

TARR & FEATHERS

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Dedicated to M.I.S.

You quite literarily blow me away!

With thanks to:

Gilly Hull for her tip-tapturvating secretarial support
and Ma for some prevailing, steely patience.

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Chapter 1

On a Wing and a Prayer

Even after being warned several times of a foreign attack people carry on their daily lives as normal. Bolts of rain rush down to earth strengthened by a precocious wind whipping at each and every drop firing them down with angry intent: unyielding our constant energy force pours out it's relief! Many of this town's working folk instinctively respond to yet another wicked wet spell by complaining as they flock to shelter; else hold out in their chosen place of employment till the worst moves on. Tarr's Victorian park etched out of the south adjacent to the main road leading in to town, a few moments before glistened splendiferously with the sun here suddenly besieged by an onslaught of surging rain, lost in its ferocity refreshed by its vigour. In the park's centre a huge leafless oak holds its ground as an inspired wind lashes into a frenzied attack wielding a fat, restless cat to flip over onto its drenched coat soaking up some fresh mud, sliding along; a slippery stray.

'KonK!'

The cat's bedraggled head shakes then its body joins in shimmying the worst off, then sits up and licks a gesturing front paw that triggers the opposite hind leg into motion skipping between scattered trees within the hammering water slaughter. From a corner entrance a middle-aged man wades in alone dressed as if on course for Antarctica, his head down moving quickly along a streaming path in the

direction of the Arctic Circle twisting hastily to one side so as not to tread on the thirsty cat lapping up a fulfilling pool.

“Bumpfrid? Come on then.” Bounding out of the gloom a big dog bellows loud woofs; the cat instantly freaks punching out every hair on its body screeching an eerie scream jumping clean off the muddy ground as Bumpfrid, the happy, go lucky St. Bernard curiously rams her nose in; to the cat’s swift lash-out of a sharp, swiping paw ripping open the dog’s snout scurrying off at speed as Bumpfrid claims revenge, bouncing doggedly after it both blindly dodging the trees through the deepening mud.

As fat as it is this dirty cat sprints gracefully with precision compared to Bumpfrid; lumbering like a drunkard chasing an apparition of meth’s. A high fence looms on the closing horizon without hesitation the cat leaps through the falling rain, eyes closed, front legs poised wearing a knowing smug smile as it hits the fence then vanishes; blindly over to the other side leaving Bumpfrid to slam on her brakes sliding to a halt in front of a lower brick, garden wall.

“Hey! What have I told you about that?” Her owner tugs on his dogs’ hardened collar promptly skidding to the drenched grass hard on his backside: she shall not be moved!
“AAHHHHhhh!?”

‘RRREEEeOOoWWWww?!’

From behind the shield of a fence comes what must be the repercussions of this wildcat’s desperate action, the flying puss’ with all legs and claws a brazen clasps tightly onto something too soft to be a tree, nor too loudly bewildering to be the ground! In essence, here’s a very large lady minding her own business innocently taking down her immodest underwear outside, now being indignantly mauled by a

crazed cat...from behind, and she barks harsher than any slobbering St. Bernhard.

"Shue...shue I tell ya pussy-cat. 'Dis 'ere ground ain't biggy'nough fur de both o'er us. Ya hear! Now get gone...!" She hollers hard as her fist thuds down onto the washing-line causing loss of balance the delirious woman's girth topples backward knocking the line's pole holding up her knickers out of position crashing against the fence, shocking the bedraggled cat into a hurried retreat brandishing the large lady's kaks free again to spring consistently up and down as they please!

"What's all de noise about Blossom?" A concerned elderly man does his best to run from the back door to aide this dazed damsel, when reaching the victim's side helps her up; with all his might.

"It's not bean m'day Sidney! A flyin' puss-cat just stuck some real sharp claws in m'back!" Blossom tries to survey behind her searching as far as she can around either side brushing herself down while Sidney dusts off her outer fringes.

"Is everything alright?"

Both Sidney and Blossom survey across an adjoining garden fence to find their friendly, long-term neighbour.

"Yes tank-ya George. Blossom's be'an stabbed in de back by Cecil. Ya knor, dat local stray?"

"Cecil you say?" Blossom hadn't recognised the culprit.

"Blossom...how are you feeling?"

"Ya knor Cecil. I'll make sure I gets an apology when 'e comes fur some milk!" George listens briefly checking his wrist watch.

"Will you excuse me? The news is about to start. Well it looks as though you've managed not to dirty your underwear anyway."

“Do ya really tink tat’s gonna happen Georgie?” Blossom speaks meaningfully as she scans George’s earnest expression.

“Excuse me...? Oh...you mean! Well there’s no real way of knowing for sure Blossom, unless of course we directly consult our Prime Minister.”

“Shame! I tink we must ‘ave misplaced dat particoolar number.” Sidney flicks up his bushy eyebrows shrugging with a smile.

“I believe it wise to keep in touch with our country’s future, though there is only so much we can know...before the old imagination pours on the colour.”

“Oooohh...don’t start mine off Georgie, dere’s nor knowin’ where it’ll all end up.” Blossom has saucy plastered all over her meaning.

“I’ll probably see you both tomorrow, have a good evening... Be gentle with Sidney now. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight George. Beware of dat flying cat.” Sidney waves smiling warmly, escorting the washing lines’ pole to rest against the house wall as Blossom plucks off her knickers.

George pulls the patio door shut yet leaves it unlocked plodding passed a beautiful wooden, hand-carved fireplace dragging a finger across its mantel instantly reminding his guilt he hadn’t dusted for more than a year, plunging comfortably back into a wide, welcome armchair flicking on a radio which crackles as if to say ‘I’m on’ and a woman with a bright, rasping tone continues to speak. ‘... *For those of you returning from work there’s been an updated report regarding the threats made by Faghad of the Abacuss’ Nation on Wednesday evening. He spoke earlier this morning in a radio broadcast threatening excessive harm to certain areas of this country. It has been confirmed that Faghad, the*

Abacuss leader is resolute and will not be bargained with claiming he has been cheated by our Government...' George switches off the radio pondering for a moment contemplating this threats validity. After hearing about Faghad for several days regarding his proposal to attack his country George is feeling scared that this will scupper his life-long ambition if he doesn't act soon and limbers up to his feet marching outside into a hazy rear garden.

Gazing above him eyes winking away sporadic splashes of falling beads George discerns a much clearer, deeper blue sky; this small part of each day when light transcends through darkness: twilight's creeping in as dusk emerges. The radiant star of Venus sparkles distantly, shining high and spying overtly above the flanking Pmendi hills Jupiter springs, where our moon pours light across a burgeoning, reckless sea respectively closing down another washed out period. A droplet splashes into a glazy eye snubbing out its glow bringing the dreamy old-timer back to his prime objective focusing to the end of his well kempt, yet natural looking garden strolling on straightening a slanted, homemade bird table on his way; so often re-adjusting his own works of art, he slows then stoops to rein heartfelt attention proudly down on a box full of flickering shadows.

"Hello my lovelies... You can see the rain's almost gone." With a taught right hand he flips a catch playfully off its guard calling to his friends. "Come and join me in the dusk!"

Although later than their normal routine these words are blessed with quite a to-do, all of his eager homing-pigeons flap, run, push and fly away from their coop free to the wavering winds; though none went further than the view of their keeper; unused to travelling away from home.

