ninotschka, well she blossomed like a flower in the sun around David. He became her best friend. They did everything

together. They would swing together in the nearby park, race around the house chasing each other in games of tag, or simply sit side-by-side watching TV. Of course David did not understand a word she said, or she him, but that didn't matter, they were together, and when they looked at each other they knew, and would smile. Some things don't need words.



Good morning Ember,” her fairy godmother called out as she approached her cottage. “Already tired of being a gypsy?” Ember only nodded her head with relief.

“Well, well, not even three weeks. Let me just check your aura to see if you have been kind to everyone. I expect it wasn’t as easy or as much fun as you thought, was it?”


Again, all Ember could do was nod her head.

"Is that a yes or a no?" her fairy godmother then asked and laughed. It wasn't really a question.



"I can see you have learned your lesson, though. You might just make a fine queen after all."

And with that she changed Ember back to being a princess, the cart back to the cat, the horse back to the hamster, and all her gypsy artefacts back to a very bruised looking pumpkin. Being a gypsy had not been the fun Ember had thought it would be. She



had had to sleep outside, she couldn't wash properly... and the hunger! No, she would never complain about being a princess again.

So after giving her fairy godmother a big hug, stuffing the hamster into her pocket, and picking up the now very tranquil cat, she ran back to the castle, happy to be herself and back home again.


"Now don't forget to invite me to the wedding," her fairy godmother shouted out after her, but Ember was already too far away.



After having lost his wife, family, and all their associated friends, David now lost his job. Apparently his inability to make the necessary social adjustments was affecting his work. His boss suggested he see a doctor. For David, this was out of the question. He didn't need psychiatric help, what he needed was a friend.

But there was none left. He let his drinking habit go from heavy to over weight.

With the divorce official, the financial fallout landed in a heap by the door. Unable to pay anyone, David didn't see any point in opening the letters. What good did it do knowing exactly how much he owed someone when there was nothing he could do about it? At the same time he was finding out that Karenina's needs and wants were endless. Starting a new life in an old world was not only difficult but also expensive. His short-term feelings of goodwill and charity were being strangled by responsibility. His answer was to stay away.

ather Arhman remained perched on the rooftop like one of its gargoyles all that morning, watching Thing. While Thing, looking like a gargoyle, sat patiently waiting in the village market place. But nothing happened. No one came. Thing didn't understand and neither did Father Arhman.

So it was that as the evening drew to a close, Father Arhman went out looking for him. He wasn't to be found in any of the usual places, tied up or hiding. In the end Father Arhman found him sitting all alone at the bottom of the town hall stairs still clutching the penny. He had waited and walked the streets all day looking for her.



“Come along, Thing,” Father Arhman said, puzzled by the sad look in Thing’s eyes. “Come on, let’s go back to the church. It will be alright.”

“But Ang’l?” Thing said in explanation and gave another sad and hopeless look over his shoulder as Father Arhman took him by

the hand.

Father Arhman could only say, "Yes, I know." Although he had no idea. Poor Thing, he really did believe the angels had finally come for him. With that, holding Father Arhman's hand tightly, they silently made their way home.

Later that evening, after Father Arhman had tucked him into bed and gone back down to the church to pray, Thing cried himself to sleep. He just didn't understand.

The following week it arrived. The king was delighted, and the queen broke down and cried. Ember stood there looking puzzled. The neighbouring king had accepted her Father's offer. She was going to be married the following summer! It all seemed to be happening so fast.



If life is not crashing into you and telling you that you are about to die, then generally speaking you are winning

Karenina was winning, but her jealousy, like a rotten apple, was beginning to spoil the rest of her senses. Unaware of David's failing enthusiasm and financial difficulties she assumed the reason for his absence was another woman. Determined to outdo her imaginary rival, she increased her attempts to satisfy him physically. This only left David feeling even more distraught. His need to be wanted and cared for was lost, replaced by an almost violent and phobic desire.

David reduced his visits even more.

Spring arrived.


The snow melted. The birds returned from wherever it was they had gone and were now busy building their nests. The trees and hedges greened. Everything spoke of life. Even the cold night air

caused the stars to sparkle anew.

While outside the world was promising a new day, inside the laughter and smiles were taut. Karenina became ever more choleric as David became less responsive to her approaches. Ninotschka cried. The air was stifling. Windows needed to be opened to let the fresh air in, but habits are hard to break. Where their love had stopped, life began; Karenina conceived

Part Three

It was a late spring morning and the sun was a blood orange in a white sky. The roads were empty and the air fresh. David was sure they would be on time. There was even a parking place in front of the hospital.



Thus in a good mood and with a smile for anyone, David told Karenina he would wait outside, waiting around a hospital reception area was never a nice experience. Besides, smoking wasn't allowed inside.

