

# The Brussels Legacy

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### Glossary

### Acknowledgements

## Foreword

I came to Amsterdam because I fell in love with Holland's cold northern light. I wanted to observe the phenomenon with my own eyes, to make sure it was really as pure and clear as Vermeer had painted it. It's true about the light here. Dutch streets and canals often sparkle in an extraordinary play of sunlight and sharp shadow. Sometimes the contrast is so intense that it resembles the strange light emitted during a solar eclipse. On other days, the sky is like a Ruysdael painting, with threatening, purple-bruised rain clouds, separated by light patches of watery, blue sky. In English, these blue patches are still called 'Dutchman's Britches'.

In Amsterdam, ancient brick houses lean precariously into our streets. Tourists, workers, and dreamers mimic the crowded, 16<sup>th</sup> century street scenes of Pieter de Hooch. Amsterdam's streets were always filled with noise, bustling crowds, and it still is today. Our modern residents still have the same, iconic faces as the people who were captured on canvas so many centuries ago. These Dutch faces, so like Rembrandt himself, have become part of the world psyche. Contemporary Dutch faces wouldn't seem out of place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Look into any chic hair salon and you'll see a Renaissance Madonna getting extensions, or a large, red-cheeked woman, whose face is like Vermeer's milkmaid, vigorously scrubbing her front steps or pouring milk out of that same earthenware pitcher. Only the clothes have changed. The Dutch have also kept their names, like *Vroegop-Windig*, which means, an early riser with wind, or *Naaktgeboren*, which means born naked. They live in

the same houses as then, with the same ordinary lives and the same Dutch faces, visually suspended in the past, as if they were unwittingly playing bit parts in an open-air museum. Every generation is passionate about its home-grown metaphors and sayings and these sayings are faithfully passed down. Everyone believes them to be true. Even the modern generation has a mania for them, often using four or five of analogies in one sentence. Most of these sayings are about vegetables and farm animals. I've never heard any other country express its disdain of the *bourgeoisie* by comparing it to the scent of boiled Brussels sprouts in a room. The Dutch say, '*Hey guys, it smells like sprouts in here,*' whenever someone begins to defend their own middle-class values. It is a paradox, because most of these sayings are very down to earth. For example, if something is true it is '*as true as a cow*'. If you don't want to lead someone into temptation, you '*Never tie the cat up with bacon.*' It is best to buy a little book of these sayings, otherwise you won't really know what they mean. I began to think about the presence of Brussels sprouts iconography in language and in Western art, particularly in the Netherlands. Was I the only one who noticed its visual reference in paintings and its strangely cryptic, but obvious importance in European culture? Love them or hate them, sprouts continue to play a role in our subconscious. They won't leave us. A steaming mound of Brussels sprouts piled high on a plate, can produce a profound sense of tragedy in a child's mind, and induce a lifelong hatred of them. This seems to be a universal syndrome that is deeply rooted in the past. One cannot ignore it. Sprouts are mysterious. Observe the way they grow in the fields.

Where did they come from? Why are there so many references to Brussels sprouts tied with red ribbon? There are numerous examples of sprout iconography in the Western art, ranging from cave paintings to Bingo Campbell's business card. No one has ever considered it to be significant or even worth writing about, until now. These questions have taken over my waking hours. I have searched ancient crypts, private libraries, museums, and spent days locked away in some of the most obscure archives of European art history. My search was disorganised and it took me back and forth across two continents. It was only later that I began to realise that my quest for the symbolic meaning of Brussels sprouts in art had become an obsession. I must be careful now, or my search for the true meaning of Brussels sprout iconography will take possession of my soul.

## NEOLITHIC CAVE PAINTING

35,000 BC Magdalenian Neolithic Parietal Art

Discovered by Count Bernard Gerard Maria de Rocquefort

Les Bezies, France

1913 AD



## The Painted Hands

Count Bernard de Rocquefort was an old man in 1913. Despite his age or perhaps because of it, he'd developed a passion for digging up treasure. Like many aristocrats of that era, he'd had quite a few brief passions, but since it was all the rage to collect artefacts and fossils, he ordered his carpenters to build him a special cabinet with lots of little drawers and shelves to house his recent discoveries. The better he became at recognising fossils, Stone Age tools and arrowheads, the more he noticed them on his land. Flint axes and other treasures lay in the open fields, ripe for the taking. He always got a shiver of greed when he saw a finely chipped flint axe. It made him feel like a pirate. He always found something, a fossil shell, a blunt, smooth grinding stone, or a cleverly carved bone fishhook. The best hunting ground was by the caves near his castle. Bernard kept his most valuable wines and cheeses there.

One morning, like every morning in his life, he sent for his usual breakfast of *pâté de foie gras*, a truffle omelette, and a glass of sweet *Mombazillac* wine. This was followed by a bunch of hothouse grapes. He'd been eating the same thing for fifty years and he'd never tired of it. He raised his lorgnette and peered down the long dining table at Max, his mortal enemy. Max was a black poodle with light-brown eyes and a crooked tail. He was, as usual, begging for more *pâté* and doing his pitiful, high-pitched whine, which worked very effectively on the Count's nerves. Max was so persistent that Bernard lost his temper and threw grapes at him. Max ran out of the castle with his tail between his legs, and didn't come



back for his afternoon tea. The old Count shouted after him: ‘Good riddance, wretched mongrel!’ He got up from the table and went back to play with his fossil collection. Gradually it became late in the afternoon and Max still hadn’t returned. Bernard began to imagine all kinds of dramatic scenes: Poor little Max lying in a field with a broken leg or kidnapped by those wicked village boys. Each scenario was worse than the previous one, so the Count finally decided to go out and look for him. ‘Horrible dog,’ he muttered. ‘Why should I bother? Does he ever show *me* any kindness?’ He stamped up the chalky path that led to his caves and he began to hear the sound of hysterical barking. The heavy wooden door to the wine cave was open just a crack and Bernard wondered if there might be anyone in there with Max. He shuddered. His lantern was lit and he opened the door a little wider with his foot. Clutching his duelling pistol in one hand and the lantern in the other, he rushed into the cave shouting: ‘I’ve got you now; the police are coming and I’m armed to the teeth, *Sacré bleu!*’ The cave was bitterly cold. Bernard was shivering, but he felt braver because there didn’t seem to be anyone there except little Max. Following the sound of his dog’s voice, he came to a large hole in the cave wall. He was positive it hadn’t been there yesterday, but as he bent down to look at it, he tripped over a stone and fell against the hole. Half of the wall collapsed at once, and the Count found himself up to his knees in dirt. He brushed himself off and squeezed into the ever-widening opening. It seemed to be a long tunnel. His lantern created eerie shadows on the walls. Further down the tunnel, he saw Max barking at a large bird. ‘*Putain!* A simple chicken?’ cried the Count. ‘You

made me leave my warm fire for a common chicken?' Max grinned in his evil way and wagged his little tail. He seemed to be proud of himself. The Count swore under his breath and looked up at the ceiling for a bit of divine guidance. He needed just enough guidance to prevent himself from giving his dog a swift kick. It was only then that he noticed some splashes of red ochre and white above his head. It looked like a row of white hands. Paint had been sprayed around the handprints, leaving a pattern of red on the calcite-white ceiling. There were other weird images too. As his eyes adjusted to the flickering lamplight, he found drawings of fat ponies, a large bull, running deer and a whole herd of spotted cattle. The paintings were astonishingly modern, as if they'd only recently been scratched and painted into the chalky surface of the ceiling. 'Vandals!' cried Bernard. 'Those boys are ruining my life! Last week they stripped all of my espaliered pears from their branches, and the fruits weren't even ripe! I'll call abbot Didier; he'll know how to deal with them.'

In 1912, there were only two telephones in the little village of Les Bezies. Bernard had one and his friend, abbot Didier le Blanc, had the other one. Once the Count got back to the castle he ran to his study and shouted into the telephone receiver: 'Can you hear me Father? I am speaking to you on the *telly-phone*... *allô*, Didier, are you there? Help! We've been robbed! I also saw some wicked, terrible, devil-worship paintings in the cave!'

'I can hear you, Bernard,' said the priest. 'So can the angels in heaven. You don't need to bellow! I can hear you all the way to my house and *my* windows are shut. With a voice like that, you don't even need a *telly-phone*.'

‘You have to come right away, Didier,’ said the Count. ‘I am beside myself with rage! I’m tempted to go down to the village, yank those awful boys away from their dinners, and flog them in front of their parents.’

‘Calm down, Bernard, you’ll give yourself apoplexy.’

‘Can’t help it, I’m so angry I want to bite the carpet.’

‘Peculiar things are bound to happen if we drink too much vintage wine on an empty stomach. I warned you about that last week, but did you listen?’

‘I’m quite sober, Didier, I swear it. Max ran away and didn’t come back, I went looking for him. Then I accidentally fell through a hole in the wine cave. I’m sure those boys dug it. It collapsed into a sort of tunnel, so I crawled into it and banged my knees. Now my good trousers are ruined. You must come! Those boys have committed their last crime against me and my noble estate. You realise of course, that my castle is considered to be one of the best *châteaux* in France!’

‘Who has committed this heinous deed?’ asked the tired abbot with more than a slight note of sarcasm.

‘The boys, Father! It’s the ruffians again! Scoundrels, every one of them! We must find out exactly who they are and who their leader is, and punish them! Yes! Now!’ ‘Did they harm you? Did you hit your head?’ asked the abbot. ‘That might explain it.’

‘No, no, my head is fine, but they’ve scribbled and daubed paint all over my cave. It’s covered with paintings of creatures with horns, and some spotted ponies and hands... So many ghostly white hands, Didier, they’re all over the ceiling...All over!’ The Count’s voice broke with vexation and fear. ‘I’ll be right there, Bernard, Stay calm.’ said the tired abbot.

Didier put on his coat muttering, ‘The old idiot’s really lost it this time. Imagine that! He’s found a secret tunnel painted with creatures and handprints all over the ceiling. He’s definitely been sampling too much wine again. And he’s probably been eating gobs of that stinky cheese before bedtime. We’ll have a nice cup of mint tea and a little talk. That usually calms him down.’ He sighed and shut his front door. The Count was waiting at his impressive iron gates. He was carrying his pistol and two large lanterns to light their way. He came out, carefully locked the gates behind him, grabbed Father Didier’s hand and began to pull him up the hill to his wine cave. Soon they were standing by the large hole behind the many rows of wine racks. The Count shouted: ‘See what they’ve done? They must have covered it up with sticks and dirt, because they wanted to hide their graffiti. There’s no other explanation, is there?’

‘It looks like the wall collapsed by itself, said the abbot. ‘I don’t see any signs of digging, and those seem to be your own footprints, and Max’s of course.’

‘What about the chicken? How did she get in? I always lock the door.’ ‘Maybe you forgot to do it, last time. Shouldn’t we explore the tunnel tomorrow? It’s terribly dark and clammy in here and I should have worn my winter cassock.’

‘No! We have to go in now; you’ll be my witness! What if they come back tonight and wash it off? How can we prove it then?’

‘God give me strength.’ muttered Father Didier. He took one of the small lanterns and crawled into the opening. The Count followed him, talking hysterically all the while. ‘There! Raise the lantern higher! Higher!

Higher! That's it! See what I mean?' he said, pointing up at the ceiling. They fell silent, amazed by the sight of it. 'These paintings weren't made yesterday, Bernard.' whispered Didier. 'There seems to be a thin layer of rock crystal covering these drawings. That makes them very old. It takes a long time for the crystal to cover them. It's like an ancient cathedral. Our boys couldn't have done this! These images were probably put here thousands of years ago. See those holes high up on the wall? It looks like part of an old scaffold. If this art is authentic, it would be a real discovery! Your cave could be an important addition to our national heritage. You'll become famous whether you want to or not. But it is your decision. Do you want this cave to become a national monument? Shall I call my friend Father Breuil, in Paris?

'With respect, Father, we don't need another priest. We should be calling the police,' said the Count.

'Don't you see, Bernard? This is an important discovery. *I* don't know too much about cave art, but Father Breuil does. He's told me all about it and showed me some wonderful photographs of caves like yours. He's an expert in this new field of archaeology. They call it prehistory. He's already found some beautiful paintings and artefacts in a cave not too far from your castle, and he has an interesting theory about how old these paintings really are.' The abbot wiped some dust off his face and turned to the old Count. 'Well, Bernard, what do you say?'

'Huh? Pre-what?' asked the Count absently. He was imagining himself standing by his famous cave. His picture was in all the papers...

‘This may be the work of Stone Age Man,’ repeated Father Didier. ‘Your cave may help us understand lot more about how people lived and worshipped, many thousands of years ago.’

‘I’m still not really convinced the boys didn’t have a hand in it,’ said Bernard, his face flushed. Didier sighed and escorted his friend back to his castle. They talked long into the night and not a drop of wine was tasted.

A week later, Count Bernard watched the Abbot walking up his hill with a scrawny, young boy. His heart began to pound with self-righteous anger. He took his walking stick and rushed out to meet them, furiously waving it above his head and shouting all manner of ungodly things. ‘Good work, Didier, he said, after he’d calmed down a bit. ‘You’ve managed to capture the leader of those terrible boys! Give him to me, I’ll twist his ears and make him cry! Has he confessed yet?’

The boy, who didn’t look much older than thirteen, wore a cheeky grin and gracefully extended his hand to the old Count. He didn’t seem to be at all frightened. ‘Permit me to introduce myself’ said the terrible boy. ‘Monsieur de Count de Rocquefort, I am Abbot Breuil, Professor of Archaeological Studies, in Paris. Appearances can be rather deceptive, can’t they? Especially in my case.’ He said, humbly.

The Count turned quite red with embarrassment. ‘I would like to extend my apologies, Father.’ he muttered. ‘I thought you were one of our peasant boys. You’re not wearing your cassock, and you look very much like our Gilles, one of our worst of them. Forgive me for saying this, Father, but aren’t you a bit too young to be a priest?’ Abbot Henri Breuil smiled and said, ‘I really *am* old

enough and happens to me all the time. I never wear my robes when I'm exploring a cave. You'd be surprised how many people tell me to run home to my mother. Shall we examine the paintings right away? Afterwards, we could go to Father Didier's house for tea, perhaps?'

'Yes, said Abbot Didier, Adele, my housekeeper has made another cherry custard tart. It looks sinfully delicious. You've really come prepared for battle, I see.' 'We'll each take two of these,' said Bernard, still red in the face. He handed out the lanterns and tried not to get in the way.

'It seems like these paintings are from the Magdalenian Period, which would make them about thirty-five to forty thousand year's old, and look, here are some carvings too!' said the young priest to Father Didier and Bernard. There were ten large mammoths, a whole herd of short-necked ponies, and a magnificent, stern-looking bull. The bull was glancing over his shoulder at the rest, who appeared to be fleeing from some unseen danger. The bull's eyes seemed to express fierce irritation at the Count's encroachment into his sanctuary. Each animal was edged in black charcoal. The artist had used yellow ochre and rust-red pigments to make them seem more realistic. He also used the contours of the ceiling to make the drawings appear to be three-dimensional in the flickering light of the lanterns. Bernard tapped Father Breuil on the back. The paintings and bas-relief carvings on the wall and the ceiling were beginning to make the old Count rather nervous. 'Father, how could a simple brute paint this?' he asked.

'A brute didn't paint these.'

‘Who *did*? It was painted by cavemen. You just said it was painted by cavemen, didn’t you?’

‘These people were just like you and me, living only slightly less hectic lives. We don’t have proof that they lived in caves all the time. They used them in the winter. ‘But it all looks so modern, so real.’ said the Count.

‘Only a great artist can create such an illusion of life. You can almost see them breathing’ said abbot Breuil. ‘Recent evidence suggests that these ancient artists, the Magdalenian people, made an astonishing artistic leap in their perception of the form and movement of the animals they chose to paint. That level of artistic genius wasn’t rediscovered until the Renaissance. I believe that prehistoric society was more spiritually developed than we are now. They seemed to worship every aspect, every minute of their daily life, and these paintings prove their love and respect for the animals they wanted to hunt. No one really knows for certain, but I think that the Magdalenians weren’t brutish people-- quite the opposite.

‘And my wine cave, is a good example of their work?’

‘To be sure, replied abbot Breuil *C’est magnifique!* I’ve already discovered a few caves in this region, and yours is the best one so far. This is just the beginning of our investigation. I’m certain your cave holds many more secrets. By studying cave art, perhaps we can gain a better understanding of the meaning of our modern life.’ In the flickering lamplight, the Count began to realise his life was about to take a different turn. He began to tremble when he thought about the monumental responsibility he had decided to accept. He looked up at the powerful, angry bull, which still seemed to glare at him for trespassing into his holy sanctuary. At that



moment, Bernard realised that he'd wasted a large part of his life on trivialities. He vowed then and there to memorise all the prehistory books he could find, so he wouldn't feel like an old fool when he took the public to see his cave. 'Would it be all right if we called it '*The de Rocquefort Grotto*?' he asked, looking down at his shoes.

'Well, I don't see why not,' said Father Breuill. He shook Bernard's hand, hugged him, kissed him on both cheeks and clapped him on the back for good measure. 'Thank you, Father,' said the old man, wiping his eyes. Back at Father Didier's house, the Count Bernard was unusually quiet and subdued, but when the housekeeper appeared with her famous cherry custard tart, he smiled at abbot Breuil and said: 'Prehistory and cavemen. Hmm, may I borrow a few books on the subject? Could you possibly send them soon? I'll need to be up to date, if I'm going to lead people around and tell them what's what. I want to be able to answer all their questions without looking like an idiot.'

Father Breuil tried to look serious, glanced at Father Didier with one eyebrow slightly raised, and his friend nodded in agreement.

'This is a grave responsibility, Count de Rocquefort,' he said. 'You will have to read *many* books. You will have to memorise every square inch of that cave and listen to me very carefully. Your cave will have to be safeguarded from people's footsteps on the fragile ground. The visitors must never touch the walls or the paintings. We will make paths where possible, and we'll have to protect the paintings and carvings from souvenir seekers.'

'I was hoping you could show me the right way to do it,' said the Count, scratching his head.

‘If you allow me to thoroughly investigate the cave and if we make sure that the walls are not too delicate, we can allow the public to visit your site in a couple of years. I would be glad to help you.’ Suddenly, he looked sternly at the Count. ‘You will have to dedicate *all* your time to the new site. Are you sure you want to take on so much responsibility?’

‘After all, said the Count, ‘I’ve spent all my life restoring my castle, so I feel like I’m just the caretaker. Each generation of *de Rocqueforts* have this honour and responsibility thrust upon them. When I die, I hope my nephew will show the same amount of love and dedication to it as I did. Are you both in agreement that we should call it ‘*The de Rocquefort Grotto*’? Would that be all right?’

‘That seems to be the most logical name for it,’ said Father Didier, grinning. They all began to laugh and that set Max off into another fit of barking. ‘Shut up, Max!’ cried the Count, hurling his usual handful of grapes at the dog. Max sat back in his chair and showed his teeth. Was that a smile?

## Count de Rocquefort's Favourite Dish

### Ingredients

1 bag of Brussels sprouts  
2 or 3 large red onions  
1 cup Rocquefort cheese, crumbled  
A splash of walnut oil  
A handful of toasted walnuts  
The juice and zest of ½ a lemon  
1 clove, finely chopped garlic  
1 tablespoon of finely chopped shallots  
salt and pepper to taste

In August, when cicadas are singing in their trees and golden *Mombazillac* grapes are ripe on their vines, your fearsome chef, Anna will boil the Brussels sprouts for 6 minutes. She will slice red onions into rings and sprinkle them with a bit of walnut oil. She'll grill them on a high heat until they are caramelised. She will toast the walnut pieces in a pan and watch them, so they do not burn. When they are ready, Annette will combine the sprouts, the walnuts and the red onions, with a dressing made from another splash of walnut oil, the juice and zest of half a lemon and shallots. She will season the dressing with pepper and a little salt, and sprinkle the top of it with crumbly bits of very expensive *Rocquefort* cheese. After this rather light supper, by all means have the cherry custard tart. Then you can enjoy a glass of *Mombazillac* from your own vineyards. This serves two abbots, a little dog, and a Count.

**Choux de Bruxelles with Onions, Walnuts, and Rocquefort Cheese From the renowned restaurant: 'The Rocquefort Grotto'.**



# MIDDLE KINGDOM EGYPTIAN TABLET

Twelfth Dynasty

Luxor, Egypt

1860 BC



## Phtatatuti

The young King awoke in a foul mood. His stomach was swollen and...umm... There's no delicate way to put it... He was suffering from gale force wind of the worst kind. 'Where's my **𓆎𓆏𓆏**? And where in the name of Sobek is my breakfast?' Phtatatuti shouted to the kitchen slave. 'By Ra's celestial nose, that wicked Osiris is late again! Tell him I'll feed him to my crocodile if it happens one more time!' The slave bowed and rushed away to tell the little **𓆎𓆏𓆏**.

'Spare me! Oh Great One! Your Royal Breakfast has arrived,' murmured the terrified **𓆎𓆏𓆏** as he shuffled into the room. His gnarled hands trembled as he set the dish on a small gilt table next to the Royal Bed. He'd been up since dawn preparing a new treat for his Lord's first meal of the day. It was a recipe with a secret ingredient. No, it wasn't poison. I know what you're thinking. It was simply a special remedy for the Pharaoh's little problem.

Osiris the **𓆎𓆏𓆏**, was a great master of recipes, but he had grown so stooped and feeble, that he relied on his assistants to chop the vegetables, carve the meat, and lift the heavy pots off the fire. He loved his Pharaoh dearly, and it pained him to see the splendidly dressed courtiers laugh behind their hands whenever Phtatatuti made an unpleasant, bottom noise during banquets. Something had to be done about it before it was too late. His kitchen assistant, Boutros Borax, had a friend who knew a friend who knew a discreet apothecary who was willing to help. Perhaps the right potion would cure his master, and Osiris, the unfortunate **𓆎𓆏𓆏**, could keep his head on his

shoulders for another few months. I say perhaps, because when Osiris fed the Pharaoh's pet crocodile who was named Sobek. The real crocodile god (who was also named Sobek) was smiling his cruel, sandstone smile at the little cook, from his niche in the highly decorated palace wall.

That afternoon, Osiris trudged through the dusty streets of the souk market and found the apothecary's shop in the second alley he came to. The door was open, but he knocked on it to announce his presence in a polite way. The ancient apothecary bowed low to him, trembled, and whispered about how he paid all his taxes every month.


'Yes, my Lord! Every month to be sure, I never forget to pay the Pharaoh's Mother Nile Tax.' muttered the old man. His hands were shaking and there were hot tears in his eyes.

'I'm not here to collect taxes,' said Osiris. He smiled encouragingly. 'I have a very discreet question, if you are willing to answer it. Would you happen to have a good remedy for wind?' said the ~~IAA~~.

'Do you mean the Sirocco, the Wind of Fire, or the Enchanted Wind that Picks up Water and Lets It Fall Somewhere Else? Perhaps you mean The Nightly Wind of the Holy Mother Nile?' asked the man. His hands were trembling more and more.

'No, no, I mean the wind one gets after dinner.' Osiris smiled again, but he took care to cover his teeth with his right hand. He didn't want the apothecary to count them because that would certainly bring him bad luck.

'Ha, ha, ha, that sort of *wind*, why didn't you say so? Come into my back room, and I'll show you how to make the right sort of potion. It's quite simple, really.'


The apothecary stood on a little stool and took an evil-coloured glass vial from the top shelf. Inside the vial was a swampy-green liquid. When the apothecary lifted the stopper, his back room began to smell like the cloacae of the River Styx. It made the 's eyes water. The old apothecary was also holding it away from his own nose and his eyes were turning even redder.

'I can't use this,' said Osiris. 'It smells like a dead sheep! He'll think he's being poisoned!'

'It's the distilled essence of Brussels sprouts and it's very safe for man and beast,' said the apothecary. 'I know it smells foul, but the smell fades with time. You can't taste it in cooking or when it's put in a drink. *Who* will think he's being poisoned, if I may be so bold?'

'I'm not really allowed to say.'

'Some things are better left unsaid,' replied the apothecary, tapping the side of his long nose and grinning. 'This is what you must do. First, write a long letter about your problem and pray at the altar of Sobek, the crocodile god. Burn the letter at his shrine and make an offering of a nice, fat chicken. No, wait... Better make an offering of two chickens, just to be certain. Before you cook your dish, you must dilute the potion with water from the Mother Nile. Add one drop of the infusion (this swamp-green liquid, here) to one hundred drops of water in a clean pot. Then you have to cover the pot and shake it two hundred times. Then say "Sim, Sim, Sala Bim! *Similia similibus curantur!* Got it?"

The  nodded happily, shook the man's hand again and said: 'Thank you so much for your kindness, my friend,' He took three golden coins from his purse and paid the apothecary, who immediately prostrated



himself on the dirt floor mumbling words of eternal gratitude, honour, and other things to keep his head safe. He finally looked at the coins and exclaimed: 'But My Lord, these are the Pharaoh's dinari! No one uses golden coins like these unless they are part of the Pharaoh's *Inner Circle of Trusted Friends and Servants*, whispered the apothecary, who was even more terrified than before. Osiris laughed, took the old man's arm and gently helped him to rise. 'Get up, my friend,' he said. 'Let this be our little secret. Please, never tell anyone, not even your wife. It would cost both of us our heads.' He walked out of the shop whistling a Sobek song along his way to the palace.

That evening he added the remedy to Phtatatuti's food and waited. He couldn't help wondering if the mighty Sobek was in a forgiving mood for once. Weeks went by, and thanks to the magic elixir, the wind of the Pharaoh did not blow. Perhaps, thought the old cook, Phtatatuti will be grateful and grant me my freedom after all these years of faithful service. Then I'll buy us a small farm and grow my own vegetables, especially those useful little cabbages! I'll have a few chickens too, and some goats and pigs. Best of all, I'll finally get a chance to cook for my *own* family, for once! Oh, I can see it all before me! My dear wife and children will finally be able live in blessed peace and vegetables! We will never have to be afraid for our lives again.

## **Ful Medames with Sprouts and a Fried Egg**

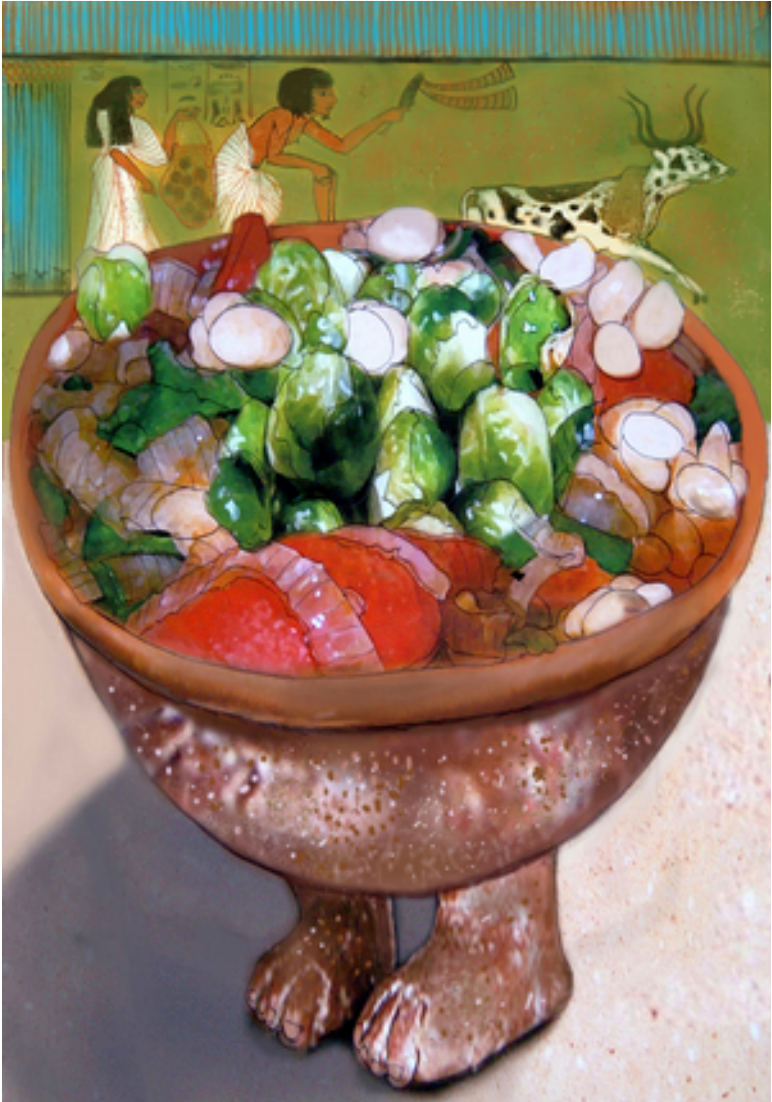
### **Ingredients**

3 cups of Brussels sprouts  
5 cups of fava beans  
1 egg, fried (optional)  
2 tablespoons of olive oil  
1 tablespoon of tomato paste  
1 tablespoon (or less, because it is hot) of harissa paste  
1 teaspoon of ground cumin  
½ cup of vegetable stock  
3 fresh tomatoes, diced  
Juice of ½ of a lemon  
4 large cloves of garlic, chopped fine  
parsley, chopped fine,  
salt and red pepper flakes, to taste

Soak your dry fava beans overnight and rinse them thoroughly, changing the water three times. Let them cook until almost tender. This should take about an hour. Boil the sprouts for 8 minutes and refresh them in cold water to preserve their green colour. Sauté the onions with garlic and cumin, add the tomato and harissa paste, and a cup of vegetable stock to make a sauce. Add the beans and crush them slightly. Simmer for 10 minutes. If the sauce becomes too thick, add a little water. Chop and add the fresh tomatoes, parsley, add lemon juice and the boiled sprouts at the last minute so they can heat through. Season with salt and some dried pepper flakes. Some Pharaohs like this dish served with a fried egg on top.

Serves one poor family or one pharting Pharaoh.

## Ful Medames with Brussels Sprouts



## THE SPARTAN COMEDIAN

Amphora: Spartan General Offering Sprouts to the  
Delphic Oracle  
Sparta, Greece  
445 BC



## The Spartan Comedian

There is an old saying in Sparta, a woman's saying: 'When you ask a Spartan woman why they are the only women in the world who can rule over men, she will reply: 'That is because we are the only mothers in the world who give birth to *real* men.'

This was also true of Zakaris' mother, Morgo. She was a Hoplite, a member of the sparse Spartan ruling class. Proud and domineering, she only spoke when necessary. She ate sparingly, slept little, and could fight as well as her husband. She didn't smell of milk and bread, but more of bronze and tanned leather.

When little Zakaris came into the world, she knew that he would be different. He was a big baby, robust of limb and lungs, but he was born smiling. He laughed after she bathed him in strong wine which nearly choked him. Smiling in Sparta was considered a grave sign of weakness, so she consulted Pythia the Oracle about her son's future. Getting a favourable prediction from an oracle always depended on the seer's whim and the opulence of the offering. It was like reading the message in a Classical fortune cookie.

The Delphic Oracle was in a playful mood and she told Zakaris' mother these momentous words: 'neither lions nor bulls will be able to resist his power. This power is a gift from all of the Gods!'

Morgo left the grotto with an uplifted spirit. Perhaps her boy would turn out right after all. Maybe he would show some interest in weapons and develop a thirst for blood like any other normal Spartan boy. She didn't care to spend much time with her baby; that task was left to the

lovely, dark-haired, wet-nurse, Olea. Sweet Olea treated him as if he were her only son. She was kind, perhaps too kind. Her skin wasn't harsh and hard like Morgo's. It always smelled of fresh bread and cinnamon. Zakaris spent his days with Olea until he turned seven. Then it was time for his war training to begin.

On the first Monday in September, the new boys entered the *'Agoge'*, an elite military school. They had the usual mixed feelings of terror and excitement. Each boy had heard the horror stories. Their brothers had told them all about the school's meagre soup with lentils, and boiled Brussels sprouts, which were eaten every day. The new boys shuddered when they heard about the obligatory daily beatings, the practice of starvation and stealing food. Their older brothers also whispered about a dark ritual at the end of their training. Only the best boys would have the honour of being sent out to perform the terrible ceremony. Most of the boys were really looking forward to it. They took their seats in their sparsely furnished classroom and watched their mentor, the big-nosed Pissistrates, who began to take the roll call. The man had a hungry face and a cruel slit for a mouth. He was like a snake with a bulbous nose. When he came to Zakaris, his eyes began to glitter. He'd already heard about the boy who smiled.

'Sooo, Zakaris Demararinos! That's not a proper Spartan name, is it? Your first name means sugar and your second name means from Demerara. That's a lovely, sweetie, sissy's name, don't you think so, boys?' The boys roared with laughter, but it didn't seem to bother little Zakaris at all. He just smiled and nodded. 'Silence,' bellowed Pissistrates. 'I'll interrogate this boy!

Tell me, sugar baby, where is the Ancient Shield of Perseus, you must know this, the one Perseus used to kill the Medusa? Where does it lie?’

‘I didn’t take it.’ replied Zakaris calmly. ‘It wasn’t me.’

‘What did you say, boy?’

‘I swear I didn’t take it, Master.’

The other boys smirked and snorted. They whispered behind their hands. Zakaris was about to have the great honour of receiving the most terrible flogging of the year.

‘Are you grinning at me, boy? Answer me! Wipe that smile off your face,’ cried Pissistrates, his veins pulsing. Zakaris pretended to wipe his face, but he was still smiling. His legs felt like wet paper and his heart began beating very fast. ‘Uh... Oh...’ he whispered to himself. There was a wave of laughter in the classroom and Pissistrates glared at the others. By this time, he was trembling with rage and he turned his bloodshot eyes on the now-silent boys.

‘Shut up, worms!’ he cried. His cold eyes looked at Zakaris. ‘Sonny boy,’ he said, ‘I’m going to beat you like an egg! Then I’ll go to your father and ask him all about you. You’re his second son, aren’t you, not his firstborn? I remember your brother, he was normal. He finished with honours last year, and there was nothing wrong with him! What a talented killer he was.’

‘Well yes,’ said the little boy. ‘I’m the second son, but my Dad and my brother will tell you exactly the same thing if you come to our house. They’ll say, maybe Zakaris didn’t take it, or maybe he did, but he didn’t bring it home. We haven’t seen it.’

Pissistrates glared. His face became a wine-dark purple. Then little Zakaris turned around, bent over, and showed

his bare bottom to the teacher. His classmates couldn't decide if Zakaris was insane or impossibly brave. No one had ever dared to ridicule Pissistrates, headmaster of the Spartan Military Academy. No one had ever made a famous ex-general look like an idiot in front of the whole class. Had the gods made Zakaris reckless? Was it an omen? Who could say?

The years passed for Zakaris and his classmates. Sometimes the days limped along like an old cart horse and sometimes they raced along as rapidly as a war chariot. The rigour of school life was ever constant. Each boy was drilled, punished and exercised to become a cold perfectly skilled fighting machine. They had all been starved and abused to encourage their desire for self-preservation. The boys kept themselves alive by stealing food and wine. Stealing was allowed, even encouraged, but if a boy got caught doing it; he would be whipped and shamed in front of the whole school. The boys were flogged every day, to make them hard and obedient. And, most importantly, they had all been told that the honourable way for a man to die was to joyously give up his life for Sparta.

Most Spartan boys were mad for war and couldn't wait to fight their first battle. They all wanted to sacrifice themselves like their courageous King, Leonidas. He had given up his life defending the Gates at Thermopylae against Xerxes, the formidable King of the Persians. Not only were the boys trained to become warriors, they had been taught to answer briefly and say as little as possible to each other. It was called the '*Laconic*' way of speaking, because '*Lacedaemon*' was the ancient name of their mountainous region. Spartans were famous in the



classical world for their short, sharp, shocking remarks. Even their conversations with each other were terse and unfriendly. Laughter had been sent into exile and wasn't expected to return any time soon. Much to the surprise of his teachers, the ever-laughing Zakaris finally became a powerful fighter. In fact, he was one of the most fearless in his group. He and four other boys had been especially chosen for the prestigious honour of taking part in the '*Krypteia*' a secret ritual for future, mad, Spartan leaders.

All of the boys were curious and also apprehensive about what might happen during the night of the ritual. The school talked of nothing else, and the boys were already treated as heroes before they even started their special training.

'My brother...' said Pausanias, who always spoke very slowly. 'My brother...said...Master Pissistrates will tell us...what we have to do. He says we must kill...Helot slaves...One adult slave for each one...of us...And we have... to do it...naked... and in secret... That's... why we can't... tell the... other...boys...when we... are going... out... tonight.'

'Why must we kill the poor Helots? What did they ever do to us?' asked Zakaris.

'We...have...to...bring...their...fresh...bleeding... heart...back...to...school...and...give...them...to...old... Uh,... Pissistrates.' replied Pausanias, breathlessly.

'So that's the secret meaning of the *Krypteia*, to kill harmless slaves? Can't we just pretend we did it?' asked Zakaris.' That night, the boys shuddered, sleepless in their cots. The thing they were forced to do would happen in a few hours. They asked Zakaris for one more joke to comfort them.

‘Well alright, here goes, but I’m nervous too, you know’, said Zakaris. ‘Listen! King Leonidas and Master Pissistrates are standing on a cliff. They are looking down at the whole field of fallen men, right after they’d lost a great and bloody battle with Xerxes. Pissistrates looks up at General Leonidas and says: ‘You know, after such a terrible defeat, I’d like to do something to cheer up our men.’ King Leonidas says laconically, ‘Jump off the cliff.’

The boys laughed, but it sounded more like ‘mmmph, mmmph, mmmph.’ They had to stuff pillows into their mouths so that they wouldn’t be reported. The next evening, our four friends stood behind a group of trees, near a small Helot village. The boys were naked, armed only with a sharp knife. They hadn’t eaten or drunk since the night before.

‘I still won’t do it, said Zakaris. ‘You can leave me here in the woods, or you can join me, but I won’t kill them.’ ‘But we must kill!’ said Orestes, who was the best archer. ‘They’ll mock us in the streets if we don’t bring Pissistrates some hearts, and sooner or later, they will kill us in front of the school because we came back as dirty weakling, failures.

‘Pig hearts,’ said Zakaris, slapping his forehead. ‘Why didn’t I think of it before? They look the same as Helot hearts. Later, we can beat each other up. Won’t that be fun? It has to look like we’ve been fighting for our lives, and that we killed them all, of course. How will Pissistrates know the difference? Who can say whether a Helot punched us or not? A bruise is a bruise.’

‘It’s brilliant, Zakaris!’ said Kryptorchis. ‘But we can’t go into a Helot market naked, and what about money?’

Do you have some secret pocket on your bare stomach to hide a few Spartan coins? Do you keep them up your...’

‘No,’ said Zakaris. ‘But we can trade with the Helots! We’ll take their clothes and what few coins they have. Then early next morning, we’ll sneak into the next village to buy the pig hearts...Simple isn’t it? You tell them, Krypto! Yes, tell them that we’ll spare their lives if they agree to our terms. After all, you’re a lot bigger than the rest of us. That will impress them even more.’