On hearing a story many years ago that held him cold for some weeks after George swore he'll never let his festooned lovelies out of his sight. His closest friend and neighbour Potter loves to taunt George about what he calls '*they're unnatural ability to fly*', an appropriate reminder that a homing pigeon is born and bred for the job of navigation which includes free-flight. This fact has always been quite clear to George's train of thought suffering regular riddles of guilt, though his heart remains adamant: these birds are the only living things he's been truly able to love, even his late wife would remark: '*my husband's a very kind and understanding man...if you don't mind being cooped up somewhere else for most of the day!*'

George notices something out of place and effortlessly scours the sky until his narrow field of view peers back into the lovelies' home.

"Arabella?" There, tucked in beside the water-tray preens Georges' one and only dove cagily spying her master from an eye. A warm hand reaches in to gently clasp the small, grey silhouette stroking her chest guiding her outwards. "You know I'll never let any harm come to you. Come and join your family." Carrying her over to the upright bird-table George frees the motionless bird to perch on its edge, gazing upward to enjoy all ten of his pigeons airborne scooping in and out of irregular dives. He perches himself down on a rickety two-seater bench re-aligning it a little musing fondly with his lovelies: familified; cheering and cooing along with his family admiring their combined spirit, skill and grace, the way George shares his love and respect for one beloved flock.

These particular *home-ins* as he prefers them known were trained in the way they'd become accustomed, George's foresight can now simply sit back reaping its reward. The old

man will always be a stickler for routine, although he's not found the heart to watch them fly free anywhere away from home he can safely point out to any doubter; *I kept my bond*. "Until now." He whispers tentatively suppressing any suspicion, deciding to break this unprecedented news once his lovelies are safely cooped up inside their communal home. He checks his watch; fifteen minutes have elapsed so the old-timer is placed into his decaying waistcoat then claps two firm cracks cheering, "Tally-ho!" One by one in their own good time the pigeon's breeze into land. After a few tantalising minutes and tiring claps they're all patrolling the freshly mowed yet soaking lawn. "When you're all safely inside I have some news to break. Come on Chor...lead their way!" George coaxes the largest of his birds back inside the coop knowing he'll remain quenching a thirst ungraciously squatting down by the creaky door quietly cooing, charming his lovelies' home to their cage.

Several more minutes' lapse due to their loyal bird-keeper chasing the last back into the air so was then forced to find some kind of treat, which did the trick but was left to share half a tin of his favourite salmon with the rest of his brew while Arabella sips her first drink from the water-bath set inside the square bird-table.

"Arabella? You still can't manage to fly all the way over here? Right you are." George pushes the door to, secures it then creaks off to fetch his favourite. "Hey?" As he reaches across she dips her tiny head pulling away higher, further aloft until appearing a mere speck of twilight before doubling back, elegantly gliding into land sedately upon George's shoulder which makes him chuckle; as it usually does. Arabella pecks her masters' earlobe that makes him tremble teasingly. With

care he opens the door placing her as if brittle glass next to Chor her protector in George's eyes.

With the catch firmly in position a strain of worry breaks out of an open face, there's important news to come. "Tomorrow my lovelies...you are all going to embark upon...well...a maiden flight. The time has come for you to be allowed to fly from those hills...yes Tinker those over there, to find out once and for all if you'll choose to come back to me...and your home here. Now, what do you say to that?" The birds coo and bob about inside their cramped house vying for space. "That's settled. Goodnight my lovelies, rest well...until the 'morrow then."

George returns inside locking the sliding doors before retiring to the comforts of his home easing sedately back into a comfy armchair frowning in thought, worried of what might happen once his lovelies are left to fend for themselves deep down fearing time maybe running out of luck. Although prompted to set his brood free via a profound suspicion of this Faghad character being seriously dubious from what he's heard so far, George almost feels blessed with an excuse to relieve himself of the very worst fear he's ever had to contain; if set free away from home would his lovelies ever return to him? Lonely eyes flicker around the shady room then slowly close, adrift, rediscovering the sanctuary of a blind dream.

To look at him one can easily guess George has lived a full life working manually for most of his years on farms in the local area, where a blatant love for birds still surrounds him. Upon the dusty mantel china statuettes of local varieties line up in a tribute to his devotion all perched exactly where they should be. Many hand drawn illustrations by his favourite local artist rest abstractly adorning every wall; each

placed haphazardly to exude their sense of natural habitat; not simply by the habit of their design. To cap them all, illuminate above his gas alternative to an open fire evokes George's only inspired commission, '*Where Eagles Dare*', a painting that devours attention. A breathing image depicting all the local birds supremely dominated by a Golden eagle's ghostly head scouring from its centre; with eyes to blind any cowering prey. As Potter says, '*quite a centre point!*' The eyes have it! Nostrils splay then blurt into fluttering motion as George becomes a snoring machine, where under this mounting din curls a reticent smile.

This aged duffer's prize for a long life devoted to the rigours of nature is a two up, two down terraced house situated in the south of Tarr set on the edge of a small Victorian park or as it's more commonly known as, '*the common*', a place of homage to mainly young folk who often play havoc there amongst other games. Some regularly hang out in small groups jibing each other else joining together on occasion to rival another gang from a couple of miles down the busy main road leading to and from Tarr's Tudor style centre. Beyond George's garden and this out of town road crops an abundance of fields each plotting their own natural identity. At present most are water-logged due to a bewildering deluge of rain in a once steady autumn to an unusually late summer, this the first year it's become officially obvious to most, including the weather forecasters who even agree with scientists that the seasons are losing their previous order; this autumn month has officially become summers' forecast to be a long, arduous warm spell of rapturous winds lashing heavy rain.

On a clear day from his garden concentrating a tiring mind far out beyond the expanse of flat fields, high across

thousands of gathered trees; roots firmly bedded in the wide expanding foundation of this ancient forest George witnesses a wonder emanating magnificently further off in the indistinct distance. Rising above it all bursts a towering mountain; the only one for a three hundred mile radius, a monumental mound reaching over one thousand metres into the open sky, known to some of the locals as *Sacred*, attributed to its limited access purveying a pure sense of lawless tranquillity. From the desolate heights of its concealed side springs roll into streams that fuel a cascading river, ultimately descending over an ecstatic waterfall to purify a glimmering lake set beside an ancient ruin, bordered by a wide ring of meticulously placed Black Jack oaks.

This sacred place is said to have been cultivated some centuries past as a kind of natural retreat in a position out of Tarr's view, almost impossible to reach unless one or more are prepared to travel through dense forest for an hour or so then climb the mountain via precarious winding, gravel paths that grind to its sheer, jagged peak unveiling a reckless, jaw dropping descent into a wild ocean perpetually battering the cliffs way down below. The only other known alternative is to take a boat along the Mesol River out into the channel then attempt a landing upon steep, sharp cliffs stretching along a two-mile current churning coastline. Very few people actually know of this mysterious place, known to George and his close friend Potter as *'The Secret Haven'*.

This has become a special place in George's imagination after reading an ancient, local manuscript in Tarr's library telling of a brave, glorious guardian who protected all that lived within this ancient forest assisted by a golden, magical bird protecting all those who subscribe to the natural laws reared on the mountain. As to George's

knowledge they might still ancestrally roam the surrounding skies today believing he's clapped eyes on it, only once many moons ago yet it was clear and will never be doubted; by George anyway. For years he and Potter have threatened to seek out the remains of a ruined temple situated in the forest near the banks of the Pmendi hills that, according to this old legend was built by the same king as a place of refuge, becoming a shrine for the ones they call Druid who worshipped here for a long, peaceful period; up until the moment an enemy descended thriving in a warrior mass down the adjacent Pmendi Hills rising steeply on a parallel beside the forest's deepening throng, their name a living memory to all that perished there that horrific day, when men from nether shores rode the waves to invade and conquer. According to this legend Tarr's king and the Druid tribe were slaughtered leaving a very different kind to hold the throne, a kind whom it appeared never began to understand the true meaning of the word, a ruler who suffered mad strains of misery, prone to the craving of plunder.

