Mr Fizzle lived at 23 Waterside Drive on the Gold Coast with his wife Mrs Fizzle and their cat Percy. Mr Fizzle was a middle-aged gentlemen, about mid 40's, who had black hair with streaks of grey and green eyes. He often wore pinstriped suits and dirty jeans and had a large collection of umbrellas even though it did not rain much on the Gold Coast. Mrs Fizzle was also in her 40's, and had light blonde hair and brown eyes. She often wore second hand dresses that she found in the op-shop and liked to read books about Richard Nixon. She had hundreds of books on Richard Nixon, and she would read them all nearly every day and night. But the strange thing was that her political beliefs were the direct opposite of the former republican president. Mr Percy was a grey and white cat who was about five years old. He often enjoyed catching mice and birds and would often show them to Mr and Mrs Fizzle. Of course they were not as impressed with his efforts and Percy would often be bemused as they scolded him for what he thought was a kind thing he was doing for them. These three lived in a house, and not just any ordinary house, they lived in a magical house.

The Fizzle's first came across this house about a couple of years ago. They were looking to move from their old place and were searching around the area for some new houses. The search was exhausting, and had taken many weeks. They were just about to give up when they saw the house. At first glance it didn't look that special, in fact if Mr Fizzle hadn't stopped to tie up his shoes they wouldn't have even looked at the house. It was a two storey red bricked house with square windows and a chimney. The front yard was small with no real flowers or any weeds anywhere. Just concrete. The garage looked kind of cramped from the outside, and it was painted blue and yellow. They then noticed that it was open for inspection.

'12 to 2.' Said Mr Fizzle reading the sign out the front.

'Why has this house got a chimney?' Asked Mrs Fizzle looking up at the red bricked chimney.

'Huh?'

'A chimney. I mean this is Queensland. When are we going to be having a fire here?'

'I don't know. Aesthetic thing? Come on let's go inside. Who knows this might be the house we are looking for.'

So they went inside the house. In the house was a lounge with solid gold chairs and a red and black carpet. The kitchen was white and grey with a microwave that could cook anything from popcorn to chicken, an oven that was capable of cooking for over two hundred people, and a fridge that not only stored food but could also have many drinks in it as well. There was only one bedroom. But it was a very big bedroom. The size of about ten normal bedrooms and it took up the space of the entire second floor. It had wooden floorboards, and a couple of circular windows with yellow blinds flapping in the breeze. On the middle of the huge room lay a huge bed. This bed was about three metres wide and about two metres long. There were white sheets on it along with a green and yellow blanket and an orange duvet. There were also about ten pillows of all different shapes and sizes. Some were square, others were circular, and even a few were rectangular. They were all of various colours of red to blue and they were all laid out neatly at the head of the bed. The bed was neatly made, and the mattress looked very solid. The bed was made of a combination of both wood and metal and looked very sturdy. The rest of the room was scattered with sparsely laid out furniture. A rocking chair which looked a hundred years old and in need of a paint job lay in one corner. Near the other corner there were some black leather couches and a sofa that was yellow and

had holes all through the side. The rest of the room was full of dusts and cobwebs which caused Mrs Fizzle to cough.

‘Bah! This dust.’

‘Well we can clean it. Won’t take that long.’ Said Mr Fizzle as he inspected the yellow couch.

‘You say that but don’t come complaining to me once it takes us all afternoon to clean this bloody room!’

‘God do you ever stop complaining?’

‘Yes. When I’m not near you.’

‘Never mind. Hey, what’s over there?’ Said Mr Fizzle pointing to a door in one corner of the room.

‘Don’t know. Bathroom maybe?’

Mr and Mrs Fizzle walked over and opened the door. Mrs Fizzle was right. It was a bathroom, a most spectacular bathroom. It had the usual sink with soap (yellow but fading), a plug that was white coloured, and taps with both a hot and a cold. There was also a shower that looked just right in that it wasn’t too big or too small, it was just right. It had solid gold taps as well as a golden showerhead and it was covered by a glass case so as that no water could escape onto the floor and flood the bathroom. The toilet, which was cream coloured, was in another room so as to maintain privacy. It had its own voice activated system in which it not only provided a pleasant experience for the user but also cleaned itself (even if the flushing option was available). But the real big thing, the one that made the bathroom stand out was the spa in the other corner of the room and the sauna in the other corner of the bathroom. The sauna was small, just enough for maybe a couple of people at most. It was brown coloured and had wooden seats. The spa could maybe fit about four or five people and was solid gold which could relax a person instantly. The Fizzle’s were most impressed with this arrangement as the house in which they currently were living in had an awful bathroom, the pits. The toilet was always flooding, the shower was leaking and flooding the bathroom floor, and there always seemed to be ants anywhere. But in this bathroom both Mr and Mrs Fizzle could see no ants at all. In fact it looked very clean and tidy. It didn’t have the dust and cobwebs of the main bedroom at all.

‘Wow!’ squealed Mr Fizzle in delight as he marvelled at the bathroom and all of its luxurious objects it held.

‘I know! How good does it look?’

‘I want to buy this place. I want to buy it right now.’

‘Yeah, me too.’

‘Ok, we’ll just go and…’ Mr Fizzle stopped.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Mrs Fizzle.

‘Well I was just thinking about the other house we saw the other day.’

‘What about it?’

‘Well it was pretty good I thought.’

Mrs Fizzle looked at her husband with an incredulous expression. This house seemed perfectly fine to her with its spacious bedroom, wonderful kitchen, and a spectacular bathroom. She could easily see herself living there and she did not want her husband to ruin that for her.

'That house? It smelt and had an awful bedroom.'

'Well I didn't think it was that bad. I mean what smell? I couldn't smell anything.'