‘I suppose it is true.’ said Kryptorchis. He threw out his chest and looked down at himself.

‘We’ll wait behind the trees.’ said the young comedian.

‘No, Zakaris, you’re coming with me, or I won’t do it, said Kryptorchis.’ The four boys shook hands with each other. They let out a horrific war cry and charged down the hill, to the first hovel they saw. They battered and broke the wooden door with their fists and demanded to be let in. Every year the trouble began in the same way, and there was nothing the Helots could do but prepare to die with dignity. If a boy was killed during the attack, any Helot who defended his family would be killed.

The father hesitantly opened his door to them. He realised at once what was going to happen, so he fell on his knees and begged them for a swift death. The mother gathered her children around her, covered them with her robe and said softly: ‘Spare my little ones and they will grow up to serve you.’ The children didn’t cry out or try to escape, and the young Spartans were impressed with their courage.

‘Get up, get up,’ said Kryptorchis gruffly. He felt his face turn red with shame and anger.

‘We just want to make a deal with you! We need your robes and enough coins to buy some meat. There will be no killing in this house, unless you put up a fight. You may choose, Helot! Will it be death to you and your family, or a little trade with us? Now what’s it going to be?’

‘Am I dreaming? Is this a wicked joke?’ asked the father, not daring to look at his tormentor.

‘No sir, he’s deadly serious,’ said Zakaris. He folded his arms, stood by his huge comrade, and tried to look ferocious as well.

‘Wife, our life depends on it!’ bellowed the old man. ‘Get our pot of coins! Bring robes! Hurry up, woman!’ The Helot’s wife took a small metal pot off the table, opened a roughly hewn, painted chest, and brought out two coarse robes, a sheepskin and one dirty handkerchief. She laid them at Zakaris’ feet. ‘I’m afraid this is all we have. Here are our two drachmas and that’s the end of it.’

‘It’s a start,’ said Zakaris. ‘But you still don’t have enough clothes for all of us.’ He turned his back to the family and whispered to his friends: ‘Pausianas, you wear the sheepskin, I’ll take the best robe, because it was my idea in the first place. Kryptorchis can have the other one. Orestes, I’m afraid you’ll have to go naked.’

The old man shuffled quietly up to Orestes, and said: ‘Wait, young man. With the greatest respect, you’re much too fine-looking for our clothes. Take my wife’s pink robe. Then you won’t have to go naked. My rags are so full of moth holes and they stink.’

Zakaris smiled. Orestes was known to be vain and he always took great care of his clothes.

Orestes said, ‘Me? Handsome Orestes, going to market dressed in pink rags? Isn’t there any other way?’ he asked, with a note of panic in his voice.

‘No.’ said Zakaris simply. ‘Cover your head with the handkerchief. Hurry up!’

The boys dressed, bade the family goodbye and ran into town to buy some medium-sized pig hearts. By the time they got to the market, his friends were still giggling and even the Helots were grinning at them.

‘You’ve got to do it, Oresteia my sweetie. You’re the woman of the house now,’ said Zakaris.

‘I’ll kill you later,’ muttered Orestes between his clenched teeth. He began to speak in a high, girly, voice and haggled over the price of hearts with the fat, rather dirty butcher.

‘Helloooo!’ said the butcher. ‘Are you new in town?’ he moved his bushy eyebrows up and down in an attempt to look sexy.

‘Yes!’ replied Orestes in his normal, low voice. ‘Here’s your money, idiot! Give me those hearts and piss off!’ Back in the woods, the boys lost no time in pummelling each other until they were convincingly bloody and bruised. Zakaris smeared some of his own blood on Orestes’ face and gave a pig heart to each of his comrades.

‘No one must ever know about this; we must swear an oath with our own blood, too’ said Orestes. He cut his finger and passed the knife to the next boy.

‘We promise!’ said each boy solemnly. They smeared pig’s blood and their own on each other’s hands and faces. ‘Friends,’ said Zakaris. ‘I’m not coming back, you know, not ever. The boy was serious, for once.’

‘Tonight,’ said Zacharis, ‘I’ll be on my way to Athens to make my fortune. I almost wish I could stay, because I’d love to see the look on old Pissistrates’ pig-hearted face, when you tell him about our splendid victory against the Helots.’

Kryptorchis said, ‘I’ll miss your lousy jokes, my friend.’

A few tears were roughly brushed away, and Zakaris put his arms around his friends to comfort them.

‘You’ll hear about me very soon,’ he said. ‘I’m going to write wonderful plays in the city. You can come to my first performance! Free tickets and all...’

‘Great...tragedies full... of... dignity... and disaster? With... a woman’s... chorus of...wailing...singers?’ asked Pausanias.

‘What do you think?’ replied Zakaris, with a coy smile.

Zakaris held his head high and stared out at the city of his birth, his city, which was perched on the stony hills in front of him. His steps were measured and proud as he walked down the steep hill. He heard his school mates laughing in the woods.

He went to Athens and as soon as he could raise the money, he joined a travelling theatre. Eventually, he became a very successful playwright. All of Athens would rush for seats at the opening night of his new plays. Many Athenian critics agreed that Zakaris was as funny as Aristophanes. While this recognition of his talent didn’t increase his riches, he was loved by the crowds. Soon he was able to afford a comfortable house and garden. When he was thirty, he married Eleni, the most beautiful virgin in Athens. They had seven children who all grew up with their father’s sense of humour.

Orestes, Pausanias, and Kryptorchis, managed to come to all of his plays. They always cheered louder than the rest. Once, after another sparkingly successful opening night, Orestes told Zakaris that he'd seen Master Pissistrates sitting in the front row, The old tyrant was looking even more stiff and sour-faced as he usually did.

The Headmaster's eyes were now clouded with age, but he never stopped staring at Zakaris. His predatory face was still vicious, like a wolf about to devour a rabbit. He didn't smile. Not even once.

## **Spartan Rations: Shrimp Sagnaki with Sprouts**

### **Ingredients**

- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 small bag of Brussels sprouts
- 2 large cans chopped, peeled tomatoes with liquid
- 3 crushed cloves of garlic
- 2 chopped large onions
- 1/4 cup of ouzo or raki
- 1 glass of Cabernet Sauvignon
- 1 dash of tabasco sauce or red pepper flakes
- 1 bag of frozen tiger prawns
- 1 handful of decent feta cheese
- 1 bay leaf, 2 tsp. dried oregano, chopped parsley

Sauté the onions until they begin to turn golden. Add the tomatoes. Add the ouzo, crushed garlic, the red wine and the rest of the herbs. Add the red pepper flakes according to your taste. Cover the sauce and let it simmer for 1 hour. Stir it frequently so that it doesn't burn. Thaw the shrimps, rinse them, and add them to the sauce. Be sure that the sauce has thickened before adding the shrimp or they will turn nasty and taste like fishy rubber. Let them simmer for about 4 to 8 minutes depending on the size of the shrimp. Boil the sprouts. They should both be ready at the same time as the shrimp. Add the sprouts to the sauce. Add the cheese and cover the dish so that the cheese can melt. Sprinkle with freshly chopped parsley. Eat your sagnaki with home-made bread, which you can dip into the sauce.

The recipe serves four boys, starved into submission.



## Spartan Shrimp with Sprouts and Tomatoes



## LATE ROMAN SPROUT CULT

Copper panel, Roman Emperor Celeritus Trabanti

Rome, Italy

60 AD



## The Noble Racer

‘Since that barbarian Nero stole Rome and got himself assassinated for his greediness, it’s become too dangerous to walk in the streets at night. There are roving bands of criminals everywhere you look. Why, I scarcely dare to go to my nightly orgies anymore. Ye gods, if only we’d moved to Herculaneum when we had the chance, but oh no! Not you. You had to stay here, didn’t you? You had to risk my life and the safety of our children. For what, Celeritus, honour? Ha! Don’t make me laugh, you have no honour! You’re nothing but a papyrus tiger! And you call yourself an emperor?’ Say something you weakling!’ screeched Empress Odia Vulta. She usually raised her voice one querulous octave at a time, reaching a twanging crescendo. The Emperor’s wife actually had two voices, one which was sultry and civilised, which was used for her nightly dinner parties, or her nightly naughtiness at an orgy, and her second voice, which was reserved for her husband at breakfast. This voice was so harsh that even a crow would have to cover his ears. Celeritus Olitus needed to cover his ears all the time. He stared blankly around the elegant atrium and said, ‘Yes dear... No dear...Of course dear...,’ as he counted under his breath. ‘I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X...’ It always worked for him, and her voice gradually faded into the background. The storm of words diminished into a soft ‘*wow, wow, wow, wow*’ in his tired brain. In one unguarded moment, Celeritus made the classic mistake of nodding when he should have shaken his head, so his wife pointed to the door dramatically and banished him to the stables as she usually did. ‘Oh really,’ she hissed.

She gave him a swift kick in his *gluteus maximus* on his way out the door. ‘I don’t want to be embarrassed by your usual lack of performance in the ring today, not in front of the Ambassador of Carthage! You *must* succeed,’ she yelled after him.

Emperor Celeritus Olitus Currus Trabanti stood in the open doorway, sniffing the fine scent of hay, oiled leather, grain and horses. His Egyptian stallions greeted him, tossing their heads impatiently. They knew there were presents hidden in his robes. He always stole apples and sweets for them, and today he’d managed to get some peaches and a handful of raisins. They were the best Arabian racehorses that money could buy, three splendid brothers. Two of them were glossy black and the other one was white with blue-black skin. Celeritus groomed them and oiled their hooves. He never allowed anyone else to do this. ‘I would have been much happier as a stable hand,’ he whispered to Ahmed, the white one. Ahmed was his favourite.

The white stallion whinnied softly and nuzzled his master’s neck. Celeritus and his horse closed their eyes at the same time, two equal creatures, breathing peacefully with each other. ‘We’ll make them all proud of us, my love,’ he said. ‘It doesn’t matter what Odia Volta says! At least the people love me. Don’t they still wear sprouts in their hair as a tribute to me and to my love for all creatures great and small? Everything’s still all right, isn’t it, Ahmed?’

He hitched his horses to the chariot and drove to the Circus Maximus. He was already three hours late, but he took his time, because he wanted them to be well-rested.

The stable master said: ‘*Domine*, where were you? Your challengers are already waiting at the starting line. *Festina, Domine!*’

Of course Emperor Celeritus Olitus Currus Trabanti won. Perhaps it was the superior performance of his hot-blooded Arabian horses, but would you dare vanquish your emperor in a chariot race?

Tired and elated, Celeritus Olitus took his place in the Royal box, next to Lord Bomilcar, the new Ambassador of Carthage. They both waved elegantly to the frantic crowd. Forty thousand voices howled and ranted. Then the trumpets sounded three times for the gladiatorial games to begin. It was a part of his official duties that Celeritus hated the most.

Many of his friends felt as he did, that blood sports were legalised butchery. But no one dared to say anything. Some of them admitted to be secretly thrilled at the sight of blood, but they would never admit it to Emperor Celeritus.

When scores of gladiators began to die, Celeritus thought of the noble Seneca’s ‘Epistle Number Seven’ which he had written to his friend, Lucilius. Seneca wrote: ‘Unhappy man that I am! What have I done to deserve this, that I must look upon a scene so barbarous? At midday, the men were thrown to lions and bears. This was merciful when compared to the rest of the day. In the afternoon, they are thrown to the audience who are excited by blood, not sport. There was no escape for these men. I pray you, Lucilius, do not attend the games. Either you will be corrupted by the multitude or, if you show your disgust, you will be hated by all.’

Celeritus Olitus wanted to cover his ears as the cries of the fallen men reached his ears. The crowd taunted the gladiators: ‘Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! Kill!!!’ The Emperor could hear his own wife shouting hoarsely: ‘Burn Him! Set him on fire! Why doesn’t he fall on his sword and die like a real man?’

The Emperor felt soiled by the bloodthirsty cries of the spectators. His wife was screaming so hard she sounded like a fish market harridan. He realised at that moment that he (who might possibly be the last emperor of Rome) was in an impossible position. The crowd wanted the gladiatorial games, but they were also calling for a constitutional government. If he couldn’t hide his disgust at the carnage well enough to fool the crowd, they would think he was a weakling. And his enemies would jump at the chance to assassinate him. But if he didn’t show how he really felt, he would betray his own personal ethics about violent behaviour and killing. Even though most of his noble friends had been tolerant of his vegetarianism and his love for animals, the common people had already started to distrust him for it. The crowd was in a sullen mood today, but a crowd can change its mind in the beat of a butterfly’s wing. Soon, the bloodthirsty voices of the people would convert the rest of his remaining friends in the Senate. Everyone was yelling and pointing at him: ‘Kill him or save him, Emperor? Decide his fate and we will decide yours!’ The beautifully dressed Ambassador of Carthage turned slightly away from him, embarrassed at the emperor’s inability to control the jeering crowd. He didn’t want it to show in his cold eyes. Celeritus called Aurelius and whispered: ‘Friend, Go tell my wife and Ambassador Bomilcar, I am going home now. Hurry up!’

‘She will not be pleased, *Domine*,’ replied the slave. ‘If I may be so bold, I know if I tell her this, she’ll hurl something at my head or even your noble head, Master, you know it and I know it.’

‘I know she will, dear boy. Make any excuse you wish, but meet me back at the villa as soon as you can. We’ve got to get away from this crowd before they kill us today. I feel it Aurelius, we must hurry.’ The slave bowed and pushed his way through the crowd to give Odis Vultus the bad news about the Emperor’s ‘headache’. Then he sneaked away from the stands and ran to the villa as fast as he could. As soon as Aurelius was back, Celeritus went to his father’s crypt, removed the dusty bones and wrapped them in his own gown of purple silk. He made a hasty offering to Jupiter, and begged forgiveness for what he was about to do. He also left a large bag of gold by the altar for the priests. Then he and Aurelius set fire to the bundle and blackened his father’s remains. They put the scorched robe and the bones in a box, and hid it under Celeritus’ royal bed.

Later that evening, when the household was asleep, a high, terrified scream was heard in the Emperor’s bedchamber. The servants rushed in, fearing an assassination attempt. They were astonished to find a pile of scorched bones lying on the tiles, and the still-smouldering purple robe.

‘Praise the gods,’ cried Aurelius, ‘our leader has been called up to Mount Olympus to sit with his peers. His soul was too pure. Oh, boo, hoo, hoo!’ he sobbed. ‘Oh, the bitterness of it all!’ He pulled his hair and shouted to the other servants: ‘Remember his love for all of those who were helpless! It must have impressed them up in

the clouds. Ahh...Great Jupiter has summoned him for an even greater honour! Perhaps he has now become the God of Horses!’ Aurelius had run out of tears, so he covered his face and said in a low, solemn, voice: ‘*Hic video veritatem.*’

Odia Volta gave him a sharp look, but didn’t move. Celeritus was hiding in the wardrobe with his hand clamped over his mouth and his heart pounding like Vulcan’s hammer. It was difficult to listen to the long-winded lamentations of Aurelius, because he also felt a strong urge to giggle and he had to pee. Aurelius was showing a tremendous gift for drama. Celeritus would have to reward him handsomely, that is, if they managed to get out of Rome alive. Aurelius, who was still having difficulty hiding his own merriment, threw himself against the Emperor’s wardrobe and pretended to faint. He leaned heavily against the door, to prevent anyone from discovering their deception. By now, the staff and Odia Volta were bored stiff, so they all decided to go back to their rooms and catch up on their lost sleep.

Celeritus and his slave slipped out of the villa and tiptoed through the courtyard to the stables. they covered the hooves of the stallions with soft cloth, hitched them to the chariot and were away before anyone knew.

Cynics assumed that Celeritus had abdicated his throne out of cowardice. Slaves believed the story of the Emperor’s ascent. And soon nearly everyone believed Celeritus was sitting on Mount Olympus with the gods. He was eating his sprouts and lark’s tongues in the company of a man who looked very much like Aurelius. Behind him stood the magnificent Arabian stallions, which had now grown wings and had fiery red eyes.



## **Quail's Eggs, Lark's Tongues and Brussels Sprouts**

### **Ingredients**

20 larks tongues

6 soft boiled quail's eggs

chopped spring onions, chives, or parsley to taste  
vinaigrette dressing

½ pound large steamed Brussels sprouts

thin slices of pancetta

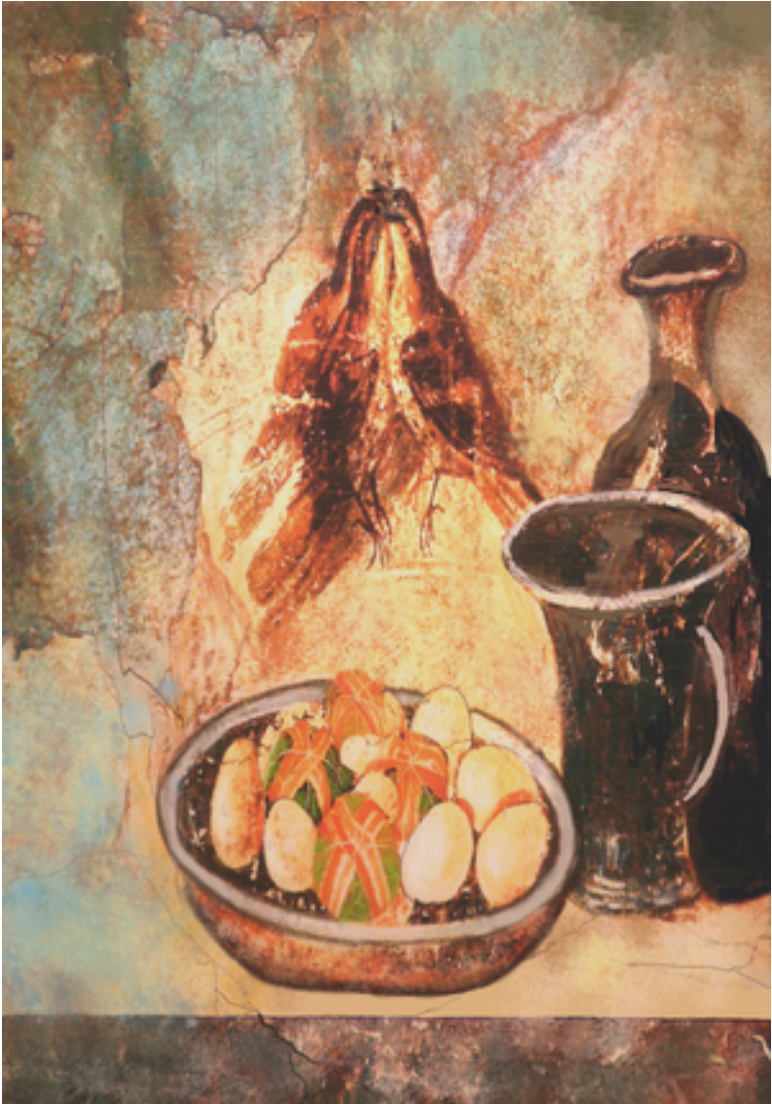
6 tablespoons of duck liver pâté

Tell your slave to boil the quail eggs for 4-5 minutes. Have him flogged if the eggs are too hard. He must steam the sprouts for 8 minutes until tender, then he has to scoop out the egg yolks without tearing the white part. He must fill the egg cavity with a small sprout, one lark's tongue and a small amount of liver pâté and put the other half of the egg on top of the sprout. Then he should wrap the egg, sprout, and pâté in pancetta, making sure the egg is covered with pancetta or it will burn. He must grill it until the pancetta is crisp. Command him to pour the dressing over the eggs, then beat him again.

### **Found on a Clay Tablet, approximately 60 BC.**

Where can you find lark's tongues or baby mice in sweet wine these days? Ye Gods, the state of Roman markets are really appalling! Today, I asked my slave to get a dozen quail eggs, some lark's tongues and a few slices of pancetta, and what did he say? with? He told me that the eggs were sold out and they were also out of lark's tongues. Naturally, I sold him the next day. It is glaringly obvious to anyone with eyes in their head that no one is paying attention to details, are they?

## An Emperor's Breakfast



## MEDAEVAL STAINED GLASS WINDOW

Edinburgh, Scotland

950? AD



## Arthur and the Song of Love

I was a liar when I was young. I tried to stop, but I just couldn't stay truthful for very long. Granny said that I was becoming just like my father and she swore she'd put an end to my lies in the same way as he'd been stopped. One night she made me sit by the fire and she tried to explain what truth meant and why it was so important not to lie.

'There's nothing wrong in telling a good story after dinner, but to tell a lie just to escape punishment, or to get out of your chores, or to make yourself bigger and grander than you really are, then that's the Devil's work. 'But Granny, it simply slips out of me sometimes, I can't help it.' I said. That *was* the truth.

'You have to stop right now, Willy. God doesn't take kindly to liars, and if you don't stop, I'll bring you to the Wise Woman in the Woods. If your father were here more often, he'd take you himself. I know he would, because when he was about your age and telling lots of lies, I took him to see her.

'What happened to him?' I asked, not really wanting to know.

'Oh, *she* put the fear of God into him and he never lied to me again. Of course, he still became a Scop, telling stories to anyone who will listen, and he still travels from town to town, but storytelling has become his work. We've had a good life because of his stories, haven't we? Now he knows the difference between a falsehood and the truth and he only lies in his wild tales. Don't you see the difference, Will? If you don't stop, your next lie, big or small, will force me to take you to the Wise Woman.'

‘I promise not to tell any more lies, Granny. Not even little ones. I’m awfully sorry. Don’t make me go! I’ll be good, you’ll see!’ I burst into tears and hid in the barn for the rest of the afternoon. I was good for a whole week, but on Monday morning, a small lie slipped out of my mouth before I could catch it. I don’t even remember what it was, but it made Granny so angry that her hands shook as she packed our little bag of provisions.

Her eyes were still fierce as she grabbed my hand and started up the path to the dark woods. This was no small undertaking. There were bears in the woods, boars, and wolves too. The woodsmen told us that they had seen a *manticore* just last Thursday, with seven rows of teeth and a craving for the blood of children who were stupid enough to play in the woods. Although none of us had ever seen the *manticore* eat anyone yet, we were all frightened that one of us would be next. Villagers went to the Wise Woman only as a last resort. We feared her more than the bloodthirsty beast with seven rows of teeth, because her reputation was more terrible than anything that lived or ate things in the forest.

‘You must know...’ said Granny, after we had been walking for about an hour. ‘You have to realise that the Wise Woman is powerfully ugly. The last time I saw her was when I took your lying father to her, as a last resort. ‘How ugly, Granny?’

‘Oh my boy, I’m afraid she’s a powerfully ugly woman. She’s rickety thin, with a pendulous lower lip and only one snaggly black tooth in her mouth.

‘What’s *pembulous*?’

‘Pendulous? It means hanging down. One of her eyes looks north and the other one looks south, so you never

know whether she's looking at you or not. She has a striped cat that is bigger than any cat I've ever seen, and his eyes are crooked too. He stares at people and says things to the Wise Woman in his own language. When I took your father, I was a lot braver. I told her that we, the God-fearing folks of this village, we use earthenware pots and iron cauldrons. We didn't have any glass bottles. I told her that none of us are rich enough to have glass bottles, and that we wanted to know how she paid for hers. When I finished shouting at her, she stayed silent and beckoned your father and me into her house.'

'What did she do?' I asked. Only half of me wanted to know what she had done to Father. I searched Gran's eyes for a glimmer of kindness, but her face was hard as granite and she didn't say any more about it. I was getting hungry and thirsty, and I wondered why my own sweet Granny had suddenly become so cruel-hearted. We finally came to a small clearing, so we sat on a rock to have a bit of lunch. I searched the trees for a sign of the *manticore*, and as I peered into the distance, I thought I could see a thin plume of smoke rising out of the forest. It scared me so much that it was hard to swallow my bread. I tried to wash it down with water, but it stuck in my throat and Gran had to thump me on the back until it went down. I didn't feel like eating. My knees were already beginning to feel weak and shaky.

'What did the witch say to you and Father?' I asked. Part of me was curious about what she had done to my poor old man, and the other was filled with awful thoughts about what was about to happen.

'That's for me to know and you to find out, boy,' replied Granny, quietly.

We put our food back into the bag and walked slowly into the darkest part of the woods. We kept our eyes open for danger. Even though it was the middle of summer, I felt cold. I could feel the eyes of creatures peering at me, and the dark, pointy fir trees seemed to reach out their limbs to snatch me up. Granny was silent and she held my hand tightly. Perhaps she was as scared as I was, but her face didn't show it. When we came to the Wise Woman's little house, my legs gave way and I couldn't walk, I couldn't breathe, nor could I shed a single tear over my mistakes. Granny dragged me to the witch's gate and shouted: 'Wise Woman, are you at home?' The door opened and a horrific old hag stuck her head out. A sooty raven perched on her shoulder.

'Who wants to know?' she asked. 'Who wakes me up while I'm taking my noonday rest?'

'It is I,' said Granny in a shaky voice. 'I am the mother of Martin the Scop, and I am the grandmother of this boy, William.' She shoved me through the gate so that the Wise Woman could get a better look at me.

'I remember Martin,' said the hag. 'What is wrong with this little one?'

'He's a liar like his father before him, and he will go to Hell, if he doesn't stop his wickedness!' said Gran, as she pushed me forward. Then she left me and rushed back behind the gate. I stood in front of the old witch and dared not look up at her.

'Ahh, hmmm, yes indeed, I see it in him,' said the witch. 'He is elf-shot, just like young Martin was, and his tongue has been bewitched by the little fellows. Elves possess the blood of the race of Cain, therefore they must be smitten out of this boy too, as you well know.'

‘Will he suffer much?’ asked Gran, grinning a little. ‘By the sacred bones of Saint Eloy, he shall know how to tell the truth when I get through with him, hee, hee! Leave him with me, and come to fetch him tomorrow. And when you return, you must pay me with two rabbits, a bag of flour, some good butter, and a basket of eggs.’ The Wise Woman wrenched my hand from the gate post, pulled me into her house, slammed the door behind her and stood in the yard, talking to Granny. I wished I could scream, but I could see them outside. Maybe she would tell Gran that she didn’t want me.

I couldn’t see much at first. A little fire was lit in the grate. As my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw many glass bottles, just like Gran said. They were filled with dried plants and cloudy potions. All of it smelled like something or someone had died in the room. The giant cat was still alive. He sat on his own little chair, staring at me with his crooked, yellow eyes. He opened his mouth to speak and I saw his pointed, front teeth. ‘Nowooo, Willy,’ he said. ‘Why, why do you tell lies?’ He arched his back and stretched out his long claws. He did it on purpose, to frighten me. I’d already started to cry before *she* came in. The raven was perched on her skinny shoulder, and I wondered how she could stand his claws digging into her bones.

‘Willy, oh Willy, why, why, do you lie?’ asked the raven. His eyes were also yellow and so were her eyes. ‘Answer him, William,’ she said, but I couldn’t think and I couldn’t stop looking at that one, rotting tooth poking out of her lip. I opened my mouth and no words came out. When I got my voice back, I told her I didn’t know. She had eyes that could look into a person’s soul.



I found myself thinking, What's so wrong about telling a little fib? Everybody lies sometimes...The tales I make up are more exciting than our boring little lives in our boring little village, maybe that's why I tell lies, but I knew that wasn't the whole truth. 'The stories you imagine are more exciting than your real life and you are too cowardly to admit that you haven't done your work. Isn't that right, William?' she asked, with a gentle voice.

I nodded, astonished that she could read my thoughts. Then she smiled sweetly at me and gave me some bitter tea sweetened with honey. She bound my hands with red string and there were tiny cabbages tied to the string. She muttered weird words above my head. I fell asleep and awoke the next day. The cat was sleeping on my chest, so I dared not move. I was still afraid he might chew my ears off. I tried not to think about the other horrors which would soon befall me.

It was at breakfast that she told me how to live the rest of my life. This time she didn't look at me when she spoke. She was gazing far into the flames and speaking to the raven. He was daintily eating a piece of bread and honey from a chipped, blue plate.

'Boris,' she said to him. 'I've looked into the fire for this boy's future, and the fire told me that if he is good, so will his life be. This boy will become a famous man, a poet and a singer of songs. He will meet a king and sing at his feet. The stomachs of the King's guests will be filled with delicacies and their minds and hearts will be filled with the sweetness of his songs and the power of his tales and riddles.' She pointed her bony finger straight at my heart. 'Your family will thank you for this, Now lad, promise me never to lie to your family again.'

She looked stern and I couldn't meet her crooked eyes, I wasn't sure which one of them was watching me closely.

'Promise her!' croaked the raven. 'Look up, boy! Look into her eyes!' I raised my head and saw she was smiling.

'Spit on your hand and give it to me boy, that will seal our bargain,' said the witch. She stretched out her long fingers. I spit, and we pressed our hands together. I could feel that she had spit on her bony hand, too.

'Go to the monastery,' she said, 'and listen to the holy men chanting their vespers. They will teach you how to sing. Do you hear me, William? Save your mind for the ancient sagas and riddles. Learn all of them by heart.'

'My mind felt clear again, and I envisioned myself singing for the King. Perhaps I *would* be a great Scop. Perhaps I'd learned my lesson, and I would never lie to anyone again. If I felt a lie coming, I would be still for a moment and wait for the truth to come back to me.

The years passed, some of them filled with hot tears, cold disappointment, and hardship. The other years sailed through their appointed days, like leaves in the wind.

I practised my storytelling with Father and I went to the cloister for a whole year. I began to sing with my father and we became so well loved for our stories and songs that we did not suffer the hunger winter as much as many of our neighbours. We shared everything we had with them.

One evening, a horseman knocked on our door with his staff. The snow had piled upon his head, so it looked as though he was wearing two hats. We bade him enter, took care of his horses, and gave him bread and Coleworte soup. He handed my mother a scroll wrapped in fine deerskin; a message from the King. It was a

summons for us to perform at The Royal Christmas Banquet. My mother's face turned white and she stared into the fire. What should she do? My father had been gone for a week and wasn't expected until Wednesday afternoon.

She read the decree again and again. 'You must answer me, woman! Where is your husband?' demanded the messenger. 'As you can see, I have brought two horses with me,' he said in a cold, haughty manner.' Granny looked at Mum who was heavy with child and she frowned at the old messenger. He was frail and severe, with a head like the dried skull of a bird. His neck was skinny and crooked. His back was bent, too.

'Take our William, sir,' she said. 'I can't say when his father will be back. He's old enough, nearly fourteen,' she said. 'And he's a much better singer than his father ever was. Sing Willy, tell him one of your riddles.'

'But what about our Mum?' I asked. 'The baby's coming any day now! How will you do without me?' Mum laughed and said: 'It's our special work, William. You're no good at birthing, last time you fainted dead away!' Granny shook her head and waggled her finger, saying, 'Tut, tut, tut, the very idea. He fainted again when the cow had her calf, last spring.'

'We'll start early tomorrow,' said the weary messenger. 'It is a two-day ride to Camelot, but it will allow me enough time to instruct you in The Royal Protocol.'

The man was as good as his word, and his words were as parched as dry meal. He drilled me on the fine points of how to behave in front of my betters. At first it was fascinating to hear about how people had to behave at the King's court, but after two days of hearing rules, he said:

‘You will be allowed to sit in the Grand Hall because your father has a great name. He is the most famous lyre player in England. You must wash your hands before eating, you must never eat anything that slips from your fingers, but you must quickly take it from the floor, bless it, and set it by your plate, later someone will collect the food and distribute it to the poor. At the end, you will be summoned by the blast of a horn, one single note, for otherwise it will bring storms upon us’...and on and on... and on... until I wished I could push him off his horse and ride the rest of the way in peace. I could already see the impenetrable earthen barricades, the high stone gate, and the roof of King Arthur’s palace. The frosty grass glistened like rock crystal in the last rays of the sun.

We, the King’s guests and performers, lingered long in the draughty corridors which led to the Great Hall. I was so nervous that I couldn’t speak to anyone. A Frenchman with a red moustache, sat next to me and he talked for both of us. He had strapped many baskets on his back and arms, and in these baskets were glass bottles of all sizes. I thought of the witch and felt a chill of fear. What if my voice left me? I kept on muttering the words to all the songs and heroic poems I’d learned, but it got all jumbled up. The Frenchman rattled happily on, and clapped me on the back. I didn’t understand a thing he was saying, but I smiled and nodded like an idiot.

Servants trotted to and fro, carrying linen tablecloths, beakers and plates. They arranged the long wooden tables and benches that would have accommodated everyone in our village and they scrubbed and polished the tables until they gleamed.

Everyone shooed me away whenever I tried to peek through the doorway. We were given 'beor' to drink. It tasted wondrously of apples and honey and it eased my fear a bit, but not nearly enough.

Finally, a single, strident trumpet note called to us to attention. The King and Queen entered first, heavy-footed in their brocaded robes. They were followed by the dignitaries, all the knights of the Round Table in their polished armour, then the courtly ladies in their fine gowns.

At the very end, I was shown to my seat at the feet of the King Arthur and Queen Gwenevere. The King looked down upon me and his eyes seemed faintly amused. Perhaps it was because I had taken my father's place. It made me remember what I had been summoned to do, and I was even more afraid than before. The great room was decorated with gold-woven tapestries of the freshest colours and the walls were decked with yew branches, holly, ivy, and rosemary. The amount of light and warmth given off by the fireplace and all the torches and candles warmed us as if it were a day in May. The guests were gladdened by wine and laughed at the jester's silly antics. We partook of the great boar which had been roasting all day and had driven us all wild with hunger. There were potages of winter vegetables, with a few of the witch's little cabbages floating in our bowls. When I saw the small cabbages, I glanced at the King and Queen. I wanted to see if they had crooked eyes, but they did not. We ate sweetmeats of dried fruit and nuts; a dark goose dripping with juice, more pretty fowls, and after that, a roasted ox, cut up and served on a long skewer. There was one for each table. Upon every table

were six tender chickens stuffed with grouse, and the grouse were stuffed with sparrows. There was a large pie of venison and winter apples. The Queen's pie, which was carried in on a trestle, was as big as a cartwheel. It was filled with a living surprise.

When Queen Gwenevere cut the first piece, four and twenty sweetly singing blackbirds rose to the ceiling, and we all let out an undignified cheer. If Her Majesty was startled, her enigmatic face did not show it. She clapped her hands and called for the Scop. Soon the whole room was clamouring for my father to sing, but when I stood up, they just laughed and called out for the real singer. They chanted; 'Scop! Scop! Scop! Tell us a riddle and sing us a song!' I didn't know what to do, but one of the courtiers pointed to the King. I approached the Royal Couple, bowed low to them just as the messenger had taught me to do, and then I turned and bowed deeply to the merry-makers.

'Your Majesties, and honoured guests,' I said in a weak voice, 'I will tell you a riddle. Whoever guesses correctly may choose the first song.' Derisive laughter and whistling rose up from the crowd. My knees would not stop shaking, no matter how fervently I prayed to God to give me courage. I took a deep breath and began to speak in a mewling voice: 'Hear ye, the riddle,' People started to point and stare as I recited it to Queen Gwenevere:

When I am alive, I do not speak.  
Those who love me, cut off my head.  
They bite into my bare body.  
I do no harm and yet they cut me.  
Then soon enough, I make them cry.

The crowd guessed many times but then the King whispered into his wife's ear. She raised her hand politely and said, 'Could it be an onion, little scop?' She smiled back at him.

'That is the correct answer, Your Majesty.' I mumbled, not daring to look upon her face.

'You will now please Us to sing: "The Enchanted Lovers," she said, gesturing elegantly with her little hand. The melody took over my soul. My song rang out as clear and cold as a waterfall of notes. I didn't recognise the power of my own voice, because it seemed to belong to someone else. Someone older and confident of his power to sing a good story. Perhaps I'd *become* the music. Was the old witch's prophecy coming true at last? I sang out:

I was undone, in love, and in distress,  
When your clear eyes saw mine, Mistress.  
They conquered mine, my Conqueress,  
By your good sense my heart is blest.  
Fair your figure and dear your face,  
White your hands, and full of grace.  
Quiet bearing; gentle pace.  
Love forms a dreamer, full and fair,  
I seek you in dreams and everywhere.'

King Arthur sat with his head in his hands and silver tears glistened in his eyes. Other people stood up and sang as I sang with them for as long as I was able to stand. The Frenchman showed the Queen all of his queerly shaped bottles and she was delighted with them.

At night's end she beckoned to me, and gave me a beautifully engraved and carved wooden box. 'Open it, child.' she said, raising one fair eyebrow. I bowed low and took the box in my trembling hands. There, lying on a satin cushion was a small lyre, and in a red velvet bag next to it, were four and twenty gold coins.

'Take it and be joyful.' she said. 'This is your quest. You have the gift to be a Scop like your father. You will come to me when you are old enough and you will study music with the good friars until then.'

My mouth fell open and stayed that way; I looked like our village idiot. There was no breath left in my lungs and I didn't know what to say. A Courtier kicked me in the backside and hissed: 'Say: *I humbly Thank you, Your Majesty...* you little fool!'

'I.I... Thank you, Your Majesty!' I stammered and then I fainted onto the rush-strewn floor. It felt as though there were clouds in my head and I thought I heard the Queen laugh for the first time. The King was laughing as well, so everyone had to laugh, though I'm sure many of them didn't know why. That night of songs, sagas and riddles changed our family forever.

When I was fifteen, I was sent to the Queen to learn manners and music. I did miss my family, and cried every night. I missed their laughter and the simple love they showed to each other. It was love without shame or guile. That sort of love was sadly lacking at King Arthur's court.

After a few years, I became the Royal Scop to the Court of King Arthur and Queen Gwenevere. The courtly protocol was mercilessly strict. Constant gossip and lies filled the mouths of the lords and ladies like a secret and



deadly serpent. Many reputations were lost in that realm of half-truths and envy. Their gossip mirrored the precise, calculated language of the courtiers, but it was friendlier, sweet on the tongue, and far more malignant. I hated it. And I never paid any attention to their tales. I was also never allowed to tell my family about what went on in the Royal Chambers. It would have cost me my head and their heads as well. After a year, the King finally took pity on me and I was allowed a few visits home, to be with my family and friends.

Since then, we've lived our separate lives as best we can. Many people in our village, envied me for becoming a Scop, and I envied and idealised their country ways, because nothing is *ever* what it seems at Court. Nothing the Noble Lords and Ladies promise, or insinuate, or even swear on the Holy Virgin, is to be taken at face value. Caution, silence, intrigue and scepticism are part of the price I've paid for my life with King Arthur and his Queen. Would I have chosen differently had I known what the Wise Woman really saw in the fire that morning? Would I have remained in my village to watch my parents grow old, to see my granny buried under our bending cherry tree, or to have been at the village fete when my little sister was married? The answer haunts me as much now as when I was a novice during my first years at court. I've finally convinced myself that the answer is 'no'. And has any mortal woman ever taken the place of my mistress, Music? The answer again is 'no.' I have always remained faithful to her. And she has, in her own fashion, remained equally true to me.