Contained in the last paragraph of this ancient, council-treasured document the learned, though anonymous writer is concerned to note, *'The spirit of these times will always remain, cherish the new-day or it all stays the same.'* There it ends but for George it became a turning point in his philosophical career when his trusty bible was placed with dignity into an old book-chest which holds quite a distinguished collection of work, when out came this decision; from then on he'll search a little closer to home deciphering the local lay of Tarr's land, earning George an acquired insight into closer events. Potter, who still labours his personal plot of land regularly asks his chum about the

condition of Tarr's forth coming weather often being tickled-jolly at George's accuracy.

At 6am prompt every morning without fail Potter, George's dear friend and next door neighbour will be found surveying his treasured plot inherited after an old employer, a Lord Riddell passed on leaving his trusted head-gardener a small though much loved reminder of his roots. Potter's remained loyal to the Lord's land for nigh on fifty years where he met George who worked under him for more than twenty of them. Unbeknown to Potter days before Lord Riddell's final breath he bequeathed his ashes to be strewn over this very plot, believing to feel safer in the deft hands of his most nature-loving colleague. Ironically George inherited the responsibility of sprinkling the Lord's dusty ashes across Potter's legacy without letting on to his friend; fulfilling the Lord's will. Six years later an unsuspecting Potter remains wondrously agog at how well his rhubarb harvest continues to flourish: wonders will never cease!?

This particular cloudy morning is dedicated to the art of erecting, in this case a scarecrow which possesses a no more alarming air than a lump of jelly with ice-cream but Potter has faith in his work, simply left with the final task of making it stay standing upright.

"Come on, firmly does'ee... Bollards! Now I knows how that bloke who built Frankenstein's monster must've felt." The scarecrow bearing a face-filled grin politely says nothing and patiently smiles on. "Darn thing won't stay..." A piercing squawk grabs Potter's fraying concentration, stumbling he drops the happy go lucky scarecrow turning quickly behind to observe nothing but the tops of trees skirting the edge of the forest, where above them a cluster of clouds steadily make

way for the next, so he drags up the scarecrow attempting to plug it securely in the squelching ground.

'Squawk!'

“Get out of it y’pesky varmint!” Perched above him, rocking on the scarecrow’s head muses a crow which on landing immediately jumps off into the bitter air squawking over and over again as if to spew laughter down on the agitated codger, circling around a few feet away from Potter’s baffled, spinning head. “Be off with ya...y’darn ‘opeless creature!” Potter swipes menacingly at the crow causing it to reach higher into the morning sky eventually dipping away. Potter’s lifeless apprentice is kicked to one side as a distraught old man slumps down pulls out a tobacco tin instantly skinning one up. In seconds he single-handedly lobs an excruciatingly slim cigarette in between his lips, plucks a match from a box, strikes it across the smiling scarecrow’s face lighting up his smoke first time, his wary eyes examining the bellowed smoke whorl mumbling, “Roll on November 5th.”

George’s alarm clock never fails to go off at 7.30am due to him remembering every morn to reset it once it has rang out the awakening call. Nearly all his working life began at this time and some habits are hard to break, though George often re-assures himself lulling in bed is no different than resting in death. The clock’s bell-basher tweaks at one minute before the half hour and with it George’s head normally flinches to prepare the rest of him for a wicked shock of sharp, bright bells ringing out a new day *'DINGaLINGaLINGaDING...'*

... And so it rings on and on and on...!

Outside amidst this dawning day an awakening town embarks on its daily duties encapsulated by a foreboding

cloudy air of wetness. A post-mistress striding along the pavement stops to check she carries the correct post in her hand before marching down a path. Unbeknown to this postess, new to the area, beyond this approaching front door lives one of the most vicious dogs any of the neighbours have ever encountered. The posty lifts the squeaking letterbox initially startled by a barrage of abusive barks, totally incensed it rages uncontrollably. The post mistress slightly taken aback by this unwarranted verbal maltreatment calmly pulls something from her pocket flicking it through the letter box sending the correct letters in after it. The caged beast is silenced greedily distracted by an intense, chewy piece of nougat that so happened to render its tasteless welcome speechless.

Crossing the main road aiming for three huddled early 20th century terraced houses she gradually notices the ringing of bells, that on arriving outside the middle house it dawns on her; there may be trouble ahead! Her postal bag slumps to the ground, beyond the remit of her job with genuine concern she raps hard on the door, her mind filling with trepidation knocking harder calling out through the letterbox.

“Hello there! Is anyone at home?” She swings her spooling head round to see if anybody nearby might be able to help as the door slowly creaks open.

“Good morning. Can I help you?” After wiping some sleep from his eye George gapes at this rather attractive lady dressed smartly in a postal uniform secretly hoping his luck is about to surpass itself.

“Oh... I’m so glad. I thought you may have...well I thought...?”

“I’d popped off perhaps?” George smiles obligingly.

“Well I... I’m so sorry to have disturbed you.” The postmistress picks up her sack flinging it over a shoulder.

“It’s entirely my fault madam. Living alone for as long as I have one isn’t as inspired to venture into bed as much as they were. Forgive me. Now I better go and turn that racket off. Good day and...thank you for your concern.”

“Take care then...oh, here’s your post.”

“Looks ominous...thanks again.”

He pushes the door closed plodding up to his bedroom, resets his alarm clock before tending to an obvious official looking letter en-route to the bathroom.

‘Knock. Knock!’

“Who’s that now?” George rams the document into his pocket trundling downstairs to confront the door knocker.

“Good morning, what’s all the excitement about Blossom?”

“Oh... I’m so glad ya’re up Georgie.” Blossom carries on searching all about her frantic with worry.

“Blossom...explain to me, what’s the matter?”

“Well I... I’m so sorry to ‘ave disturbed ya. It’s simple really... I checked Pfors’ cage an’it’s vanished.”

“What...the cage has disappeared?”

“Nor ya fool, me parrot. Ting is Georgie... Pfor can’t fly...not since we got’im anyhow.”

“Pfor won’t be far away, don’t fear.” George places a reassuring hand on Blossom’s shoulder but lost in concern the distracted big mama bounces homeward probing all around. “Take care now. I’ll certainly keep an eye out. Please don’t worry.” George pushes the door closed mooching over to the front-room window.

Curtains fling open filling the room with a dowdy light, enough to see flicking on the radio which crackles before releasing an old Cole Porter song: *‘I get a kick out of*

you' coming to an abrupt end as a man with an extremely pompous tone interjects... 'This radio station has just received an important news flash regarding Faghad of the Abacuss Nation who spoke of a plan for mass destruction in a radio broadcast at 4am this morning. He declared parts of this country will be stricken with the power and might of Abacuss, warning our Government to act swiftly in preparation for what he calls the force against injustice. The Prime Minister's reaction is unknown as yet...'

"Bloody typical..." George's self-control wanes. '... Ministry of Defence have issued a statement which reads as follows: The General Public must not lose faith in their Government who are doing all in their power to redeem the situation and if...?' George slaps the radio off button.

"If?" He pauses for thought scratching an incurable itch on his head deciding the best thing he can do under these grave circumstances is to prepare for the worst, today's turning out to be one of the most potentially distressing days George can remember and it hasn't really started yet.

A scattered burst of sunray leaks in so much light through the patio doors George's vision is stolen from him blindly tugging at the frayed, orangey-green curtains to shield his awakening eyes forcing out three cat baskets from the back of his stair-cupboard he'd reluctantly purchased in a boot sale held at the local church at the edge of the nearby common nearly four years ago. George wasn't really an ardent religious supporter but does believe; if someone cannot find faith in themselves then why not relieve their beliefs via God? It keeps them off the streets; unless on witnessing a Jehovah! He can only manage two baskets then realises the patio doors need to be unlocked.