The day matured and the sun yellowed as the sky turned a pale blue. Puffing contentedly on his fourth cigarette, David watched a man struggle by with two large and heavy- looking plastic bags, full of shopping.

“At least I’ve got a car,” he thought and smiled again. Then, stubbing the cigarette out in the ashtray provided, he went inside.

*T*ime passed and with it life seemed to return to normal. Thing went about his everyday, daily life and the strange event with the pennies had apparently been forgotten. The only difference was that Thing no longer smiled, even when he rang the bells.

Poor Father Arhman, he just didn't know what to do. He was completely at a loss as to the reason; even when he told Thing about the angels and his mother Thing did not smile. Until early one spring morning when a special invitation arrived for Father Arhman.



The neighbouring king's son was about to be married and he, as the local bishop, had been requested to perform the ceremony.

Thinking this would be a nice change for Thing and might take him out of his gloom, he decided to take him with him. A royal wedding was always a grand event. Surely this would cheer him up.



When Karenina finally appeared, David's first thought was that he'd been outside longer than he'd imagined. Usually her visits to the doctor lasted at least an hour. She did look angry though, which was normal. Preferring the imminent scene to take place outside, David veered towards the exit as he got up to meet her. He didn't make it, much to the amusement of the dulled patients and the receptionist. Apparently the doctor had taken it very light heartedly- almost laughing when he mentioned it, after all it wasn't the first time she was pregnant.

Karenina, though, didn't see the joke.

She didn't see anything funny about it at all. She felt cheated, denied. She had been less than six months in Germany and hadn't even begun to make a new and better life. She didn't want a baby right now and certainly not from him.

He was only the first man she had met.
And in her rage she told him this.

Outside the day turned into a Rembrandt painting while within the world washed away like a watercolour caught in the rain. David told her to get into the car, with the image of Karenina's ireful expression and the words "not from you" like some demented Buddhist chant drowning out every other thought, he drove her home.

The next two weeks passed listlessly, each of them pretending nothing between them had changed. David did whatever Karenina asked while Karenina remained unusually silent as they waited for the days to become hours, and then the hours to become but one, and time for them to leave.

„It's for the best,“ David said, trying to convince himself just as much as Karenina. Karenina nodded with dull consent. Half an hour later they arrived.

From outside the place looked just like any other building, but

there was no large brass sign on this doctor's wall.
David rang the bell.



On entering the city, Thing's face lit up and Father Arhman smiled. The town was full of people and noise. Walking timidly beside Father Arhman, Thing went completely unnoticed for the first time in his life. No one paid him any attention at all. There was simply too much going on. There were too many strange and wonderful things to look at for a young boy dressed in a headscarf and cloak to be of any interest. Strangely dressed people juggled, swallowed swords, and threw metre-long flames of fire from their mouths. Even the streets themselves, now all decorated with bright coloured ribbons, seemed more interesting. Music echoed off every building wall, while the air hung heavy with the smell of freshly baked bread and grilled sausage...

And there, right in the middle of the town square, for everyone to see, was the reason for it all. Sitting side by side on a large gold-plated throne, surrounded by a squadron of elaborately dressed soldiers, sat the young prince and his soon- to be- bride. Thing's eyes and mouth opened wide. Father Arhman, seeing his reaction, smiled again.



What is the Prince and the Princess whom I am to marry tomorrow, Thing,” Father Arhman said in explanation as they made their way slowly towards the betrothed. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

A slow procession of guests and visitors elegantly made its way down the long red carpet that was rolled out in front of them, to a steady background of oh’s and ah’s from the on- looking crowd, as one by one the people gave whatever wedding gift they had. Thing dug deep in his pocket for the penny that Father Arhman

had given him nearly nine months earlier. He had kept it safe and with him ever since she had disappeared. Thing knew that the beautiful princess was none other than his Angel, only now instead of wearing rags and having wild black hair she sat upon a golden chair all dressed in white, just like the angels in the church. She even had golden hair like they did.

Overtaken with joy and certain she would be happy to see him again, he let go of Father Arhman's hand and began to make his own way forward. He could hear Father Arhman calling him to come back, but paid no attention. He only laughed to himself as



he imagined Father Arhman's face when he found out that the Princess was in fact his Angel.

Thing knew what he had to do. He had to give her his penny, a present, just like everyone else.


He was almost there now, in front of her.

She must certainly be able to see him.

Happily he removed his scarf and cloak, laughing out loud as she turned towards him.

Their eyes met. Ember panicked upon recognising him. Had he recognised her?