## **King Arthur's Colwortes, Fenkel and Soppes**

### **Ingredients**

½ pound of Brussels sprouts (colwortes)  
1 fennel bulb, cut into very thin strips  
1 small basket of wild mushrooms or a handful of dried mushrooms that have been soaked in hot wine for 1 hour  
4 onions cut in half and 2 medium onions thinly sliced  
2 cloves of finely chopped garlic  
1 teaspoon of grated fresh ginger  
1 ½ teaspoon of honey  
Some oil for frying  
½ teaspoon of the finest saffron  
1 cup of sweet wine or vermouth  
toasted whole wheat bread, in thick slices

Cut onions in half, put them in the hot oil and let both halves get brown on their cut side. Remove them and set aside. Put the finely sliced fennel in the pot with the sliced onions, fry them until the fennel is golden. Add the wine, spices, and water. Put the onion halves into the pot. Simmer the vegetables until they are tender and have absorbed the spices. Serve on thick trenchers of goodly toasted whole wheat bread, which has been baked in the oven until it is very stiff and hard. Eat right away, so the soppes do not get mushy and fall apart. When dining with the King, it is not polite to eat the bread, because this will be your plate. Do not burp or sneeze, and if there is a mouse in the pie, throw it under the table for the dogs. It is bad manners to call attention to a mouse in your food.

This recipe will serve 4 Courtiers or ten Serfs

## King Arthur's Feast



## ‘THE PRIORESS’

Unknown Artist. Coventry, England  
1312?



**Geoffery Chaucer's Prioress**  
From 'The Canterbury Tales'  
England, 1370-1412

A Semi-Serious Note from the Author

After forty years, I re-read Geoffery Chaucer's famous 'Canterbury Tales' and was surprised that I could understand most of the Middle English verses. This was because I had learned French, German, Dutch, and a few other languages. The more I read, the more I laughed. Chaucer wrote about a pilgrimage to a holy cathedral (Canterbury) and he may well have been one of the travellers. The sharply dispassionate and modern portraits of his fellow pilgrims seem to be written with a dirk, rather than a pen. What astonished me was a reference to Brussels sprouts ('Colewortes' in Middle-English) which is mentioned in 'The Prioress's Tale.' The Prioress is a dedicated fashionista. She believes she is sensitive to all God's creatures and is far more educated than the rest of the group because she can speak French very beautifully. None of her fantasies are true and that *makes* the story. The exact date of the first publication of 'Canterbury Tales' is not known, but many believe it was printed between 1330 and 1370. In my opinion, that's a long time to wait for a publisher to make up his mind, don't you think? On the following page, you will find a rare excerpt from Chaucer's 1412 edition. It clearly mentions Brussels sprouts in the text, referred to them as 'Colewortes', a common Middle-English, probably Anglo-Saxon word. They didn't seem to notice the difference between big cabbages and little ones.

## THE PRIORESS

There was also a none, a prioress,  
That of her smylinge was ful simple and coy,  
Hire gretteste oath was By Saint Loy,  
And she was yclept madame Eglantine,  
Ful weel soonge she the service dyvyne,  
Entuned in hire nose ful semely.  
And Frenssh she spoke ful faire and fetishlike,  
After the Scol of Stratford atte Bow,  
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.  
At mete wel ytaught was she with alle,  
She lete no morsel from hire lippe falle,  
And of Colwortes was she semely fond  
She let ne're one rol on the grond.  
Ne wette her fingers in sause depe,  
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,  
That ne drop fille upon hire brest.

### **Translation:**

There was also a nun, a prioress, whose smiling face was blessed and shy. The greatest oath she could utter was 'By Saint Eligius!' And she was called Madame Eglantine. She sang the divine service very well; sung acceptably through her nose. She spoke French in an affected tone, in the manner of the School of Stratford on Bow, because Parisian French was unknown to her. At mealtime she used good manners and never let a morsel fall from her lips. She was very fond of Brussels sprouts and never let them roll upon the ground, nor did she dip her fingers deeply into the sauce. So daintily did she eat that she didn't spill a drop upon her breast.

**‘THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS’**  
Hieronymus Bosch, s’Hertogenbosch, Holland  
1465



## Machteld's Lament

My Anneke,

First of all, it pains me that I haven't written in so many months. Our city guards are trying to protect us from a gang of renegade soldiers who are still with us after the last war. They go to other towns to pillage and rape, but they always return to take the last scraps. And they steal what they can, because they were never paid for going to war. And like us, they are perishing with hunger. It is difficult to send any letters to you, I hope you are well.

As you know, my son Jeroen just turned thirteen when the fire broke out in our city a month ago. Since then, he is so strange and silent. The boy has terrible dreams at night, dreams of Hell's demons and even of the Devil. It is as if he has taken his own happiness, folded it neatly, and put it into a part of his mind's cupboard. I have always believed that there are as many ways to interpret the world as there are people, and I have learned to accept Jeroen's strange ways, but after the fire, he is much worse, and we have become even stricter churchgoers than our neighbours. Fear makes us careful not to stray from the narrow path. I cannot say why the fire spared my family, but I thank God every day. Last Sunday, our priest proclaimed in a fiery sermon that the burning houses, the smoke, and the wailing of those who had lost everything was the will of God. He said that this was a sign of what would befall us again if we didn't mend our sinful lives. In his vision, that fire was paradise compared to the reality of Hell. Whether we have been saints or sinners in God's eyes, everyone has been sorely



tested in these turbulent years. One can never quite manage to be as good as one wants to be. As you well know, God is watching us all the time. And he is seldom pleased with what he sees. Perhaps it is the legacy of the war. Everyone here is still afraid that more soldiers will come and take what little is left. You, me, and our fathers before us have lived our entire lives at war. Remember the endless battles between the French and the English which took place in our fields and woods? And the Black Death which came to our neighbours last winter? The French and the English stopped fighting before Anthonis and I were married, but why they started fighting, I will never know. Perhaps they didn't know either. We have borne the memories of what we have seen in the same way as many other families have done, by not complaining and hoping that things will get better tomorrow. It has forced us to define the borders of our lives. Some of us choose to dwell only in the present time, and others, like me, take comfort in the small things that happen with the changing seasons; snow on the corn fields, or a tiny blue flower peeking out of the grass.

We are making a good living from Anthonis's landscapes and portraits. All the boys have become painters; even our youngest boy Goossens, has sold a few panels in the market. We live in a stone house now. Jeroen is eager to learn all that his father can teach him. He's become very good at drawing. In fact, he can already do something his father can't and that is to draw what he is thinking or what he has dreamt. And it all looks so realistic. He often frightens the other children by telling them evil stories and making them gather strange objects for him like dead birds and broken butterflies.

He mixes all these horrible things together to create his paintings. It terrifies my little girls. Yesterday he took a perfectly good egg, blew it out, put butterfly's wings on it, gave it a head of a dead mole, and made it some spectacles out of picture wire. Then he set it on the table where he could see it and he painted it on a wooden panel. It was so skilfully rendered that the ungodly thing seemed to come to life, as if it had simply been hiding behind the kitchen door all this time. Our priest, Father Buxtehude, says that my boy's drawings of monsters and his paintings of Hell will change in due time. He will grow calmer as he gets older, and then our priest is sure the boy will decide to paint good, Christian landscapes instead of these monsters. But truth be told, Anneke, I am not so sure. I despair that he will never be right in his poor head. Please write to me as soon as you can, as I would like your advice on this. The poor boy's imagination seems to be growing more extreme and frightening every day. You know him as well as I do, and I am also convinced that, because you don't live with him every day, you will be able to see him with different eyes and perhaps you might tell me what to do with my boy?

From your loving sister,

Machteld van Aachen-Bosch

LEONARDO da VINCI  
From the Wensleydale Codex  
Wensleydale Castle, England  
1508-1510



## Leonardo's Invisible Invention

My name is Dr. Trudy Matterhorn. I am an historian and also an expert on Italian Renaissance manuscripts. My two colleagues, Dr. Gwendolyn Tanner, who is our parchment specialist, and Dr. Barbara Gulleys, her assistant, are dedicated, historical scientists, nothing more and nothing less. Two years ago, we were sent three mysterious pieces of parchment which had been folded into the pages of a children's book. The pages were in remarkably good shape, considering their age. After carefully preserving and photographing the parchment, we are now convinced that these precious pages are the authentic missing pieces of Leonardo da Vinci's *Wensleydale Codex*.

This notebook, which was probably written and illustrated between 1508 and 1510 in Florence, is filled with drawings of nature, odd-looking machines, a flying saucer, philosophical musings about the creation of the planets and the sun, and observations about nature in general. There is one hastily scribbled note about the beginning of '*everything*'. What could he mean by that? Leonardo does not use any description other than the word *tutti*, when he describes 'The Beginning of Everything', and the word is always underlined. As the reader is most likely aware, *tutti* is the Italian word for *everything*. Also included in his description are rows and rows of complicated mathematical formulae about strings, speed and time. We can't decipher any of it.

What made Leonardo one of the greatest geniuses of all time? The answer to this is as complicated as his own mind. He was curious about everything and he was

blessed with a photographic brain which could record what he saw, without iconic or formulaic prejudice. This curiosity, and his reliance upon his five senses as well as his ability to describe his findings in his notes, enabled him see the world with new eyes. He refused to accept a fixed reality as his elders believed it to be, and his curiosity encouraged him to rediscover this reality with each new day. He often referred to himself as a ‘disciple of experience’. Some say that he never took the word ‘yes’ for an answer, but continued to question everything around him, until he died.

After four months of painstaking research at Wensleydale Castle in England, we would like to officially declare that the three newly discovered parchment pages are indeed the last pages of the missing part of the original Wensleydale Codex.

The first of the missing pages (page 39?) is nearly blank, with a barely legible number at the bottom right-hand corner of the parchment. This page seems to be stained with spilled red wine, or possibly red oil paint. After scrutiny of the number, which resulted in some passionate disagreements between our members of staff, we all took a vote and declared it to be the number 38. The number, (as you can see in the illustration below) was nearly impossible to decipher.



Page 38 or possibly 39 does have drawings (see the large illustration with the war horse) which appear to illustrate a visual joke by suggesting the linguistic similarity between the words 'cavalino', which, when translated from the Italian, means a small horse (see middle of page) and 'cavolino' which means a little cabbage or sprout. There is also a passage which reveals da Vinci's hypothesis about the world being a unified, living organism. We also believe that we have found significant proof that Leonardo designed a spherical, flying object that looks like two pie pans, one on top of the other. He must have kept this information secret, because these theories would certainly have been considered heresy in the eyes of the Church. Had these pages fallen into the hands of the authorities, it would have meant his death. A well-rendered Brussels sprout plant can be seen above the horse's back. At the upper middle of the page, as well as the upper left hand side, one can see two angels with little cabbages tucked into their sashes. The deeper symbolic significance of these references to the Brussels sprout is yet to be fully understood. We know that Leonardo was a passionate cook, a confirmed vegetarian, and that he often complained that he abhorred the scent of roasting meat. We believe that the obvious presence of Brussels sprouts in his work may symbolise man's difficulty in dealing with the human condition, or perhaps it is a symbol of one carrying the cares of the world on one's back. Some scholars suggest that the cabbage or sprout motif could be a metaphor for man's accumulation of knowledge, because of the Brussels sprout's similarity in shape to the

human brain. We are inclined to agree with this last hypothesis.

In the middle of page 39 there is a nearly invisible line of text, written in his usual mirror script, which, for the sake of clarity, we have turned around so that it is legible. It says: *‘O Dio, ho dimenticato la formula per far riapparire l’inchiostro invisibile!’*

When we held a mirror to the sentence, we could understand the words. This last passage has been roughly translated from the Italian to English, and it reads: *‘Oh God, I cannot remember the formula to make this invisible ink reappear.’* Therefore, it is plausible to postulate that Leonardo was working on a way to send invisible, espionage messages. On page 39, or as one of us still stubbornly claims, page 38, many attempts were made to examine the surface of the page under the microscope, and we used sophisticated X-ray and scanning techniques as well. Our team could decipher little evidence of a written formula for the invisible ink used on the page, except that it seemed to be a lighter, but absolutely exact copy of the previous page, 38. We believe that this was one of his first attempts in perfecting a formula for this type of ink. See the full-sized page of faded images on the following page.



Page 38 of the Codex. Because of its lack of any sharp detail, we must assume that Leonardo succeeded in inventing an efficient invisible ink.



## Tagliatelli or Tortellini with Brussels Sprouts

### Ingredients

2 tablespoons of virgin olive oil  
1 bag of Brussels sprouts  
2 medium onions and 2 cloves of garlic chopped  
2 cups of finely grated Parmesan cheese  
1½ teaspoons of dried oregano  
1 handful of fresh basil  
a pinch of dried red pepper flakes  
a pinch of crushed fennel seeds  
fresh tagliatelli or fresh tortellini for two people  
1 cup of dry white wine  
salt and pepper to taste

Sauté the chopped onions in olive oil, (find the best tasting oil.) Put a large pot of water on the heat and add salt to it. Pasta without salt is like a beautiful woman without an admirer. The onions should be delicately fried until they are lightly brown. Add the chopped garlic and let it turn golden. Be careful not to burn it, because burnt garlic is bitter and will ruin the dish. Add the oregano, red pepper flakes, crushed fennel seeds, as well as the white wine. Cook on high heat until the wine is reduced by half. Add the halved sprouts and let them cook until they are just tender. Boil the fresh pasta in water until it is *'al dente'* or until the pasta rises to the surface. Drain, mix with the vegetables, and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and fresh basil leaves.

Have a couple of bonbons, ripe figs, and a glass of cognac for dessert. This recipe serves two people in love, or one vegetarian genius.

## Leonardo's Candlelight Supper



DIETRICH DATTENS von DATTENSDORF

Possibly by a student of Albrecht Dürer, oil on oak panel  
Düsseldorf, Germany

1520



## The Seer's Unforeseen Retreat

Most Europeans were illiterate when Gutenberg's printing press began to change the way we see the world, but more and more of them were learning how to read. If you couldn't afford to buy the new books, which were terribly expensive, there were boldly illustrated pamphlets and tracts of all descriptions rolling off the presses. Very much like the rise of newspapers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and frighteningly like the internet of this century, the truth in these tracts was more often than not, absent without leave. This omission didn't seem to bother the new readers too much and they rarely questioned the verity of what they saw in print. Bertrand Russell said: 'The swift propagation of witch hysteria by the press was the first evidence that Gutenberg had not liberated man from original sin.' Far from it, the good citizens of Düsseldorf managed to get their hands on an excerpt from the sensational new treatise on witchcraft '*The Malleus Maleficarum*' or 'The Witches Hammer'. The treatise made everyone nervous, especially women. People became suspicious of their neighbours, their wives and sisters, and even more afraid of odd-looking strangers. It also made them wary of scholars and people who pretended to know the future.

One must admit that Puelo the Muse looked a bit odd. He wasn't built like a goat, not exactly. He was a pale shade of blue, had horns and dainty, cloven hooves on his back legs. He had large brown eyes which looked quite goatish, but he had delicate arms and hands which he held out in front of him like a dinosaur. He usually preferred hopping to walking. Puelo was diplomatic,

well-spoken and an avid reader of Gutenberg's new pamphlets; not so much for their educative content, but more for their inflammatory text and vivid woodcuts. Puelo begged his master to buy him the newest scandals hot off the press, and he tried to convince him that it helped him to understand the depths of the human soul.

Heini Dittens, Puelo's reluctant master, was a pale young man who liked to dabble in magic and prophecies, rather than study for his exams. Puelo appeared to him one night after Heini's only successful attempt to summon up a spirit. He'd asked for a beautiful, willowy damsel with brown eyes and he fully expected a woman to appear. Despite his preliminary shock, he allowed the creature to stay with him. They both suffered the shame of Heini's failure to finish his degree in medicine at the University of Heidelberg, and they both returned home. Puelo felt it was necessary to change his master's name into something a little more aristocratic. An important-sounding name might be just the thing to convince the townspeople that this timid, pimply, bumbling, boy was a professor, or at least an impressive seer. Heini's new name was 'Dietrich Dattens von Dattensdorf, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Astrology and of Divination'.

'Now doesn't that sound better, Heini ...umm, I mean Dietrich?' asked Puelo, sarcastically.

'It's a bit long,' said his master, picking his teeth. 'It'll take time to get used to it.'

'We have little time left *dummkopf*. Our money is gone. Your father is late with your allowance, so now you must go to work!' replied the Muse with an elegant gesture. 'If you hadn't whined for all those pamphlets, we would have had more than enough to live on. Where will it end?'

I'm penniless, Puelo! It's entirely your fault and you don't care!' said Heini, bursting into tears.

'Never shall it end, I hope,' said the blue one. 'I'll help you with the new astrology charts, but at the end of next week, you'll have to give a lecture on the power of the stars and their influence on our daily lives. You will also make a few prophecies. We'll hold the lecture in the town square; I already received confirmation of the date.'

'Isn't there some way you could do it? You know, without me?' said Heini.

'It's impossible! We'd both be burned as witches if anyone knocks my magic hat off and sees me for what I really am. I'll help you when the time comes, I promise! Now, start learning that lecture for next Thursday or I'll have to punish you.'

Suddenly, they heard a loud pounding at the front door. '*Um Himmels Willen*, it's my dreadful Auntie Gerhilda!' whispered Heini. 'Puelo, where is your Tiny Hat of Indifference? Put it on! Put it on! She's already at the door, pounding and pounding as if she wants to break it down! *Donnerwetter!* What are we going to do? Don't let her see you!'

The Tiny Hat of Indifference didn't make one invisible, but once put on, another person looking at the wearer would be oblivious to what he saw and he'd go on with his life without remembering the encounter. This dreamlike state could last several hours, but the memory of the encounter would usually return after a while, and confuse the poor fellow who had seen you in the hat.

Puelo put his magical hat on, tiptoed out of the room and crept into Heini's four-poster bed, silently drawing the filthy comforter over his head.

‘I smell mice!’ said Heini’s aunt when she was finally allowed into the front room.

‘Really, Auntie, I’ll summon the rat catcher right away. He’s just come in from Hamelin, I hear he’s very good. Would you like a cup of tea, perhaps a bit of cake?’ he asked, with a note of desperation creeping into his voice. Heini was hoping that she would refuse, because he only had a small chunk of mouldy bread in the cupboard.

‘No time, no time, can’t you see I’m a busy woman? Don’t try to change the subject! I know what you’re like! Tell me, why do you always have the curtains drawn in the bedchamber? You should turn back the bedcovers every day. That’s the German way, *Ordnung und Sauberkeit*. You must hang the counterpane out of the window twice a week, or the mice will come for sure. Ahh, what’s the use? You never listen to your old Auntie. I’ve brought your monthly allowance, and while I’m on the subject, why don’t you find a real job? You could resume your place in your father’s law firm, nothing important mind you, but you could be his scribe or something insignificant like that. Give it some thought, Heini. I’m sure he’d take you back if you begged him. He’s furious about how you changed your name. Well, I must be off,’ she said. She never allowed anyone to interrupt her sermons. Auntie, who was shaped like a church bell, always wore four skirts on top of each other, and as many petticoats. She lifted up the heavy, woollen outer skirt and pulled out a small velvet purse on a cord. Heini smiled sweetly and kissed her wrinkled cheek. The old woman poured out the contents of the purse onto the table by the hearth, and walked to the front door with loud, staccato steps.

As soon as he saw her disappear around the corner, he began to mumble under his breath: ‘Of course Auntie, I’ll think about it, Auntie, I promise! My Auntie’s a busy woman? More like a busybody to me, messing in everyone else’s business. I tell you, Puelo, all the money in the world isn’t enough to make me go back! Auntie can say whatever she likes, but I’m not going to work for that evil, selfish man ever again, even if he is my father.’

The week passed too quickly for the young seer, and Thursday, which a week ago seemed a long way off, finally became the day of reckoning. Heini was as prepared as he ever would be. Just between you, me, and Puelo, he was definitely not ready to address the public. Puelo decided to coach Heini from the crowd, if he had trouble remembering his lines. ‘Give them a few juicy prophecies! Something disastrous,’ he shouted from the first row of the gathering crowd. Heini, in the guise of Dr. Dietrich Dattens von Dattensdorf stood on a hastily built dais, wearing his lace ruff and a shabby, black robe. His knees were knocking and he began to sweat.

‘I p-p-predict,’ he began, ‘tha-that on the fuh-fuh-fuh, fourteenth day of this muh, muh month, ...uh... of October...uh.. we will be plagued by frogs...a great fog of frogs... and these frogs will fall from the sky to the ground at a 45 degree angle. There will be much rain to follow the frogs, and hail, which will cut down the crops. The hailstones will be as big as duck eggs, and violet.’

‘Booo! *Unsinn und drek!* Nonsense! It’s too cold for frogs, young man, they’re asleep!’ roared a burly farmer with a dangerously shiny pitchfork. The crowd jeered and Heini covered his eyes. ‘It’s starting out wrong! Help me, Puelo! Save me!’ The wretched boy had tears in his eyes.



‘You’re being too specific, Heini!’ shouted Puelo. ‘Be obscure! No more natural disasters. They don’t like it. Tell them something positive’. No one noticed the blue creature in the front row, except his poor master. Heini forgot his lines and his chin was trembling as much as his knees. ‘Umm...Ermmm...All of your wives and daughters will have lots of babies this year and uh...’ He frantically searched his brain for something intelligent. ‘And...uhh... it will be a very good harvest too!’

‘*Ach zooo, Professor Hanswurst!*’ cried a burly farmer. ‘Are you a warlock by any chance? We know how to handle witches in Düsseldorf! Here is your hail! *Und* here are the babies!’ said the big man, as he picked up a handful of Brussels sprouts and lobbed them at the Great Seer’s wobbly head.

The crowd was well aware of Heini’s weakness and they began to shout: ‘Witch! Witch! Throw him in the water and see if he swims! Burn the Witch!’ After the sprouts hit Heini, some overripe tomatoes landed on his robe. Then there was a fusillade of carrots, more tomatoes, more cabbage, a few old fish, some honeycomb and a ripped-open feather pillow, which made our seer look like a frightened chicken.

Puelo’s hat was knocked off in all the confusion, and as he bent down to pick it up, a little girl saw him and began to scream. She pointed at Puelo and pulled her mother’s many skirts. ‘Look, Mum! There’s another witch, a real one!’ she cried! ‘There’s a blue goat-witch standing next to me! Please, pick me up, I’m afraid of him!’

By the time her mother looked down, she didn’t notice anything unusual, because Puelo had found his hat and put it back on. He disappeared behind a hay wagon and

began an incantation of duplication by tapping his Tiny Hat of Indifference and whispering the magic words: ‘*Verandis petasus indifferens, fio duo!*’ And while the crowd was still buzzing, Puelo calmly walked up to the podium and gave the duplicated hat to Heini. The townspeople glared at the seer, shook their heads in confusion and began to chat with each other as if nothing had happened. If one could read their minds, their thoughts might be summed up in a few words, and those words were: ‘Hey? Did something happen? Oh I’m hungry let’s have some lunch. whoa, I feel sleepy, what happened? Huh?’

Puelo and Heini managed to blend into the crowd. They made their way home without being discovered, but like all stories, there is a twist in the tail. You must remember, The Tiny Hat of Indifference could induce a strong feeling of forgetfulness, apathy, hunger, or even make an angry crowd feel peaceful, but it only lasted for an hour or two. After a while, people came to their senses and remembered Heini’s horrible prophecies. They wanted revenge. Gathering up their pitchforks, their bludgeons and torches, they marched to Heini’s house, where they took out their anger by battering down his front door. The butcher and the baker, who were the strongest and bravest men in town, went in first. Heini’s house smelled of freshly boiled sprouts and sausages. There was a cauldron of soup still simmering on the fire, and the table was laid for supper.

‘I’ll climb to the loft and see if those witches are hiding up there,’ said the baker.

‘Let me do it, Wilhelm, you’re too fat to get up the ladder and you can’t squeeze through that narrow, little

opening,’ said Hans, the butcher. He was a tall, stringy man with strong arms and hands as red and glistening as the flesh he hacked. ‘Go ahead, I won’t stop you,’ said Wilhelm, relieved that he didn’t have to confront any witches.

Heini and Puelo were still in the attic. They hurriedly shoved their meagre belongings into a sack and fastened their Tiny Hats of Indifference tightly to their heads, so they wouldn’t blow off. The ‘warlocks’ were pushing their sack out of the window when Heini saw the butcher’s angry, bald head appear in the loft opening.

‘Never mind him,’ whispered Puelo. ‘He won’t notice anything, unless we slap him really hard on his big nose.’

‘But he’s so close, I can smell his breath. Are you sure he won’t do anything?’ asked Heini. ‘Can he smell us, too? Can he?’

‘Heini,’ said Puelo, ‘how many times do I have to explain this. He sees us, but he doesn’t care. He’s walking around in his own ignorant dream. That’s the power of the Hat. Now let’s go!’

Puelo and Heini climbed out of the window and teetered over the tiled roofs of Düsseldorf until they were safely away from the mob. Then they calmly walked into an inn, took enough provisions to last them a week or two, and they set a small bag of money on the innkeeper’s table. It was more than enough for the food. In fact, it was enough gold to keep a man happy and fed for a week. No one noticed anything at all, and the innkeeper was quite willing to keep someone’s ‘lost purse’ for himself.

After a short while, lurid pamphlets and posters were handed out, all over the city and suburbs of Düsseldorf.

Dire warnings were sent to neighbouring towns, lurid details about the powers of the dangerous professor and his magical, blue companion were discussed in the streets. People started to look over their shoulders if they had to go out. Everyone bought a talisman or a secret potion against witches. The description of ‘The Terrible Dr. Dattensdorf also know as ‘The Seer’ was ridiculous. It described him as a ferocious-looking giant with red-glowing eyes, a long black beard, as well as a moustache. He was carrying a large club in one hand and a book of magic in the other. The drawing of Puelo, who really *was* a magical creature, was also completely wrong. It made him look like a naughty rabbit. The good citizens of Düsseldorf never saw the seer or the blue goat-witch-seer again. There might have been a tiny possibility that Heini and Puelo were living right in their midst, but the people never admitted that they saw them. Not one word was written about them, because no one really paid any attention, did they?

## **Heini and Puelo's Favourite Sprout and Sausage Soup**

### **Ingredients**

1 bag of Brussels sprouts (600 to 800 grams), steamed for 7 to 8 minutes  
4 plain German sausages (bratwurst or other large ones)  
2 glasses of Riesling  
1 tablespoon of butter  
2 cups of roughly chopped leeks  
1 litre of chicken or vegetable stock  
1 roughly chopped medium cabbage  
1 medium can peeled chopped tomatoes  
3 cloves of garlic  
1 sprig of dill weed,  
1 handful fresh basil leaves,  
salt and pepper to taste

Boil the sprouts in half a glass of Riesling and water for 8 minutes, put them in cold water to preserve their colour. Sauté sliced sausages in a bit of butter until brown. Pour away most of the fat from the sausages; add the garlic, the chopped leeks, and another glass of Riesling, the chicken stock, tomatoes, and the coarsely chopped cabbage. Simmer for 10 to 15 minutes or until the cabbage is tender. Add the steamed sprouts and continue to cook for a minute more. Add the fresh dill at the very end. Let it simmer uncovered for another minute. Serve with boiled new potatoes, good Dutch or German cheese, and a bit of mustard. Drink the remaining glass of Riesling. Pour yourself another one. You deserve it, you know. You really do.

This serves four as a starter or two fugitives on the run.

## Heini and Puelo's Sprout and Sausage Soup



SYMBOLIC STILL LIFE WITH PEAR  
Han Deley, Dutch master, oil on wooden panel  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
1630 AD



## The Dutch Solar System

‘Can you paint all of our planets, Earth, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Mercury, Jupiter? Why don’t you put them in the background of my official portrait and don’t forget to use symbolic vegetables to represent my Vegetable Enterprise Company,’ said the stranger, whose nose looked remarkably like a ripe turnip.

Han Delety sighed. He’d had some rather difficult requests for paintings in his short career, but this one was the most unreasonable. His mind went blank and he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. Would he be allowed to paint the truth as he saw it? Did Merchant Aloys De Vries actually realise how ugly he was? Would De Vries pay him after he saw his portrait? Even a cleaned-up version of *Mijnheer* De Vries’ face would frighten the rest of his clientele. Han had to think quickly. Any attempt to paint ‘old turnip-nose’ might ruin his career before it actually got started.

‘Why don’t I paint a small still life of a cabbage and all that, to represent your wealth and Christian piety? A portrait of you, with the greatest respect *Mijnheer* would be frowned upon by the Church. The elders might consider it to be a sign of great vanity. But a deeply symbolic painting suggesting the inevitable decay of earthly forms, framed by a properly dignified classical setting, let’s say an ancient Roman niche? That wouldn’t cause any offence. How does that sound? The church elders would approve. We could use all kinds of cabbages and a cucumber if you like. Brussels sprouts could represent the planets,’ he said carefully. ‘And wouldn’t the butterfly symbolise the grace of God?’



Hazelnuts are a well-known symbol of frugality. The apple represents the temptation of Eve, and the pear could be an allusion to your dear wife's proven fertility. You do have five living children and that is a miracle in itself. Would you like a skull on a pedestal? It will help you meditate on the fleeting nature of time and remind you that the world is nothing but vanity, vanity.'

'Oh no, not a skull, my wife wouldn't allow it!' cried the turnip man. 'I like the idea of cabbages - it will show our gratitude for God's abundance, but I don't want any flies or worms on them like I've seen in some of your other paintings. I want something that will show my neighbours how much we are worth, without seeming to boast about it. Yes, I want a sober painting with lots of secret messages. When can you finish it?'

'If you could allow me a small advance on the final price, I could buy my oil and canvas, and grind the colours this very day, *Mijnheer*.'

The turnip man's eyes turned even smaller and greedier. 'Now, about the price of the finished painting, it would depend on how big it was, wouldn't it? I want a little one; no sense in paying too much for a piece of art.'

'Of course, *Mijnheer*, but one has to consider the time involved in painting it, and the complexity of the symbolic images. Shall we say twenty guilders for the wood panel and my materials, and another forty guilders for the finished work? It's the going rate for small paintings,' said Han Delety, holding his breath. It was an extraordinary sum of money in those days.

'Eighty guilders?' spluttered the outraged merchant. 'Are you mad? Isn't that rather a lot for a small painting

of a cabbage, an apple, a pear, some sprouts on strings, some hazelnuts and a small pickle?’

‘With all due respect, sir, you are paying for all my hard work and my years of experience as a still-life painter, as well as my extensive knowledge of the proper holy symbolism,’ said Han, secretly crossing his fingers behind his back.

‘What about my portrait? If I buy the still life, do I get a discount on that, at least?’ asked the merchant.

‘Oh, I would love to do it for you, but honestly, there are two very famous painters who specialise in prosperous merchants and dignitaries of your class. There’s Rembrandt of course, but he doesn’t have enough finesse, and his backgrounds are much too dark. But Frans Hals, well now, he’s the only one I know who could paint your face with exactly the right amount of dignity it deserves.’

‘Do you really think he would do it?’ asked the turnip man. He adjusted his hair and smiled proudly into the small, convex mirror in Han Delety’s reception room.

‘I can assure you, there’s no other genius who could capture your unique qualities on canvas as well as he can! The artist lives in a little village close to Haarlem. Haven’t you heard of him, sir? He is getting a wonderful reputation as a portrait painter.’

‘Who hasn’t heard of Frans Hals? Everyone in Amsterdam knows his name!’ The merchant crossed his fingers behind his back as well. His nose turned even more purplish because he told a lie. Then he ostentatiously poured twenty guilders out of his velvet purse and let them fall one by one, upon the table. ‘I will be visiting every week to check on the progress,’ he said.

‘I’ve got no problem with that,’ replied the artist, fervently hoping the opposite.

‘Then we have a deal!’ said the merchant. He clamped his hand on Han Delety’s delicate fingers and squeezed them so hard the artist’s eyes began to water.

Mijnheer De Vries did come to the atelier, as often as twice a week, and he made a nuisance of himself by trying to change the composition and arguing about the symbolism of cabbages, or the meaning of sprouts and apples. At the last minute, he insisted upon changing the colours to match his new Persian rug. Eventually, he paid the rest of the artist’s fee and rubbed his hands, delighted at his great bargaining skills for the price of an original Delety painting. And what a beautiful addition to his home! How jealous his colleagues would be when they saw it hanging in the parlour.

When Merchant De Vries wasn’t at home, his long-suffering wife covered the little painting with a golden silk cloth. She despised it, nearly as much as she despised her fat husband’s incessant bragging to his guests about how much he had cheated the poor little artist out of his fee. It made her seethe when he kept explaining to them that she was the pear, a fine ripe pear of womanly fecundity, the loving mother hen to his brood of healthy, chubby-faced children.

‘One of these days,’ she whispered to herself, ‘I’ll wait until he is fast asleep, then I’ll get my sewing scissors and remove his fine ripe pair.’

‘Your wife is looking particularly serene tonight,’ remarked a portly man, who had made a fortune in the Indonesian Colonies by importing nutmeg. He was sitting

next to Merchant De Vries at one of his interminably long dinner parties.

De Vries turned to his wife and asked, ‘Will you say something, dear? No?’ She made a little wiping gesture with her napkin to let him know that his moustache was still dripping with chicken fat. He didn’t wait for her to answer and he resumed his conversation with the nutmeg merchant. ‘My lovely wife has so much to be grateful for!’ he replied, as he tore another tender leg from the roasted chicken in front of him, and popped most of it into his mouth. The juice ran over his chins and stained the damask tablecloth.

His wife smiled sweetly at him and delicately pushed her plate away. She folded her hands demurely in her lap. No one noticed how her two slender fingers were making the sign of her embroidery scissors. The fingers moved silently:

Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Snip!  
Etc.

## Koopmansballen (Merchant's Balls)

### Ingredients

300 grams minced beef or lamb

3 eggs

2 cups or more of fine dried bread crumbs

A bag (7 to 8 hundred grams) of Brussels sprouts, steamed for 8 minutes

1 large onion, roughly chopped

2 small cloves of garlic, finely chopped

2 teaspoons of dried thyme, salt and pepper to taste,

1 glass of white wine

Add ½ cup of breadcrumbs, salt, pepper, the chopped onion, and a clove of garlic which have been lightly fried, but not browned. Add one egg and the tomato puree to the lamb or beef and mix well. Add more crumbs until it has the texture of meatloaf. Wrap a thin layer of this mixture around each steamed Brussels sprout to make a round ball. Roll each ball in beaten egg and then in bread crumbs. Put balls in the refrigerator for 15 minutes to firm them up. Repeat the process with the egg and the crumbs. Fry your balls in oil until golden and the meat is cooked through. You can make sure that they are done, by pricking them. If they are done in the middle, the toothpick will feel quite warm.

Make a tomato sauce with a can of chopped tomatoes, a glass of wine, a bit of garlic and onions, some thyme, and lightly season it with salt and pepper.

This serves three starving artists, but don't let them to draw on the tablecloth after they eat.

**Han Deley's Merchant's Balls (Koopmansballen)**



SASKIA

Rembrandt van Rijn\* silverpoint on coloured paper.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

1634



\*Well, not exactly by Rembrandt...

## Saskia's Awakening

Saskia awoke with an unexpected sensation. It was a fluttering, butterfly-like feeling in her abdomen. On this sunny second day of spring, she felt a baby dancing in her womb. It was not a kick, but a soft kiss, barely perceptible, like the movement of air over a bird's wing. She knew then that she was with child and she was afraid. She got up and sat in a chair by the window. A beam of light streamed through an opening in the curtains, with an intensity that was almost too much to bear. It promised to be the first bright day in more than a month of rain. She could hear birds singing in their nests and she saw the flat, beige seeds of the Dutch elm trees, falling like swirling snow. The swirling seeds gathered in all of the corners of the streets. Children picked up handfuls of them and threw them at each other. Early shoppers chattered as they made their way to the market. The clattering sound of the servant girls' wooden clogs sounded like ponies trotting on the cobbled pavement. Saskia shook her sleeping husband. She pulled the bed clothes off of him and tickled his feet.

'Remy, wake up! How did it go at the dinner last night? Wake up, I have to tell you something.' she said. Then she threw open the heavily carved doors to their bedstede which was a two-person, boxed-in bed. The mattress was much shorter than the ones we have today, because in 17th century Holland, everyone believed that your soul could fly out of your body if you lay on your back and snored. Most people slept in a sitting position so that they wouldn't accidentally lie flat and die in the night.



‘Saskia...Mmmmf...mmmf... not now...shut the damned *bedstede* doors,’ muttered the painter. He rolled over and opened one eye, and he lifted his head and moaned. Rembrandt had peered far too deeply into the bottom of his wine glass during a dinner with some of Saskia’s wealthy friends, and now he was paying a heavy price for his intemperance.

‘So what did the Mayor say? Did he ask you to paint the Civil Guards? Can you talk yet?’ she asked.

‘Just barely... Ow, my poor head. What time is it?’

‘That’s right dear, sit up for a moment; I’ll call the maid to bring our breakfast. I have to tell you something my love, we’re going to have another baby.’

‘That’s nice,’ said Rembrandt with his eyes closed. He pulled the covers back over his head, but when her words sunk into his foggy mind, he jumped out of bed and grabbed her by the waist. He began to dance and shout: ‘What, another baby? Are you sure, Sass? What am I doing? Is dancing harmful to the baby? Shouldn’t we call the doctor?’

Saskia frowned. ‘I’m fine, and I don’t want a doctor,’ she said. ‘I think I’ve been pregnant for at least three months, and it feels like a little boy.’

‘How do you know?’ asked Rembrandt.

‘Oh,’ said Saskia blushing, ‘we just know; a woman feels these things. Now, tell me everything about the dinner with Frans and Maria. What was she wearing?’

‘Well, she was wearing a velvety sort of thingy. It was dark blue I guess, with a large white lace collar.’

‘You’re a genius at painting the deepest parts of the human soul but you’re hopeless at describing party frocks! Go on.’

‘Um, it’s hard to remember. She wore little blue shoes with silver buckles. It all started with drinks of course, and Frans Banning Cocq was very stiff at first, but they both began to smile at me after the second course.

Saskia nodded encouragingly.

‘That was a very positive sign,’ she said. ‘I was expecting Maria to mention the group portrait first. She usually does the talking, when it comes to decorating.’

‘Yes, but this is for the Musketeer’s Meeting Hall. It’s the largest meeting place in Amsterdam. You’d think that Frans would make up his own mind about how big it should be.

‘You don’t know Maria as I do. Did she pretend that they hadn’t decided yet?’

‘Yes, all of those little hints and smiles she gave me, and all that anticipation, it made me eat too much. I thought the dinner would never end. There were too many plates of food, too many bottles of wine and too many little glasses of gin afterwards. They had little sugar ornaments, shaped like muskets and crossbows, and I nearly broke my teeth on one of them.

‘You aren’t supposed to eat them, they’re only for show, sweetheart.’

‘No one said anything about not eating them, or anything about the painting until we were about to go home.’

‘Oh, you poor, poor, man,’ said Saskia. She wondered if he would ever get around to telling her whether he had been granted the commission or not.