“One thing at a time sweet George.” A hymn for a him. Another basket rests on the floor as again he unveils a new day.

With an extra spring in his step George dons a brave facade striding off into the chilly, dew drenched garden to face an unsuspecting family.

“Good morning my lovelies... Isn’t it the best day for it!?” He flicks off the catch and the door swings open; instantly via one fell swoop George comes to his senses quickly shutting it tight. “I’m so sorry! Force of habit I’m afraid. Now come on, one at a time.” Easing the door carefully open a steady hand plucks one lovely at a time carefully filling a basket. “I know there’s a bit of a squeeze but it’s not for long. Come on!” Once eight of the home-ins watch and coo from their safe positions the pigeon fancier fetches the last basket placing his final three lovelies inside, not for a moment forgetting to softly murmur encouragement to every lovely.

“George! Can I trouble ya for d’moment?”

“Ah! Are you and Pfor reunited?” George checks all is secure before venturing across his soggy lawn towards Blossom bobbing about on the other side of the fence.

“Ave you or f’dat madder those pigeons seen m’P-for yet?” Her head refuses to stay still as she speaks glancing in as much space in the pure hope of finding her lost parrot.

“I’m sorry Blossom, we haven’t.” The unnaturally sad big mama bursts into torrents of tears. “There, there Blossom, you mustn’t worry...you know what Pfor’s like. Nearly every bird I’ve encountered owns a sense of humour and none more so than P-for parrot...who’s probably hiding somewhere. Here, dry your eyes.” George passes over his personal, well-used rag only for Blossom to politely shake her head calming herself a little. Placing a warm hand on her wet

cheek George attempts a bid at consolation sensing soft tears splash over a swollen finger as she blubbers on.

“Ooooh, I’m so sorry Georgie. I loves dat bird ya knor?!” Even before she finishes speaking a despairing Blossom decides to maintain her search back indoors.

Chapter 2

Lost in Space

Pfor, the Rasta's parrot disappeared only moments earlier through no fault of its own. There appears to be a reason for most things, in Pfor's case it's quite simple; this parrot's a dreamer so used to getting lost. After four years on our earth this particular bird remains desperately unaware of the reason why it lives; to this day a closet case. From being born locally in a pet shop three miles down the road up until this fateful opportunity Pfor endures being a deliriously captivated victim of circumstance. The name Pfor was given to this parrot after it became blatantly clear the pet-shop owner had no idea what sex it belongs to; if at all? So overcome with joy was he in this his first successful cultivation promptly stuck Pfor parrot in a cage ready to be bought and sold. Via this increasingly civilised hardship Pfor's only true release is to dream and this imprisoned parrot dreams of nothing but being able to fly: its reoccurring wonder. Sidney bought four month old Pfor for thirty quid on appreciating its black, yellow and green plumage acquiring it as a present for Blossom who at that time missed her homeland desperately needing some-ting to call her own.

Early most mornings Pfor's accustom to Blossom habitually unleashing its cage door open rain or shine to give her little treasure a chance to stretch its wings but not once has this dense closet case been able to let go of its perch. Pfor simply and sadly drifts out, away into a safe, sublime world; flying from pillar to post in its head. The cage Pfor lives

in hangs in the lightest corner of the front room facing the television. Below it, out sprawled rests the visitors chair where once and a while a mutual friend of Sidney and Blossom calls in for what usually ends up in a fun packed evening, from Pfor's perspective anyway as without fail their house pet ends up shrieking with glorious glee; Pfor squeaked so incessantly on one visit poor Sidney had to be held down for sometime else he would've cooked then eaten his frenzied pet. Though in the last two visits their old friend has respectively neglected to smoke at all since Blossom discreetly mentioned there was a chance Pfor had become affected by their infectious brand of smoke. She was proved correct when by the end of both subdued sittings her *little rainbow* gently swung slowly back and forth lost in another silent world.

Not more than an hour ago Blossom, vigorously vacuuming like she does first thing every Thursday without fail unless incapacitated; singing mellifluous gospel songs, push-pulls her vacuous partner to the rhythm of calypso. She purposefully did it this early to annoy Sidney who loves to sleep in as he works the late shift as a security guard for the council run water authorities. Pfor hadn't been feeling its weird kind of normal; oblivious to itself over the last two weeks becoming agitated and uncomfortable; which may account for why this melancholy parrot escaped without meaning too!

As per usual Pfor hadn't noticed Blossom open the cage door customarily lost somewhere dreaming away amidst a dull cloud, wafting through an aerated imagination; teasing the breeze with tightly closed wings when, for some reason Blossom decides to resume her cleaning accompanied by her favourite record so proceeded to comply, her only

problem arose when it came to working the new stereo-system which has become one of Sidney's better attributes, she simply could not get the record to revolve. Without warning Otis Reading accompanied by his full-on compliment blasted relentlessly at top volume jolting Blossom into animated panic stations; unless it's her own brand of dance craze? So caught up was she in a vain attempt to quieten down Mr. Reading she misses her *little rainbow*, shocked beyond belief fall headlong out of the vibrating cage cruising towards the thread-bare carpet.

Instinctively Pfor's wings splayed out. This strange sensation forced Pfor to shake with delight as an unusually warm, humming feeling oozed invitingly, without sparing a thought or even opening an eye the airborne parrot skimmed on an air of temptation out through a wide open, lounge window as if taken over by an occult summoning away into the light of day, intuitively drifting, eyes firmly closed with a turbulent, spirited rush guiding the propelled parrot into where danger can so easily damn the way. A warm air current urgently lifted Pfor over terraced rooftops causing another electrifying buzz to surge within, still further Pfor glides, higher the lost bird rose directly above the Victorian park where a local cub-scout football team were impatiently waiting to practise.

Two fathers managing the side rut face to face, arguing as to which of them would referee the match when one of the two girl guides in their team took the initiative, punching the ball from under her manager's arm kicking it over to her colleagues, controlled with deft feet by one of the younger players who innocently picked it up. When he turned to face them his feelings cramp into horror realising all of his team-mates now surge towards him with unnerved

conviction, in spasmodic fright the young lad kicked the ball as far away from him as possible sprinting off in the opposite direction.

Pfor began to feel odd. This weird feeling developed far too quickly... A crushing wave of air smothered the bewildered parrot rendering it back to reality as the ascending ball misses shooting higher somersaulting away. Pfor uncontrollably flaps ecstatically about before attempting to regain composure then preferably land back in the confines of a safe imagination. Gravity in the meantime found the balls' correct aptitude in altitude thrusting it straight back down to earth punching Pfor's wing, who instantly squeals at this inconvenience entering into quite a personal pandemonium when...? This parrot's character building stuff stiffened.

Another wavering air current sways Pfors' wings on course in the opposite direction due to ever-changing winds of fate, desperately aware of what's become of its present unfounded position instinctively flapping harder to get away from it all as the road leading out of Tarr fades dim. Strewn below all the many differing fields gather to a cusp entering the mighty dense forest anticipating this parrot's ominous fall from grace. The hopelessly marooned parrot flew stiff, higher than ever before, as sober as it would ever likely be again; a confused mind trying to comprehend what was really happening with no way of knowing; simply hanging on to the air for dear life.