Thing raised his hand to wave. Loud and angry voices suddenly arose all around him. Someone was trying to attack the princess! He could feel someone pulling at his arm, while someone else suddenly stood in his way as the princess was hurried away to safety. Thing, however, thinking that they were trying to hurt her, roared loudly and pushed the man in front of him out of his



way. Somewhere further back he could hear the desperate shouts of Father Arhman begging him to stop, to come back, before it was too late.

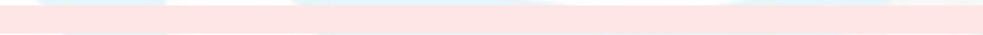
Ember looking back over her shoulder at the struggling figure of Thing, slipped and fell. “No!” Thing cried in desperation as a guard picked her up and began to carry her off. She was almost out of sight now, but Thing wasn’t going to lose his Angel again! Enraged and frightened, he pushed past the last guard and headed straight for the guard who now held Ember.

He hit him harder than he had ever hit anything before. The guard crumbled under the blow.

“T’ing st’ong. Ang’l dafe dit T’ing,” He said to the frightened look upon Ember’s face. Picking her up, he turned to run.

But where?

Everywhere he looked were guards. The gathered crowd now stood silent in shock, simply watching while this apparent deformity of God’s creation tried to make off with their soon-



to-be queen. He could see Father Arhman telling him to put her down. Begging him to put her down. No, Angel was safe with him. If only he could get back to the church. Thing knew everything would be all right the moment he was there. But which way?

He turned madly back and forth, looking for a way out, while Ember swung on his shoulder like a rag doll. Then all of a sudden he felt a sharp burning pain right between his shoulder blades. It went searing through his body, crippling his thoughts and darkening his vision.

He began to stagger. Finally he fell, still holding tightly onto Ember. The last thing he heard was the cheering crowd.

Someone had saved the day.

One of the many guards, having seen his chance, had taken his bow and fired, shooting Thing squarely in the back.

He had saved the day!




David stared at the blank and discoloured walls of the waiting room, a reflection of his own state of mind. On the table both the ashtray and the pile of magazines showed signs of age. Insensitive to the situation, he wondered where the other fathers were and reached over and took Karenina's hand. "It's okay, I'm with you." He said and gently squeezed it. But it wasn't okay as he couldn't be with her, not in this; it wasn't going to happen to him. He wasn't about to face the true consequences of their love. So what was he trying to do then, give her support? Now? It was too late now for support. Support would never have taken her there in the first place. Support would have written a very different ending to her story.

When Karenina's name was called David stood up to go with her, still believing this was the correct thing to do. The nurse blocked his way. "May I help you?" she said, her coldness belying her words, for this was not a question but a statement - there was absolutely nothing she could do for him. „This is not like giving birth, you know,“ she continued with open hostility. „Most of our patients don't want to see anyone before or after the operation. Least of all a man.”

Cut and taken back by this, David turned once more towards the open waiting room door. All eyes were on him. Eyes he had thought empty and tired like he was were filled with animosity. He instinctively reached for his cigarettes. In the confusion of the morning he had left them at home. It was then he overheard what the nurse was asking Karenina.

„Are you sure you want to go through with this? I have to ask, you understand?”

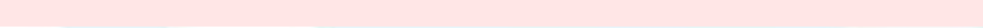


When Thing finally awoke he was in a dark, cold, damp room. The only source of light was a small window to his left that looked out onto the street. He could see the shoes of the people passing by, and occasionally someone's twisted face as they bent down to sneer and spit at him.

His back still ached from the arrow wound, although it had stopped bleeding. He had been stripped to the waist. Chains connected him to the wall by his ankles, wrists and neck, like a wild animal.

For three long days and three cold nights, Thing was left alone without any food or water. During the day he could hear the distant sound of hammering and sawing, and at night the raised jovial voices of people coming and going from whatever party they had attended.


It was on the morning of the fourth day that the large heavy wooden door to his room was finally opened. Light rushed in like



an assailant, blinding him momentarily. Instead of the friendly face of Father Arhman, however, two large men carrying swords stood before him. They set about removing the chains, only to put a large wooden oxen stock around his neck. They then attached another chain, this time with a large metal ball at the end, to his left leg. When all of this was done and secure he was led outside.



If Time was a car then it now slammed on the brakes, sending David headlong and unprotected into the windscreen. The



hallway flooded with silence as Time's exploding airbag suffocated the driver. Why didn't Karenina say something, answer the question? Surely they had talked about this, it was for the best.

Karenina, pale and trembling, lifted her head to answer. At the same time she turned and looked at him.

Their eyes met as Time stopped for ever. The nurse, cut him free of the tangled car wreck and took Karenina's cold hand. There were other young girls waiting for her help, some life had to go on...