Rembrandt continued: ‘Frans was moody and silent for most of the evening - you know how severe he is. But eventually he tapped his wine glass and cleared his throat

in an ostentatious way. He never looks directly at a person when he addresses them, and that made me even more nervous. I also don't believe that any of the men in our illustrious Civil Guard were really interested in sitting still long enough for a portrait. They cared more about their beer and their little glasses of gin. Finally, everyone started to yawn, and a price for the Guard's portrait was suggested. I was so shocked I nearly fell off my chair.'

'Was it too little?' asked Saskia. 'He's notorious for being tight with money.'

'No, that's just it - I'm getting the whole sum in advance. Sixteen thousand guilders! And they want the painting to be huge, about twelve feet by fourteen feet, maybe even larger. Now we can afford a real house. This place is too small for me to paint something that big. Besides, we have to think about the baby. I'll write to your uncle. He probably knows a trustworthy estate agent. They call themselves *'makelaars'*, these days.

'Good grief, man! What's that? Is it another sort of doctor?' she asked. She got off the bed, stood over him and folded her arms. She was frowning.

'I don't want any more doctors.' she said quietly. 'The old ways and the things my mother told me are much better than these new doctors. What do they know about it? They've never given birth. This time we're having an ordinary midwife.' Her last doctor had given her and the baby a 'strengthening' potion called 'Dr. Digby's Powder of Sympathy'. This concoction was made with oil of vitriol, which is sulphuric acid mixed with oil. It made them both so ill that the little one died a week later.

‘Don’t get excited, Sass. It’s bad for the baby. I’ll ask your uncle, he knows everything.’

The next afternoon, a little man in big boots knocked on their front door. He was carrying an ostentatious walking stick and he wore an enormous cavalier’s hat with its plume sticking straight up. He erroneously believed it made him appear taller. Their maid had already let him in and told him to wait in the front hallway.

He had to wait a long time, but eventually Saskia and Rembrandt came down the stairs to meet him. They were wearing their best clothes and both of them looked very serious.

‘Good afternoon, sir. My name is Dokter, Hans Dokter.’

‘We didn’t send for a doctor,’ said Saskia icily.

‘Oh, no, no, no! I’m not a doctor, I’m a *makelaar*.

‘We didn’t send for one of those, either,’ said Rembrandt.

‘I’m a friend of your wife’s uncle, Hendrick Uylenbergh. He told me you might be interested in buying a house. The residence in question has been empty for two years, and the owner really wants to sell it. It’s in a very prestigious part of town.’ He smiled knowingly and tapped the side of his nose.

Rembrandt was not impressed. The man looked like a caricature in his big hat with the ridiculous feather, and he was being much too friendly to Saskia.

‘My wife and I don’t have a lot of time. What do you actually do?’

‘I’m glad you asked me that. As you know, I’m a *makelaar*. It’s perfectly legal, you know. We’ve recently formed a guild. There’s nothing to worry about, sir, I have impeccable references. We *makelaars* are the

people who sell houses. I happen to know of a house which would be perfect. It is near Mijnheer Hendrick Uylenbergh's residence. Would you like me to come back at a more convenient time?' He smiled broadly at Saskia, and winked.

'You have my full attention,' said Rembrandt through clenched teeth. 'Let me read your letter of introduction.' Saskia read it too. She recognised her uncle's signature and his wax seal at the bottom of the page.

'It seems to be genuine,' she said. 'It wouldn't hurt to take a look.'

'Would you like to see the house today?' asked Hans eagerly. 'It's not too far from here. I have a carriage waiting, if you are so inclined.' Saskia asked the maid to bring her a warm shawl, just in case.

As the carriage rattled down the street, the little man explained his trade to them. They hadn't asked him to, but the man rattled on and on, as if his life depended on it.

'I'm glad you asked about my title.'

'We didn't...' said Rembrandt.

'You see, a *makelaar* is someone who makes things happen in life. It comes from the French word: *maquereau* and it means mackerel.'

'He smells like one,' whispered Rembrandt. Saskia tried not to giggle and she covered her face with her silk handkerchief.

'Not many people know this,' the *makelaar* went on, 'but in the old days, the mackerel was known as the marriage broker of the sea. He'd introduce male herrings to their future herring brides. It also means a piece of

timber which joins the ridge beams to the sprout beams, if you see what I mean.’

Saskia began to cough because she couldn’t hold her laughter back any longer. ‘Are we there yet?’ she asked.

‘I’m glad you asked me,’ said Hans. ‘We’re here, indeed.’ He told the coachman to wait, and helped Saskia out of the carriage.

The house was large, with four stories and ten rooms. There were four bluestone steps leading up to the front door. The door itself was flanked by two classical columns and a pediment at the top. The roof had three chimneys and another large triangular pediment. It was a daring, neoclassical look, so very modern.

‘I’ll take your wife down to the kitchen, while you go upstairs to view the other rooms,’ said Hans.

‘We’ll all go together,’ said her husband. ‘I love kitchens.’ He shot a glance at Saskia and she smiled back. The *makelaar* skittered down the stairs and Saskia whispered, ‘Don’t you dare leave me alone with him.’

‘I won’t,’ said Rembrandt. When they got to the kitchen, he said: ‘I will need a rather large room for a new commission. It will have to be very high. Is there anything like that here?’

‘I’m glad you asked me that. There’s a covered gallery in the garden, right next to the privy. I think it may be just what you are looking for. Let’s go out this little door by the sink, and you can take a look.’ Everyone is building roofs over their courtyards these days. An outdoor structure is very handy in the cold and rainy winter months.’

Rembrandt estimated the height of the roof and said: ‘The roof isn’t high enough, it won’t do.’

‘Raising the roof a few metres could be done in a week.’ said Hans. He waved his hand dismissively. ‘Let me show you the most important room in the house.’ He turned, and trotted up the stairs. ‘Right this way, folks!’ he called from the top.

‘I thought he was going to give us a tour of the outdoor privy. What a horrible, little man!’ said Remy.

‘Behave yourself, Rembrandt!’ said Saskia, covering her mouth again so the obnoxious little man wouldn’t be hear her laugh.

Hans stood in the opulent entrance hall with his arms open wide, to show off the room. They’d managed to get a brief look at it before he’d hurried them downstairs. The fireplace was carved from red marble and the floor was tiled with black and white stone tiles. The ceiling beams were painted dark red and ochre. In the smaller room on the right, there was a low platform under a tall, leaded window. A leather chair was placed upon it. Anyone who had to wait for Rembrandt to come down the stairs from his painting room, would have a wonderful view of the street. It was an ideal place to receive clients.

‘I’ll leave you two lovebirds to discover the rest of the house. Go up that spiral staircase to your right and take your time! I’ll be out in the courtyard.’ said Hans.

Saskia fell in love with the master bedroom. Though many of the rooms had a *bedstede*, including the kitchen and all of them had fireplaces, this room was large and elegant and it had deeply carved doors on the *bedstede*. The fireplace was flanked by two marble statues of a man and a woman.

The room was filled with light. They saw the other upstairs rooms and they were so taken with the house they were speechless. It was more than perfect. Neither of them could hide their emotions from Hans when he returned. The little man began to jump up and down with excitement. 'I knew it! I knew it! Isn't this the perfect house for a famous painter and his wife? Don't argue! I know you love it already.'

'We do, but it all depends...How much is it?' said Rembrandt. Saskia held her breath.

'I'm glad you asked me that,' said Hans. 'You can move in tomorrow and you can pay for it in a few easy instalments. For you, it's only thirteen thousand guilders. I can come by tomorrow and draw up the papers.'

God forbid, thought the artist. 'Let's draw them up today and I'll sign them right away. How much do you want for a down payment?' He said, warily.

'I'm glad you asked me that. Shall we say two hundred and fifty guilders?' The two men shook hands and they all rode back to Rembrandt's house. Hans promised to raise the roof of the outside gallery and that it would be finished in a week and a half at the latest.

Later that night, Saskia sat on the bed, brushing her golden hair. Rembrandt had stopped work for the day and was sitting at their little mahogany table. He began to draw a portrait of her. She looked up at him and asked: 'Do you still love the house as much as I do?'

'I'm glad you asked me that,' he said. She threw a pillow at him and nearly knocked over the candles. Rembrandt tore it open and shook its feathers all over her. Soon they were enveloped by feathers, by kisses, and great happiness.



## Saskia's Breakfast



## Saskia's Pickled Sprouts

### Ingredients

¼ head of cauliflower cut into flowerets

1 cup of fresh mushrooms cut in half

2 cups of Brussels sprouts

8 small onions

Pickling liquor:

½ cup of sugar

¼ cup of mild vinegar

1 cup of water

6 peppercorns

1 teaspoon of salt

Boil the onions until nearly tender. Parboil the cauliflower, divided into flowerets, as well as the sprouts and the mushrooms, until they are almost tender (about 5 to 6 minutes). Mix ½ a cup of sugar and ½ a cup of vinegar and the salt together.

Make the pickling liquor by adding 6 peppercorns. Add the vinegar, salt and sugar. Boil for 5 minutes to dissolve the sugar. Pour over vegetables put in a sterilised glass jar. (Before you start cooking the vegetables, you can sterilise the jar by putting it in the hottest wash cycle in your dishwasher or by boiling the jar and its lid for at least 10 minutes. Do not touch the inside of the jar or lid after sterilising them.) Store pickles in the refrigerator. Saskia would have used a clay pot with a well-fitting lid. She would have made them in the winter and kept them in the basement cool room. The pickled sprouts would have been put into clay pots which were covered with sand, to keep them cool and dry. It serves one pregnant woman for a few days.

## PORTRAIT OF JULIA RAMSBOTTOM

Student of George Romney, oil on canvas

London, England

1760



## Julie the Sweep

Charles Peter Ramsbottom stuck out his pinkie in an exaggerated way, raised his glass of vintage port and proposed a toast to his younger brother. Jim was sitting at the other end of the long dining table and didn't speak. Charlie raised his voice and said: 'Well Jim, I'll be the first one to admit that new money breeds new confidence, and I'm also not ashamed to say that I'm feeling rather confident these days. Now that London has become the most important shipping capital of the world, we've both done very well, I dare say. Our riches surpass my greatest expectations! Let's drink to Pecunia!'

'Hear! Hear! Hoorah for Pecunia, the saucy wench!' cried Jim, who was constantly reminded that he was younger than Charlie. 'We've been shipmates since we were boys, and look at us now. You're fat, but I'm still thin as a stick. Who's Pecunia? Where did you meet her?'

'Jimmy lad, you don't think Pecunia is a woman, do you?' asked Charlie.

'Isn't she? Don't call me lad! I'm only two years younger than you are, and we're both old.'

'Pecunia means money in Latin. It's a nicer way of saying that we're stinking rich,' said his brother.

'What do I care about Latin? You needed it when you became the lawyer of the family, *modus oppertandi ixie trixie* and all that! Not me, Charlie. I didn't need it, I stayed the same and you let me. It wasn't easy when we started out, was it? We were snot-nosed lads on our first merchant vessel. Remember how rotten the food was? I say! When I hear people say that our Great English Navy

had the best rations in the world, it makes me want to laugh. Which was worse, the maggotty ship's biscuits or the beef with even bigger maggots? Remember their greasy, cold bodies popping out of the beef and wiggling their legs at us? Why did those bugs always feel so cold when you bit into them? They got into all our rations, didn't they? Everything was rotten, because everything was always wet, including our good selves, and it still gives me a chill when I remember it. Don't you feel it, still? Did you ever imagine that we'd end up living like pearls of society?'

Charlie didn't answer his brother because he was preoccupied by an unusual sound coming from the hearth. It was a scuffling sort of noise, as though a small animal was trying to climb down their chimney. The day was warm, so the fire wasn't lit.

'I'll take a look,' said Charlie. He bent over and tried to peek up the chimney. 'Be a good chap Jim, it may be a large bird or a rat, but my big stomach is getting in the way. I can't bend down far enough to see up the flue. 'I see legs and his black feet,' said Jim, peering in. 'I think it's a monkey, a big one.'

'Try to poke it with the fire tongs! Can you reach it?' asked Charlie, standing back a bit.

'I can just touch one of its feet,' replied his brother. Suddenly, the monkey let out a high-pitched cry, and fell on top of Jim. They both tumbled onto the rug, sooty and surprised. The animal was bigger than they expected, and Jim grasped it by the waist. He tried to pin it down but the monkey struggled out of his grasp and picked up a chair to protect itself.

‘S’truth, its wearing boy’s clothes, and it looks more like a boy than an ape,’ said Charlie, who was now safely behind his chair.

Then the sooty creature spoke in a cultured, high voice: ‘Let me go, I say! My master is waiting on the roof. Please, sirs, he’ll be very angry if you don’t release me! Don’t come near me, or I’ll throw this chair and I’ll scream and scream. I’m not a monkey, I *have* a monkey and I’m a little girl!

‘Well I’ll be a bleating cheat,’ said Charlie, and he came out from behind his chair.

The child seemed unaware that she was wearing rags and soot from head to toe. She put two fingers into her mouth and whistled. There was another scratching sound from above, and a real monkey scrambled out of the fireplace and jumped onto his mistress’s shoulder.

It was a Capuchin, who was not much bigger than a beer mug. He had a sad little face and a dark spot on his head. The monkey took one panicky look at the two men, and he screeched. Then he jumped into the chandelier above the dining room table.

‘Abel, get down from there this instant! We’ve got to get back up the chimney,’ said the girl. Abel climbed down, ran across the room, and jumped onto on her shoulder.

‘Don’t go, don’t go,’ said Jim. ‘Can’t you tell us your name? What were you doing up, or should I say down, our old chimney?’ He took one step closer. She stepped backwards, frowning at both of them, and shook the chair in a menacing way.

‘Stay away! Please, I must go to him,’ cried the girl. ‘Master is waiting on the roof!’

Suddenly, they heard someone shouting and kicking the front door. A coarse, male voice bellowed: 'You've got something of mine! Give her back to me and there ain't going to be no trouble, but if ye keep her, I'll have the law on ye!'

Julie started to tremble and whispered, 'Please let me go for the love of God! Give him what he wants or he will be angry.'

'Not very likely,' said Charlie, firmly. 'You're only a child and it's unfair to make you work so hard! The butler and I will deal with him, and then we'll bring you back to your parents. This is all wrong, can't you see that? Jim, take her to the kitchen and ask Molly to make her something to eat and to draw her a warm bath if she'll have one.' He and the butler went to the front door to confront the angry chimneysweep.

'So young to be put out to work,' said Jim, astonished. 'Here, put down that chair and take my hand. We'll go to Molly and get something to eat. It's all right now; at least tell me your name. And what's your friend's name?'

'He's Abel, and I'm Julie,' she replied. She put down the chair, hesitantly put her hand in his, and followed him out of the dining room. She'd studied his face and decided to trust him a little.

'But how did you start working at your age? How old are you anyway?' asked Jim.

'I don't remember sir,' she said. 'I think I might be eight or nine. We don't have birthdays at the Foundling Hospital, so I forgot. Our mother gave us up when Father died. She left a silver teaspoon with the wardens, but she never came back. I've seen the spoon, and they told me it was from her, but they never let me hold it. Perhaps she's

dead too. About a year ago, a dirty man came to the Foundling's Hospital. He was looking for a boy to go down the chimneys and he chose my brother Tom, because he was the thinnest. He let me go with Tommy if I agreed to clean his house. He is our master now, and he's a chimneysweep.'

'Why didn't Tommy fall down our chimney today?' asked Jim. 'Did he run away? I wouldn't blame him, if he did.'

'No, sir, he died a month ago,' she said. Tears made rivulets down her dirty face and she wiped them fiercely away with the back of her hand.

'There, there, sweetheart, don't cry, you'll make me cry, and I don't want to,' said Jim. He took out his handkerchief, wiped his own eyes with it and made Julie blow her nose. Then he took her to the kitchen and called for Molly.

'What an outrage! We saw him off, but he says he'll be back to claim her! Something has to be done right away,' said Charlie, at the kitchen door. 'It's the least we can do! And she must have good food and some decent clothes. Jim, you run off to the shops and ask them to make her a few dresses and hats, of course.'

'Don't you think we should measure her first?' asked Jim. 'You reckon, like a horse? Then I'll know what to ask for. I don't know what girls wear nowadays. They'll most likely laugh at me in the shop, and I'll have to run away in shame.'

'Hurry up, brother! It's nearly one o'clock. Just tell them how tall she is. You're not the first man to buy a dress for someone. She's not taller than my cane, and not much wider. We can mark it and then you can take it to



the dressmaker. Meanwhile, she can wear my new dressing gown if she wants to.' When Charlie approached her with the cane, Julie instinctively covered her head as if he were about to strike her, and she tried to make herself small to avoid the blow.

'Oh, bless her...I won't hurt you, child! We just have to measure you. You would like some new clothes, wouldn't you? Some pretty dresses, and some bonnets?' he asked. Julie stared at him as if he had just fallen from the moon. She nodded slightly. Just then, the parlour maid came in with the lunch dishes on a tray, and she started to scream: 'A rat! A rat! Get him off of there!' Julie's monkey had crept onto the table to have a bit of fruit.

Everyone turned to see him frantically stuffing as many grapes as he could into his mouth. The maid's scream startled the little creature so much that he picked up a cream cake and hurled it at her. She ran into the garden, crying for the cook, who was picking herbs for their supper.

Molly Wilkinson, the long-suffering cook, had taken care of Charlie and his brother Jim for many years. She was a patient, practical woman, round and soft, with merry black eyes that looked like two currants pressed into a bun. She marched into the kitchen and said: 'What's all this then, a lot of noise about a little creature? Mercy! The floor is covered with soot! What have you been doing, Charles? And where did this child come from?'

'It wasn't our fault!' said Charlie, looking rather guilty. 'She's the one who fell down the chimney. This is Julie and there's her monkey. He threw a cream cake at Mary,

and it landed on her nose, didn't it, Julie?' Charles and Jim tried to stop giggling, but they failed.

Molly shook her head and sighed. She led Julie to a kitchen chair and sat her down at the table.

'Please, Miss Molly, may Abel have some more?' asked the child. 'He's still quite hungry.'

'I suppose Mr. Abel is this little devil who upset the maid? He can have some more if he doesn't bite me. Does he bite? Just call me Molly, everyone does.'

'Thank you, Molly. He doesn't bite very often, only when people scare him.'

'Well, I'm not going near him! You'll have to bathe him, but you're going in first and then it's your friend's turn,' replied the cook. She winked at Julie.

Abel jumped back into Julie's lap, and Molly washed the little girl's face and hands and began to boil water for the bath. She fetched the laundry tub from the scullery and put a towel into the bottom of it, so Julie wouldn't slip. The two brothers retired to the parlour to discuss their next move against Mr. Pigge the Sweep.

It was peaceful and warm in the kitchen and Julie began to feel sleepy. 'Do you like posset, child?' asked Molly. 'Have a bit, while we wait for the water to get warm. Would you taste it? It should be just cool enough to drink. I've got a lovely, cold lamb pie and some left-over Brussels sprouts and carrots. What does *he* eat?' she asked, pointing to the monkey who was still resting in the little girl's arms.

'Oh we'll eat anything,' said Julie. 'Sometimes Abel steals apples or bread from the market. He's so fast that no one can catch him, and I know it's wicked, but that's how we've been getting by.'

‘Poor little mite,’ said Molly. ‘It’s a wonder you both survived at all. How old did Mr. Jim say you were?’

‘I am probably eight years old and my brother Tom was nine and a half,’ she replied softly.

‘Now you two sit down at the table and I’ll serve up. Mind your manners Abel, Abel, strong and able, get your elbows off the table!’ By then, the monkey was already on the table, sticking his little hands into the lamb pie, trying to pick out the Brussels sprouts. Julie took a bite of her food. Then she lay her head down on the table and wept. There was no sound to her crying, just tears. She lifted her head up for a moment and asked: ‘Molly, will they send me back to Mr. Pigge or to the Foundling Hospital?’

‘I don’t know, child...Can’t really say...’

As she helped Julie take off her clothes she noticed rows of fresh whip marks on her back and older cuts and bruises on the back of her legs. ‘Where did you get these bruises?’ asked Molly gently.’

‘I fell down, ma’am. I fall down all the time.’

‘No, dear! I believe you’ve been whipped and beaten many times. Nothing makes the same marks as the lash of a whip. You can tell me, I’ll stand by you no matter what happens, you poor child.’

The little girl glanced at Molly’s face and decided to confide in her. After all, it was wicked to lie about it. Molly put her soft arms around the child. ‘Tell me, dear,’ she said. ‘I really want to know.’

‘It was Mr. Pigge. He did this to me, but he was always beating Tommy more than me.’

Molly took off the girl’s rags, helped her wash, and wrapped her in a robe. She put her by the fire to keep

warm. Then she wrestled Abel into the bath, scrubbed him, and tried to dry him, but he kept jumping in and out of the tub, splashing water, and climbing onto her shoulder. He tore Molly's new lace cap from her head and threw it into the tub. Molly wanted to laugh, but she said: 'This floor's beginning to look like a small lake. I've got to be firm with him, or he won't never learn proper manners!'

Charles and Jim heard all the splashing and they stood in the doorway, laughing at the battle at sea. Molly was defeated.

'It's not funny anymore, Charles! Help me!' she cried, out of breath, and red in the face.

'You are doing a good job of it,' said Charlie. 'You don't need me.'

'Julie,' said the cook. 'Why don't you dry Abel off while I talk to Mr. Charlie and Mr. Jim for a moment? I'll be right back. Tell me, where does this Mr. Pigge live?'

'Fourteen Folgate Road, by Spitalfields Market, not far from here,' said the girl.

Molly nodded and quietly shut the kitchen door behind her. Julie tiptoed to the door and tried to listen to their conversation, but they were speaking too softly. She knew they were talking about her and she began to tremble again. She heard them whispering about the Foundling Hospital so she held Abel tightly and turned her face to the fire.

'So this is it, little one,' she whispered. 'We'll be sent back and when we get to the orphanage, Mr. Pigge will come for us again. And this time, he'll take you away from me forever.'

Time stretched itself into trudging seconds of uncertainty and Julie became reconciled to going back to Mr. Pigge. She held Abel's tiny, black hand, and waited. On the other side of the door, Molly told the men about the girl's secret and Charles hissed: 'We'll go to his house right now, and thrash him with his own whip! Let's see how he likes it! Then I'll speak to my old colleague, Judge John Blackstone. This is an outrage! 'I've read about such cases in the paper, but I never thought I'd see a young victim of such brutality in my own house!'

'Shh! Keep your voice down, she'll hear you.' whispered Molly. 'As soon as Mr. Pigge is caught and locked away, you can go to the Foundling Hospital. Then you will start the adoption process for Julie, that is, if you want to keep her.'

'Of course I do! We've got to do it in the right order. I'll go to the orphanage, and Jim will find Mr. Pigge. And if he can't, we'll get a witness who isn't afraid to testify that he saw Mr. Pigge whip our Julie. And I'm sure we can find someone who saw him forcing her brother to go down that burning chimney. I'll go to the Foundling Hospital and arrange for her to stay here for the time being. Now Jim, if she's strong enough to tell her story to the judge, her testimony will carry great weight in the courtroom. The wounds on her back are enough evidence to hang him. We'll have to get a doctor to dress the wounds and make his report. And if we can get someone from Pigge's neighbourhood to testify, we'll have an excellent case against him. What do you think?' asked Charlie.

‘You’re right, you’re the lawyer,’ said Jim. ‘I’ll go to the doctor and send him to Molly, then go to the dressmakers and order some clothes for her. After that, I’ll find that blaggard Pigge and thrash him until he cannot stand! I’ll hand him over to the magistrate myself. One thing worries me though. Will they allow a little girl to live with two old sea dogs like us?’

‘That’s not a problem,’ said Molly. ‘Men of your status and wealth won’t have any difficulty adopting a poor little waif. All you have to do is ask them. I adopted my two girls many years ago, and the regents didn’t make any fuss about it. They told me that there are far too many children in the Foundling Hospital. They simply can’t take care of so many of them as it is.’

‘That’s a relief, Molly. We’re off!’ bellowed Jim. The brothers rushed down the front stairs, and took off in different directions.

While Charlie went to the regents of the orphanage, Jim took his whip and a thick rope to Folgate Road. He wanted Mr. Pigge and he also wanted to see whether it was possible to break down his door in a surprise attack. He spoke to many of the sweep’s neighbours, and they agreed something had to be done about Gregory Pigge. Everyone told him the same story about Julie’s brother being forced to go into the burning chimney. No one had dared confront Pigge about it, because the chimneysweep had powerful friends. The kindest thing anyone could say about Mr. Pigge was that he was a liar, a bully, and a ‘rough piece of work.’

Mr. Pigge’s house was by an ancient market area with noisy and narrow streets, where people tried to sell anything from cannons to fine lace. Shining new shops

had been built right next to rickety, old market stalls where the vendors sang their special rhyming songs to bring in the customers. The lanes were crowded with people of every description, rich and poor, shoulder to shoulder, competing with each other to sell the most. There were vicious dog fights, ringed by fine gentlemen, farmers, and even beggars who threw their last coins on the ground. Some people lost their entire fortunes on one fight. Loose cattle, travelling surgeon-barbers, ragamuffins, thieves, and well-dressed ladies roamed the same streets. The ancient market square was filled with the scent of hot bread, boiled sprouts, violets, old fish, smoky bacon and the metallic smell of freshly cut meat. Everyone was trying to shout or sing louder than his neighbours, all the while watching out for clever pickpockets. Mr. Pigge didn't seem to be at home, or if he was, he wasn't receiving visitors today. His house was locked tight and the windows were barred. It looked more like a fortress than a home.

Jim realised it would take many men to break down the door, so he walked away with his rope in his hand, muttering out loud and kicking the loose stones with his boots. He met his brother in their street and angrily told him about 'Mr. Pigge's Fortress'.

'Never mind, it wouldn't have worked anyway,' said Charlie. 'If we'd galloped in like a pair of old fools, he would have given us a right pounding, and he would have run away with her. After my meeting with the Foundling Hospital regents, I spoke to the magistrate. His band of *Bow Street Runners*, who have now been chosen to join the first sort of organised police force in England, they're local men chosen by the Magistrate. They don't patrol

the streets but they can arrest people, investigate a crime, and also take suspected criminals to the magistrate's office. They're probably on their way to Pigge's house right now. They'll arrest him as sure as bees is bees.'

'And Julie?' asked Jim anxiously. 'Do we have permission to keep her? Must she go to court and face Pigge?'

'Yes to both questions. She can stay with us until the adoption becomes legal, but she will have to testify. We have a great chance of winning the case. I went to the chambers of the Right Honourable Judge Blackwater, you remember? We studied law together, years ago when I came back from sea and had to learn a proper profession. When I presented her case, he was shocked, and he agreed that she had to be there to give evidence.

'Doesn't John Blackwater have those awful, bulging red eyes and spindly legs?' asked Jim.'

The very same, Jimmy,' said Charlie. The brothers came home feeling like young lions. They shouted for Molly and Julie and found them in the kitchen, making bread. Abel sat in his own chair, quietly watching them. 'What's happened to Abel?' asked Jim. 'He's very well-mannered. Does he feel alright?'

Julie was wearing one of the parlour maid's old dresses which Molly had shortened, and an apron which reached her toes. She laughed for the first time in the big house and said: 'Molly and I made a collar for him and every time he sees it, he sits down and minds his manners. He loves the stables, the horses aren't even afraid of him.'

'Hmmm,' said Charlie, 'I'll believe it when I see how he behaves at dinner. He grinned at Julie. 'Where did you buy that lovely blue dress?' he asked. 'You look very



regal in it, and very grown up. Now Julie, I've got some questions for you. First, would you like to stay here with us and be our little companion? Second, would you like to become a proper lady, and have lessons at home?'

'I can't say,' said the little girl, frowning. 'My head feels strange and it's spinning so. Did you buy me from Mr. Pigge? Do you want us to live here with you? In your house? You don't even know us...' Then she suddenly turned very pale and fell to the floor.

'Mercy!' cried Molly. 'It was too much for her to take in. Jim, would you please carry her up to the blue bedroom, and stay with her until I come up with a cup of soothing tea.'

Jim carried Julie up the stairs, laid her on the bed and put a cold cloth on her forehead. When she finally opened her eyes, Jim was gone and Molly was bending over her with a fan in her hand.

'You gave us quite a fright,' said Molly, and she stroked the little girl's curly hair.

Julie pulled the covers over her head and cried: 'Where's Abel? What have they done with him? We can't stay here, Molly! Take us back to the Foundling Hospital. At least there I can play with Abel and the children until someone wants me to work again. I don't want to become a lady! I'm very sure that real ladies aren't allowed to have monkeys! What if you all get to know me and you don't like me anymore? Mr. Charlie will put us back out on the street. It happens all the time. My friends have told me about what people do to orphan girls when they get tired of them. And I won't go to court either! It's horrible in there! I don't want to see his face

again, because I know he will force me to go back.’ She turned her face to the wall and was silent again.

‘I know lots of fine ladies who have monkeys. It’s in fashion these days,’ Molly lied. ‘My girls were about your age when I adopted them. They felt exactly the same way you do now. They’d forgotten about being safe and happy, and they were convinced that I would grow tired of them, and send them back. It took them quite a while to realise they could stay with me forever and ever.’

‘Is that true? They felt like me? And they were scared like me, too?’

‘Of course they were. You’re scared right now, but you’ll feel better soon. Mr. Charlie has sent for Dr. Shallot and he will take care of the wounds on your back. Now, drink this herb tea before it gets cold. I’m off to the kitchen. That naughty Abel’s down there by himself, and he’s probably got his little hands in the jam jar. I’ll bring him to you, but now, just close your eyes for a while, dear. I’ll be back soon.’

Julie wiped her eyes and gazed around the light blue room. She saw lace curtains dancing in the light breeze and she touched her silken pillow. Everything smelled clean and fresh and a small fire had been lit in the grate. She snuggled into the soft down counterpane and sighed deeply as Abel grasped her hand. Just before she fell asleep, she thought: Why are they acting this way? Everyone is being kind and kindness feels so strange. Will they change their minds and send us back? She fell into a deep sleep, and didn’t even wake up when the doctor examined her back.

Early next morning, the parlour maid heard someone ringing the bell to the front door. She opened it a crack to see who was making such a racket, and saw a group of ragged young boys standing with their caps in their hands.

‘We want to see the Guv’nor, Miss,’ said the tallest boy. ‘That laggard Gregory Pigge was locked up last night, and I’m s’posed to tell Mr Charlie that Judge Blackstone won’t wait ‘till tomorrow! He’ll have the trial at twelve o’clock today! We come to fetch Mr. Charlie, and Miss Julie too. The magistrate says the monkey isn’t invited.’

‘Wait here,’ said the maid rudely. She wrinkled her nose in disgust and slammed the door in their faces. She ran up the back stairway to the bedrooms to wake everyone.

Julie heard Charlie and Jim talking about it at breakfast, and couldn’t eat. What if the judge didn’t believe her? What if she had to go back? Since she was afraid to say anything to Mr. Charlie, she whispered her fears to Molly when the cook helped her to dress.

‘You are not on trial today, Mr. Pigge is,’ said Molly simply. ‘All you have to do is tell the Judge the truth, just like you told me. You’re better than Mr. Pigge! You’re clever and pretty, and above all, you’re strong enough to tell the truth about Tommy. You’ve got us, too. We’ll be right there with you.’

‘Will I have to show them my back, in court? Do I have to undress in front of all those people?’ she asked in a small, trembling voice.

‘The doctor will testify that he’s seen the wounds on your back and he’ll tell the judge how bad they are. Don’t worry about the crowd, child. There’s no need to undress yourself in front of them.’

The courtroom was full of vendors from the market as well as people who had personally felt the brutality of Gregory Pigge's gang. Some had read about it in the paper and wanted an exciting day out. Fancifully powdered aristocrats and beggars, jostled each other for a place to stand in the crowded courtroom. There was a great deal of noise and laughter in the room. The sight of the crowd and the smell of so many unwashed bodies were hard to bear. Most of the ladies had to put perfume or vinegar on their hankies and hold them delicately to their noses. Mr. Pigge sat in the dock, stuck his thumbs in his trouser pockets and grinned and winked at his friends in the front row.

The Honourable Judge Blackstone was a small man with bulging red eyes. He wore his dirty-grey judge's wig made of horsehair, and he called out in his thundering voice: 'Silence! I will hear from the main witness now! Miss Julie Elizabeth D'Arcenne, would you please stand up and tell me what you know about the accused?'

Julie was so small that the crowd could hardly see her face when she stood up. Her legs felt weak, and when the judge asked her name, she tried to speak but nothing came out of her mouth. She looked helplessly at Mr. Charlie. He stood up with her, grasped her hand, and it helped her find her voice again. 'Present, Your Honour,' she said.

'Miss D'Arcenne,' roared the judge. 'Is it true that you ran away from your master Mr. Pigge and now you have taken refuge in the house of my esteemed, old colleague, Mr. Charles Peter Ramsbottom? Answer the question girl and tell me the truth. We always punish those who lie.'

‘I didn’t run away, Your Honour. I accidentally fell down Mr. Charlie’s chimney while I was trying to clean it, sir.’

The crowd erupted into boisterous laughter and Judge Blackstone vigorously banged his desk with his gavel and glowered at the crowd.

‘Order in the court! I will have order! Let the witness continue.’

Julie took a deep breath, looked at the judge and resumed her story.

‘Mr. Pigge made me promise not to tell. He told Tommy that we didn’t deserve to eat, and he beat us every day. He had to beat us because we were bastard children, and we needed to be whipped so we would learn to be good Christians. Mostly he got at Tom, because Tom wasn’t quick enough at his work. A month ago, he made my brother go down a hot chimney and Tommy died there. If I get sent back, Mr. Pigge says he’ll take Abel away from me and drown him in the Thames. Then he’ll hang me back up on his meat hook in the kitchen and whip me ‘til I die and I’ll end up dead, just like Tommy did.’

The crowd gasped.

‘Is Abel your other brother?’ asked the judge.

‘No, Your Honour, Abel is my little friend. He is a monkey, sir.’

The people began to whistle and cheer. Again, Judge Blackstone banged his gavel and glowered at the frisky crowd. Then he looked back at little Julie who was so terrified, she looked as though she were going to faint. ‘Go on young lady, tell me about your brother Tommy,’

he said, in a surprisingly gentle voice. ‘Can you tell me when he died?’

Julie was silent for a moment. ‘A little more than a month ago...sir...’ she whispered.

‘Speak up child, so we can all hear you,’ said the judge.

‘About a month ago, our master, Mr. Pigge, was asked to clean all the chimneys of a big brewery. A fire was still burning in one of the chimneys when they got up to the roof, so Master doused it with a bucket of water. Then he made my brother go down into it, but Tommy got stuck, and his legs were awfully burned by a hot water pipe. Master called to him, and told him to hasten to the roof, but Tommy cried out, saying, I can’t come up, Master, I must die here. And he did. A bricklayer broke down part of the chimney to get him out, but it was too late. I saw his legs, and they were burned off to the knee. That very day, after Tommy was buried, I had to take his place and go down the same chimneys again. I’m not very good at it. Chimneys scare me and I always think of Tommy, that’s why I fell into Mr. Charlie’s front parlour, sir.’

Julie covered her face with one hand, hoping she didn’t have to say any more. She didn’t want to cry in front of the rowdy people. With the other hand she squeezed Mr. Charlie’s fingers very tightly and she tried not to look at Judge Blackstone’s face.

‘Thank you my child. That will be all,’ said Blackstone, quietly. He smiled a thin, malevolent smile at Mr. Pigge, who was becoming aware that the trial wasn’t exactly going in his favour. All of his swaggering, sneering, and waving to his cronies had disappeared. He couldn’t meet the judge’s eyes, and when Pigge tried to sit down,

Blackstone sternly commanded him to remain standing. Other witnesses were summoned to speak about their own troubles with Pigge, and no one had a good thing to say about him.

Gregory Pigge was sentenced to public humiliation in the pillory. He was also sentenced to seven years in the British Army, to serve with General Cornwallis, as a common foot soldier. He was ordered to serve his time in the Colony of Virginia, in America.

‘Whew, that was a close one!’ said Charlie, as they left the courthouse, hand in hand. ‘In an hour’s time, Mr. Pigge’s going to the pillory. They’ll put his head through a hole in a board and his hands will be stuck through two small holes and tied, so he can’t protect his face. His legs will be tied to a pole so he’ll have to stand there all day. People can throw all sorts of nasty things at him, like rotten eggs, dead rats, and horse poop. Would you like to throw something horrible at Mr. Pigge? We could get a place in the front row, how about that?’

‘I once saw a man in the pillory.’ said Julie quietly. ‘He stole a bag of flour for his family, but the crowd was cruel to him and they hit him in the face with stones. It wasn’t fair. And I never want to see Mr. Pigge again, with or without rotten eggs or dead rats.’

‘If you don’t mind, Charlie,’ said Jim, ‘I’m going to buy some nasty old vegetables in the market and throw them at him. I need to throw something awfully smelly at him, and I won’t be stopped until I do. I’ll be home soon enough to see her little surprises.’ He winked knowingly at his brother.

‘Ah, Jim, don’t give it away, you nearly ruined it! I forbid you to come into the parlour until you’ve had a good wash at the pump!’

‘I’ll be back in an hour, at the most,’ said Jim, and he dashed away to join the gathering crowd of spectators at the pillory block.

‘Please, Mr. Charlie? Please?’ Her feet were dancing on the cobblestones and she had nearly forgotten her unhappy conversation with Molly the night before. ‘What is it? What is it? Please give me a clue?’ asked Julie.

‘Then it won’t be much of a surprise, will it? Not until my brother gets home. That’s my final word.’

‘And he can’t come in ‘till he gives himself a proper scrubbing at the pump,’ she said.

‘Just call me Charlie. After all, you’re going to be our little girl now. That is, if you and Abel want to stay with us.’

‘I want to, Charlie, and so does Abel.’

All the way home, Julie tried to guess the surprise. Was it a new dress? That would explain why Molly suddenly covered up a pile of clothes and shooed me out of the kitchen this morning. Was it a tea party? A dolly, perhaps?’ Since Charlie kept saying ‘No, no, no, no,’ she stopped asking him. When they reached their front door, she climbed the stairs to her room and waited for Jim by the window.

Sometimes an hour seems to last forever, but finally, Julie heard Jim’s boots crunching up the gravel drive to the front door. She watched him shiver and make terrible faces at her as he scrubbed himself at the pump.

Charlie clapped his hands, and everyone in the big house, from the upstairs maid to the charwoman, lined up



in a neat row on the lawn. They wanted to officially welcome the little girl into their world. They walked with her to the stables, and there she saw a little white dog. He had a note tied around his neck and he sat up in a pretty fashion. She read the note out loud: ‘My name is Pippin, and I’m yours to keep.’

‘Oh my,’ gasped Julie. ‘He’s beautiful!’ She knelt down and stroked his white fur. ‘Look at his little face, he looks just like a white fox. Look, Molly, Abel’s made friends with him already. He’s climbed onto his back and Pippin doesn’t seem to mind it and Abel already knows how to ride him like a pony!’