Up above, flying higher at cruise speed en route to a feeding haunt two crows give each other the eye, in unison they scan downwards weighing up the next move concentrating their minds on a vulnerable titbit unknowingly about to land in a grazing field. Again the crow's wicked eyes

shiftily meet each other's gaze twinkling in anticipation. Pfor instantly sprung aware of that very same feeling encountered only moments before quickly peering below: there's nothing but hedge-rowed pastures.

'Earrrrgg! Earrrrgg!' Pfor flung its head up in astonishment, like rocketing arrows an out stretched pair of talons plummet towards two closer, darker birds plucking each one from flight both screeching out their anger no match for this colossal assailant, all this so near violently thrusting turbulently away from Pfor's catatonic state low into the enveloped mass of trees.

Pfor lands. It was by any bird's standard a disgraceful attempt and a prize parrot duly paid splurging to a halt in freshly laid cow dung.

"I'm going to die." The sodden parrot felt quite sure death beckoned as everything inside it persistently empties out of its beak, the distressed, tropical recluse yelled out as if it were the last, falling face down in the smelly dung weeping. Quickly that surging unto familiar feeling wells up inside and as it intensified more and more the wider Pfor's eyes gape until gaining clear, visual focus a sudden powerful force causes the defenceless bird to squeal then automatically bolt backward; stiff as a...

Potter had grown despondent of his uncooperative colleague lying across his dewy land gazing up at the sky, his misty eyes following every bird drifting over head: mesmerised.

"What's that then?" He bolts upright. "It can't be?" Over yonder he clearly observes something merely heard about and being incredulously honest he's found that particular story hard to believe...until this moment. "It's that blessed

eagle... I'm sure o'it!" Hypnotised he witnesses this living spectre tip'n tilt high up over the forest's edge circling around probably in search of food urgently diving at speed on a collision course with the earth perhaps a mere ten fields away. "Cor blimey!" So engrossed in this spectacle of a fabulous birds' sudden action causes Potter to lollop back though his eyes stay fixed on the eagle's plummeting course. In an instant the eagle drops out of view causing Potter to flip up onto his feet where the scarecrow's twig fingers poke in his face forcing Potter's attention to change punching the scarecrow's head clean off. "You t'were askin' f' that... Yeah you t'were!" He immediately scans up trying to regain sight of the eagle but it's flown.

Through many a night over many varying years Potter and George have spent a great deal of time together discussing all sorts of intriguing phenomena yet only one mystifies Potter. George relayed a story to him awhile past about a guardian who protected all of this surrounding area apparently surviving somewhere on the sacred mountain, believing this to be symbolic of an ancient, peace loving king who as legend would have some believe reared a golden eagle to keep watch from Elysium above. On experiencing this ancient tale slowly unravelling over the preceding years Potter has done his best to believe his good friend, to whom he rigidly trusts but without experiencing any proper proof. Now, from this day onward his faith can honourably prevail.

An eagle has landed. With a stern gaze the majestic, golden bird of prey stares down on a cowering victim, struck dumber than Sidney would've ever of thought possible over awed by this daunting, wild creature. The eagle's

impenetrable eyes lucidly soften as it calmly makes an acquaintance.

“My name is Aquila. Who, and...eh...what are you?” Pfor’s pride refuses to let the side down and attempts to relay a greeting.

“M..m...my...nnname...is... P...p... Pfooor.” The parrot’s body effortlessly trembles all over.

“Good...you speak Mother Tongue. Those are very peculiar markings... Wait! Be still.” The eagle rips off into the sky with insatiable ease returning swiftly.

“We cannot stay here without attracting more trouble. I know of a place close by...can you fly?” Pfor lies nodding a dung-drenched head.

“But this smell weighs me down a bit.” The parrot ruffles its wings scattering mess everywhere but try as it might the parrot’s grasping claws will not budge.

“I’ll carry you.” The eagle’s beak pulls Pfor up by the scruff of its neck resting the parrot securely on his back then leaps into the air bearing the clutch of Pfors’ hooked claws gripping tightly. “I feel I have to show you something...if I may?” The frightened parrot crammed rigid naturally answers this call by simply emoting pure fear.

This impromptu adventure is more than a horrible nightmare of reality for Pfor, visions of Blossom dusting and singing sometimes out of tune swarm around in its bemused mind, it even starts to sing along with the daydream endeavouring to keep its wobbly grip on the situation as the eagle soars faster wafting his head rhythmically surveying from side to side.

A yellow Austin, Morris Minor executes a precise ninety-degree turn swerving left along a relatively barren

road towards the Pmendi hills verging up ahead. On the rare occasion George ventures out of town he'll never fail to stop at the entrance to Potter's field, either to say hello or else admire his friends work. An open gate beckons, after checking the way George reverses through the vacant space consciously observing all around; his perception akin to that of an elder blackbird assessing a scene. Once clear of the gate's journey closed George departs the purring car, shuts the gate returning to park up beside a bountiful blackberry bush adorning a knackered out sign reading, *'No Trespassers on the Lord's Land.'*

"I won't be long my lovelies!" Each basket case coos and flutters their apparent approval setting his guilt free to roam. George knows Potter hates keeping his gate-door open to anyone but him: *'Never leave y'self open t'anyone y'can't trust'*, words heard by George from Potter's very lubricant cake-hole years ago after experiencing a miraculous revelation which has respectfully stayed with him. Although not yet official George is the only person allowed on Potter's hallowed ground, his open gate remains a personal welcome gesture and on closing it hikes off to the entrance of his friend's inner-sanctum.

"Potter. Potter where art though?" Hastily making his way between a tall copper beech tree and a rusty tractor along a twisting path unevenly cropped through six foot tall, dried grass the old boy stealthily heads for Potter's secret sanctuary. George's skipping stride hesitates spotting the back of Potter's head poking out from behind an acutely shaven, half-circular hedge shielding an allotted fire place comforted by a highly sprung, leafless hawthorn singled out by an alluring forest a few stone throws away.

“Potter...you wingless buzzard! What you up to aye?” There came only silence. George slows down enough to stop regaining a little lost composure drawing in a much-needed breath.

“Georgie me old matey!”

Jumping out from beneath the tall grass shouting loud happily bounces Potter, swirling sharply George finds his wild mate waving his arms about pulling warped faces.

“You sod!” George is only just becoming amused.

“That’s right...salt o’the earth me.” Potter strides over to his visiting friend who appears rather puzzled.

“So who’s that?” George points to an ominous head poking out of the hedgerow.

“Oh that’s Frank. I thought ‘e’d be able t’elp scare off ‘em darn crows.”

“I assumed you’d be scary enough for that job Pots.”

“‘Til you got ‘ere any-road. Aye George... I’ve seen it! I ‘ave y’know, as plain as flour from the corn... I saw it!” Potter guides his bemused friend over to the laid-back scarecrow, sits him down on a rusty iron sun-lounger, pours him a steaming hot cuppa from a flask revealing the vision he’s just encountered.

Time; according to the human perspective approaches 11:30am. In the midst of reality forest life hustles and bustles pursuing its natural powers of persuasion within staunch surroundings; squirrels dart across leafy-laden meadows tripping from tree to tree in their search for nutritional stock keeping them healthy through the impending fruitless, winter chills. Scouting the whole area milling high and low fly differing varieties of birds tirelessly seeking out food, twigs and leaves to replenish their nests

providing sustenance for their young: for each living part of the forest there's a particular purpose, a reason to survive via instinct, each continuing to act on their individual need to exist: where only the keen enough survive.

Descending at speed above it all the eagle and pillion passenger swerve below a dense gathering of trees.

"Pfor? Below us, within that ruined building lives the crow's kingdom. It's where I dropped off those two hecklers earlier." Aquila circles around to give Pfor a proper chance at glimpsing the dark, servile ruined temple where underneath them disturbed eyes wretch menacing disdain.