Outside the sun was shining and he could hear the distant sounds of the birds. The fresh air attacked his nasal senses. Stumbling weakly, he was pushed and pulled onto a nearby cart where he was once more chained and made to stand up as it drove out of

the courtyard.


It was still very early. Normally at this hour the streets would be empty. Thing knew this very well. But as the wagon passed through the large iron gates of the prison, a large screaming crowd awaited him. They waved their clenched fists in the air and hurled rotten fruit and abuse as he passed.

“Freak! Monster!”

The cart slowly made its way up the street into the market square where the hammering noises had come from. There, in the middle of the square, was a freshly erected large wooden platform upon which hung a bright new shiny guillotine. Thing knew what it was for as he had seen it many times in the village square where he lived. He had even asked Father Arhman what it was for.

“It’s to wipe away the sins of the sinner,” he had been told. “It purifies their souls. It is only for evil men, Thing. You have nothing to worry about.”

Suddenly fear washed over him like awakening from a bad dream.



He realised it was he who was about to go underneath the guillotine. But what had he done? He had done nothing wrong. He looked frantically around for Father Arhman.

Just in front of the stage he was again unchained and led to a block where he was forced to kneel. The crowd cheered thirstily. His eyes raced wildly across the sea of faces before him looking for the familiar face of Father Arhman. Surely he would come to save him. Father Arhman always came to his rescue.

It was then that he saw his Angel.

There, high on a balcony directly opposite him, she was standing beside the young man he had seen her with earlier. He called out to her, but the jeers of the crowd were much too loud. Twisting his face and body, he called again with all his might. This only made the people cheer even louder.


A church bell rang out. One single sad note. Thing had often rung this one note but had never understood what it was for. Now he did. Frantically he looked around. Desperate. Where

was Father Arhman? Then suddenly there he was, standing beside his Angel! A smile crept across Thing's pain- twisted face. Everything was going to be all right after all. His heart began to beat fast. He could see Father Arhman talking to his Angel. Surely she would explain, she would tell him everything. How they had met, how she had danced for him.

Time slowed down.

Father Arhman turned and looked straight at him. He did not smile. Then, to Thing's surprise, he crossed himself and then made the sign of the cross in the air. Thing could see his lips moving in that familiar whisper pattern that he made when kneeling in front of the big wooden





cross with the figure of a man on it. In his hands he could see Father Arhman's fingers playing with the beads of his chain. These were the beads he always played with when he was troubled or someone had died. Instead of telling the guards to release him, he turned to his Angel. And, as if in slow motion, he watched her nod her head, then turn away from him. In return, Father Arhman nodded his head towards the man who was holding the rope of the guillotine. Slowly, that man released his grip...



Paler now than she had ever been, Karenina came out of the operating room and automatically took David's outstretched hand. Feverishly he listened as the nurse explained about the tablets and what should be done if she did not stop bleeding. What did she mean by, 'didn't stop bleeding?' What had they

done to her?

What had he done to her?

He turned towards the exit with Karenina in a stupor by his side. They walked stiltedly towards the car.

Insensible to the immediate surroundings, he drove her home.

Home. The very idea seemed so far away now from the place he was taking her.

Too weak to climb the stairs, David carried her like a child. A child, yes, but also a mother. Both denied.

Slowly Karenina undressed and lay down on the very same bed where it had all so passionately begun. She'd felt safe then. Safe in the arms of her love.

But loved ones didn't do things like this.

Too tired and too weak to think about it, Karenina turned away from him. Who was he anyway? Her boyfriend? Her future husband? Or just an oily old ship that had come into her harbour one night with empty promises and rotten cargo?

She had travelled so far too, and all for nothing. There was no

difference between this world and the one she left behind. It was only geography. In Russia people had no beliefs, here she had nothing left to believe.

Outside the night darkened the horizon. Somewhere out there the world filled with bright lights and fun places. Places where couples walked hand in hand. Places where children laughed and survived. Karenina closed her eyes to sleep. It came like snowfall on a dirty city.



The Fairy Godmother walked slowly, unnoticed and unstopped, through the crowd. She hadn't been invited to the wedding after all. But that hadn't bothered her then and didn't bother her much right now either.

All around the square people were pushing and shouting, but for Thing and the Fairy Godmother they might just have well have

been alone.

Not a sound could be heard.

“Well Thing,” she said and smiled. “Are you ready?”

His eyes turned towards her, puzzled. Then they lit up like never before, for all around her were a multitude of angels, laughing and calling his name. And there, right in the middle, more beautiful than anything Father Arhman could ever have described, was his mother. He knew it was her, she was holding her hand out toward him, beckoning him to come.

So it was that Thing never heard the metallic swish of the guillotine. ... Thing was with the angels. ...