‘Speaking of ponies,’ said Jim who was standing behind her, ‘what do you think of this splendid creature?’

Julie spun around to see what Jim had. He held the reins of a white pony that had a black mane and tail and black markings on his delicate legs. It looked as if he were wearing black socks.

‘He comes all the way from Wales,’ said Jim, proudly patting the pony’s neck. ‘It was really hard to sneak around the back into the stables, because he kept whinnying when he smelled the other horses. I saw him yesterday, on the way to Mr. Pigge’s house. And he was still for sale today, so I bought him, instead of throwing rotten eggs at Mr. Pigge. We can’t ride him yet because he has to get used to his new home. Isn’t he fine? What will you call him?’

Julie thought for a moment and said: ‘I will call him Tommy. I still can’t believe this is happening to me, and all in two days time. It’s like a strange dream. Last night I told Molly that you’d get tired of me and take me back to the Foundling Hospital. Then Abel and I would be

hungry and scared again. Molly told me that I couldn't remember how to be happy anymore, but now, whenever I think of the sad times, I just pinch myself, and choose to be happy inside.'

'What a clever girl you are,' said Molly. She put her arms around the little girl.

'It's not so easy to explain,' Julie went on. 'I couldn't change what happened to me or to Tommy, because we were too young to do anything about it. But now, I believe I can decide things for myself about what happened to us, and I choose happiness. This is the beginning of our whole new life together, and I'll try to be good and make you proud of me, and Abel will try to be good, too.'

'I'm proud of you already. You're already the finest little lady we've ever known, and the bravest one too! Look at how you stood up to the judge and Mr. Pigge,' said Jim. 'That took bundles of courage.'

'That's true, but I do hope we can also help all of the orphans like me, the ones who are hungry and unhappy, so they won't feel alone and they can find a kind family. That would make us happy forever, wouldn't it?' She looked up at Jim and Charles.

It certainly would,' said Jim loudly. He blew his nose vigorously into his large red silk handkerchief. 'I must be getting a cold,' he muttered.

As they walked down the path to the house, Julie looked up into the sky. Her lonely past was already beginning to lose its hold over her and her future shone before her, like the new moon above her. It was peeking its thin face out of the night clouds and it seemed happy for her..

## Abel's Lovely Cream Cakes

### Ingredients

100 grams of digestive biscuits or ginger snaps, whizzed into fine crumbs in a blender  
55 grams of ground almonds (you can buy these already ground up)  
50 grams of melted unsalted butter  
2 small tubs (200 grams) of cream cheese  
1 small container of sour cream (100 ml.)  
1 egg plus 1 egg yolk  
100 grams of caster sugar  
1 Tbsp. vanilla extract  
50 grams of sliced strawberries  
whipped cream for the top

Preheat oven to 160 degrees Celsius. Line a twelve-muffin tin with paper cupcake cases. Mix the biscuit crumbs, almonds, and butter in a bowl, using your hands, it's more fun. Press 1 tablespoon of the biscuit mixture into the bottom of each case. Refrigerate them for about an hour, to let the crumb mixture stiffen.

The filling: Use a hand mixer to beat cream cheese, sour cream and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the egg and beat well. Add the egg yolk the vanilla and beat the cream cheese again until fluffy.

Divide mixture over the cupcake cases and bake for 20 minutes or until the cakes are done. Let them cool and finish with a dollop of whipped cream and half a strawberry or a candied Brussels sprout if you dare.

Serves one monkey, two old men, or six very well-behaved children.

**He was not Abel to Resist Them**



## THE MELANCHOLIA OF SPROUTS

Fritzel Balthasar Karper, oil on canvas

Dresden, Germany

1836 AD



## **The Unbearable Melancholia of Sprouts**

Fritzel Balthazar Karper was born in 1796, in Dresden, Germany. His father was a prosperous fish merchant who aspired to be a gentleman, but his exuberance and honest enjoyment of the simple things of life often got in his way. He and his wife were large-boned people who enjoyed their lives, their food and their children, who had been raised to love the same things. When they were at home, they whistled and sang at the table, smacked their lips when they ate, and always laughed too loudly for polite company. When their last son was born, his parents realised at once that he was an entirely different kettle of fish. Even as a young boy, Fritzel had a diffident disdain for food and childish games. He was appalled at the rude good health of his family and despised their table manners and their incessant, happy chattering. He was often so still and aloof that his brothers and sisters would forget he was in the room with them. He did not love them, not any of them. He fervently believed that he must have been adopted, because he had absolutely nothing in common with them. He felt as if he were a slight and fragile songbird that had accidentally been hatched by an ordinary, mother turkey.

Fritzel liked to write poetry and draw landscapes. These two urges grew stronger with the years, until they became true obsessions. This hunger to write and paint what he saw, eventually took over his life. His face had become delicately pale, and his eyes were hollow and brooding, a taciturn witness to his carefully cultivated inner sadness. Though it was fashionable to be pale and troubled in the early 19th century. All the best poets, and

the most inspired painters, as well as their admirers, tried to cultivate the look. Fritzel B. Karper, poet *and* painter, lived it to the extreme. He believed he would lose his talent if he changed his melancholy outlook on life. He felt as if the simple acceptance of an ounce of joy would destroy the creative flow of his special words and colours. His melancholy *was* his paintings and poems. They lived for him, and in him, sadly growing in his soul, and taking the forms of graveyards and ruined castles. Later, the motifs in his work were paintings of skulls, owls, coffins and lonely male figures contemplating the splendour of nature. When he was at university, his friends tried to help him out of his dark moods by suggesting a picnic, an opera, a concert...anything? They finally grew tired of his persistent gloom and left him to wander into the seductive, melancholic, landscape of his own mind. At the end, even his boisterous family didn't come to see him anymore. After many years of lonely contemplation, he finally found the right words to make it clear to them, that they had never meant anything to him. His infrequent visits and growing hostility at family gatherings was enough to make even the most jovial aunties and uncles want to lock him in a cupboard until the feast was over. They all reluctantly agreed to leave him alone. (It must be said that most of them *pretended* to be reluctant...) His last poem deals with the act of resignation to the inevitable passing of all forms of life. His last painting, of a lone figure in a Brussels sprout field, is a reference to his chosen path, the choice of a silent, northern man, a man who refused to be happy.

### **Ode to a Brussels Sprout Field**

They are ripe now, round as planets,  
Grey-green, melancholic spheres.  
Forced to flourish, shining, pining,  
For the crisp autumnal air.  
Each globe, selflessly resigned,  
Waits now for the hand to pluck.  
We are they, awaiting Someone.  
Cool, the calm and careful hand,  
Pulls us from our earthly matrix,  
Through our meagre days and plans.

Fritzel Balthazar Karper, Dresden, 1836.

(Actually written by) L. A. Delehanty)

By now, you are probably beginning to suspect that nothing is what it seems...And not very much of it is exactly true, is it?



## Unbearably Lonely Pea Soup

### Ingredients

2 to 3 bitter tears of regret (optional)  
2 cups of water  
3 cups of frozen peas  
pinch of salt (to rub into your wounded soul)  
½ handfuls of fresh mint leaves  
a sorrowful wrench of black pepper  
1 carrot, boiled and cut fine  
½ cup of crème fraîche  
1 boiled Brussels sprout tied with a red string

Boil the cubed carrot and the sprout in salted water until tender. Set aside. Add the mint to the water and bring back to the boil. Add the frozen peas, simmer them for 3 minutes and allow them to cool. Put peas and boiled carrot in blender and blend until smooth. Maybe it's better to make them a little lumpy, because this will enable the eaters to reflect on the lumpiness of their own lives. Add a bit of the cooking liquid and blitz it. Add the crème fraîche, and salt and pepper to taste. Place the boiled Brussels sprout, a sprig of dill and a drizzle of olive oil on the top of the soup. This will serve four diffident Romantic Era poets, who will toy with the idea of having a bowl of soup. They will look away from it, gaze back at the bowl for a moment, sigh, and then dip the sprout up and down in the soup. Most of them will frown and sniff disdainfully at your attempt to cheer them up. One or two of them will leave the table to sing a few Schubert ballads about going out in winter, but none of them will eat, none of them. How very sad, how tragic.

## The Unbearable Heaviness of Pea Soup

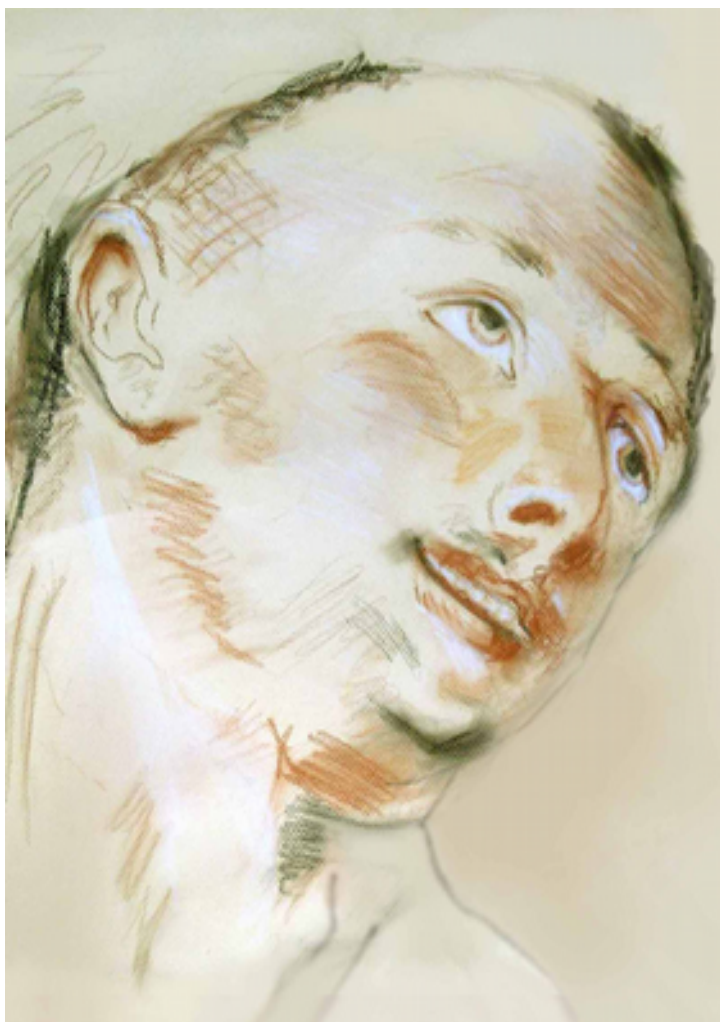


A YOUNG FATHER

Maurice Le Crayeux, pastel on cream coloured paper

Paris, France

1850 AD



## Christmas in Paris

Charles Baudelaire, who was a naughty poet, lived in Paris during the time of this story. He wrote: ‘The old Paris is no more, the form of a city changes more quickly alas, than the heart of a mortal. Paris is changing, but nothing in my melancholy has shifted!’

And Paris in 1850 was changing in a rapid and cruel fashion. Whilst Baudelaire was writing about melancholy and punctuating his poems with many exclamation points and parentheses, his continual lack of money forced him to shift and change (like Paris) from one cheap and dodgy lodging to even cheaper and dodgier ones. Poverty didn’t do much to snap him out of his melancholy. Areas where the poor had lived for many years were being torn down to make way for the grand boulevards and impressive buildings we admire today. The working poor took anything they could get, and hotels profited from the housing crisis by often putting two families in one room and charging excessive rents for the privilege of staying there.

Guillaume La Grange was a handsome young butcher who left the little village where he and his family lived for many generations. It wasn’t his choice, but due to a lack of government funds and the decimation of soldiers in the countless wars, small villages in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century France, were impoverished and dying out at an alarming rate. Their local leaders had become as corrupt as Versailles. By chance, Guillaume had been accepted as an apprentice to the finest butcher in Paris. The apprenticeship was formalised at the ‘*Boucherie de Pierre*’. He was granted permission to send for his family

as soon as he found a place to live and he found one, the day before Annie and the children arrived. It was nearly the end of December, so he was grateful to find a single room in a shabby hotel near *Les Jardins des Plantes*. It was also close to the butcher shop, and his children would be able to play in the park. They didn't even have to cross the street to get there. The Baby Duck Hotel was not much different from any of the other squalid establishments for the poor. The hotel had a brand-new, wrought iron fence around it, but it had a night-time secret that would strike fear into the strongest of hearts.

'You won't have to share it with another family, at least not right now. Does it suit you?' asked the landlord, whose immovable smile seemed to be carved into his face. 'We hope you and your children will be very happy here, we always aim to please. That will be one hundred Francs in advance, sir.'

Guillaume saw that it was a rather large attic room with a low, sloping ceiling. Part of a windowpane was missing and when the wind blew, it made a whistling sound through the broken glass. At one time, the walls had been papered with yellow wallpaper, but this had faded to a dirty brown-beige colour, not unlike the colour of infant's poo. The ceiling was blackened by forty years of oil lamps. He saw an old lamp lying by the fireplace. It seemed to be the only thing that wasn't broken. A ragged blanket lay on a straw mattress and the bed itself would barely fit one person, much less a family of four. There were no sheets or pillows. A cracked and soiled chamber pot had been shoved under it. The room stank of the previous occupants who had left their scent behind like unwashed, blue cheese-eating, ghosts. Guillaume sighed.

He was glad that his wife hadn't climbed the six flights of stairs to see what they had come to, but what choice did they have, especially so close to Christmas? He'd have to think of a way to warn her without alarming his tired children.

'I'll just get my wife and daughters; they're waiting outside the gate with our things,' said Guillaume.

'Payment in advance, you understand,' said the proprietor. He didn't bother to smile, anymore.

Guillaume paid him, went down the stairs, warned his wife about the room and helped the children to go up with all of their belongings. It took a while to unload the cart he'd borrowed from his boss, but finally, after the cart was returned, they closed the door to their room. For a moment they all stared helplessly at each other. Adele began to cry. 'It's cold in here, Papa and it stinks like pee. Where's *my* bed?' asked Claudine. Guillaume moved the narrow iron bedstead so that one side was pushed up against the wall. Then he stood back and admired his work. Now it could be used as a sofa during the day.

'We're going to play a game tonight.' He said. 'We're going to be sleeping sardines. What do you think of that? Do you know how sardines sleep? Sideways, just like they do in the can. Claudine, you are the eldest, so you lie on the bed first, with your head towards the wall, and then Adele. Little Marie-Laure can sleep near the railings.'

'But our feet are hanging over the sides.' said Adele. 'Especially mine, because I'm getting taller and taller. Why can't we go back to our farm, Papa? It's strange here, people don't smile and say *Bonjour!* And I'm cold.'

‘Can’t be helped, that’s how we’ll have to sleep, until I can buy a proper bed. Now let me cover you up *Voilà!*’ He threw a homemade quilt over the girls, made a long pillow out of the old blanket and grinned triumphantly at his wife. She took off her glasses, rubbed her tired eyes, and managed to smile at her little girls. Then she pulled off her coat and shawl, put them on the floor next to the bed, arranged all of their other clothes on top, and covered the lumpy, makeshift bed with her mother’s old tablecloth.

‘Tomorrow,’ she said, ‘Papa and I will make a new place behind the wardrobe, and it will be our own little bedroom. We’re too tired to move it tonight. Besides, we want to sleep close to you, to keep you safe. Do you see a table anywhere? No? Then we’ll have a picnic supper on the floor. There’s just one chair with three legs and no one should try to sit on it. Guillaume, you take the pitcher and wash it carefully at the well. I’ll lay the plates out and put a rag in that crack in the window. Don’t forget to take the soap with you!’

They ate the rest of the bread and cheese they’d brought from home, and took turns drinking out of the pitcher that was on the tiny washstand. Annie La Grange was already busy with a list of things to barter or borrow from her neighbours. Guillaume had brought his tools with him and he could make a table and benches, if they could find a few pieces of wood in the street. When the children were asleep, the young parents were free to talk about how they were going to manage.

‘How much money do we have left, dear? We really need to buy some coal tomorrow, the girls might fall ill if we don’t,’ she said.

‘Ninety francs and forty centimes. I’ll leave some money on the table, before I go,’ mumbled Guillaume. ‘I’ll get paid tomorrow and I hope Monsieur Pierre remembers to do it... Zzzz ... zzzz ..... zzzz... Huh? Did you say something, dear?’

‘Don’t forget to remind him in a nice way. You’re very good at that,’ said Annie softly. She glanced at her husband and saw that he’d fallen asleep again. She set the carriage clock to three o’ clock, because Guillaume had to be at the butcher shop early. Then she stared out of the dirty window. The sky was beginning to herald the approach of another long winter night. Her mind was filled with lists of things to do, but her heart was still in the countryside. She finally lay down beside her husband, and wearily closed her eyes. Her mind surrendered itself to a dark and comfortless dream.

Early in the morning, Guillaume tiptoed down the stairs and shut the front door quietly. He opened the wrought iron gate, but it slipped from his grasp, and banged shut with a terrible clanging sound. The poor man flinched and resolved to be more careful next time. He looked around quickly to see if anyone had noticed him, and it was then he saw two large yellow eyes which shone in the meagre light by the hotel. They were the eyes of a large creature, a creature that stared out from behind a hedge, which was only a few metres from the gate. He heard a low staccato grunting: ‘Huuuh, huuuh, huuuh, huuuh.’ Then a series of dangerous-sounding roars: ‘Arrrhaaoorr! Arrrhaaoorr! The sound was so powerful that he could feel it vibrate throughout his whole body. Though he wanted to run, his legs wouldn’t obey him.



He knew he had become the monster's prey. Guillaume could smell the animal now, and he also knew it was a cat, a big cat. Despite the fact that his legs seemed nailed to the pavement, his mind remained remarkably clear. He realised he was about to die, but the only question occupying his thoughts was whether it was a lion, a panther, or a tiger. He tried to move again and suddenly his legs remembered how to run. As he raced along, not daring to look back, he expected any minute now, to be pulled to the ground and torn to pieces. His feet seemed to float effortlessly over the paving stones. He ran faster and faster, but was it enough? Finally, Guillaume saw a light burning inside the butcher shop, and he frantically beat on the front door.

‘Monsieur Pierre! Open up! Please let me in!’ he cried. ‘Come in! What’s the matter, son?’ said the old butcher. ‘You’re shaking all over! Have you been robbed? Did they beat you up? Come in, come in, Guillaume, you poor boy!’

‘Shut the door, sir! He’s after me! It’s a lion...perhaps a tiger...I can still smell him! I heard him roar three times. I felt the sound deep in my chest. It shook my bones, sir.’

‘Sit down for a moment and drink this,’ said the butcher. He made a big show of bolting the door so the lion couldn’t get in and he poured a generous amount of cognac into a glass. He gave it to Guillaume, whose hands were shaking so much he couldn’t keep the glass steady. Pierre took it, and held it to the young man’s lips.

‘Don’t gulp it all at once.’ he said. ‘Just sip it slowly until you feel better.’ He was trying to look sombre, but couldn’t manage it for very long. When the young man stopped trembling, Pierre said, ‘You’ve had a ghastly

shock, but I believe I can shed some light on your experience. You see, my boy... life is like an onion. When you peel it, you have to cry. You have peeled the biggest onion of your life this morning, and I know that your onion was a lion. In fact it was three lions, two lionesses and a male. You probably saw a lioness, now they're the ones that do most of the hunting.'

'Onions, sir? What does that have to do with dangerous beasts roaming the streets? Where did they come from? No one at the hotel told me about loose lions, and I don't know anyone who's seen one walking down the Boulevard Saint Jacques! I thought Les Jardins des Plantes is supposed to be a botanical park, with flowers and exotic birds in cages. Think of the children - they will play in the park every day. It shouldn't be allowed!' 'The lions arrived only two days ago. I read it in the paper. They are part of a new exhibition in the park. It's called "The Wild Predators of Africa". The park recently bought some monkeys, and I read that they've got two giraffes as well. They're all in cages or fenced in. The zookeepers insist that it's perfectly safe. The new curator wants to make it into a proper zoological garden, to bring in more money. Did you happen to let the gate bang shut as you left today? The lion enclosure is right next to your hotel; that's why you could see the lioness's eyes. She probably thought you'd banged the gate on your way to feed them.'

'Yes, it all makes sense now.' said Guillaume. The gate did slip out of my hand. I heard that horrible roar and I saw those big yellow eyes. Ah, Paris is so full of surprises.'

The two men went to work, and Pierre was surprised at how skilful Guillaume had become in such a short time. The boy was a natural, an artist with a knife. He had an honest face and a friendly way with his customers. It was as if you could read his soul and what you read was pure.

When it was almost time to open the shop, Guillaume took a deep breath and asked: ‘Would you happen to have any spare wood in the back room? Or perhaps a chair that needs mending that I could borrow? It’s Christmas Eve and I’d like to surprise my family.’

‘What precisely do you need, boy?’ asked Pierre slyly. ‘Not much. The place is big enough, but we need to get an old mattress for Annie and me, and some wood for chairs or benches. Maybe even enough for a small table. I can make or mend anything and you’d get it all back in a short while when I’ve saved enough to buy my own furniture, or you could take it out of my pay.’

‘There’s no need for that,’ said Pierre. ‘How many chairs do you need, five? It’s not a loan. I’ve wanted to be rid of that rubbish in the shed for a long time. You’d be doing me a favour by carting it away. Speaking of which, we’ll take the cart after work and I’ll help you carry my old furniture upstairs. I’ll go see what’s left. No arguments, boy! You mind the door while I’m in the back.’

Pierre opened a window in the storeroom to let some light in. There was an oak table, an old armchair, a dusty landscape of the countryside, a moth-eaten Persian carpet with a rather large hole in it and six crippled wooden chairs, all of which had lost a leg or a seat, but the legs and seats had been put into a neat pile. There was a bookcase and a wooden chest filled with his wife’s old bed sheets and blankets. They smelled musty and needed

a good airing, but they were clean. He even found an embarrassingly old mattress, with its bedstead and two children's beds. He hesitated a moment and finally heaved them onto the pile one corner of the room and then he went up the back stairs and came back down with a basket of his daughter's old books and toys, five feather pillows, a few more blankets and a small brass candelabra. He put them by the growing pile of furniture. He sprinkled a little dust over them to make them look as if they had been there for a long time. The shop wasn't busy, so Pierre made an excuse to leave. He rounded up his colleagues and asked them for a small donation for his new apprentice's family.

When he returned, the vegetable vendor, the baker, the grocer, the coal man, one of the washerwomen and a candlestick maker were standing by his shop with parcels in their hands.

'I told you people not to arrive all at once! Now he'll get suspicious,' said Pierre. 'We'll have to think of another plan. Put everything in the cart, and I'll cover it with blankets. Then we'll pretend it's his birthday. We'll help him carry this stuff upstairs, then we'll give him the furniture. Jean-Paul, go get one of your little cakes, and the rest of you, hide around the corner until Jean-Paul comes back. Thank God, Guillaume's been too busy to notice you hanging about. Wipe those smiles off your faces! Disappear!'

Guillaume hadn't noticed a thing. It was nearly three o'clock and his shift was over. He was busy tidying up, completely bent over with his arms inside of the meat counter, when everyone tiptoed in and began to sing 'Happy Birthday' in such an off-key chorus, that

wouldn't have seemed out of place in the Wild Predators of Africa exhibit. Some of them clashed pot lids together.

'I'm really honoured,' said the young butcher, 'but my birthday isn't until next November.'

'Well, never mind dear, here's something for your whole family, and welcome to the neighbourhood,' said the rosy-faced, rotund washerwoman. She put her massive red hands on the counter and gave him a large bar of yellow soap. 'Look!' she said, 'here's Monsieur Tartinette with your cake. He's absolutely the best baker in town, I guarantee!'

The rest of the merchants had already hidden their gifts in the cart and now they filled the shop, shuffling their feet, clearing their throats and trying to look very serious.

Guillaume felt tears in his eyes. 'I don't know what to say,' he whispered. 'If anyone needs something mended, I'll do it for free. May I keep the cake for my wife and children, for Christmas Day?'

'No,' cried the flammable baker. 'It's not the right cake! What you need is a *Bûche de Noel*. Now that a Christmas cake! Never seen one? It is a chocolate roll with cream filling and shavings of dark chocolate on the outside, with glacé cherries and meringue mushrooms and marzipan holly for decoration. That's the only thing I will allow your family to eat after a Christmas Day dinner, and I will make it myself! I will give you this humble little cake as a gesture of good will, and tomorrow at noon, I will deliver the *Bûche* to your new lodgings.'

Pierre clapped his hands one time and the baker pulled out his linen handkerchief and blindfolded Guillaume, who wasn't allowed to move until all the other donations

were loaded in. Guillaume had no idea what was in the back of the cart, but he was grateful for anything they could spare. The greengrocer and the coal man sat on top of everything, whistling and singing Christmas songs, while Pierre drove the cart at breakneck speed to the old hotel. When they arrived, Guillaume raced up the stairs to warn his wife that they were about to have visitors, whether she liked it or not, and he found the room empty. He was embarrassed at how cold and bare it looked. He hastily shoved all of their clothes (which they had slept on the night before) back into the wardrobe, and threw the old tablecloth over it. Glancing around the shabby room to see if he'd missed anything, but he realised that there was very little to miss. A note on the wash stand read:

*Darling Guille, we're at the park. This morning, Adele saw a rat trying to squeeze under our door. She called it her little brown dog. I threw my shoes at it. She said I was a cruel mommy, and cried all the way to the park.*

*Love,  
Annie*

It didn't take long before Guillaume and his new friends had hauled everything upstairs, and lit a fire in the grate. A large chicken was put into a cast iron pot, and it was set to boil in the hearth, with carrots, onions, sprouts, garlic, a glass of wine and a few fresh herbs. It filled the room with an enticing aroma. They arranged the furniture as best they could, put the big bed behind the wardrobe, and the two little beds next to the ancient one that was

already there. Chairs were mended and the table was set for supper. Guillaume nailed a lath against the bottom of the front door so the rats couldn't get in. New candles provided a cheerful glow to the room, and the old rug made it seem warmer. They put an armchair over the small hole in the floor, and stepped back to admire their work.

'Not bad,' said Pierre. 'Not bad at all.'

'I didn't expect that we'd even *have* a Christmas,' said Guillaume, hiding the basket of toys and books in the wardrobe. He turned his back to his new friends, so they couldn't see his tears. 'I hear the children running up the stairs. We finished just in time. Please, would you do me the honour of meeting my family and having a glass of wine with us? We have enough glasses,' said Guillaume.

Everyone took their places and waited for the door to open. The two younger girls bounced into the room, laughing and smelling of fresh air. Then Annie and Claudine came in with their shopping baskets, which were not full. The little ones stopped jumping and stared at everyone with their mouths open, while Guillaume walked over to his wife and handed her a glass of wine. 'Happy Christmas,' he whispered. Before Annie had time to shake hands with her new friends, there was a loud knock on the door. A gruff voice shouted: 'Let me in at once, or I'll summon the police!'

'I'll get it Mamie!' said Adele. She jumped up and ran to the door.

'No, child!' said Annie. 'Let Papa do it.' Guillaume frowned at everyone, put his finger to his lips, and opened the door to the landlord of the hotel. The man shuffled in, clasping and unclasping his hands. He said:

‘As much as it pains my generous heart to say this, I regret to inform you that you and your family are no longer my tenants. I have rented this room to another family who can pay much more than you can.

‘But we’ve already paid in advance for this week! You can’t throw us out like this!’ said Guillaume. Annie frowned and gathered her children around her wide skirt.

‘Aaah oui,’ said the hotelier, I realise it’s sad, especially so near to Christmas, but things are tough all over! And yes, I *can* throw you out, as you so crudely put it, it’s all right here in your lease contract. Do you see the last clause, just here at the bottom of the document?’

‘But that line seems to be written in different coloured ink and it wasn’t there when I signed it!’ said Guillaume.

The landlord didn’t even bother to look him in the face and he stabbed his bony finger at the last line of the contract for emphasis. Guillaume noticed that the man’s nails were long, pointed, and not too clean.

‘Prove it, then!’ said Monsieur Corbeau, grinning. ‘I can’t turn back, now. Better money has changed hands. You will be out tonight or early tomorrow morning. If you refuse, you’ll become honoured guests at the Bastille on your Christmas Day. I have friends in low places.’

Guillaume pointed to the door. He’d lost the ability to speak. The landlord looked up at his dignified face and backed out of the room. Now, the young butcher glanced at his wife who sat quietly with her children around her. Her eyes showed nothing of what she was feeling. They had become cold and dark. Her mouth was set. She would not cry now, not in front of people. But the tears would fall silently, when everyone was gone.



Suddenly, the room exploded with the sound of angry voices. The shopkeepers were shocked into action. Everyone began to talk at the same time and it became so chaotic that little Marie-Laure began to cry again.

‘Silence, give me a minute to think, men! This is an outrage!’ shouted Pierre. ‘Let’s take all of the things back to the shop, and we’ll arrange them just like this, in the back room. Guillaume and his family can stay there until he can find somewhere else to live. Take the chicken off the fire, so it can cool. It’s a sin to waste a good chicken. That landlord will take it and the pot it’s cooking in. Hurry! It’s already getting dark. The least we can do is make a lot of noise when we’re going down the stairs! That should disturb the little man’s evening!’ They made so much noise on the stairs with their terrible singing, that some of the hotel’s residents helped carry their things to the cart, just to shut them up. Annie and her children couldn’t help smiling at their antics, especially when the prim little baker sang the Marseillaise while sliding down the banister. At the top of the stairs, the landlord was stamping his feet in a fit of helpless rage. He was also waving his arms and shouting ‘Thieves! They’re robbing me! Call the police!’ His long-sleeved waistcoat flapped up and down like wings, and it made him look less like a rat, and more like an old crow.

When everyone arrived at the butcher shop, Annie noticed there was a heavy smell of meat in the air. It wasn’t putrid, but it was certainly something she’d have to get used to. In those days, French butchers displayed most of their meat outside, arranging it very artistically, with sausages draped like theatre curtains, in elegant loops and folds. The eyes of sheep’s heads were replaced

with glass ones, which made them seem alive, almost as if they were watching the customers who were coming to buy them. Pierre's friends lit a few oil lamps so they could see what they were doing. They cleaned and swept out the back room as best they could, and left a window open to let the dust out. They arranged the furniture and the room looked cosy enough, but it was still chilly. This was partly due to the cold room (where the meat was stored) which was directly underneath them, and the open window. While the family was busy settling in, Pierre secretly took each of the shopkeepers aside, and asked them the same question.

‘Can you manage it in a day? Fix my parlour, put up new curtains in the bedrooms, clean everything up, bring some cooked food for their Christmas dinner, and swear an oath of secrecy? Tartinette, can you go ask the girls what their favourite colours are, a different colour for each of their bedrooms, but please don't tell them about what we are doing.’

‘Right away!’ said Monsieur Tartinette. ‘But it won't be the same without you.’

‘Don't worry, I'll tell him we're having a civic meeting tomorrow, and that he has to work alone, all day. We'll take the family upstairs to my flat tomorrow evening. Oh yes, we'll need to stock the pantry. Send your wives to me as soon as you get home. You can all spare something from your own dinners, I guess. I'll need a list of expenses from everyone. Are we all agreed?’

‘Of course!’ they replied. Some of them took out their measuring sticks and began to take the dimensions of the flat. The draper had just the right colour curtains in his shop, and he rushed away to get them.

After everyone had left, Pierre went down and knocked loudly on the heavy storeroom door. The family was gathered around the table, eating cold chicken soup, ham and bread. They had their meagre coats wrapped around their legs for warmth.

‘I’m sorry it’s so cold in here. I brought you some smoked sausages and some more bread and wine and some sweet cider for the children. Do you need more blankets?’ asked Pierre.

‘We’re fine, sir. This is the second time you’ve saved us in one day, and that’s more than any man deserves. I’ll try to find another place to live as soon as I can, but I’m afraid it won’t be easy. Everyone wants to live in Paris these days. Please join us at the table.’ said Guillaume.

‘No,’ said Pierre, ‘I’m too tired to eat. I’ll have a small glass of wine and then I’m off. My bones need their rest.’ Annie and Claudine nodded. They still seemed to be in shock, but the younger ones had already forgotten the chaotic afternoon. They were slathering their bread with butter and jam and giggling about Pierre, who looked a bit like Father Christmas with his curly moustache and his neat white beard. He sat down carefully on one of the wobbly chairs and raised his glass to Guillaume, and especially to Annie. ‘At least you’ll never be late for work, boy, he shouted. ‘Here’s to better times and a Merry Christmas to your whole family.’

A secret smile lit up his broad face. He really was tired, and he longed for his soft bed. He sighed and said: ‘There will be last-minute customers tomorrow, and I expect a lot more of them at the end of the day. Alas, I won’t be able to be in the shop. You’re on your own

tomorrow, because the shopkeepers and I will be having our annual meeting upstairs.’

On Christmas morning, Annie gave Guillaume a new butcher’s apron which she had fashioned from an sheet.

He gave her another small piece of smoked ham. Claudine got a new hat which looked suspiciously like one her mother always wore to market, but now it was covered with handmade silk flowers and ribbons. Adele had a box of paints and a roll of butcher paper to paint on. Marie-Laure found her present wrapped in the same sort of paper, and when she opened it, she found a little stuffed dog on wheels. The wheels could be taken off, so that she could sleep with it. Guillaume and Annie had made it out of wood, brown fabric and brown sheep’s wool. Its eyes were black glass buttons. It looked like a combination of a puppy and a rabbit because it had long ears and a round face.

‘What are you going to call him?’ asked Annie.

‘Her name is Paulette, the Little Brown Dog,’ said Marie-Laure with a serious expression.

‘What kind of a name is that?’ asked Claudine, raising one regal eyebrow. ‘The idea of calling a dog Paulette, it’s absurd.’

‘It’s *her* name!’ said the little one. ‘Let’s eat! Paulette says we have to eat and eat. Papa, does Father Christmas really live upstairs?’

‘Yes, perhaps.’ replied Guillaume. ‘You’ll never know.’

As the morning went on, Guillaume heard many footsteps on the stairs but he was too busy to pay attention to this. The shop was bustling and he had his hands full with the demands of his customers. Annie had taken the children to the park that morning, to see what

the new lions were eating for *their* Christmas dinner. They had just returned, full of stories about the lions and the new, vicious-looking, black panther. Guillaume worked through lunch and he didn't realise it was getting dark. At that moment, Pierre stomped downstairs and said in a thunderous voice: 'We, the merchants of this neighbourhood have something very important to discuss with you, Guillaume. Close up this shop at once! We're all waiting for you. He frowned and said: 'Bring your wife and the children too.' Then he turned angrily and stamped up the stairs.

'What on earth?' said Guillaume. 'He seems really upset. What did I do wrong?'

'I can't imagine dear, let's go up right away,' said Annie. The whole family walked up the stairs, expecting the worst. Adele thought: Perhaps I was too noisy this morning. Now Father Christmas is angry at me for shouting, and it's my fault.

The merchants were sitting around Pierre's dining room, dressed in their best clothes. They all wore fierce expressions and didn't greet Guillaume; they simply frowned at him. Then, Pierre rose from his chair and handed the young man a document which was tied with red cord and stamped with an official wax seal. 'Open it, boy,' he said.

'Yes sir.'

'Read it to us.'

Guillaume cleared his throat and began to read in a trembling voice. His heart felt like it would burst out of his chest and fall to the floor like a piece of offal. His hands shook and he stopped for a moment to regain his composure.

‘Oh, give me that damn thing,’ said Pierre, impatiently. He read the title of the deed and the name of new owner of the shop. It was then that the contents of the document began to enter Guillaume’s consciousness.

‘But it has my name on it! I’m not the patron? What do you mean? What does this mean?’ He looked at the others helplessly.

‘Oh, indeed! I think you do know.’ said Pierre with a wicked grin. ‘And not only are you the new owner, the flat comes with the shop. You will never be cold or hungry again. And you don’t have to worry about lions or landlords either. I’ll come in every day; don’t worry about that, either. I’m going to do something I’ve dreamt of ever since my daughter’s child Chloe was born. I’ve decided to live with her and her family in the suburbs, and watch my little grandchild grow up. Colette’s been after me for years, but I was always too busy here. Life is far too short to put things off, isn’t it? Nobody knows this, but ever since I was a boy, I wanted to become a great inventor. Well, that wasn’t in the cards for me, I’m not clever enough. Not one of my inventions ever worked properly. But I can certainly invent a new life for myself and a much better life for you and Annie. Do you accept the deed? Do me a great favour, and say yes. Monsieur Tartinette, please show the children their new bedrooms. The pink one is for Claudine and the blue one is for Adele and Marie-Laure to share. We put up a curtain to divide the room and we chose your favourite colours; I hope it pleases the young ladies.’ Monsieur Tartinette bowed and led the girls away.

‘This is so beautiful, Pierre, I still can’t imagine it!’ said Annie. She put her arms around him and Guillaume shook his hand vigorously.

There were screams of delight when the girls discovered their new rooms, and a great deal of laughter in the parlour. Pierre opened a fine bottle of champagne and wished everyone a happy Christmas. Guillaume kept shaking his head and mumbling, ‘This is a dream, look at this place, look Annie!’

‘Open the drawers,’ said Pierre proudly, as if he had done all the work himself. ‘See the new range in the corner? It runs on coal. And this is the way you work the gaslights. Here is your pantry, stuffed to the top shelves with everything you could ever wish for. The bathroom is around the corner and there’s even an inside toilet.’ Then the baker lifted a silver cloche which was hiding the largest *Bûche de Noel* he’d ever made. It was a long roll of cake, with chocolate icing. Just as he had promised, there were meringue mushrooms and holly made of coloured marzipan. Pierre ceremoniously cut the cake.

After four years of hard work and long hours in the shop, Guillaume became one of the most respected butchers in Paris. Annie had become famous for making hats. Claudine was engaged to a banker, and Adele and Marie-Laure were doing very well at school. Pierre began to visit his old shop more often. He finally confessed that although he loved his new life in the suburbs, being a full-time Grandpapa was much harder than he’d ever imagined. His little granddaughter had taken full possession of his time, his thoughts, his life, all of it...All.

‘Would you take me on as your apprentice, perhaps three afternoons a week?’ he asked. ‘I’ve changed my

mind about spending all my time in the country. It's more hard work than I ever imagined. Little Chloe runs me ragged, morning, noon, and half of the night. Now the only game she wants to play is "The Princess and Her Noble Steed, Albert." I am that wretched "Noble Steed, Albert" for hours and hours on end, every single day. It's wearing me out.'

'I would be honoured,' said Guillaume. 'When would you like to start?'

'How about tomorrow?' asked Pierre. He rubbed his hands happily, twirled his moustache and he grinned his famously naughty grin. 'Yes, tomorrow would suit me fine! That is, if it's all right with you, Patron?'

Guillaume shook Pierre's hand and he put his arms around him. 'We've all missed you!' he said. 'Adele keeps asking me if Father Christmas will ever come back for a visit. The girls are growing up so fast.'