This contemptuous glare belongs to the Crow-king spying from his perch upon the haggard temples' crooked spire, the king of all crows in this general vicinity displeasingly growls from under a stench ridden breathe in a deep, croaky rage.

"Oh great majestic one... I'll be rid of you..." His voice suddenly bellows fiercely, "...beware of me!"

"Uh... Crow-king. Uh... Sire? The eagle...it's up there, look!"

"Shut up! I can see he's spying on us Birdbrain! Fetch the murder, bring them to me!" The Crow-king shouts distraught with anger. "Now!"

"Uh...yes...right.er...sire. Now."

"Now!!" The king's personal slave hastily flings into flight knowing full well where to unearth his comrades.

Pfors' grip tightens as Aquila swoops honourably upward on course for the northeast side of the forest.

"I'll find you safety." With eyes firmly clenched closed the wavering parrot nods haphazardly as a breeze bursts into a livelier gust crippling Pfor's sense of trajectory as the eagle soars spaceward.

“Another cuppa Georgie boy?” Potter doesn’t wait for an answer just carries on pouring.

“Wooooe Potty, there’s lovely. So at last you’ve seen the eagle...inspirational news Pots, really.”

“Now what about this ‘ere bloomin’ Hagbag then?” Potter’s voice relays a sombre tone.

“It’s a threatening situation at present. Sadly, from my own perspective this is mind I do believe it will come to us getting involved.” George feels a sense of loyalty ease through his tone pumping up the banner. “Surely our country won’t sit back waiting for any old potential enemy to charge in!” His practical mind gently switches gear. “On my way here, pulling out of our road I noticed some proof Tarr might be making preparations?”

George’s brow strains under an inner pressure as he faces his earnestly stirred chum.

“OK? Whot ‘ave ‘r glor-ous council done?” George glares for a moment.

“I happened to notice what reminded me of a siren rigged to our local church steeple.” On hearing this Potter comes over all puzzled.

“This is probably a daft question an’ all but...do we ‘ave any air-raid shelters in ‘r town?”

“No...not that I know of.” George searches Potter’s peculiar expression.

“So y’mean t’tell I...a siren’ll go off...to let everybody who can ‘ear it know...a load o’ bombs‘r bouts t’drop...an’t that’s it, run fur cover!”

“It appears to be the case, yes.” Potter shakes his head in defiance.

“Well...what cun we do bouts it? I dunno...maybe build a shelter or some’ert!?” Potter’s mood wriggles frustratingly irritated.

“That’s a grand thought Potty but...what if we did? Where would everybody else go?”

They both stare in silence at the leafy strewn ground prompting George to clamber up on his feet.

“Potty, forgive me but I have to go. I’m setting the home-ins free from the Pmendi today.” Potter perks up with renewed hope. “I felt it could be the last chance I get.”

“That Hagbad tyrant’s forced’ee int’ this ‘ain’t ‘ee? It makes m’blood gurgle it does!” Potter quickly rises thinking as deeply as he’s able, wondering what’s for the best.

“I’m not sure I’ll get another chance to prove my lovelies will come back to me.”

“Well it’as bin mentioned a foo times in the past an’...well, now you’ve bin forced int’it really. You can always tie cotton t’each of’m...so if they gets lost or what-not we could reel’m in!” Potter’s sadly excited by this prospect, “I’ve always fancied a bit o’fly fishin’.” George shakes his head.

Although used to his friend’s sense of amusement he’s feeling the need to get on his way, after all this latest escapade’s taken him 37 years of preparation; it’s time to fly.

“You could always rig up your new friend Frank to a fishing line, that’ll catch those pesky crows out.” George waves to his mate walking back to his car. “Good luck to you an’ y’lovelies! Oh, an’ George...?”

“I know Pots, shut the gate on the way out. Hope to see you later?”

“Give m’best wishes n’love t’Arabella an’the rest...lead’m ‘omeward Georgie boy. Ta-ra!”

Pfor's stomach sinks lower eyes transfixed in complete darkness absurdly unaware of the eagle preparing to land on top of an empty water-tower standing alone in the forest's northeast corner where the trees cusp at the fields edge. 'Clank!' The eagle's lurching talons grip an iron rung stretching threefold around the top of the towers brim, wings pitched to either side aiding a careful, considerate landing. In total disarray Pfor loses its solid grip jerking from the sturdy eagle's back dive-bombing across the steel plated floor crashing into the side of an open box like compartment. The amused eagle glides over to the flat-bellied parrot's side forcing it over onto its back with a shove from his rapier beak. "Looks like you've found the perfect place to rest here." Aquila peers into the small, clammy tool shelter humming of drudgery.

"I want to go home." Pfor lifts its sprained body upward onto its claws waddling over to the tower's edge.

"Why not rest here for a while? Then when you're ready fly homeward."

The golden eagle struts over to Pfor's side inwardly acknowledging a blatant concern for the parrot's distress. "What's the problem with that Pfor?" The powerless parrot stares emptily up at the mighty bird pausing for a malingering moment then speaks wearily.

"I've hurt my wings." They attempt a flap but only a harsh, bitter breeze banter a flutter.

"You must rest. Take shelter here... If on my return you've flown home, well fly safely and be aware of all around. Farewell Pfor." Aquila throws up a wavering gesture with both gracious, arced wings leaping through the sharp air rising hastily into a vapour-laden sky.

BB's mission for the king lures him away north to the edge of the forest where wild creatures become more vigilant; their sixth sense working overtime, for where they cross beyond the forest into an area of open fields they are vulnerable; exposed to a danger, a threatening power known to them and us as human. BB feels sure his search would end in one of the fields beyond and it isn't long before comrades are spied pecking eagerly at the ground all separated from each other hopping about their business, until one of his counterparts' spies him letting off an almighty squawk prompting BB to swoop relaying their King's order. "Our king wants us now!" Every crow within range of this announcement stops to reach for the sky, in seconds a mass of black darkens it; the awakening sun momentarily haunted by the shadow of a murder.

Potter, who's about to leave his field for a walk into town stops in his tracks hypnotised once more that day, not ever remembering anything quite like this before as the dark spell of a murder surges onward flapping furiously, even the wind for an instant eluding to lose control as the crow army fix a clinical course home to their expectant leader.

Surrounded by battered walls rising as best they can around an oval arena the Crow-king, pause-poised in the middle of his domain bobs towards the only remaining turret then stops twisting his claws in the ground, swivelling the opposite way proceeding to march back again, head flinching to his left. After a short pause of silence a familiar sound ripples in, that within a few seconds rips into a deafening roar as his army of slaves return swarming the temple as if in honour of their master, each of them immediately searching

for a perch somewhere in order to experience their Crow-kings' omnipotent wish.

Their king, usually a bird of few words lifts off the ground remaining in the air hovering, occasionally flapping his wings lurking round at his minions who in turn fall silent landing back in the most central position of the ruined temple to convey his meaning.

"I have made up my mind." There's silence; his army stare at their king unknowingly. "The eagle will die!" Every crow squawks a loud cry of honour, their noise mounting tremendously. The king crow flaps his wings, flies up a few feet then lands causing the crows chants to fade silent. He's not finished. "Tonight... I expect every one of you to feast with me....in readiness for the 'morrow..." He pauses, looking slowly around at his force of strength, "...when we will hunt that eagle down...lay its body to the earth...where we will march daily upon its brittle, rotting bones...eternally!!!!"

BB uncontrollably starts to squawk with glee while everyone else strenuously scrutinise his personal celebration prompting BB to abruptly stop, until now obvious to all bar himself the Crow-king has just one more thing to add.