'Being Father Christmas or being a simple Grandpa isn't nearly as easy as you might think. I'm very glad to be here, even if it is part-time. You've really made a name for yourself, I am so proud of you,' said Pierre, 'but you must tell me if I become too bossy. Old habits die hard, you know.'

'Oh, I will do,' said Guillaume. 'I certainly will, and I don't need any cheeky, young assistants around here.' Then he winked at Pierre and they went back to work.



## The Family's Upstairs Christmas Dinner

### Ingredients

- 1 large de-boned chicken (your butcher will do this for you if you ask him.)
- 2 tablespoons of duck fat to baste the chicken (or olive oil, if you don't have any ducks)
- 4 sprigs of thyme leaves
- 1 aubergine, diced
- 3 onions, roughly chopped
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 or 3 cloves of garlic (one to be rubbed on the skin of the chicken and two cloves finely chopped for the pot)
- 4 potatoes or turnips, boiled until tender, diced and set aside
- 1 bag of Brussels sprouts (800 grams) boiled for 8 minutes and set aside
- 1 handful of fresh tarragon Leaves cut in fine strips
- ½ cup Chablis

Rub the chicken with garlic and roast it in your iron pot over a moderate fire for ½ an hour or more. Baste with duck fat, two or three times to keep it moist. When chicken is done remove from the pot. Deglaze the pan with the Chablis and add the aubergine, thyme, chopped garlic, and the onions. Simmer until tender. Put in the chopped tomatoes, the potatoes and the Brussels sprouts and heat them through. Add the tarragon leaves at the end, otherwise they will lose their taste.

Serves a poor family with three children, who will still be hungry. If they cry, give them some more bread.

## Annie's Famous Chicken



VINCENT VAN GOGH  
 Letter to His Brother Theo  
 Nuenen, The Netherlands  
 1885



## Another Letter from the Coalfields

Dear Theo,

I know you weren't too impressed with my last sketch of the coal miner's family in Nuenen and perhaps you're just as sceptical about the rest of the work I've been producing lately, but let me at least try to explain why I am so drawn to these poor people. You see, I wanted to draw them so that *our* people, our well-to-do people, get the idea that these workers, who are eating their sprouts by the light of their little oil lamp, have tilled the earth themselves, with their rough fingers, that they are now putting into their bowls, to eat a few sprouts. I want to paint a realistic picture of manual labourers to paint these people as they really are, people who honestly earn their daily bread. I want these sketches to portray a wholly different way of life from our bourgeois, 'civilised' existence. I certainly don't want everyone just to admire it, or approve of it without knowing why. Last Saturday, Pieter Jansen invited me to eat with them and to draw a portrait of their young daughter, Aafje. I couldn't say no. It never stopped raining all day, and all of us were shivering and wet when we came in from the meagre sprout fields.

Theo, the smell in that little hovel was too much to bear, even for me, a man who has become used to such things. The oil lamp gave off such an awful stench that we were soon dizzy from the fumes. And then there were the steaming, unwashed, wet clothes on unwashed, wet bodies, the smell of sour milk, and worst of all, the omnipresent rotten odour of overcooked Brussels sprouts.

My heart was crying for them and the least I could do, despite my nausea, was to finish the quick sketch I had made of their child. I got up to leave, relieved to be out of the room, but they asked me to stay for dinner and they *nailed* my drawing on their wall.

The smell and the taste of those sprouts haunts me to this day. I'd planned to make an oil painting of the family, but I cannot go back, until the memory of that evening fades from my memory. The horror I felt when I took that generously offered cupful of sprouts still remains with me, but it seems to be diminishing with the passage of time. I believe that the only way I can paint a portrait of the Jansen family is to change those horrible vegetables to a plate of boiled potatoes, "The Potato Eaters", how does that sound to you? I think it's much better than: "The Brussels Sprout Eaters".

I don't want to go back there to finish the painting! Do I have to, Theo? The very idea of it fills me with dread and at the same time I reproach myself for having these feelings. Are the Jansens not also God's creatures and thus equal to us and everyone else in the world? I've sent you another sketch of them eating potatoes this time, and I hope to see you very soon.

Your loving brother  
Vincent

P.S. Could you send me some more paper, a small canvas, and some medium-sized round brushes? You know what I need better than I do. And also a few tubes of oil paint? The usual colours, please. I would also like a tube of that new Bitumen Black. Everyone tells me it's the best black pigment that ever was invented.

## Vincent's Nightmare Dinner with the Jansen's

### Ingredients

as many Brussels sprouts as you can pick from your field  
before it starts to rain again  
a pinch of salt, if you can afford it  
carrots, if you have them  
potatoes  
pot to cook them in

Put the Brussels sprouts into a bowl and remove any yellow leaves, caterpillars, mud, or anything else you may not want to eat. Put sprouts in boiling water and cook them until the house smells like the Fires of Hell. This usually takes about three hours, depending on your coal supply or the size of the Brussels sprouts. You may boil the other vegetables too. Boil some potatoes, onions and carrots if you have them, and mash these vegetables into a paste called '*Hutspot*'. Smack it with force onto the plate. It should make a thwacking sound as it hits the plate. Serve this after the Brussels sprouts; it will give your diners something to look forward to. Eat very slowly and avoid praising the meal. Don't talk unless it is absolutely necessary. Don't use your napkin, because there aren't any. When dinner is over, unlock the cupboard and remove the biscuit tin, take off the lid, and pass the tin around the table. Give your guests only one ancient biscuit. If someone makes the mistake of trying to grab another one, snap the lid down on his fingers.

This recipe serves many.

## THE NINE LETTER WORD

Boris Orychenje, Mixed Media on Canvas

Minsk, Russia

1900



## The Scholar Who Wouldn't Eat

They lived in a small, two room flat that had one narrow window, facing the street. This single window opened just enough to let in the dense, summer air of Minsk. Leah and Saul made a bedroom and a study out of one room by moving a massive dresser half-way into the middle of it. This highly polished dresser reached all the way to the ceiling. They managed to put their bed behind it, creating a snug, but serviceable bedroom. The scholar and his wife had lived there for more than fifty years. Virtually all of their married life was tied up in that apartment. They had a tiny kitchen with an old-fashioned wood stove which heated the rooms in winter, and a bathroom with a wash line strung across the two walls like an assassin's rope. There was also a solid cast iron bath tub, which was big enough to wash a whole family at once, but the scholar and his wife never took a bath together. The toilet was down the hall and it was shared with two other families.

That muggy midday in Minsk, as the mosquitoes were already looking for intelligent people to eat, Professor Saul Pinkus left his study to speak to his wife about his lunch and the sun. Not so much about the sun we know today, or the sun whose rays radiated from the parched paved streets of Minsk, but the older, more fascinating sun. He loved the powerful and mysterious sun of ancient myths and legends. He was nearly finished writing his book about them and the research had taken him nearly as long as his marriage. Every afternoon while Leah was peeling potatoes to make *Zrazy* which was more or less the only thing he would eat. Saul would tell her a story



about a tribe of people who believed the sun was eaten by a crow. This time, he began to tell her about some Siberian peasants who were still convinced that the sun was a large eyeball that would close at night. Leah was a patient, cheerful woman who always listened carefully to his stories about the sun because she believed it would make her husband happy, but she had one secret sorrow. Despite all of her best efforts, she couldn't make her husband eat properly. No one had ever been able to do it, not even when he was a child. It was a miracle he was still alive. What did he live on, air? Did he secretly chew pages like the little beetles she sometimes found when she cleaned the hundreds of books in his study? Like all couples they'd developed their little mealtime rituals. Sometimes he would ask for a cup of chicken soup with one small matzo ball in it, but he wouldn't tolerate any potatoes in the soup or God forbid, a stalk of chopped celery. Most days, he had a few forkfuls of *zrazy* and a tiny amount of boiled cabbage or sprouts, followed by a slice of bread or a matzo. He was also fond of a salad called 'Goat-in-the-Garden', but he would only eat it in the summer. Leah cut the carrots, the cabbage, and the cucumbers very small and added a great amount of mayonnaise to it. Then she sprinkled it with some salt. She would always say: 'This is exactly what a little goat would eat if he got into the garden; carrots, cabbages, sprouts and cucumbers, Eat-eat-eat!' And Saul Pinkus would always say, 'It's not very logical, is it? If a goat got into a garden he'd eat more than just that. He'd eat everything in sight, wouldn't he?'

‘That’s the point,’ she said. ‘Sometimes I wish you were more like the goat in the garden. Then you would eat a little more of your food.’

One day, which was exactly like the day before, and the day before that, Saul was sitting in his study and he asked his wife the eternal question: ‘Leah, have you seen my glasses? Did I leave them on the kitchen table?’

‘No, dear, they’re not here,’ she said. She sighed and continued to roll out the *zrazy*. After that, she planned to make her famous ‘Goat- in-the-Garden’ salad. This time she wanted to put some more sprouts in it and less cucumber.

‘My glasses are not on my desk or I would have seen them lying there,’ said the scholar, grumpily.

‘That’s nice, dear.’

‘Did you hear me? I can’t find my glasses.’

‘They’re not here in the kitchen Saulie. Maybe they’re under a book. Are they between the pages of a pamphlet, perhaps? Did you take your glasses to the bathroom? Perhaps they fell under your chair?’

‘No, I looked everywhere. Did you put them somewhere safe? Maybe you took them because you thought they were yours.’

‘Why would I do that? I don’t need them. I have my own glasses right here.’

‘Did you look under the bed?’

‘Somebody must have taken them, Leah. It’s somebody who needs a pair of glasses. Logically, if he didn’t need them, he wouldn’t have taken them. That is, unless he wanted to sell them to someone else, for a few kopeks. The person who took them either needs my glasses or has to wear them. There is also the possibility that he doesn’t

need the glasses, but he wants to make a bit of money. Now who can he sell them to, I ask you? The person who needs glasses already has glasses, and the person who doesn't need glasses, won't buy any glasses from the one who took them. Another person might have pushed them on top of his forehead because he went into the kitchen to speak to his wife about whether the *zrazy* and the goat-in-the-garden salad are ready. Perhaps he didn't want his glasses to fog up with the steam from the pot of boiling potatoes. That is actually a big possibility. I am feeling my head for the glasses as I am speaking to you... Ah, here they are. The riddle is solved.'

When they finally sat down for lunch, Saul tried to distract his wife by asking her to go to the study and open the window for a bit of fresh air. He knew she couldn't do it. The windowsill had been stuck for forty years. When she went out, he quietly bent down and gave some of his salad to the dog. Leah wasn't born yesterday; she was peeking through the crack in the door, to see what he was up to. She didn't say anything, but she saw Saulie with the salad in his hand, and she saw Sobaka chewing a handful of sprouts. He didn't seem to like it very much, but at least he ate it. She ducked around the corner again before Saul raised his head. Saulie sat up straight again and made some noises with his fork on the plate, as if he were eating. Leah called out from the study: 'Saulie, could you come in here, please? I can't get the window open.'

'Never mind, Leah, who needs fresh air anyway?' he said, sadly.

'Oy, oy, oy, you hooligan!' said Leah. 'I know your big secret, Professor Einstein-Smartypants! You thought

you could get away with it, but no chance! I saw you giving your sprouts and carrots to the dog. Sobaka has his own food already, and you need it more than he does. Why do you give people's food to Sobaka?'

'I wasn't giving it to him, Leah. How can you possibly think that of me? We were just making a trade, I'm sorry.'

'A trade... You want to trade your dinner for what? You trade with Mr. Sobaka and what does he give you? *Nyetchjevo*, only a lick on the hand. That's some wonderful trade, eh? I worked all afternoon to make your lovely *zrazy*. Now, at least you gotta say to me, 'I'm sorry'. And this time, say it like you really mean it. Now, eat-eat-eat!'

'Shhhhhhaa... Shhhhhhaa... I am really sorry. But you see, Leah, a trade is a trade. Sobaka agreed the to the deal, so he will keep his own food and he will have a little of mine as well. It's perfectly logical, really fair, and everybody wins.'

Leah sighed and put her head in her hands. It was enough, already. Maybe tomorrow, she would make a lovely *Yablachnaya Sharlotka* with apples, butter and honey. Then, Professor Einstein-Smartypants wouldn't be able to refuse her good Sharlotka, nobody could. Mr. Sobaka seemed to read her mind and he began to wag his tail in anticipation.

## The Scholar's Zrazy

### Ingredients

4 large potatoes or 2 pounds of smaller potatoes  
500 grams of cooked ground beef or boiled brisket  
ground in a meat grinder until fine  
1 medium white onion, chopped fine  
1 small bag (600 to 800 grams) of Brussels sprouts,  
boiled and chopped  
1 egg  
vegetable oil for frying  
fresh dill leaves

Grate one pound of raw potatoes into a bowl. Boil the rest of the potatoes and the sprouts, until they are soft. Mix the grated raw potatoes and the cooled mashed potatoes together and pat them into elongated patties on cooking parchment, set aside. Since the meat is already cooked, you can proceed with the potatoes. Pepper the potatoes. Add the egg to bind them. Salt the potato mixture to taste and make fat patties of them. Mix the beef and the onions together. Spread the beef and onion mixture onto the elongated potato patties. Add the cooked, chopped Brussels sprouts on top of the meat mixture. Do not add too much meat, or you won't be able to fold the potato around it. Bring the sides of the potato patty around the meat to seal it. Put in the fridge. Fry until golden. Serves four Russians as a single meal.\*

\*Or it can also serve one fussy professor who will push it around his plate, taking little mousey bites out of it. It will last *him* a whole week if he keeps on pushing good food around like that. Make it clear to everyone that the dog isn't interested in doing a trade of any kind. Sobaka should be left in peace to enjoy his own food.

## Eateateat! The Scholar's Zrazy



**BRUSSELS SPROUT FIELD AT EVENTIDE**  
Alfred Célière gouache and pastel on canvas  
Givenchy, France  
1905



## The Eyes of Alfred Célerie

The Impressionist Alfred Célerie managed to outlive nearly all of his friends, his colleagues, and eventually, his fiercest critics who were still convinced that his big paintings were worthless daubs. This was not really true, because he'd become quite famous and his work hung in all the major museums of the world. As he approached his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday he found himself contemplating one of the most frightening decisions of his life.

His eyes had grown so old he had lost the vibrancy of each day. And that is something that most of us take for granted. His colours had deserted him and left him in a world which could neither surprise nor delight. The only comfort he had was the thought of the brilliant hues he hoped to see as he approached the Pearly Gates. Even the sulphurous yellows, blood reds and murky shadows of Hell would be a damn sight better than what he saw now. The blindness had been a gradual process. Red had become a muddy brown, green had virtually disappeared, yellow had become as weak as watery beer, and now purple and blue were beginning to abandon him. His paintings had become as grey as his clouded lenses, and he knew it. He couldn't read or even recognise his friends. His younger colleagues advised him to stop painting and take up gardening, but his passion for painting the world still held him in its grip. He accepted the fact that he would eventually have to consent to the new-fangled operation which promised to restore his sight to that of a young man, but that afternoon, while he was sitting in the surgeon's waiting room, he felt like a condemned person, counting the seconds before the



metallic hiss of the guillotine's blade blots out the sun forever. His old heart skipped a beat and he felt that, too.

He smiled a thin, brave smile and nodded politely to the other patients who were also anxiously waiting for a chance to see the world. He wondered if they felt the same. They were all silent, nervous. It was as if their tongues were connected to their failing vision. Time ticked by ever so slowly. Alfred decided to close his eyes and wait for someone to call his name. Before he drifted off, a children's rhyme danced in his head... Cross my heart and hope to die... Stick a needle in my eye... He was jolted awake by a gentle hand on his shoulder and a young voice saying: 'Monsieur Célerie, wake up, it is time for your eye medicine. Please follow me into the other room. Shall I help you to stand up?'

The little Eye Nurse was shockingly beautiful. Her softly rounded face and sensual mouth made the old man think of the early paintings of his colleague, Auguste Renoir. Auguste had been dead for years, and this girl was far too young to have posed for him. She's just a child, he thought, no older than fifteen, I'll wager. I wonder if they are going to give me whiskey for the pain. Are they going to strap me into a chair and put a gag into my mouth to stop me from screaming? He'd seen it done in the marketplace twenty years before and the horrific image of the victim's grunting and struggling had stayed with him. The unfortunate man with a cataract was first given a lot of strong liquor to drink and when he was drunk enough, he was placed in a sturdy chair and his arms and legs were strapped down. A burly doctor's helper with arms like an ox held the poor man's head, while a leather gag was placed in the mouth. The doctor

took a scalpel and cut a small slit in the white of the poor man's eye. He made this hole bigger with a hollow needle. A small spatula was put into the eye to hold the cornea away from the lens. With a bit of pressure, the cataract was sucked out through the hollow needle and a bandage was placed over the eye. The doctor happily explained every detail of the procedure to the crowd. They couldn't take their own eyes away from the terrible scene. Alfred could tell that the doctor was proud of his work by the way his voice rang out through the vegetable stalls. He had never forgotten the horror of it, and now it was going to happen to him.

'Is it going to hurt?' he asked, as she led him into a small room which smelled of carbolic soap and the sweet scent of chloroform.

'Not in the least!' she said, perkily. 'Now I'm going to put some cocaine drops into your eye every five minutes and you'll have to wait here until they take effect. That will be about fifteen minutes or so. Would you please get undressed and put on this sterile gown?'

'Is that really necessary?' said Alfred. 'I'll be strapped into a chair? Yes? And a strong man is going to hold my head steady? Then you'll put a gag into my mouth so I won't scream and scare the other patients? Will I at least get a bit of strong rum, or do you use cognac?'

'Rum, sir?' She smiled sweetly. The famous painter was probably a bit anxious... The poor, frightened old dear. 'A lot of rum!' said Alfred, 'you know, to ease the pain?'

'I promise you won't feel a thing, M. Célerie. Put your head back now and I'll begin with these drops. She left the room to allow the medication to do its work. Alfred put his head back and resolved not to scream too loudly.

After a minute or two, he began to feel something odd happening to his eye. It felt tight in the socket and it seemed much bigger than the right one. There weren't any mirrors and he had been left alone in the room, so he tried to examine his face in the polished surface of the steel table next to his chair.

That didn't work, so he tried to feel the difference between his eyes with his fingers on each eyelid. The left eye *did* feel a lot larger, and he wondered how foolish he must look in his skimpy hospital gown. He was beginning to look like a monster of course, with his knobbly old legs, one huge monstrous eye, and his shaky hands. He was an artist after all, and he was used to observing the human form, including his own, without romanticising it.

'Are we feeling better now, Mr. Célerie?' asked the nurse after she finished examining his eyes for the last time.

'What do you mean 'we'? I don't know about you, but I'm still frightened about that chair,' he replied. His attempt at sarcasm didn't seem to sink into her adorable little skull. She smiled again and escorted him to the operating theatre where he was asked to lie down on a large, cold, steel table. The last thing he remembered was the sight of her angelic face and her small white hand, which held a sickly, sweet-scented cloth over his nose and mouth. When he awoke he found himself in a ward with three other men who had undergone the same surgery. His left eye was bandaged, so he didn't know if the surgeon had been successful or not, but it didn't hurt much and his fellow patients weren't moaning or showing any signs of distress, except for one loud

complaint about the pale, dreadfully tasteless food they were getting morning, noon, and night. It was a very good sign, he thought, so he shut his eyes, pretending to be asleep. 'At least no one recognises me,' he muttered to himself. 'I've become so *passé* that no one could recognise me if I walked naked in the street with a bedpan on my head shouting my own name. Now I'm just a terrified old man in a hospital bed. There's no escape for me.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of many quick-paced footsteps and hushed voices in the corridor. A senior doctor, surrounded by a bevy of his respectful students, crowded round his bed. The doctor, who had plastered his thinning hair over his bald spot with some sort of glue, put his face close to Alfred's ear and spoke in an irritatingly loud and fruity voice,

'Helloooo, Mr. Célerie, *I* am the eye doctor. How are we? Are we feeling, any pain? Are we ready to see the world again in all its splendour? Do we have any pain in the eye?' The doctor was quite careful to e-nun-ci-ate every word, assuming that a man of such considerable years was deaf and senile, as well as nearly blind.

'Do you speak to all of your patients like that?' asked Alfred. His covered eyes glittered with suppressed fury. 'Oh, yes indeedy! I try to make it simple.' said the irrepressible physician, using his best, reassuring smile. 'Then stop this denigrating prattle at once! I can hear you perfectly well and there's nothing wrong with my brain, so far,' said Alfred.'

The doctor wheeled around and scowled at his students. 'Who laughed?' he asked. His carefully rehearsed, jovial demeanour had changed into his actual, egotistical self.

No one dared to put up their hand, so he turned back to his patient and told him in a more normal voice that he was there to examine the eye. After the examination was over, one of the students held up an eye chart. Even though the letters seemed hazy at first, they began to come into focus and Alfred found that he could read them rather well. He glanced out of the window and almost cried out. The sky was a delicate shade of Parisian blue and the chestnut trees were clothed in a fragile spring green, a green he hadn't seen for twenty years. The old man had completely forgotten that such a fragile green even existed and he felt like weeping. I've fallen into a large box of coloured chalk, he thought, and the world has renewed itself while I lay down to rest. 'Thank you very much, Doctor,' he said, suddenly humbled. And he meant it from the depths of his soul.

## STILL LIFE WITH SPROUTS

Pablo Picador, mixed media on canvas

Antibes, France

1950



## Pablo and the Fish

Imagine Antibes as it once was, a sleepy fishing village in the South of France. The hills are scented with sun-baked herbs, dust, and lavender. There are cicadas, drowsing in their secret branches. Seagulls dip and dive, crying, 'Fine! Fine! Fine!' And in the impeccably blue sky, a cloud dares not show its face. Two lovers, one rather young, and one rather old, are having a picnic on the beach, and they are completely alone. That's how it was, on the day that Pablo began to act like a fool, making silly faces at his lover, after a lovely lunch of marinated mackerel and sprouts. The light, summer dress of his young mistress ballooned above her knees, as a small breeze played with it. She began to clear away the picnic dishes and frowned at him as a mother does. 'What are you doing, Pablito?' she asked.

'Let's take the fish skeleton home, I need it.' said the artist grumpily.

'Yes Pablo, but it will make another big smell in the car, *mon petit chouchou*,' she said, still pouting. 'Why do you act like a little boy every time we go somewhere? You're always picking up sticks and refuse from the road. Most of it stinks up the house. And then you make *'art'* from it! Just like last week, when you found that old bicycle on the street! You brought it home and made a goat out of it, pough!' She held her delicate nose.

Pablo was fuming when they reached his small villa in the hills. He went immediately to his atelier and he pulled out his ceramic glazes. He'd wanted to dip the perfectly intact fish skeleton in blue glaze, then he was going to press it onto a blank, white plate. He looked at the

dripping fish skeleton and immediately lost interest in it. His soul felt numbed by Chérie's constant complaints. He couldn't stand the sound of her voice, or the way she sniffed at her food before she ate. She stuck out her tongue when she was being thoughtful, and she didn't understand his vision of life. She was not exactly what she'd pretended to be when he met her in Paris, at the chic café, *La Coupole*. How she'd shone that night, in her tight black skirt and her little striped top. She seemed to be a light-hearted Bohemian, who wanted to live life, drink champagne until she fell down, and laugh at everyone else who took themselves too seriously. How charming she was, with her black beret pulled over one eye like a pirate. But after a week, he was growing tired of her unexpectedly bourgeois, attitude.

The promise of unbridled passion was slipping away at an alarming rate, and he doubted if he could go on. It was a cruel paradox, because Chérie was strikingly beautiful, and could play the sensual woman like a pro. She was long-legged, beautifully shaped, and as graceful as a young racehorse. But her voice was becoming more strident every day, and her little habits, which had been so endearing at first, were beginning to make him want to put his hands around her throat.

He threw the fish skeleton over his shoulder, and it landed unceremoniously in a corner. He took a small, prepared canvas from the wall and fixed it onto his easel. After a rather bad start, he began to paint with full attention. Slap, slap, slap, went blocks of colour and line onto the canvas. Every now and then, he'd step back and smile at his progress. It was already a very good still life.



‘Still life’ in French is called: ‘*Nature Morte*’, which means, ‘dead nature’. He felt it was a fitting tribute to his nearly anesthetised feelings for Chérie. The little painting would symbolise a primly middle-class tea party, in honour of the girl who had so bitterly disappointed him. He painted her favourite petit fours, a bottle of wine, and a teacup. He also added a mysterious reference to himself, as an row of Brussels sprouts on a cake stand. He called it: ‘*Mon Petit Chouchou*’, which most people translate as: ‘My Little Sprout’, but because it doesn’t have an ‘x’ at the end of the word, it means ‘*My Little Cream Puff*’, instead. The affair was ended when the painting was finished, which happened in the early afternoon. Little Chérie was sent sniffing home to Neuilly-Sur-Seine, to be tearfully reunited with her worried parents.

As soon as she was gone, Pablo rushed to the market and bought two whopping mackerels. Why shouldn’t he treat himself to a mackerel salad instead of a new mistress? It takes less time than going back to the Parisian night cafes to find a suitable girl. This recipe for ‘Grilled Mackerel and Fennel Salad’ was invented by the real chef, Raymond Blanc, who is a great hero of mine. My interpretation of his recipe isn’t a true representation of his genius. I can assure you, he didn’t put in any walnuts, and he absolutely didn’t put Brussels sprouts into it, no matter how finely sliced they were into a ‘*chiffonade*’\*. I hope he will see the humour of the story and forgive me for being whimsical with his superb, mackerel salad.

\* Look it up, it may be useful in the future.

## Grilled Mackerel Salad



## Mackerel Salad with Fennel and Sprouts

### Ingredients:

Marinade

250ml cider vinegar

250ml water

5-6 pieces coriander stalks, washed

40g caster sugar

35g red onion, finely sliced

½ tsp whole pink peppercorns

3-4 lemon slices

### The Soy and Lime Dressing

1 tablespoon of oil

1 tablespoon of soy sauce

1 tablespoon of water

1 tablespoon of lime, juice only

1 teaspoon fresh root ginger, peeled and finely diced

½ teaspoon dark muscovado sugar

1 teaspoon fennel seeds, soaked in water for 2 hours, dried and toasted in a dry pan.

2 mackerels, filleted, with the pin bones removed

half a bag of Brussels Sprouts (400 grams) boiled for 6 to 7 minutes

1 handful of chopped walnuts, toasted in the same pan.

1 fennel bulb, finely sliced on a mandolin

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ lime, juice only

1 bunch rocket leaves

2 pinches sea salt

1 pinch cayenne pepper

Heat the cider vinegar, water, coriander stalks, caster sugar, red onion, peppercorns and lemon slices in a saucepan over a medium heat. Heat the mixture until just warm (60 degrees Celsius) then removes from the heat. Transfer the contents of the pan to a flat, shallow container and set aside. When the mixture has cooled, place the mackerel fillets in the container, flesh-side down. Marinate for 20 minutes.

For the soy and lime dressing, combine all the dressing ingredients in a small pan and gently heat until the sugar has dissolved. Set to one side. Preheat the grill to its highest setting. After the mackerel fillets have marinated, remove them from the marinade and pat them dry with kitchen paper. Make several diagonal scores in the skin, going across the length of each fillet to stop them from curling up during cooking. Toast the fennel seeds and the walnuts in a dry pan for less than a minute. Watch them carefully so that they do not burn. Brush a baking tray with oil. Arrange the mackerel fillets on the greased tray, skin-sides facing upwards. Place under the grill for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the skin is crisp and the flesh is cooked through.

Combine all the salad ingredients in a large bowl. Divide the fennel salad equally over 4 serving plates. Place a grilled mackerel fillet on top of each portion. Spoon the salad dressing around the edge of the plate. Scatter over the remaining toasted fennel seeds and the chopped, toasted walnuts and the freshly drained, cold sprouts.

This recipe serves four people and it doesn't have bones, so Pablito wont be tempted to use them in a painting.

## RED SPROUT- BLACK SPAGHETTI

Possibly by Wilson Pillock, house paint on board. Found in an air raid shelter. Norwich, England  
1946



## **The Corned-Beef Thief**

As she stood at the top of the stairs, Adriana could barely see the intruder. He looked two-dimensional, more like a shadow than a living person. He was hiding in a far corner of her basement. There was no point in turning on the light, because there hadn't been a light bulb in the house since 1945. Light bulbs were very difficult to come by, even a year after the war. She wished she could call the police, but her phone wasn't working either. It was due to be reconnected any day now, but the council hadn't seen to it yet. She kept her torch on the motionless figure, and held her largest kitchen knife in the other hand. Oddly enough, the man wasn't facing her. Perhaps he thought that if he stood with his face to the corner and couldn't see her, she wouldn't be able to see him. It was a rather abnormal way to hide.

Adriana stamped loudly down the stairs and stopped halfway, unsure of what to do next. The man still hadn't moved, but her own heart was beating so fast, she was convinced that he could hear it. She tried to deal with her fear in an analytical way, just as she had been taught in her psychology seminars. It didn't help.

'Hands up,' she shouted. 'I've already rung the police! They are on their way, so you'd better clear out now!' When she'd practised this upstairs, her voice had sounded confident, but now it was shaky and thin. 'Where are my neighbours when I need them?' she muttered.

The man was wearing a prisoner of war uniform, with a white patch sewn onto the right trouser leg. She knew what that white patch meant. It meant that he had been a

POW work leader. So why was he still here? Hadn't most of the POWs gone back home?

Suddenly, he turned to face her. He seemed very young, and his eyes were hollow and frightened. He hadn't shaved for days. His cheekbones and chin were already covered with a thick growth of black hair. He had the face of an emaciated saint, with dark eyes, high cheekbones and a lock of black hair that fell across his brow.

'Please, you have back door to garden?' he asked quietly. Then he put his hands above his head like a prisoner.

'No!' she said a bit too loudly. 'How long have you have been living in my house?' she asked, feeling a bit more courageous. He wasn't any older than she was, and he was certainly more frightened. 'What is your name, young man?' she asked sharply.

'My name is Jozef, Jozef Marszak. Please miss, police are coming. How do I go out? Please, I do nothing wrong, just stole food two times. I eat beans and can of cor-ned beef.'

He was shaking so much she thought he was going to faint.

'Put your hands down, she said. 'The police aren't coming, that was just to scare you. You might have been a violent man.'

'I *was* a cor-ned beef thief, and I took bread, but I am not *violent*. I go to basement and hide in wardrobe before you come home. I promise I pay you back.' He tried to smile.

She extended her hand to him and they formally shook hands. 'My name is Adriana,' she said. 'I noticed that

some bread went missing last week, and a can of corned beef, and I couldn't understand it. I thought I might have been sleepwalking and eating at night, but I couldn't find any empty cans. I'm really glad it wasn't me. Let's go upstairs. You first.' She followed him, and asked him to come into the warm kitchen. 'You look like you could use a good breakfast,' she said.

'Yes, I am angry, I am very angry.'

'I hope you mean "hungry".'

'Yes, what I say, angry for food,' he said. He had a strong East European accent and he made exactly the same mistakes in English as her father. She took a chance and spoke to him in Polish. 'My parents are from Warsaw, but they moved to Norwich before I was born. They went back a few months ago, to help rebuild their city. It's in ruins, now,' she explained.

'I know this. Poland was bombed. My *village* also bombed. How you know I am Polish?' Jozef replied, in his own language.

'For one thing, you talk just like my dad. Here, eat this, I'm not hungry.' She took her last piece of bread out of the pantry and put some margarine on it as well as the last of the jam. The man ate greedily, but after it was gone, he put his hands over his eyes to hide his tears.

'Sorry,' he said. 'I don't want crying, but you are kind, and you give to me some food. I was bad thief, but I know this is last piece of bread for you. Why you kind to me?' Another tear ran down his face and he wiped it roughly away. It had begun to rain. They both fell silent, listening to the sound of raindrops hitting the kitchen window. As they looked out, church bells began to ring and Adriana glanced at her watch.



‘We have time for one more cup of coffee. Would you like some? You can’t really call this stuff coffee, can you? It’s made of burnt acorns, or something. My mother and I used to sit at this very table, drinking *real* coffee. We always had a small piece of homemade cake, too. She is a great baker and she always asked me about how my day went. You know, we could tell each other anything. It helps to talk about things that make you sad. What about your family?’

‘Ahh,’ said Jozef. ‘I like please, another cup coffee.’

‘Have you heard anything from them since the war ended?’ she asked.

‘My family is from small *village* close to border with Germany.’ said Jozef. ‘First time, Nazis left *village* alone. They only dropped two bombs, but they came back one time more. I cannot talk of it.’

‘I understand, said Adriana, ‘but if you can tell me a little bit of what happened to you, you won’t feel so alone inside. Try it, Josef. You can’t keep it in - it’s not healthy, keeping something like that secret will eat you up. Believe me, I know about these things. I’m a psychologist.’

Jozef looked at his shoes and mumbled, ‘You are head doctor?’

‘I studied with Dr. Anna Freud, in London. The more you tell me, the easier it will become.’

‘I’m afraid,’ he said, simply.

‘Trust me, it’ll be okay.’

When he began to speak, Adriana could barely hear him. She smiled, nodded encouragingly, and patted his hand, the way her mother used to do to her, when she wanted to cry. ‘Tell me now,’ she said.

‘One week before wedding...my *willage* is bombed. Almost everyone killed...my...family...killed...and my...sweetheart...killed. Now I cry for her at night. I cry for children we never had, you know?’ He rubbed his eyes.

‘I know,’ she said. She put her hand on his shoulder. ‘Go on, we’re making good progress, it’s all right to cry, Jozef.’

‘I was cutting hay for cow, when bomb blew up her house. I hid in forest, but they found me and put me in Nazi army. I am structural engineer, very useful to Germans. I wasn’t in army long time, maybe three weeks. They sent me to Cherbourg, in train with other prisoners. We were pushed in like animals. Train had wooden seats, how you call it?’

‘I think they are called benches,’ said Adriana. ‘Go on.’

‘When we come to France, people screamed at us, because they thought we were Nazis. I can understand, but screaming frightened me. I see it in dreams.

‘What did you do there?’

‘The German captain say to us, you must fix bridge in harbour. They gave us not much to eat, but they treated us good. We was only working one week on bridge, then a British unit captured us. We was POWs again, and they put us on boat to England. He took another sip of his ‘coffee’.

‘Did they treat you all right when you got here?’

‘Yes, but...’ He smiled again, shyly.

‘But what Jozef?’

‘When we go to England, I see many women dressed like man, fixing trucks like man, and smoking cigarettes

out of mouth, without using hands, like man. It was, how you say... strange picture of woman.'

'We had to! We were doing our part for the war,' said Adriana. 'Did they put you on the train to Diss, that day?'

'Yes, to Diss.'

'You must have been at Camp 56. I used to work just down the road from there, on a pig farm. I became a Land Girl, a few weeks after I finished university.'

'Yes, it was Camp 56,' said Jozef. 'I remember smell of pig farm when we go to camp. They make interrogation, and there was long row of tables. They gave us soap and made us go in shower. They also gave medicine to kill *wszy*. How you say this in English?'

'Lice.'

'Not lice? We had many lice, they were in our hair, our eyes. Soldiers talk to their *wszy* like friends. After showers, camp guards take our old clothes and burn them.'

'Thank goodness for that,' she said, thinking of prisoners talking to their lice, like buddies.

'Then we got papers, uniform, and bag. We didn't have anything to put in bag, just papers. There were many men in barracks. We did same work every day, and it was not quiet, not one moment. You hear same voices when you wake up. Same laughter when you sleep. And next day, same men, saying same things, fighting with same people, singing same stupid songs. I wanted to be quiet. And there was another thing.'

'Can you tell me?'

'No. It made me run away from camp. I will never tell. War was over, so I ran from camp and came here, to find quiet place. I need to think, to find work. I want to work,

but everyone tell me they don't want POW to take jobs from '*English peeples*.'

The young man put his hand over his mouth. Adriana could see a muscle in his jaw twitch in an attempt not to break down again. 'Here, is peace, is quiet, but I go now,' he said. Jozef picked up his POW bag and said, 'Thank you, farewell.' Adriana grinned and held up one hand to stop him. 'Wait my friend, I've got a great idea, but first you have to shave.'

'I not understand.'

'No time to explain! Here, have a shower and I'll lay out my dad's old suit for you. And you can use my dad's razor, too. You *do* want to stay in England, don't you?'

'Willage is gone, nothing left. You know this, I tell you already.'

'Yes you did explain it, but I think we might have a job for you.'

'Is not possible! How you have job for me?' Josef's eyes were wide with disbelief.

'We'll get you some proper papers and then we'll take you on as our building advisor. With your engineering background, you'll be perfect. We need to build everything back up again, so you'll have lots of work. Where did you get the idea that we don't need people like you?'

'This is very kind offering, but how?'

'I just happen to work in the Repatriation Office, at least what's left of it. Our office took a pounding last year, but it's still standing. Come with me, and tell us how we can fix the roof.'

'But you think my English is good? Is enough to tell them about weak structure of building?'

‘You speak better English than most of us! We’ll catch the bus, and I’ll show you off to my grumpy boss. I’m sure he’ll be very glad to meet you, because a small piece of the ceiling fell on his head yesterday. Most of the roof is still on, but there is a whopping big hole in it. If you look up, you can see the birds flying over. I don’t want to hear another word about it. But if I do this for you, you have to do something for me. You’ll have to tell me what happened in the camp. Talking about it will stop your nightmares.’

‘You know my nightmares, Adriana?’ His eyes were wide and suspicious.

‘I thought you might have them. It’s your mind’s way of dealing with frightening things.’

Jozef looked out at the rain and began in a low voice: ‘I had top bunk bed in prison, and so did another man, in next row of bunks. He was not new, like me. Every night, he look at me in evil way, and he say bad things, things I not want to hear from man. He want to give me presents. You know? The other men laugh at me.’

‘It took a lot of courage to tell me that,’ said Adriane. ‘We’ll sort it out. I want you to tell me everything when we get home tonight. Don’t worry about your papers, we can help you.’

‘Why you do this for me? I was in your house, like thief.’

‘I don’t really know, maybe because you sound so much like my dad. You certainly need our help, don’t you?’

On the bumpy road to Norwich, Adriana said, ‘Look at the state of these roads, Jozef. The Germans used our English guide book, *‘Baedeker’* to single out Norwich’s churches and everything else that was old and beautiful.

They even bombed the chocolate factory and our brewery. What's so dangerous about chocolate or beer? After that, they came over many times and bombed the hell out of our roads too. Next door, our neighbour's house was flattened and we lost all of our front windows and the door blew off. It was on my birthday. Adriana took off her glasses for a moment and rubbed her tired eyes. She'd tied a scarf around her curly hair and she looked elegant in her mother's tailored brown wool suit. It was one of three suits her mother had left behind for her. She went on: 'The blast had blown dirt and soot into our kitchen and all over the food. Mother was furious, because we'd used up a whole week of ration cards for my birthday dinner, and now it was completely ruined.

'Your roof lost tiles. You have hole in roof,' said Jozef.

'That's true! How did you know?'

'Engineers notice broken things. They want always to fix.'

'This is our stop, Jozef, let's get out here, she said.'

As they walked down the dusty corridor to the Repatriation Office Adriana detected a mixture of fear and hope in Jozef's eyes. She watched him as he examined the walls, then the ceiling, and the cracks in the foundation. He also saw the hastily repaired holes in the roof. After a thorough analysis of the damage, Adriana introduced him to her boss, Captain Paterson. Jozef stood at attention.

Captain John Paterson still wore his home guard uniform, and he liked to have everything neatly organised. He called out to his secretary to bring the refreshments. 'Tea, Dottie, and bring the good biscuits!

At ease, Jozef! Adriana, I might need you to translate for me, if you would be so kind.'

Paterson's secretary walked carefully into the room, balancing a large tray with a tea service and a plate of chocolate biscuits. She was of medium height and sturdily built, with thick, golden hair that was braided around her head, like a crown. She wore a neat tweed suit and sturdy shoes. Her eyes were startlingly blue, as blue as cornflowers. At first, she didn't see Jozef, because she was concentrating on the tray. But he stared at her. He jumped to his feet and shouted, 'Dorota, *Ukochana!* It is you?' They rushed into each other's arms and began to speak at the same time.

'*You* were dead,' she said, bursting into tears.

'I thought *you* were dead, like everyone in willage.'

'Jozef, how have you come here? It is a miracle. I thought you were in heaven!' She began to cry even louder.

'Holy Moses!' said the captain. 'What are they going on about? They sound like machine guns, ratatatatatatat! It sounds awfully like Russian to me.'

'They're speaking Polish, sir,' said Adriana. They were engaged before the Nazis destroyed their village. Jozef assumed that everyone in his village had been killed. He is a structural engineer. He's looking for work, and I thought he could help us. We need him, sir. I'll vouch for him.

'Well, I'll be damned,' said Captain Paterson. 'It's just like a bloomin' picture show, isn't it? We rescue Dotty from the Jerries, and look what happens! Harrumph! A lot of love and kissing...Humph.' He lit another cigar and took a gulp of his tea. 'Sit down, boy,' he bellowed,

puffing vigorously on his cigar. 'You're looking for work? Well, we've got more than enough of that! Show me your POW papers, son, I won't bite, thanks. Now go talk to Dottie, until I'm through with them.'

After a few minutes, Captain Paterson went to his secretary's desk, where he found Jozef and Dorota sitting together, holding hands.

They were still talking as fast as they could, compelled to tell each other everything, before they could be separated again.

'That's enough of that, said the boss. 'You've got the rest of your lives to tell each other what happened in the war! Your hired, Marszak, now get to work! Draw me up some plans, start with the roof! I can't live with it any longer because the rain falls on my desk. They've even got a bet going round about when a bird is going to shit on my head. Start wherever you like, I don't care, as long as the roof gets fixed. Dorota, no more kissing! I won't stand for any lovey-dovey in this office. Everybody get back to work now, the show's over.' Paterson marched back to his office, lit up another cigar, and slammed the door behind him.

After a year, Adriana sold her house to Jozef and Dorota, who were expecting their first baby, any day now. She joined her parents in Warsaw, and after six months, despite all of the warnings her inner voice was giving her, she married a dashing handsome violinist, who had a difficult time being faithful to her. But that is another story.

Dorota and Jozef married a month after they found each other. They had three daughters who looked just like their mother, with thick blonde hair happy dispositions,



and cornflower-blue eyes. The girls grew up speaking perfect Polish and English.

Joe and Dottie didn't always live happily ever after. No one has ever managed to keep that façade alive for the whole time, it's too exhausting. Even your good friends will never really take your eternal love affair seriously, and they will talk behind your back. It's human nature. But despite that, Jozef and Dorota always believed they could see into each other's souls, and they usually liked what they saw. They also decided in the early days, not to be stubborn about their side of an argument, and they tried never to go to sleep, angry. Perhaps most importantly of all, they tried to surprise each other in small ways. A piece of warm pie, a new razor, or wildflowers plucked from the hedgerow. An American poet summed it up very well:

‘To keep your marriage brimming,  
With love in the wedding cup,  
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;  
Whenever you're right, shut *up*.’

Ogden Nash

## Corned Beef with Portrait



## **Corned Beef Hash with Brussels Sprouts**

boiled sprouts  
3 carrots  
7 boiled potatoes  
2 onions or leeks  
1 beef stock cube or beef drippings  
1 tin of corned beef  
1 cup of water or less

Slice the carrots and onions thinly. Add them to the water in a heavy frying pan (cast iron if you have one). Add pepper and the stock cube. Simmer the vegetables with the lid off until the carrots and onions are tender and the water is reduced. Add the Brussels sprouts, cut in half. Mash the boiled potatoes slightly, and add them with the corned beef, which has been cut into cubes. Let the mixture cook at a moderate heat for 20 minutes, to let the flavours mingle. Turn the mixture every now and then, so it can turn crispy on the bottom but it doesn't burn. You can substitute turnips for the potatoes or parsnip for the carrots. In the war, people used to cook with anything they could barter or grow in their home gardens.

This serves four or more people. That is, if you can get your hands on a loaf of bread and a few more potatoes. You can barter those old turnips you've been keeping in the potting shed, or those wilted carrots and sprouts, for a can of corned beef. That is, if you can stand eating it one more time.

## FOSSIL OF A PROTO-BRUSSELS SPROUT

Posidonian black shale, 345,000,000 to 280,000,000 BC.  
Discovered by Dr. R.N. Kohl, 1936. Excerpt from: 'The  
Diary of Two Fossil Hunters' by Dr. R. N. Kohl and Dr.  
Hans Schleppefischer. Zurich, Switzerland. Photo  
taken in 1932 AD.



## Diary of Two Fossil Hunters

I met Dr. Rosa N. Kohl in Dotternhausen, a coal mining city in Western Germany. Dotternhausen was close to where I grew up. Rosa had been sent by the Geology Department of the University of Frankfurt to dig for fossils in a nearby outcropping of oil-rich shale.

On a cold February morning in 1925, my young boss went out early. She left me in the front room to write up our findings and make lunch for the men. It was light enough outside for me to catch a glimpse of her slender silhouette going down the path. Half an hour later, rain pelted our small window and the wind had picked up. I imagined the wind cutting through her coat. She told me afterwards that as soon as she got to the site, she stopped for a moment to blow on her hands and wonder whether she should pack up her tools and return home. The wind stung her eyes so much that she stumbled over a small rock formation. Its thin, sharp edged layers were stacked on top of each other, like a pile of cheap paperback novels. She pulled a sheet of shale out of the oily strata and nearly dropped it, realising that she had tripped over something truly remarkable.

Rosa saw a frond of fossilised vegetation peeking out from a thin layer of the rock and it looked like an outer leaf of a miniature cabbage. She wrapped the specimen in hessian to keep it dry and trudged back to our base camp.

She set the fossil on the table and took off her wet coat. Her fragile shoulders were still shaking with cold as she explained in her prim fashion that shale is especially good for the preservation of fragile plant material. She whispered that this particular specimen was *very* special.

And it was for our eyes only. I loved it when she whispered to me. It wasn't easy for either of us to live in that isolated mining camp. In those days, it was unusual for a woman to become a scientist, or anything else but a mother or a wife, and the crew members made it painfully obvious that she was not accepted as one of the gang members. She endured their sarcastic suggestions to go home and create something useful, like a baby or a nice, little hat. She was patient with the sullen silence and insulting laughter which always ensued when she dared to speak of her own work. She was already rather famous for her discoveries, and I think it made them jealous.

I was her only friend, a tall, spotty boy, two years younger than she was. The men teased me about my shyness and they always mocked me when I stuttered. When they made fun of Rosa, it made me seethe with rage. I wanted to punch them every time, but I kept my head down and said nothing. It was pointless to defend either Rosa or myself, because it would have made the teasing worse and both of us would have lost our jobs. It was 1932 and all of Europe, especially Germany, was immersed in the worst depression in history. Any work was hard to get. One couldn't complain about working conditions, because there were hundreds of people who would gladly take your place, and keep their mouths shut.

I'd just made coffee, and the smell of it filled the room with comfort. She told me that she could smell it wafting out of our little chimney. When she sat down to warm herself by the stove, I gave her a cup and looked away, as usual. I'd been preparing the usual sandwiches and soup for the crew, but I made sure to cut her some thick slices of dark bread and Emmenthaler cheese before *they* came

home for lunch. She sat down and put her head in her hands for a moment.

‘R-Rosa, are you keeping it s-s-secret? W-w-what’s in the hessian?’ I asked, unable to look into her eyes. I could see she was excited about her find.

‘Would you like to help me? I’m so cold and my hands are still shaking. We’ve got to split this shale without damaging the fossil. Oh Hansi,’ she said, laughing, ‘look at me when I’m talking to you. This has to be our little secret, *ja?* When do you think they’ll be back?’

‘Oh, n-not for an hour, I sup-p-pose, here, its c-cabbage and h-h-ham again, but it will warm your h-h-hands up.’

Rosa accepted the steaming bowl of soup, but she just stirred it with her spoon. She didn’t want to hurt my feelings. My cooking was nearly as bad as my stuttering, and both of these failings, along with a long list of other deficiencies, made me reluctant to speak unless she asked me a direct question.

‘Can I trust you Hansi? Take a look at this fossil,’ she said. ‘I believe it is from the Eocene period. That makes it approximately 220 million years old.’ We peeled back the wet hessian and began to detach each thin layer of shale with dissection needles. A large, perfectly formed fossil of a Brussels sprout began to appear, but half of it was still buried in the layered rock.

‘It’s as b-b-big as a duck egg, Rosa! It’s like a b-b-baby c-cabbage,’ I said.

‘Hansi, it’s so funny, but this fossil is my name, Rosa N. Kohl...*Rozenkohl*... Brussels sprouts in German. Isn’t that an amazing coincidence?’

We had a good laugh about it as she set up her Brownie camera to take a few photos. We’d lost track of time. I

didn't realise it until we both heard the sound of heavy work boots crunching up the gravel path. The oil hunters had decided to eat early and they didn't take kindly to any excuses about not having their lunch ready on time.

'Quick!' said Rosa. 'Wrap it up, and hide it in my bag. I don't want them to see it. They'll probably just smash it and laugh at me. I'll get rid of the camera.'

She just managed to shove it under her chair as the men stomped into the room. Their coats were steaming in the heat of the cabin's old brick oven.

'*Donnerwetter*, Rosa, you're back awfully early. Too wet and windy, huh?' said the leader, Jörge Schultz. 'Hey, Stupid Hans, we've been eating this stinking cabbage all week. We need more meat in our bellies or we can't do our job.' The rest of the crew laughed, and one of them slapped me on the side of the head. I staggered backwards, just missing the steaming pot of soup.

'So, so, *Weibchen*,' said the old bully, as he leered at Rosa and held out his bowl for soup. She looked away. 'You discover anything earth-shattering today?' he continued. 'Heh, heh, heh, maybe you made a great big discovery that will change the world. Look at you, you're blushing sweetheart!' And he laughed his derisive, piggy laugh. Soup dripped from his bushy moustache and he winked at the rest of his men.

'I'm not blushing, leave me alone,' Rosa replied. She walked to her cot, lay down in her wet clothes, and covered herself with a thin blanket. The men forgot all about her. They were tearing large chunks off the heavy rye loaf to dunk into their soup.



Rosa began to shiver, and she complained of a headache. Red spots started to appear on her neck. I gave her my own ragged blankets, but it didn't do any good, she was still shivering. I couldn't do anything for her until the men left. After lunch, they decided to go to the village pub to wash down their meal with a stein of cold beer. It was too wet to work anymore, so they used the weather as an excuse to escape. It was time to get drunk. After they left, I put my hand on Rosa's forehead. She was flushed with fever and rambled on about the fossil, about how rare it was, and how I had to take care of it. A little later, she complained about the light and began to cough in a terrible wrenching way. I knew I had to act quickly, so I dashed out of the cabin without my coat. It was a mile to the nearest town, and I had plenty of time to think about Rosa's fever, and how similar it was to my sisters' illnesses, last summer. It all started with a fierce rainstorm which lasted for some days. The streets of my village near the River Neckar were flooded with knee-deep water. Waste from our antiquated sewers ran into the streets after the second day. We saw many more rats than usual as they scuttled into the streets, looking for new hiding places. They were everywhere, and the more they got used to the sunlight, the bolder they became.

After a week, both of my sisters became ill. Each of them suffered a sudden fever, and both had strange red spots on their necks. My oldest sister, Maria, was first. We summoned the village doctor, and he turned pale when he examined her. Maria was my favourite, mostly because she rarely made fun of me, as Hannalore did. She lay still and uncomplaining; her eyes were dull like the eyes of an animal in pain. Their room had a yellow,

sick smell about it. Old Dr. Kramer thought he recognised the symptoms. He'd seen entire regiments die of it in the Great War. There was nothing he could do then, but give his men laudanum to ease their suffering, and that was all he could do for my sisters. As usual, I was listening through a crack in the bedroom door.

I heard the doctor tell my father that Maria had *tymus fever*, (at least that's what I thought he said). He also told my father there was little hope for her. He said that Hannalore was showing symptoms, too. The only remedy was to pack both girls in ice in an attempt to break their fever. My father, who never said much about anything, let out a high choking cry. He knew that the doctor couldn't help them.

The sight of him breaking down and sobbing like a child frightened me more than I want to remember. For a brief moment, I imagined what life would be like without Maria. Why couldn't the old man get it instead of her? Then a wave of guilt washed over me and I felt like a monster for even thinking about it.

The next day, they seemed a bit better. They both still had high fevers, but at least they were conscious. Even though the doctor remained stubbornly pessimistic, and didn't alter his original diagnosis, my sisters recovered in a couple of weeks. Hannalore went back to teasing me worse than ever, but I was so grateful she was alive that it didn't matter anymore. Was it the ice that saved them? Was it really typhus? Who could say?

The doctor looked at us and shrugged his shoulders. He was also baffled. He ordered us to remain in quarantine for the next two months, to protect the community. We stripped my sisters' beds, burned their sheets, their

books, and their old toys. Mother boiled our clothes and the curtains in bleach water, and she scrubbed the house again and again and again. I thought she had lost her mind. There were no more trips to the Saturday market, no more visits from my school friends, nothing but waiting for the quarantine to be lifted. I was so anxious about getting ill that studying became impossible. I dared not go back to university; I was too far behind in my studies. I felt as old and trapped as my father. A different and stronger silence widened the gap that had always existed between us.

We were all obsessed with our bodies, watching each other constantly terrified if one of us coughed or complained of a headache. Concerned neighbours left baskets of food at our gate, but they didn't come near us. After the quarantine ended we were all still alive, but the isolation had taken its toll. The villagers never forgave us for making them afraid, even though no one else in town became ill. I finished my studies in geology and rarely came home to visit. It shames me to this day, but I couldn't face my father. He was a stark reminder of the kind of man I'd probably become if I weren't careful.

That afternoon when Rosa took ill, I recognised the symptoms right away. The sudden high fever, the same red spots and the coughing spells...It had begun in the same way as the illness of Maria and Hannalore. They were symptomatic of typhoid fever.

Dazed and frightened, I ran through the rain and muddy streets to the village doctor's house. I begged him to come to us, that night. The wretched coward wouldn't even look me in the eye, or shake my hand. He pushed a bottle of opium syrup across his desk and told me to keep

Rosa warm. He promised to pay us a visit, but his eyes told me a much different story. I knew he wouldn't come. By the time I got back, the oil men had cleared out. They'd probably heard the news from the doctor, who was also a regular visitor to the pub. News travels fast in a small community. A yellow quarantine sign with large black letters spelled out the word: *Typhus!*

I opened the door and began to weep silent, helpless tears. I knew I'd have to bury her when the time came, and I'd have to do it alone. Rosa was sleeping deeply, hardly moving.

I felt her forehead, and strangely enough, it seemed much cooler. After a while, she sat up and asked for some water. Looking up at me with those logical, grey eyes, she asked me, 'Hansi, why are you crying? It's only a little chill, I'm feeling a lot better now. Is there any soup left, *Liebchen?*'

She called me *Liebchen*. Was it a joke? Was she still delirious? Could I really allow myself to hope that she felt something for me? During our isolation, we came to realise that we couldn't live without each other. She broke me of my stuttering by making me sing every word of our conversations. I have a terrible voice and I can't carry a tune, even if my life depended on it. It was impossible at first, because we laughed too much and I couldn't concentrate, but very soon, I began to speak more intelligibly. After years and years of practice, I still can't say my *S*'s very well, and that's the letter that gives me the most trouble, especially if I have to give a speech somewhere.

We married a year later in Heidelberg. My parents came to the wedding, and I saw my old father smile for the first

time since my sisters' illness. I smiled back. Rosa and I soon found work at a geological research site in Switzerland, near Graubünden. Our salary was barely enough to keep us alive, but we managed.

When the war began, and the entire world went mad again, we were thankful to have escaped from our homeland. Hitler's henchmen would have certainly killed Rosa and the children, because Rosa was Jewish. They would have killed me too because I'd joined the Resistance at the beginning of the war. By then, we'd become our adopted country's most famous fossil hunters. To tell the truth, we were the *only* fossil hunters in Switzerland at the time. After the war, we returned to Germany once again, to bring Rosa's Brussels sprout fossil to the Natural History Museum in Frankfurt. We called our specimen *Brassica Oleracia var. protogemmifera, kohlii*, in honour of Rosa's maiden name, which, after all was very appropriate because her maiden name after all, was 'Kohl'.

## **Professor Rosa N. Kohl's Fossil Potato Salad**

### **Ingredients**

five large waxy potatoes  
1 bag of Brussels sprouts  
1½ cups of beef broth  
1 cup of blonde beer

### **Dressing**

1/3 cup white wine vinegar  
1 teaspoon of sugar or honey  
1 tablespoon of mild mustard  
½ cup of chopped onions  
freshly ground black pepper and salt to taste  
1 handful of finely chopped chives

Dissolve half a stock cube in 1 cup boiling water. It's better to make your own, but you could go to a good delicatessen and buy some real beef stock. Add the beer and enough water to cover the sprouts. Boil the sprouts for 6 to 8 minutes or until just tender, not soft. Remove sprouts, rinse in cold water and put the potatoes which have been cut into equal pieces in the hot stock. Boil these until firm, but yielding. It depends on the potato. Poke them with a small knife. There should be some resistance to this violence, but you don't want them to fall apart, do you? Drain, peel, and cut them into ¼ inch slices. In a large bowl add the vinegar, sugar, mustard, chopped onions and the salt and pepper. Shake and hustle the vegetables in the dressing and let them stand for half an hour. Sprinkle with chives and serve.

It will feed six ordinary men, or three hungry Geologists.

## Fossil Potato Salad with Sprouts



## VEGETABLE SALESMAN

Remy Oblique, Oil on Canvas,

Brussels, Belgium

1960 AD





## A Very Modern Cabbage Farmer

I will never forget the first time I actually got paid a decent wage. It happened in a village just outside of my hometown, Veendam. I needed money for someone I had grown to love even more than my own life. I longed for her and dreamt about her every night. The thought of finally possessing her had become an obsession I couldn't suppress any longer.

No matter how long I'd done that miserable paper route, my savings weren't growing fast enough for my needs. My allowance was one guilder a week. Pa was always reluctant to hand it over. You could see it in his eyes and on his lips, which he pressed so tightly together that it looked like he'd swallowed them. Along with the guilder, came his long-winded, weekly sermon. After he gave them both to me, the sermon seemed to be stuck to the coins like old chewing gum. Pa was a man of few words, but he always seemed to find enough of them when it came time to lecture me about being frugal. Despite all that, I'd nearly reached my goal, and I was looking forward to seeing *her* at last.

One day, in a fit of insanity (probably brought on by a soul-eating algebra lesson) my best friend Wout and I decided to play football with a few cabbages. The cabbage patch was not too far from our school, and it was surrounded by high trees so no one would discover us. Those cabbages were enormous, and there was a squeaky sound to their leaves as our boots wrenched them out of the ground. We sent them flying through the two oak trees that we had chosen as our goalposts. We also stripped all the Brussels sprouts from a mature plant and

hurled them at each other. We did it again and again. Wout was a viciously good shot. Those hard sprouts stung like bullets when they hit me in the back.

When we finally came to our senses, we ran back to my house. No one saw us. I was nervous. Suppose someone had ratted on us? Our street was already crawling with cops. Wout's father was a cop, and Detective Sergeant Jansen lived across the street from us. He played cards with Pa. We were surrounded.

After that, I didn't dare walk to school with Wout, much less hang out with him. After a week, no one had pounded on either of our front doors, so Wout and I began to relax. The clandestine excitement of the crime faded away, and so had our urge to confess it. A week later, when we came bouncing in the back door, we saw my mother standing in the kitchen. Her face was pallid and she had her hand over her mouth.

'Do join us in the living room,' she said quietly. 'There's someone who wants to have a little chat with you.'

Wout and I glanced at each other. I felt my face turning red, and Wout's was too. I wondered if his heart was pounding in his ears as much as mine. We followed Ma into the living room and stood there, struck dumb for once in our lives. Detective Sergeant, Rolf-Peter Jansen was hunched up on our narrow sofa, with his knees under his chin and a cup of coffee in his hand. He couldn't stretch his legs out because the coffee table was too close. He looked really uncomfortable, like a grown-up sitting at a child's tea party. He smiled gently, and told us to sit down, please. Oh, my God, I thought. Are we going to be arrested for kicking a few cabbages?

My mind was racing for a way to get us out of trouble. Wout's face was grey-white and he was swaying a little.

'Wout, sit down before you fall over, son.' said the Detective Sergeant. 'I believe you boys have something to tell me, you know, about the cabbage incident that happened eight days ago?' His bushy moustache twitched up and down when he talked.

'Why now?' I asked, instantly realising that I'd said the most incriminating thing possible.

'So, you're admitting it, Bert?' he asked gently.

'Uh...we did kick some cabbages around, but only a few of them, officer,' I said.

'Ten, to be precise,' said the tall cop. 'Are you also pleading guilty to the destruction of a large Brussels sprout plant?'

'Yes, sir, and we're very sorry about it now.'

'Yeah,' said Wout, softly.

'You and Wout are going to be a lot sorrier when Mr. Beekman gets through with you,' said Detective Jansen, smiling his cop's smile.

'Yes, sir,' I said. Tears started to sting my eyes. Wout looked like he was going to be sick.

'Mr. Beekman saw you do it,' said Officer Jansen. 'He'd been out of town for a week or two, but as soon as he got back, he reported the crime. Now, we don't want to keep him waiting, do we? He's not a very patient man. I think you both know his reputation.'

'Yes, sir,' I mumbled. Farmer Beekman's hands were as big as dinner plates and he was known for using those hands to knock men down for no reason. As we trudged to the door, I turned to look at my mother, one last time.

Ma was wringing her hands, but Pa clenched his bony fingers and glared at me. I feared that look worse than Mr. Beekman. We took the narrow road that ran behind the school to Beekman's cabbage farm. When we stepped out of the car, we saw him. He was standing at the gate. He was smiling in an evil way, and his dog was grinning too. As we walked towards them, the dog began to growl, and he showed us his snagged teeth. Oddly enough, Mr. Beekman didn't seem as angry as his dog. He took us over to a wooden shed which was attached to his farmhouse.

'Well, well, well, Bert and Wout! Good to see you, boys,' he said in a hearty way. 'Let's forget that little incident with the cabbages. I'm a fair man, and if you clean out this shed for me, we're even. I've settled it with Inspector Jansen, and he thinks it's punishment enough for any man. Okay?'

'We'll do it!' cried Wout. I nodded too. How bad could it be anyway? It couldn't be much more than a few hours of work, and then we'd walk away as free men. He might even give us lunch. He looked like a man who enjoyed his lunch.

When Mr. Beekman opened the double doors of the shed, we smelled a sort of Green Hell. There were rotting vegetables of all kinds, and underneath the decayed vegetation was a gelatinous, reeking, gooey substance which could have been anything. The old cabbages and sprouts had become a horrible grey-green colour and they'd disintegrated into the walls of the shed. The stench of them was sharp and shitty. When we picked them up with our hands, they looked kind of dry enough, but if you squeezed them too hard, a noxious, watery slime

oozed out and got on our hands. When the ooze got all over the rest of us, the smell was indescribable. Beekman trotted back and forth, lining up ten large plastic containers for the rubbish. He gave us two shovels and suggested we would probably have to use our hands again to get all of it out of the corners. I needed to be sick, and I was. He kept out of our way after that and only peeked around the corner, now and then. Later, he came back with a hose. Once the hose was attached to the water supply, we finished the job in no time. I wondered why he didn't give it to us at the start, probably to increase our suffering. When we were done he made us strip, shoved us into a downstairs shower room, and gave us a bar of green soap. We scrubbed ourselves raw, but the smell didn't go away. He gave us some of his old overalls to wear home. 'Sorry boys,' he said. 'I had to burn your clothes.'

'That's all right, Mr. Beekman,' said Wout. 'My Mom would have done the same thing.'

'How would you boys like a ride home on my new tractor? I can't let you go without some money,' he said in his best vegetable salesman's voice. He gave us ten guilders each, which was a fortune in those days. And then he smiled like a dodgy clergyman. Then he walked to his tractor, jingling his keys, and whistling. 'Don't even think about getting into the cabin with me,' he said. 'You can both ride above the wheels.' The back wheels were enormous. There were two narrow metal seats above of each bumper which gave us just enough room to perch there on one side of our butts. We rode into town like heroes and like all fame, our glorious deeds faded into oblivion after a week. I didn't care. I was busy with

more important things. Along with the money Mr. Beekman gave me, I'd saved up just enough money to buy my shiny black-and-chrome '*Tomos*' moped. She was a mysterious Czechoslovakian beauty. She may have been second-hand, but to me, she was a pristine Goddess of the Moped Dynasty. I didn't call her anything because I thought *Tomos* was such a lovely name. I'd worshiped her in silence for years and years, and now she was mine, forever faithful, forever lovely, forever mine.

## **Naked Bottoms in the Grass**

### **Ingredients**

1 large jar of white beans  
1 large jar of green beans  
1 kilo of potatoes  
1 bag of Brussels sprouts (800 grams)  
1 large smoked sausage  
1 beef or chicken bouillon cube  
1 knob of butter  
salt and pepper to taste

Peel, quarter, and boil the potatoes with the bouillon cube for approximately 20 minutes or until they are tender. Add the Brussels sprouts about 10 minutes later, cook for another 8 minutes and leave them with the potatoes to keep warm. Boil the sausage with the white bean and green bean mixture for a few minutes, to just warm the sausage. Take out the sausage and keep it warm under the pot lid. Mash the potatoes and sprouts with a little butter, season well, and gently fold the white and green beans into the mixture. Slice the sausage and garnish the dish with it. Put the sausage slices in a half-moon pattern on top of the bean and potato mixture. You can also put them on in a random way. The white beans are meant to represent the naked little bottoms. I can imagine if you put two beans together, it might resemble a bottom, and the green beans are meant to be the grass. The sprouts symbolise the trees and bushes. I have no idea what the sausage stands for. This dish is mostly eaten by the people who live in Veendam. It should serve four ordinary people, or two teenage boys.

**A recipe from Veendam, in Holland**



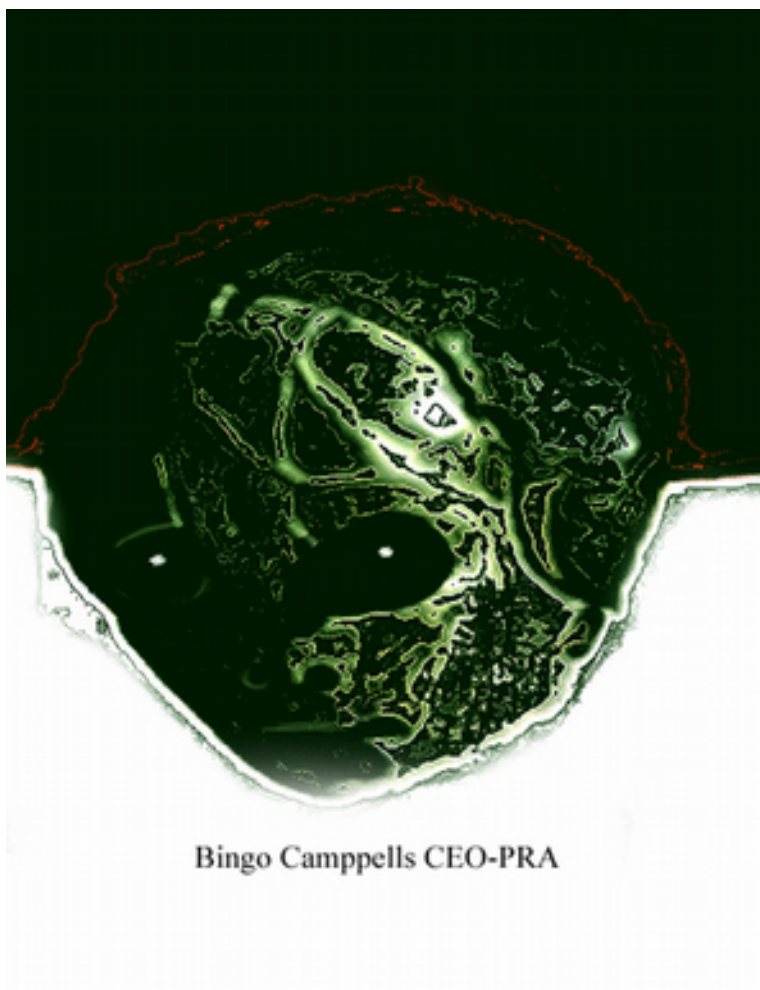


## BINGO CAMPPELLS BUSINESS CARD

Erzhnapien ink on polymer card (Information on the back)

Planet Erzhnap

2012 AD



## **And Bingo Was His Name-O**

Andie's day always began at six. She showered, dressed, and fastened her long red hair into a ponytail. She got into her faded uniform, knotted the shirt at the waist, and pulled on her sturdy boots. These heavy boots came up to her knees, to protect her from the rough terrain, and rattlesnake attacks.

The fifteen-minute drive to the nature reserve had become a daily meditation for her. The early morning silence and the subtle colours of the rising sun on the sand prepared her for hoards of noisy school children and tourists. They asked the same questions every day and she always answered them patiently. She enjoyed her work, but really looked forward to the afternoon. It was only then she could follow her real passion, research into the life and habits of the sand hill cranes. These impressive birds returned to their desert home every year, on precisely the first day of summer. She loved the way they danced, and the way they seemed to greet her when they saw her arrive each morning.

The Bitterlake National Wildlife Refuge was located a few miles from Roswell. It was an unlikely piece of verdant ground, in the middle of the desert. Its streams and lakes were supplied by a large underground aquifer which began near the Mexican border.

Andie's day was as ordinary as a day could be, but that evening as she was driving home, the clouds morphed themselves into a strangely brilliant orange, and an intense turquoise blue. The road back was remarkably empty of cars. Even though she'd seen this magical play of light on the hills before, this sunset was very different.

She felt a surge of love for her arid world and an odd feeling of déjà vue. She got out of her car and walked backwards to her front door to preserve the last rays of the sunset in her mind. There were no noises at all. It was as if the land and its inhabitants were holding their breath. She kicked her boots off at the door, picked up her mail and went into the house.

As she was going through the flyers and bills, she looked up, startled by the sharp crack of breaking branches and a rustling sound. She ran to the window and opened it. A large branch of the apple tree had fallen and right beside the broken branch was a pie pan. It was nearly as big as a small car. The top of the pan began to rise up, and she saw that it was actually two pie pans, one on top of the other.

‘Oh ... my... God!’ she whispered. As soon as the words came out of her mouth, she felt foolish. ‘That’s probably what everyone says when they see their first spaceship. Why am I talking to myself?’ She was trying to decide what to do, when a small, greenish-silver man was climbing a ladder which had suddenly appeared in the roof of the craft. The little humanoid sat on the grass for a moment, gasping for breath. He beckoned to her. Despite her better judgement, she bent down to get a better look at him.

‘May I have a drink of water?’ he asked softly. He had a face like a wrinkled old Brussels sprout. Andie could see her own face reflected in his eyes, which were black and almond-shaped. He had a slit for a mouth and didn’t seem to have any discernable nose or ears, just holes where they should have been. She couldn’t help noticing that he had a skeletal system which resembled a human’s,

because his spacesuit hung in loose folds around his bones, and his face was terribly thin. He seemed to be shouting, but she could hardly hear him, so she got down on her knees and whispered: ‘Are you all right? I come in peace. This is the planet Earth.’

He smiled at her and pointed to the kitchen. He whispered, ‘Hydration, hydration!’ So Andie ran into the house, put some water in a little cup, and brought it over to him. He drank it as fast as he could.

‘Ah, that’s better,’ he said. ‘Now I’m ready for more, please.’

‘You speak English! This is so weird. I’m not even scared. Should I be scared of you?’

‘Of course not,’ said the alien, weakly. ‘Everyone says *‘Oh my God!’* the first time they see me, especially now that I’m so dried out. It’s my own fault for not drinking enough; we can lose over ten percent of our water if we aren’t careful. May I come in?’

‘Oh yes, said Andie, you can’t stay out here. Mr. Jim might get you. He’s my cat.’

‘Could you carry me, please?’ asked the little creature. He put his arms up like a child, and Andie took him into the kitchen. She shut the cat in the bedroom. The spaceman drank many more cups of water. He’d already grown a few inches and his voice was much stronger. The more water he drank, the faster he grew, until he was a bit larger than a twelve-year-old child. His silver spacesuit expanded with him, and his face became smooth and leaf-like.

‘But isn’t that shrinking and re-growing, painful? Doesn’t it hurt you to lose so much water? Doesn’t it affect your life span?’ she asked.

‘We don’t feel it too much. It’s easy, really. As for our normal life span ... well, we get by. You should know, you’re a scientist, aren’t you? May I ask your name, Earth woman?’ He already knew it, because he could read her mind, but protocol was protocol. The last thing he wanted to do was startle her. It would really ruin his planetary plans.

‘My name is Amanda Worhope,’ she said. ‘But most people call me Andie. I *am* a scientist, and how did you know I was one? Is it my outfit? I study the sand hill cranes at the Bitter Lake estuary. Why do you speak such good English? Do you come in peace too?’ Questions tumbled out of her mouth. Was she imagining the whole thing? Could she be the one who was dehydrated? Dehydration can certainly induce some convincing hallucinations.

‘I know you’re shocked to see me. I’ll try to answer one question at a time. I am from the planet Erzhnep, not far from here, and of course I come in peace, silly girl! I nearly came in pieces trying to steer my spacecraft through the branches of that old apple tree. My horizontal adjustor isn’t working too well. In answer to the other question, I’ve learned all of the world’s languages. We’ve been monitoring your planet for centuries. We’ve enjoyed all of your transmissions since the start of radio in the 1920’s. We especially love your television broadcasts. They’re hilarious on so many levels. And it’s great for learning languages.’ He folded his hands and nodded encouragingly at Andie.

‘Are you hungry, sir? Do you eat our sort of food?’ she asked. He still seemed awfully fragile. Perhaps he had a special diet.

‘I eat everything except sprouts... They’re *so* not me. Brussels sprouts looks much like we do, and it feels a bit like cannibalism or something.’

‘How would you like some spaghetti? I’m good at that.’  
‘You could wake me up for it! I like buttered toast, too. And pizza, corn on the cob, watermelon! We know all about your Earth food from your famous cooking programmes. We even have a few Earth Food restaurants on our planet.’

‘What’s a big Earth transmission hit on your planet these days? I can’t believe I just said that!’ said Andie, laughing.

The alien smiled and said, ‘It has to be ‘The Dog Whisperer’. Your leaders could do well to study Cesar’s calm assertiveness training, don’t you think?’

‘Yeah, you’re not wrong. I told you my name, now what’s yours? I can’t believe I’m talking to a real alien.’  
‘You’ll get used to it. Seriously, we don’t actually use that word on other planets.’

‘What word? What other planets?’

The little figure started to laugh, and it sounded like he was whistling through his nose. ‘We don’t use the *alien-word* because the rest of us in the universe consider it to be ... alienating. We haven’t thought that way for many millennia. After all, aren’t we all just simple variations of the same universal elements?’

‘That’s true,’ said Andie. ‘How do you pronounce your name?’

‘Bingo, B-I-N-G-O, Bingo Camppells. Everyone on our planet has the same last name. I’m in interplanetary consulting. It’s been my job for centuries and I love it, but my real hobby is terrestrial studies. I’ve been

studying your planet for uhh... let's see... umm...two and a half thousand years, perhaps a bit more. What are a few millennia here and there? Here's my card. Sprinkle a little water on it and it will grow to poster size.'

'You've got to be kidding! Is that what you really look like, all weird and blackish-green? Are you using some kind of cloaking device? Did you say fifteen hundred years?' Andie ran to her tablet and looked up a timeline of world history. 'That would be about the time of King Darius, the Great Persian Emperor, wouldn't it?' she asked.

'That's right! Did you know he was phobic about eggs?'  
'The mighty King Darius?'

'He couldn't stand the sight of them. Go on; sprinkle some water on my card. A few drops should do the trick; it's a special polymeric paper. I'm rather proud of the Brussels sprout design. See? It has my picture on it. That's the way I look to our cousins, the fish.'

'It looks more like a strange Andy Warhol poster. My father was a big fan of his. That's where I got my nickname. Did you meet him, too?'

'Yes, I visited him in New York. The whole Campbell's Soup Series was our little joke for the universe. We decided to make ordinary objects into pop stars, just for fun. A painting of a can of soup became just as famous as the Mona Lisa. Everyone loved it.

'Have you known any other famous people?'

'Stephen is a good friend of mine.'

'Which Stephen would that be?'

'Hawking, he's got a wicked sense of humour. I met him years ago, when he was at Cambridge University. Some of my other best friends were Crazy Fingers

Wolfie Mozart, Big Albert E, and Leonardo. I've made great pals throughout the centuries.

'I can't take it all in! Leonardo? Mozart?' said Andie. She sat down.

'It's nothing,' said Bingo. 'I was just making friends, exploring a bit, doing some terrestrial gardening. I've lived for a long time, you see, and I've always had tremendous curiosity about how other beings experience their universe. Not only here on Earth, but on other planets, too. You should meet my dad. He's even more passionate about exploring. My granddad is also a great explorer. He told me that he and Moses took a vacation and ended up lost in the desert for forty years. At least that's his story and he's sticking to it. He got married again last week.'

'What?' Your *grandfather* got married? How old is he?'

'Oh, he had to,' replied Bingo shyly. And he's just celebrated his sixtieth millennium anniversary. Great party, everyone was there!'

'Are you immortal, then?'

'Oh no! Of course not, we just live in epochs, not in years.'

'Is your atmosphere the same as ours?'

'Yes, but much cleaner, and throughout the centuries we've even managed to propagate many of our Erzhnapian fruits and vegetables here on Earth. We brought you the strawberry and the Brussels sprout. Oh yes, and the pineapple. These are some examples of our gardening skills. And we brought you the durian! It smells like rotten meat on the outside, but it's delicious on the inside. Like the durian, our Brussels sprout is also very nutritious. People either love it or hate it because of



the way it smells. Take the avocado, that's one of ours too, but the pit is much too large, isn't it?'