"It's 'ice to know I can still make someone happy. My crows! We are the true rulers of this kingdom, the gods of this sky. The almighty power! Be free...! Indulge yourselves in preparation for the 'morrow!" The Crow-king drained of emotion falls on BB who in turn topples backward, his claws ending up supporting the king's fall; holding him agonisingly upright as the hawed shriek their ignorant delight swooping around awash in high spirits. Regally musing at his followers their king scoffs at BB. "Move your left claw up a little, will you? It's a mere inconsiderate there." Stretched out on

crumpled wings BB dutifully obeys as the Crow-king relaxes back to enjoy this well deserved moral support.

Whenever George arrives in the hills their sense of beauty tends to bring on a warm smile; he loves this place, unsure if it's the panoramic view spread out for miles around or the solitary freedom he feels being there, oh how he wishes he could thrust out his arms and take off gliding on warm air currents, drifting higher then lower as free as a bird. He gently parks the car in a lay-by only a few yards from where his pride and joys will be reluctantly set free to the unknowing elements, so on landing respectfully takes out one basket at a time placing each of them gently by a bench facing the horizon.

To the left in the north Tarr looms, its bland bricks and sloppy mortar, weary roads and modern accessories carved out of the landscape resemble a dried up scar, where down below spread out as far as the oceans' edge, bursting with the freshness of nature blooms the majestic forest canopy. George glances over to his right staring at the mountain, captivated, as if trying to work something out in his mind. One of the pigeon's helps the bird tamer regain some reason for being there, he reassuringly pats each basket sitting down on the bench contemplating the task ahead with all three baskets cooing and flapping down beside his feet.

"Now...listen my lovelies. You all know what's expected of you...from here on I'm afraid it's up to you. Just fly straight home." George points enthusiastically away towards Tarr. "Do you see, just before the church spire there? Good luck my dears, the journey shouldn't take more

than a few hours or so.” He checks his watch, his arm shaking as he records the present time. “It’s 12.17pm.” Beginning to feel apprehensive, having no way of being absolutely sure his 10 pigeons and only dove will make it home he lifts each of the catches facing the baskets towards their open unpredictable future, the wait now truly taking its toll. Cagily George pulls up the doors to the first then the second basket. “Be off with you my lovelies!” In the third basket Arabella waits with the others watching their family circling in the sky above them, realising a trusty friends’ quivering hand pluck her out before guiding the others free. “Arabella, keep watch over them... Bring them home to me.” Throwing up hands either side he releases her following his favourite’s course, joining her lofty family; cornered in a misplaced trance.

Thankfully all the home-ins congregate harmoniously high up but seem lost circling or looping back and forth in the same space, none it appears prepared to take the lead so used to staying in close proximity of their keeper. George carefully sits back down on the bench realising his lovelies are simply doing what they’ve always done, what he’s taught them to do, in his haste to fulfil the destiny of his greatest dread he’s forgotten any form of proper preparation. His mind attempts to reassure himself what might be for the best; all he has to do now is a few claps, a couple of ‘*tally-hos*’ and they can be safely on their way home...

A dull boom resonates from behind amplifying louder with thunderous aggression, ‘*Whhhhooooosssshhh!*’ A fighter plane rushes over George’s head forcing him to duck initially then fling himself off the bench searching desperately for his family who’ve gone absolutely berserk twisting and lunging together in obvious shock instinctively chasing each other’s tail-feathers. Fortunately, the one thing George bargained for

eventually happens when Chor, the bravest, potential leader of his family seizes the initiative.

Once over the sudden scare Chor quickly regains composure beckoning the flock to steer upward away from the hills aloft the giant expanse of forest. The tired man's eyes cool catching a glimpse of his flock as their far-flung bodies inescapably blend into low merging clouds breathtakingly out of sight. He stares at his hometown Tarr; a mass of stacked up buildings huddled together in concrete, an unnatural sight compared to the colourful freedom of the adjacent natural land, contemplating the dangers that lie in wait within this enigmatic forest; other birds can attack his lovelies, they could lose their way and never be seen again...

A starling chasing a sparrow darts across his view both elegantly flowing in unison, his keen eyes lock on to their complex path until he loses sight of them, where in a revelation his mind becomes alive bringing a familiar feeling of hope back to him, the same positive emotion that in the past inspired so much pleasure and joy. He sort of smiles, gets up and returns to his car. His trusty engine starts up after the second try and George pulls away but instead of driving on the road pulls over, the wheels leading him to a towering edge a few feet from the bench. Pulling up he winds down the window and shouts as loud as he can muster, "Tally-ho my lovelies!!"

The eagle cuts effortlessly through the air, a racing mind in time with each beat of a motion, to simply switch off indulging such a fortune of freedom within the wild skies can in a moment meet with untimely death, this Aquila knows all too well, a cool, canny determination kept busy in order to sustain this privilege of life.

The one thing keeping us creatures busy is the need for food, people are fortunate in this regard, most don't have to kill their prey before consuming it but in the wilds there is little choice, away from civilisation one begs, steals or borrows and the eagle being carnivorous feeds on the flesh of other animals. Imagine the task of being uncivilised like a wild animal unaware from one moment to another where or when the next meal will be served; rarely ever on a plate.

Relatively close to his mountainous home Aquila veers away to the left aware that close by lay a clearing where rabbits and hares often frolic, playing earthbound yet ultimately aware they are prey to some who dwell above them. Aquila spies two hares chasing each other in the open meadow completely engrossed in a friendly race instinctively dipping lower to assess the situation; judging the winner who ironically, now bounding nearer the centre of the glade sprinting at speed may become branded a total loser...

'... *BANG!*' A single shot from a double-barrelled rifle shrieks out, one hare instantly leaving the earth plunges somersaulting to the ground: dead; the other glimpses its competitor eyes glazed knowingly then darts off at a tangent hopping with all its might towards a clump of bushes.

Aquila steers up knowing exactly what's on his mind keeping clear above it all waiting for that special moment noticing an elderly man with a shotgun cocked, tilted under his arm stomp into view from out of a shielding cops, a Golden Labrador chasing close behind trots then races passed; it's tongue out and tail lashing from side to side. Amongst all this commotion Aquila cautiously glides down accelerating as he goes, when just a few feet away from the goal lets out a piercing *shrill!* The dog stops in its tracks, the confused man panics dropping the gun; he being the one now

cheated by surprise, in a flash Aquila claws up the dead victim lunging close across the human's path before a bold surge upwards gripping the hare so tightly talons touch at their tips hooking up fresh flesh. The man grasps for his gun but scrapes his hand on some thistles only to suffer defeat left with his faithful dog barking ferociously to watch the jubilant eagle escape upward, outward for the bottomless void.

George drags slowly up to the junction leading either homeward or to town hovering in its mouth, the car engine bobbling with anticipation trying to make up his mind which direction? *'Beep...Beep!'* A frustrated driver behind helps make him immediately turn left, after passing the entrance to Potter's field where an old rag flies wildly stuck to the gatepost aware this code means his friend's left, he drives on in the direction of town hoping to run into him; as it were, with the pending news of a threatening attack apparent George is compelled to investigate the Council's concern and everybody else's for that matter. By the newsagents adjacent to a small café the yellow Morris Minor veers right along Tarr's high street, with a clutter of cars on the road George takes care; people in cars appear to be more erratic driving around built up areas continually baffling George who believes traffic should be banned from the central locations within towns and especially cities, simply to ease the congestion of stress. Waiting for traffic lights to glow green at the main crossroads observing human allies doing their shopping, etc. out and about, wondering if they actually appear relatively threatened by these strong claims of attack broadcast earlier by the enemy; Faghad of the Abacuss?