'I see what you mean, but your planet must be more evolved than ours is. I mean interstellar travel and all.'

'All that can be changed. It's actually another reason I came back so soon. I'd like to invite you and a delegation of Earth's scientists, to visit our planet. Do you think we could organise a meeting with them? I would like to explain our rescue plan for Earth. What about CNN? Don't you think CNN might reach the biggest audiences? There is much my planet could do to help.'

'To help us in a positive way? Not cleaning up our pollution so you can eat us later? How can I know what your real plans are, Bingo? I don't know you.'

'Will you trust me to help you understand what I plan to do? It will only take a few seconds and it's painless. Do you want to know?'

'Well, all right, as long as it doesn't interfere with my thoughts of change my brain function.'

'You will still be exactly who you are, but you will know a lot more and your mathematics skill level will increase exponentially.'

'Do it! I'm not that good at higher math.' she said, but her voice shook with fear. 'Is it reversible, Bingo? Any side effects?'

'No side effects, just a clearer way of thinking. The rest of your brain will remain exactly the same as before.' He put his silvery hand on her forehead and for a second, she felt a sort of mild, electrical tingling and then a significant clarity of her thought processes.

‘How are you feeling now, Andie?’ asked Bingo. He touched her forehead to examine his work on her Intraparietal Sulcus region of the brain, and he smiled.

‘Marvellous!’ she giggled. ‘I’ll Google CNN and send them a video of you and the spaceship. But will they take it seriously, Bingo? Can you influence them from such a long distance away from here?’

‘Not really a lasting influence. It all depends on how the entire world reacts to me, whether they accept that I’m real, and that my intentions are for the good of mankind.’

‘Can’t you predict the future?’

‘As far as I know, there isn’t one civilisation in the universe that knows what the future holds, but I can read faces, hearts, and minds, rather well.’

‘Then couldn’t you use mind-reading ability to convince the CNN desk that you’re not a fake?’

‘You’re a very clever girl!’

‘Are you patronising me, Bingo? You have created a monster.’ She laughed. He smiled sweetly and shrugged his shoulders. Andie was proven right. The CNN desk was extremely sceptical. They were sure it was a hoax. Bingo had to do a lot of mind-reading and answer many questions about the physics of space travel, before the CNN news desk granted an interview in Roswell. The network decided to send one of their most experienced interviewers, Mr. Buff Orpington. If anyone could expose a hoax, Orpington was the man for the job. He had a British face, charming blue eyes, and was about average height. He kept his hair cut short to minimise the fact that he was nearly bald. His eyes radiated a sharp sense of humour and an intellect that could cut through any political smokescreen.

After a few minutes, Bingo agreed to give him an exclusive interview and he also promised that his planet's experts would meet and talk to the Earth's political leaders and scientists at the United Nations. They agreed the conference would take place in a weeks time. All through the night, large white vans with satellite dishes on their roofs set up their stations in a cornfield next to Andie's house. The entire area had been cordoned off with hurricane fences and the corn was cut down. The residents of Roswell were ordered to stay indoors. The CIA, representatives from the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI were also on standby in another part of the field. By the time everyone was in place, the field resembled a small, white-roofed town. It was eerily quiet. All the streets in the neighbourhood had been barricaded.

At precisely 10:00 a.m. Mountain time, Mr. Buff Orpington walked up the gravel path leading to Andie's little house. His footsteps crunching on the sharp stones, sounded abnormally loud. He took a deep breath to compose himself and knocked briskly on the front door. It opened all by itself, and he went inside. As the door closed behind him, he saw a tall red-haired girl sitting in the kitchen with 'The Alien'. Buff was automatically drawn to her. She was one of those willowy women who are effortlessly pretty, although she didn't seem to be aware of it. She had an oval face, full lips, and wavy hair. They were having buttered toast and coffee. Jim, the cat, had claimed his place next to Bingo, and Bingo raised his hand in greeting: 'Good morning, Buff, I am Bingo Campells. Did you have a good flight?' Bingo smiled.

‘Buff Orpington from CNN, good morning.’ Bingo extended his thin, grey-green hand and tilted his head to get a better look at the reporter, whose eye’s reflected a secret only Bingo could see. The man shook hands with both beings. ‘Pleased to meet you, Bingo,’ said Buff carefully. I should have said something a lot more formal, he thought to himself. ‘Now, he said smiling, ‘I’ll set up this video camera, all right? Just act naturally and don’t stare into the lens if you can help it.’ Andie got up and stood protectively behind her little friend.

Buff adjusted his viewfinder and lens, tested the microphone with his sound crew and took a seat at the kitchen table.

‘Would you care for a cup of coffee or some toast?’ asked Andie, using her best manners.

‘Two sugars, a dash of milk?’ asked Bingo. ‘Cookies? We have your favourites.’

‘How...? Oh yeah, you read my mind, didn’t you? I’ll have my coffee the way he says, and some cookies too,’ said Buff. ‘Now Bingo, we are all very curious about why you have come to Earth, but we also have a duty to our viewers. I was sent here to unravel the real story behind who you are. What are your actual motives for coming forward at this time? Can you prove that you are who you say you are?’

‘Isn’t my strange appearance proof enough? How would you like me to prove it to you, sir?’ Bingo asked. Buff thought for a moment, and replied: ‘It’s a warm, muggy morning here in the desert. Could you make it snow right now? How about suspending time for a minute? You know, like they did in the movie, that should be easy for you, if you aren’t lying.’

‘You’ve been watching too many old movies. This is not a replay of “The Day the Earth Stood Still.” I do come in peace. We’ve been observing your civilisation for over 40,000 years, and we believe that now is precisely the right time to help your planet. Take a look out the window, Mr. Orpington. It was snowing, but the snow wasn’t quite the right colour, it was pink. He noticed his mistake, and he changed it to white flakes.

‘Sorry, Buff.’ he said. ‘We have pink snow on Erzhnap, is that enough proof? I don’t want to upset the balance of the ecosystem any more than it already is.’

‘To what are you referring? I’ve got to say, your little demonstration was pretty impressive.’ said the reporter, with a note of irritation.

‘You are aware that your planet is in trouble’ said the alien. ‘It has become unbalanced, with widespread poverty, water shortages, famines, and there have been many more natural disasters, lately. You have seen and reported on more of these problems than most people, so you know what I mean.’

‘But what can *you* do about it?’

‘He can do a lot of things,’ said Andie, putting her arm around her friend. ‘Go on, tell him, Bingo.’

‘For one thing, we can give you a clean and efficient energy source. In the meantime, we can stabilise your climate, remove all of your pollution, and eradicate hunger and disease.’

‘And the price?’ asked Buff. ‘What do we give you in return? There’s always a price, isn’t there? We both know it, don’t beat around the bush, tell it to me straight.’

Bingo stood up and stretched out his arms. ‘We mean your populations no harm, sir. We are simply here to help the world regain its balance. We love the Earth, always.’

‘You’ve cleverly sidestepped my question, Bingo. I can’t see any emotion in your eyes, or anything else for that matter. It’s like looking into a polished mirror and it makes me feel strangely uncomfortable. Why did you mention harm when I only spoke of trust?’

‘I wasn’t trying to avoid the question. It’s true, my eyes are reflective. But if you could see into them, you would only see love. There is no price for our services.’

‘But we already have organisations in place to handle these problems: the UN, the Earth Institute, many other international organizations, all for the same purpose. Why don’t you ask *them* whether we need to do anything right now?’

‘That’s exactly why I’m here, sir. Could you help me set up a meeting with your best scientists and all of your world leaders? We could Skype, you know.’

‘Possibly, but the decision to meet you should be up to them. You’ve been visiting Earth for a thousand years?’

‘Two and a half thousand years of research for me, actually,’ said Bingo, tapping one of his long fingers on the table.

‘So you think you *know* something of our world. Then you must be aware that any individual, any group or country, would find your offer as seductive as having a genie to grant them their three wishes. But even genies have their price, and it’s always a high one.’

‘I know it sounds too good to be true, but it is what it is. We want to give this gift to *everyone* on the planet, not only to specific groups or nations.’

Andie was quiet during their conversation, but she noticed that Bingo was beginning to change again. Buff Orpington noticed it too. Bingo had become a few inches shorter than he was an hour ago. He also looked tired and his face was becoming more and more wrinkled.

‘Shall we take a break, Bingo?’ asked Andie.

‘Good idea, I need some juice,’ he said quietly. She rushed to the refrigerator and brought out a pitcher of lemonade. Bingo greedily drank a glass, wiped his thin lips, and asked for another. He’d already started to grow, and the lively, green colour was returning to his face. ‘Nice one! That’s better,’ he said. ‘More, please?’ Buff couldn’t help staring at the change in him. ‘Are you all right now, Bingo?’ he said. He zoomed in for a close-up as the little greenish-grey man began to talk. Buff interrupted after a few words, and said, ‘you can make it snow, and I just saw you grow three inches in less than a minute, but you still won’t tell me your real motives? I can always tell when someone is holding something back.’

‘You’re right, I am holding something back. I didn’t tell you my real position because I didn’t want it to get in the way of our mission. You see, actually I’m the Senior Director of our *Planetary Rescue Agency*, the PRA for short, and I’ve been sent here to make the proposal.’

‘The Planetary Rescue Agency?’ asked Buff.

‘It’s like your Red Cross or Red Crescent, but of course, we are a lot bigger. We can usually repair a planet’s ecosystem in a week or two, world poverty and disease could be eradicated in about two months. I would also like to invite a few of your scientists to visit us, if they wish to do so. We would like to share our music, our arts

and culture with you. We are a larger planet, with the same type of atmosphere as Earth, and the same type of carbon-based, life forms. There's plenty of room for everyone.'

'Wouldn't it take years to reach your planet?' asked Andie. She started to do the math in her head and said 'Three days'!

'That's right!' said Bingo. We know a thing or two about navigating the space-time continuum. It's all about utilising antigravity, String Theory and a couple of other neat tricks.

'I'm not convinced,' said Buff. 'It's like you said, just too good to be true.'

'It's simple Buff. May I call you by your first name? Don't you realise that you and I are deeply connected. Our hearts and minds, though differently made, can feel the same emotions. We are all part of a much greater totality. When a portion of this system begins to fail, it can affect everything else. Is it wrong to help one unbalanced part, of the universe to regain its equilibrium? May we give you this gift of new technology and also solve your planet's issues with overcrowding? May we heal everyone, even you? We will ask for nothing in return, not even friendship if you don't wish it. You are free to make your own decisions. You even have the right to reject our plan, but I hope you won't.'

'Why not let us go on in the natural way, as an example of survival of the fittest?' said Buff. He felt a note of repressed anger creeping into his voice. Who *was* this little guy with his 'perfect solution' to the world's problems?

'Your world is running out of time.' said Bingo quietly.



‘The thing is,’ said Buff. ‘The thing is, we like to make our *own* decisions. We have our own belief systems. Some of us even think that Mother Nature will cycle through these problems and come out the other end. She will evolve into a force that will be much bigger than anything we puny humans can throw at her. It’s happened before.’

‘Your world always helps its own in times of need, that’s also part of nature’s plan. We just want to help you achieve a good balance.’

‘You are patronising us,’ replied Buff. ‘And in my opinion, you’re being arrogant. Do you expect us to blindly trust you? Are we to be taken into your correctional guidance like naughty children? Are you offering us a slice of paradise? And if so, do we really want it from you?’

‘That’s a good question! Do you?’ asked Bingo.

Orpington suddenly stopped talking and he put his hand to his ear. He was listening to instructions through his earpiece. A red light started to blink on the camera in front of him, and he was ordered to break for a commercial announcement. He focused the camera on himself, smiled at his viewers with his most reassuring smile, and said: ‘We’ll be right back with this exceptional story. This is Buff Orpington in Roswell, New Mexico.’ He was deeply moved and it showed. He turned off his microphone, sighed, and looked over at Andie and Bingo.

‘That was President Obama,’ he said. ‘The President, and most of the other world leaders have been briefed. We are now waiting for them to connect to Skype. The response has been overwhelming.’

The way it's looking now, the whole world wants to talk to you and they want it right now!' 'President Obama will be looking into your living room,' said Buff, using his famous cheeky voice. 'Yep, he's gonna see everything, even that big hole in the carpet.'

He went out the front door to brief the rest of his camera crew who were waiting outside.

'Can I get a couple more people in there?' he asked. 'And some better lighting? Let's set up the large TV screen for the President's speech. Check, check. Is the sound all right now? The entire crew peered into the front windows, wanting to catch a glimpse of 'The Alien'.

'President Obama?' asked Andie. 'The President will be looking right into my living room?' She glanced around and it occurred to her for the first time, that her furniture was terribly shabby-looking. 'Bingo, she said, 'we've got to go through with it. Are you strong enough to go on?'

'Yes, yes, I can! I wouldn't miss this for the world. Ha, Ha, a little joke... I can't wait to hear what everyone has to say. This is what I came for, how wonderful!' Andie hurriedly took the breakfast dishes into the kitchen. She put them in the oven to keep them out of sight. When she was out of the room, Bingo changed the furniture, replaced the carpet, and gave the walls a new coat of cream paint, just by waving his skinny little arms a bit.

Buff watched through the window with his mouth open. It took Bingo less than half a minute to change the room into a modern, stylish place to give a presidential interview.

Andie kissed them both on the top of their heads when she saw Buff sitting on the new sofa and Bingo sitting in a very elegant, long-legged chair. While CNN was still busy with commercials, the crew used this time to set up the lighting and bring in more cameras. Suddenly there were many people shouting instructions and bringing in more and more equipment. Buff Orpington's introduction had to be long enough to give the world leaders time to link into Skype, but not so long that his listeners would begin to lose interest. Buff scribbled furiously on his yellow notepad, tearing up sheets of paper as he wrote and tossing them in the corner. Bingo sighed and made each piece of crumpled paper disappear as soon as it hit the floor. Buff read some of his notes to Andie and asked her if they sounded okay. She didn't have time to answer.

The cameraman focused on Buff's face and gave him the go-ahead sign. He took a breath and began to speak: 'Mr. President, World Leaders, Representative Bingo Camppells, good afternoon. I have the unique task of bringing you together, to meet and to begin a dialogue. This dialogue will change our future. The results of this meeting may prepare the way for all living things on Earth to join in a system of interplanetary governance. The consequences of this union may result in a better understanding of our place in the universe. Bingo Camppells offers us a caring, interplanetary gesture to heal our world, and to drastically alter the behaviour of our political leaders. It will take a quantum leap for mankind to transcend the biases and prejudices which have been built up from antiquity. If we agree to do this, perhaps, we can all give up these divisions and look at the problem with fresh eyes. Ladies and gentlemen, I am

leaving you with an opportunity to begin anew, a chance to begin with a clean slate, a *tabula rasa* for a healthier planet. I believe that Bingo Camppells and his advisors are offering us this opportunity. Thank you very much.’

The cameramen stopped filming and the whole crew began to applaud and cheer.

‘Cool!’ cried Bingo. Could you give me a hug, now?’

‘Just a small one,’ said Buff, grinning. ‘I don’t hug guys, much.’ He walked over to Bingo and put his arms lightly around him. A strange, icy feeling crept through his blood and he felt his muscles straightening and becoming stronger. The chronic pain was gone. He felt strong and he didn’t seem to need his glasses anymore. The weariness of living with chronic pain had also disappeared. There was no real cure for multiple sclerosis. Pain had been his faithful partner for more than twenty years, and he had become very adept at hiding it. He was a master at showing the sunny side of his character. No one except his wife knew how much his body hurt each day. Now it was over. He could feel it on a deeply cellular level, and it made him want to dance. He felt the top of his head because it had begun to tingle. He ran his fingers over the new stubble and his eyes glowed.

‘How’s that, feel any better?’ asked Bingo, slyly.

Before he could answer, there was a loud knock on the door. Andie opened it and saw a large man wearing a black suit and sunglasses. He pushed past her and strode into the kitchen. The agent asked Buff if he was all right, and he frowned at Andie and Bingo. The reporter nodded, still stunned and delighted by the energy surging through his new body.

‘I wasn’t going that fast, agent Smothers!’ said Bingo. ‘It was an accident, and I’ll pay Andie for the damage to her apple tree.’ He didn’t smile, but he *was* whistling through his nose. The tall FBI man stared at him and remained silent. ‘This is a real bummer, you know,’ continued Bingo. ‘I was hoping to see Will Smith and that smart-talking pug dog, Frank the Remoolian. Wasn’t he the best actor? So, I finally get to meet “A Man in Black?” We’ve heard a lot about your sort, on Erzhnap. In case you didn’t guess it, I’ll have to introduce myself, I’m an alien, and I’m pleased to meet you.’ He offered his hand, but the FBI agent didn’t seem to appreciate his humour. He didn’t shake hands, and he left after Buff told him that they were expecting the President to go on air at any minute. Buff also explained that the President wanted a private, one-to one conference with The Alien. He also mentioned that the President hadn’t requested any FBI assistance and neither had CNN.

The agent walked stiffly to the door, turned and snarled, ‘We’re coming back to get you. You can’t run and you can’t hide from us. We’ll find you, wherever you are, you can count in it.’ Bingo looked at Andie and didn’t speak.

When the televised conference was over, the entire world was talking of Bingo’s proposal. All the countries held a, immediate telephone vote. There was little dissent between the nations, and everyone was willing to send a representative to the forum. A meeting was scheduled at the United Nations building in a week’s time. Until then, there would be a universal ceasefire between nations at war. It was decided that both planets would send their groups of scientists to the UN as well. The first goal was

to distribute food, water, shelter, and clothing to every world citizen who was in need of them, no matter where they lived. Then they would address the effects of natural and man-made global disasters. Climate change and environmental clean-up would start at the end of the week. Bingo invited a few of the world's most famous scientists to meet his father's ship. It would be carrying the Planetary Rescue Delegation. He programmed a temporary hologram into their brains that told them where to go and where they would be met.

‘I’ve got to call my father right away! Now where’s my *δαμεδ* phone?’ asked Bingo in a panicky voice. He searched his pockets in vain. ‘We have the same trouble on Erzhnep. SPHDS, or Sudden Phone Disappearance Syndrome, seems to be a universal mystery. No one knows why.’

Andie took Bingo to her work, and told her surprised colleagues at the nature reserve that she was going on vacation for a few weeks. Who could say no to that? Three days later, Andie, Buff Orpington, Bingo, and a small group of scientists stood on a hill in the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, outside of Roswell New Mexico. They were all waiting for Bingo's father to arrive in the early hours of August 8, 2013. No one could imagine what would happen, all of them had seen ‘*E. T.*’ so many of them were expecting something with music and a really dramatic entrance. But there was no sudden parting of clouds; no music, no fleets of tiny space ships. In fact, there wasn't a sound, except for the sandhill cranes, who were doing their best. They danced and jumped, shattering the morning calm with their harsh voices: singing: ‘Arrr! Arrr! Arrr!’ Bingo was enchanted,

so the cranes repeated their dance steps and bowed to him again and again.

‘I’ve never seen them do it quite like this before,’ whispered Andie. ‘They’re dancing for you. I know it. They recognise you.’

‘Can’t you speak Crane? These are really great lyrics,’ he said. ‘They’re so poetic.’

‘I can’t speak any bird language, not yet, but since you changed my brain, everything seems possible...’ Suddenly, everyone in the crowd, old and young, started giggling like children and they couldn’t stop. At once, there was a *boing-boing* sound, and an enormous spaceship appeared on the nearest hill. It was a much larger version of the pie pan ship that had carried Bingo to Earth. The top lifted up and a ladder appeared. Bingo’s grandfather and his new wife were the first to walk down the steps. Then his father appeared with Erzhnap’s experts on Planetary Aid. They politely shook hands with everyone. Bingo’s father frowned and whispered something in his son’s ear. Then he and the entire PRA\* delegation were escorted to the waiting, black limos. They sped away to the airport.

‘Did you get into trouble, Bingo?’ asked Andie.

‘Not really, it could have been worse,’ said Bingo. A few minutes later, more Bingo-like beings with uniforms walked quietly down the ramp of the ship to escort the new visitors to their seats.

‘Welcome to The Erzhnapien Galaxy Airways, Mr. Orpington and Miss Worhope. We’ve heard so much about you. Are you quite happy with the window seat?’

\*PRA Planetary Rescue Agency

‘Mr. Orpington, we’ve contacted your wife and she gave you permission to go home with us. We told her you’d return in a week. I hope this meets with your satisfaction, sir.’ said the flight attendant, as if it was ordinary occurrence. Buff nodded and his eyes quickly scanned the sleek interior of the spacecraft. He felt a shiver of excitement travel up and down his spine and he felt like a young boy.

‘Good morning, Bingo,’ said another flight attendant. ‘It’s good to see you again, sir. Erzhnep Airlines wishes everyone an enjoyable flight.’

The organic seats adjusted perfectly around each passenger, and the observation windows raised or lowered themselves to provide the passengers with the best viewing angle. The spaceship smelled like sunshine, warm bread, and fresh coffee.

‘Good morning everyone,’ said a tinny voice. ‘This is your captain speaking. For those of you who have never flown with us before, our estimated time of arrival on Erzhnep will be three Earth days, twenty minutes and four seconds. We will be travelling at Official Riblap Warp Speed. This can be calculated in Earth terms as seven hundred and three billion kilometres per hour, which is six hundred and fifty-six times the speed of light. On board, there are forty holographic movies to choose from and the movie screen is located at the front of your seats. We also have a fully equipped recreation deck for your enjoyment. Refreshments will be served in two minutes. Feel free to ask for any type of Earth food and drink. You might be interested to know that we have the newest meal simulators in the galaxy. I will answer all of your questions about Erzhnepian Warp Speed as



soon as we leave your solar system.’ The captain had repeated his speech so many times that it sounded like one interminable, monotonously long sentence. There was an audible gasp from Buff Orpington, who was sitting behind them. Bingo turned to him and whispered,

‘It’s all right to ask the captain about how the warp propulsion works, but he’ll talk your ears off, and he’s very proud of his new ship.’

‘Do you think he’d mind if I went up right now?’ asked Buff, trying to hide his excitement. He felt even more like a little boy, living in a boy’s wildest dream, but this time it was real.

‘We’ve already passed through your Solar System, you see, it only takes three minutes. I don’t see any reason why not,’ said Bingo.

Then he leaned over to Andie and said, ‘Have you ever noticed that it doesn’t matter which galaxy you’re from, all pilots sound the same? I’ve been on your planes many times before, and even though the pilots sounded remarkably like our captain just now, nobody paid any attention to me. They didn’t even know I was there. Shall I tell you why? It’s because I was wearing my Tiny Hat of Indifference. I never travel without it. Ask a flight attendant for one, they always come in handy when you don’t want to be disturbed. You can take it home with your luggage. It looks just like an ordinary hat and it always stays in fashion, because it changes with the yearly trends.’

Andie and Bingo went to the observation deck to watch the stars, planets and galaxies whizzing past the spacecraft. It resembled a kaleidoscopic light show. ‘There’s something I’ve always wanted to know,’ Bingo,

said Andie, taking his small hand in hers. ‘Can’t your people feel anger or get annoyed at anything? I haven’t seen you frown once, or say anything negative about our world. Surely you must feel upset at many of the cruel and unjust things we’ve done throughout the centuries, generation after generation. How *can* you not judge us? I do! We never seem to learn from our mistakes.’

‘Four hundred millennia ago, we were like you, quick to feel threatened, quick to act, and compelled to protect ourselves at any cost. Our response to aggression was fear, followed by anger and followed by aggression. These feelings were just as sudden and overpowering as the emotions that Earth people feel right now. That’s why it seems as if each generation makes the same mistakes as their parents. Our brains used to be set up to destroy anything that might have been a threat. It is a survival tactic. If that meant fighting, starting a war, or even taking a life, we did it, too.

‘Yes, said Andie, but how did you learn to stop?’

‘Simple relaxation, really. Long ago, we learned how to programme our brains to communicate with itself and reduce our primitive ‘flight or fight mechanism.’ That’s why we have such big, leafy, foreheads.

‘Yes I know the feeling, the racing heart, clenched muscles, angry thoughts boiling up in your brain...Once it starts, it’s hard to control.’

‘We learned to create a dialogue between the part of our brain that wants to fight, the amygdala, and the reasoning part, the cerebral cortex. We actually learn this technique when we’re babies. It’ll be easy for you to learn how to do it! You’ll be surprised! I can teach you tonight, OK?’

As for other rules, we rely on Robert Fulghum's version of how to live a happy life, he's also a frequent visitor.

Play fair.  
Don't hit people.  
Share everything.  
Clean up your own mess.  
Don't take other people's things.  
Put things back where you found them.  
Draw, paint and sing every day.  
Play and work every day, some.  
Take a nap every afternoon.  
When you go out into the world,  
Watch out for traffic,  
Be aware of wonder,  
Hold hands, and stick together.  
Remember the little seed in the styrofoam cup:  
The roots go down, the plant goes up and nobody  
actually knows how, but we are all like that.'\*

As Andie and her new friend watched the planet Erzhnapi come closer and closer, she noticed that the sky and the oceans of Bingo's world were light, almost iridescent violet, and the vegetation was as green as Spring. There was an abundance of life everywhere. When they walked down the ramp of the spacecraft, Andy and the rest of the visitors were surprised to see all the residents of Bingo's city gathered to greet them. The Erzhnapians were perfectly still, only raising their green hands in unison, and waving them in celebration.

## **Bingo's Famous Erzhnapien Sprout Sorbet**



## Bingo's *δαμεδ* Sorbet

### Ingredients:

- 6 marzipan Brussels sprouts
- 1 full cup of mint leaves, firmly packed
- 2 cups of water
- 1 ½ cups of caster or granulated sugar
- ¼ cup of sweet, white wine (Clarette de Die)
- 1 tsp. of lemon juice
- 1 tsp. of finely grated lemon peel

Bring the all the ingredients (except the wine, lemon juice and peel) to a rolling boil, and cook over medium heat for about 10 minutes. Let this cool to room temperature. Stir in the white wine and the lemon juice and peel. If you have an ice cream maker, chill the mixture thoroughly and follow the directions on your machine. If not, put the mixture in a shallow freezer tray and stir it every hour until there are no more ice crystals to be seen. Serve in a wine glass or a lovely china teacup and garnish with a sprig of mint and the marzipan Brussels sprout.

To make the marzipan Brussels sprouts:

Colour your marzipan (which should be available at a good chocolatier or baking supply site on line} with yellow and green food colouring. Mix well, but not too much, so that it stays streaky. Roll out a small ball, about as big as your thumb. Flatten five smaller balls to make the leaves. Attach each flat leave in an overlapping way. Put each sprout on top of the sherbet with the sprig of

mint. This is an autumn dish and often the marzipan sprouts are tied with a red ribbon.

Erznapian translation,

τιε αλλ τηε σπροθτσ φιτη ρεδ ριββονσ ιφ υοθ φαντ το εα  
τ τηεμ τηε φαν τηεσ σηοθλδ βε εατεν / Τηανκ υοθ φορ ρ  
εαδινγ τηισ βοοκ·

Serves six Erznapians. They will eat the sprout first. It is mandatory.

## **Glossary, Puns, and Explanations**

## Chapter 1: The Painted Hands

*Châteaux*: French for castles.

*Choux de Bruxelles*: means Brussels sprouts in French.

*Mombazillac*: a sweet dessert wine from Provence.

*Sacré Bleu!* French swear word.

## Chapter 2: Phatatuti

𐩈𐩀𐩁𐩃: cook.

*Dinari*: Egyptian money.

*Sim, Sala Bim*: words of a magic spell.

*Similibus, Simillum, Curentar*: means: 'like cures like', a concept used in homeopathy. A plant or a substance is used which mimics symptoms of the disease when taken, or looks like the offending organism. For example, some spotted leaves may cure snake bite.

*Sobek*: Egyptian crocodile god, symbolising the fertility of the Nile and the power of the Pharaoh.

## Chapter 3: The Spartan Comedian

*Agoge*: Spartan military school for boys who started at age seven. Means disciplinary school as well.

*Amphora*: an oval-shaped Greek vase.

*Aristophanes*: a Greek playwright who wrote comedies.

*Hoplite*: a Spartan slave.

*Krypteia*: a secret and deadly graduation ceremony of the Spartan military school.

*Kryptorchis*: a pun on Greek names. Means undescended testicle.

*Olea*: ‘olive tree’, ‘olive oil’, and a small Greek coin.

*Orestes*: Greek boy’s name. It is the name of a Greek mythological hero, and it comes from: *óros*, which means mountain in ancient Greek, or ‘the man who conquers mountains’.

*Pausanias*: 5<sup>th</sup>-century Spartan general. The name may mean ‘stability’, but it is a pun on the fact that Pausanias pauses a long time between words.

*Pissistrates*: based on an Athenian tyrant’s name, but it sounds like a boy who is peeing in the street.

*Zakaris Demararinos*: the name means: ‘Sugar of Demerara’.

#### Chapter 4: The Noble Racer

*Celeritus, Olitus Currus Trabanti*: a mock-Latin series of names means: Fast, Smelly, Chariot of Trabant.

*Festina, Domine*: ‘Hurry, my Lord!’

*Gluteus Maximus*: Latin name for the muscles of your bum.

*Hic video veritatem*: ‘Here I see the truth.’

*Nero*: Late Roman emperor, known for executing some of his family members, and the ‘Burning of Rome’, which may or may not have been his fault.

*Seneca*: (c. 1 BC – 65 AD) Roman philosopher and teacher of Emperor Nero. He was also a philosopher, a playwright and statesman.

*Ascension*: The Emperor had gone to Mount Olympus to race his magnificent Arabian stallions on the Elysian Fields. That is where all the self-respecting gods go to race and watch the fun.



## Chapter 5: King Arthur and the Song of Love

*Beor*: a sweet type of beer, made from honey, grain and apples. It was very weak, and usually given to children.

*Colewortes*: Brussels sprouts.

*Fenkel*: fennel.

*Manticore*: a mythological monster with seven rows of terribly sharp teeth, and a fondness for eating children.

*Soppes*: thick, stale bread, which was used as a plate for stew, vegetables, or meat dishes. It was bad manners to eat the bread, unless you were very hungry, or if you didn't know any better.

*Glass bottles*: these were incredibly rare in the early Middle Ages, only the rich could afford them. Therefore, it was suspicious if they were found in a hut.

## Chapter 6: Geoffrey Chaucer's Prioress

The poem has been translated at the bottom of the page. And as you might have guessed by now, not any of it is real except for the Middle-English.

## Chapter 7: Machteld's Lament

*'sHertogenbosch*: an old city in southern Holland. The name means: 'The Duke's Woods.'

## Chapter 8: Leonardo's Invisible Invention

Everything (I hope) is explained in the text. It is supposed to be deliberately obscure. There *is* a Cheddar cheese and a Cheddar Castle, where actually, one of da Vinci's illustrated notebooks is kept, but there is no Wensleydale castle, it is a cheese, a very good cheese, but nothing to do with Leonardo da Vinci.

## Chapter 9: The Seer's Unforeseen Retreat

*Donnerwetter*: German expression of surprise. Means: 'thunder weather!'

*Dummkopf*: German for stupid-head, dolt, or idiot.

*Hanswurst*: German expression. It means an absurd person who acts like a clown. Such a person is also called a 'Pickled Herring.'

*Ordnung und Sauberkeit*: means: order and cleanliness in German.

*Um Himmels Willen*: means: 'by the will of heaven'. Used somewhat like: 'God, give me strength!'

*Unsinn und Drek*: German expression of disbelief.

*Verandis petasus indifferens, fio duo!* Mock-Latin: means: 'Tiny Hat of Indifference, become two.'

*The wine glass in the illustration for Puelo's soup*: If you look closely at the reflection in the wine glass, you might see a portrait of Puelo.

## Chapter 10: The Dutch Solar System

*Frans Hals*: 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch master of portrait painting.

*Guilder*: Dutch currency until it was replaced by the euro.

*Han Deley*: an anagram of my last name, 'Delehanty'. I fooled you, didn't I?

*De Vries*: a name that means: from Friesland, a northern Dutch Province. Frisian people developed a reputation for frugality with their money and their words.

*Mijnheer*: roughly translated as: 'my Lord', used like 'Mister'.

*Still life*: a painting of natural or man-made objects. There is often hidden and explicit symbolism in these paintings. They were very expensive in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and some of them could cost as much money as a small house.

## Chapter 11: Saskia's Awakening

*Bedstede*: a bed, usually big enough for two small people. The bed was built into the wall. You could close its doors at night to keep out the draught. People slept sitting up because they believed when you lay prone, your soul could fly out of your body when you snored. Your soul was also in mortal danger if you sneezed, and that's why people all over the world still say 'Bless you.'

*Makelaar*: a go-between, a facilitator. In Rembrandt's time, a 'Makelaar' was a type of mackerel, an oily fish. The mackerel was believed to help bachelor herrings find their herring brides. He would act as a fishy marriage broker. I swear this is not made-up; it's true.

## Chapter 12: Julie the Sweep

*'As sure as bees is bees'*: to be certain of something, probably Irish.

*Capuchin*: a monkey, native to South America, named after the Capuchin monks, who came to work there. The monkey's fur resembled a monk's hood and robe.

*Foundling Hospital*: in 1756, a bill was passed that every child who couldn't be cared for was to go to 'The Foundling Hospital', in London, England. After a year, it had 14,934 children. Many of them were orphaned or illegitimate. Of these nearly 15,000 children, 4,400 survived to be apprentices, but they were often left to die a few months later, in service.

*I'll be a bleeding cheat*: a mild 18<sup>th</sup> century swearword.

*'Modus oppertandi, trixie, dixie*, Jim is trying to speak Latin but he doesn't know how, so he makes it up.

*Pillory*: a form of capital punishment. The guilty have to stand a day or two in a wooden harness which immobilises them. The crowd throws rotten food at them and excrement, bad vegetables, rotten eggs, chickens, and often stones. Some people didn't survive the experience.

*Posset*: A type of rennet custard with sherry and lemon. It was popular in the 1700s. I read the recipe and frankly, it doesn't seem very nice. In fact, it sounds ghastly, but I'm sure there are still fans of it.

## Chapter 13: The Unbearable Melancholia of Sprouts

*Romanticism*- a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement, 18-19th century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against neoclassicism and an emphasis on the imagination and emotions, and marked especially in English and German literature by sensibility and the use of autobiographical material, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation of external nature, an interest in the remote, a predilection for melancholy, and the use in poetry of older verse form. From Webster's Dictionary.

#### Chapter 14: Christmas in Paris

*Corbeau*: a crow in French.

*Crayeux*: pastels, a type of chalk. The drawing of the young man in the illustration was also done with pastels, but I drew it.

*Franc/centimes*: French currency, until it was replaced by the Euro.

*Guillaume*: William.

*Jardins des Plantes*: Botanical Garden and a zoo in the heart of Paris. You can still visit it today.

*Tartinette*: A little sandwich.

#### Chapter 15: Another letter from the Coalfields

*Nuenen*: a city in North Brabant, the Netherlands.

*Bitumen Black*: a coal derivative, which was used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to make black oil paint stronger-looking and more covering. It looked great and it covered well, but it had terrible effects on the painting because the painted surface would bubble up and crack after a few years.

## Chapter 16: The Scholar Who Wouldn't Eat

*The real nine-letter word*: eat-eat-eat! All Russian grannies say this word at least three times a day.

*Nyeetchjevo*: nothing, in Russian.

*Minsk*: capitol city of Belarus.

*Sobaka*: means 'dog' in Russian.

*Zrazy*: a famous Russian/Polish dish of potatoes, onions, and chopped meat. (See recipe)

*Yablachnaya Sharlotka*: an extremely delicious Russian cake made of apples, flour, eggs, honey and sugar.

## Chapter 17: The Eyes of Alfred Celerie

*Impressionist*: an art movement that started in Paris. The main aim of this school of painting was to focus on the natural play of light and the use of natural colours. Used mainly in landscapes and figures in a natural set.

*Cataract*: clouding of the lens of the eye.

*Chloroform*: a gas, one of the first anaesthesia substances it was soon discontinued because even a drop too much, could result in death.

*Passé*: to be out of touch, passed over, forgotten.

## Chapter 18: Pablo and the Fish

*Antibes*: a city on the French Riviera.

*Mon Petit Chouchou*: means ‘my little creampuff’ in French.

*La Coupole*: a famous Parisian Brasserie where all the famous artists used to go to eat, to see, and to be seen. They’re probably still at it.

## Chapter 19: The Corned Beef Thief

*Baedeker*: a famous English guide book which is still in use today.

*Cherbourg*: an important harbour city in France.

*Ukochanka*: darling, in Polish.

*Wizy*: body lice, in Polish.

## Chapter 20: Diary of Two Fossil Hunters

*Brassica Oleracia var. protogemmifera, kohlii*: means a wild cabbage. The variant plant is named ‘first, gem-like cabbage, discovered by Kohl. Sounds convincing enough, but I made it up.

*Donnerwetter*: a German swearword which means ‘thunder weather’.

*Dummkopf*: means stupid-head, idiot, dolt, in German.

*Graubünden*: the largest and most Eastern region of Switzerland.

*Heidelberg*: a German city with an ancient university. This city is situated by the river Neckar.

*Laudanum*: a 19<sup>th</sup> century cure-all for pain, depression etc. It was made of opium and alcohol and was used as a remedy for everything. It was highly addictive.

*Liebchen*: my love, in German.

*Rosa N. Kohl*: a pun on Rosa's name. *Rozenkohl* means Brussels sprout in German.

*Weibchen*: a little lady, in German.

## Chapter 21: A Very Modern Cabbage Farmer

*Moped*: a motor scooter. The Tomos, the Puch, and the Vespa, were the best sort of mopeds one could buy in the 1960's and 1970's.

*Veendam*: A medium-sized village in northern Holland. To say that there is a Northern part to it is ridiculous.

*Veen*: means peat, in Dutch.

*Wout*: Walter, in Dutch.

## Chapter 22: And Bingo was His Name-O

*Big Albert E*: Albert Einstein. Of course they knew each other!

*Crazy Fingers Wolfie*: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: an 18<sup>th</sup> century genius, musician, and composer.

*Darius*: Darius I. Also known as Darius the Great. King of the Persian Empire. 550-486 BC.

*Erznap*: A medium-sized planet in a small, run of the mill, galaxy.

*Leonardo*: da Vinci, one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known.

*Stephen Hawking*: cosmologist and physicist, another one of the most brilliant minds ever.

*Robert Fulghum*: Author and Painter. Wrote: 'All I Really Needed to Learn I Learned in Kindergarten.'



*δαμεδ*: pronounced: ‘Zashbourt!’ A very mild Erzhnapien swear word. It can be compared to ‘darn it’ or ‘blast’.

*The Tiny Hat of Indifference*: real indifference is true art form. See page 79. Why don’t you make a Tiny Hat of Indifference for yourself?

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THE END