He swings left into Alamo Street then a right up Wander Avenue where ahead plodding in a groove of his own

a suspicious looking character, presumably making his way home is spotted prompting George to indicate, pull over and wind down the window.

“Potty...like a lift?”

“Ah, long time no see George me old matey!” Potter opens the door and clambers in. Checking over his shoulder George signals then manoeuvres back on course.

“I’ve just driven through town Potty, there’s nothing but normality going on.”

“I know...t’worries me an’all. D’y’know Et’el Glimspot?”

“No.” George reliably looks where he’s going.

“She’s just told me the radio station has released a statement from our Prime Minister.” Potter tries to restrain his present mood realising his old mate is trying to dodge the other drivers.

“Potty...fancy a chin-wag over a cuppa?”

“Love too...me throat’s barren.”

“I’m worried about my pigeons. What time is it now?”

“12.49 precisely. Don’t y’worry ‘bout’m lovelies, they’ll be fine. You should of set’m free years ago any-road, I told’ee that!” George didn’t need to hear that over-used reminder especially on this particular auspicious occasion, the *lovelies* have been airborne for over half an hour so according to George’s predictions should be nearly halfway home.

They’re all really enjoying themselves basking in their long awaited liberation. After the initial shock of the fighter plane cutting up their path they’ve loyally ended up following Chor the eldest and without doubt the bravest which encourages the flock to feel as one; bonding together in the face of adversity. Arabella remains a few yards behind the flock guarding the rear trying to keep up with her friends due to spending much of her previous flying time perched on

their personal trainer's bird-table. The afternoon warms, the clouds have dispersed even the heavier winds have drifted away to other climes becoming a day of perfection weather wise, surely only bad navigating can stop George's lovelies returning to their spiritual home.

A short distance from their flight-path in one of the taller trees is a nest rigid in construction, not a home but rectified as a place of observation. Inside it scanning the airwaves a roving crow takes off gliding downwards to land on a crumbling dry-stone wall next to Birdbrain.

"Fetch me the Crow-king! I have something of great importance to tell him!"

"He's over there...tell him yourself." The crow stares nastily at BB who smiles back contemptuously. The bossy crow receives this message, with no time for games glides the short distance to land beside the Crow-king who happens to be extremely busy: preening.

"Aye! What the...?" The crow's king darts up in shock, in an instant the messenger realises their grave mistake wary of their life.

"I'm sorry sire... Forgive me?!"

"Have you something valuable to report?" The Crow-king glares cruelly at his loyal subject.

"Pigeons sire. Approaching from the west."

The king of the crows can't believe his luck, not only has he decided to kill the eagle on the 'morrow, here's a sumptuous opportunity for his army to practise and as importantly to eat well. He bounces into the air waving wings, squawking sheer delight evoking any crow within range of this somewhat exclusive war cry to flock around the temple walls in but a flap of a tail-feather hollering rowdily with intent.

“Quiet!!” The Crow-king appeals for silence and gets it. “Pigeon for tea anyone?” The crows squawk a triumphant cheer, their stomachs nearly rumbling as loud. “You’d better take your places, they’re closer than your bellies could ever desire!” Every crow in range of these orders rush to a vantage point, well versed in the story of survival awaits their take away meal to fly by.

At last the *home-ins* are flying together in a sort of rhythm of their own darting then circling together enjoying their most indulgent spell of freedom; as much as they can ever wish for. Chor spots a bird flying towards them and turns his head to let the others know someone unfamiliar approaches but before he can speak another crow’s flying beside him who speaks in a polite, jovial manner.

“Good day. How are you?” Chor isn’t sure how to take this somewhat cheeky gesture and says nowt leading on in the direction he believes will coax his follower’s home.

“I wonder...can you tell me the way to...?” The crow pauses for affect then carries on menacingly, “...eat pigeon?” Chor stares reluctantly into the crow’s eyes sensing nothing but trouble, his perception convinced there’s drama brewing. He knows where ever he flies the flock will follow, here’s the time to test his ability as leader; a responsibility that works best under pressure; Chor’s feeling it about to erupt beneath his tremulous feathers darting upward to the north where reassuringly the flock dutifully follow.

Another crow springs beside Chor now flanked on either side stimulating a gear change automatically speeding up due to a chemical reaction taking place inside his turbulent body, invigorating his blood circulation propelling Chor further, faster. Aware there are two crows flying either side of Chor, realising the flock is threatened Arabella drops

back a few yards enough to glimpse down below without causing her friends any concern, registering the tops of trees and up ahead what looks to her like a derelict house in a small clearing; the air stream changes, her friends are flying upwards veering left so she moves accordingly glaring back at the odd derelict building below in shocking astonishment shaking her head in disbelief; but it's true a monstrous cloud of at least forty crows take off from the temple, in a matter of seconds this sight eclipses the land like a gruesome night shadow. Arabella knows she must do something fast and with all her strength rips into the flock screeching her fear.

"Split up!! Fly for your lives!!" The flock fears any choice and disperses acknowledging the reality they're disturbingly close to being victims of a murder.

The two crows flanking Chor squawk a loud war cry then strike at the flock's leader, one blocking Chor's way the other taking a bite out of his neck. Chor spins wild, wriggling, twisting, clawing at one of the crows fighting bravely though his energy quickly runs low as the two crows easily overpower him; completely exhausted Chor drops out of the sky. The other pigeons are frantically flying away in different directions as the concentrated hunger of crows give chase; one spots Chor falling promptly changing course flying fast towards him, a few feet from the ground it catches the dying bird its beak plunging into his neck killing him outright landing to feast on the blood stained meal causing BB, in his capacity as the king's personal aide (nay, scapegoat) to swarm directly over comprehending his comrade disregarding the crow-law.

"What are you doing? Take it to the Crow-king before I report you." Some say rules are made to be broken but not as far as Birdbrain's concerned; the Crow-king ordered all food will be

shared which is a rare event so his second in command believes strongly in this principle...but no, not all.

Outnumbered four to one Georges' lovelies have no chance of victory succumbing to nature's reason for the crows dictating the upper hand due to their basic understanding of natural law; earning valuable experience of the wild. Life seems to offer many differing dimensions to learn all inevitably leading to good or bad: love or hate: win or lose. Although George has done his best to look after his lovelies they are indeed spoilt, sheltered from nasty realities they're now severely being forced to understand with their own lives.

Down below the pompous Crow-king keenly observes his army picking off each pigeon laughing in the knowledge his minions have it easy this time when unexpectedly he spies a bird flying lower getting away from the barbaric mass of murderers heading under cover of the forest canopy.

"Over there!! Get it!" He can't be heard or is flagrantly ignored so takes the initiative flapping off in pursuit; the battle nearly won.

Quickly realising she's no chance of saving her friends Arabella flees from the dispersing flock for her life heading for a large oak tree standing with dignity above the rest, flying frantically through the tree's canopy she's aware of someone tailing her so on approaching the oak swoops in a curve right around its thick trunk cruising upward noticing a fat bird flying through the oak's leafy hood aiming straight for her, unknowingly about to confront the vicious Crow-king. She can clearly see he's alone so frenziedly rushes towards him when on approach the descending crow politely smiles cruising over his head bombing this very royal subversive with excreta that lands plum in the king's face, who reels

distraught in discomfort spluttering and spitting the foul mess out of his mouth as Arabella scurries away, turning briefly to witness her assailant landing at the foot of the oak twisting and a shaking. Gliding through the canopy cloak she slows up taking care not to cause alarm searching for danger in the sky but mere emptiness fills the air, cautiously cruising low as fast as her nerves can carry her away from the danger of the crow below scouring all around in search of her lost family.