'You serious?' Asked a shocked Mrs Fizzle.

'I am. I mean I can't really remember any smell at all I'm sorry to say.'

'It was a fishy smell.'

'A fishy smell?'

'Yes. A fishy smell. I could smell it all throughout the house. I can't believe you couldn't smell it.'

'Well whatever. I mean can't we just look at that house again? Just a second look?'

'What don't you like about this house? I mean it is so great! It has a bathroom, a really great bathroom. Isn't that what we wanted? A bathroom which wasn't crap like our own one? I don't know about you but I was sick and tired of having to not only deal with a leaking shower, but also a toilet that would always flood all the time. God that was so annoying! Plus all the ants! Ants everywhere!'

'I don't think the ants were that bad. I mean sure I saw them a couple of times but they were never an issue for me.'

'Well they were for me! By god they were! I remember a couple of days ago I was getting myself ready for the morning when I saw all these ants. Rows and rows of these tiny little black ants crawling along the top of the shower and making their way ever so slowly into the sink where I was just about to wash my hands. It made me sick seeing all of them in one place, it made me so sick that I decided then and there that we really should look more closely at getting a new house. I mean I know we have sort of looked at houses, but seeing all those ants really made me really want to get a move on with that.'

'We have though! I'm just worried that we may be rushing into this too soon. We have only been looking at this house for like, what is it, maybe a couple of minutes at most?'

'So? I mean this is a pretty good house.'

'Yeah, I guess so. I don't see anything wrong with it, I'm just feeling cautious. I really don't like jumping into these things. It just makes me nervous that we might not get what we wanted.'

'Oh I'm sure we shall be fine! There will be nothing to worry about.'

'Yeah, ok, let's do it! Let's buy the house!' said Mr Fizzle who decided to stop worrying about things, things that were out of his control, and embrace the fact that he and Mrs Fizzle had really stumbled into the perfect house for them.

'Ok,' said Mrs Fizzle with a beaming smile showing all her teeth, 'let us go and buy this house!'

So both Mr and Mrs Fizzle both went and brought the house. The details of how they purchased the house were both dry and boring, not at all suitable for a story. Unless you do like reading about that sort of stuff. Then I suppose you, dear reader, can close this book and go and find stories about

people buying houses. For the rest of you who are still reading this book we shall now journey to when Mrs and Mr Fizzle were spending their first night in the house. They had spent the previous few days slowly moving all their items of their other house. This included stuff like all of their clothes, furniture, and some various other items that they had collected over the years. Both Mr and Mrs Fizzle, who had been married for about ten years and had no children (they didn't really want any children), were both avid collectors of items. As was told earlier in this story, Mr Fizzle loved to collect umbrellas. He collected hundreds of them of all different sizes and shapes. Red, blue, green, black, brown, silver, gold, yellow and all these other coloured umbrellas. He first started collecting umbrellas after he had just finished high school. He was wandering around the city streets just minding his own business when he saw this red and yellow polka-dotted umbrella on display at one of the shop windows. Mr Fizzle had never seen such a beautiful looking umbrella before in his entire life. He kept staring at it, staring very intensely at its colours, at its shapes and how spectacular it looked to him. Mr Fizzle had drifted in and out of High School, getting average grades but nothing special, and although he did have a job lined up, he wasn't really passionate about anything at all. But seeing that umbrella in the window he suddenly felt this feeling that he had never felt before. This burning desire in him not to only buy that umbrella, but to also buy hundreds of other umbrellas of all different shapes and sizes. So that's what he did. After he went in and brought that umbrella he then went on to collect many more. He went to hundreds of stores, all over Queensland (and sometimes interstate or even whilst traveling overseas), where he looked at and purchased many umbrellas. He had so many umbrellas that he had to have a whole room just for them. So this new house that he and Mrs Fizzle had just moved into, with its many rooms and spacious living, was perfect for Mr Fizzle to put his many umbrellas into so that they could all be together in the one room. Of course Mrs Fizzle was not as keen on umbrellas and wanted Mr Fizzle to if not get rid of them, at least sell a few so that they wouldn't be all over the place. But Mr Fizzle disagreed arguing that they would not all be cluttered if they were in one room and that Mrs Fizzle herself had her own strange collection habits and he didn't really complain. Mrs Fizzle also argued with him about why he needed an umbrella at all, let alone hundreds of them.

'I mean it hasn't really rained on the Gold Coast for months. And when it does I mean it is just a little bit of rain. Who cares if you get soaked?' Asked Mrs Fizzle as they argued about Mr Fizzle's many umbrellas.

'Well this is just more than rain or whatever. I have told you like hundreds of times about how passionate I am about these things. I love them all.' Said Mr Fizzle trying not to yell too loud.

'Fine whatever. Just keep them all in one room.' Sighed Mrs Fizzle as she walked out to do some reading. And that was the end of that argument for the time being, or so Mr and Mrs Fizzle hoped.

Now Mrs Fizzle, back when she called Miss Tent, loved to collect books and other stuff about Richard Nixon. Unlike Mr Fizzle, whose own umbrella collection started after he had left High School, her obsession with Richard Nixon started during High School when she had to write an assignment. She was in year 10 and the subject was to with politics. Her class had to write an essay on a famous leader. Now Miss Tent looked at many different leaders in her research. She flicked through many pages looking at leaders ranging from Bob Hawke the former Australian Prime Minister to Martin Luther King who was a leader of the civil rights movement. But none really captured her attention, they didn't spark her imagination. But one day, on her lunch break, she was sitting in the library when she saw this book on the table next to her. So she picked it up and started to look at it. It was a book about disgraced former US President Richard Nixon. Now Miss Tent was not a conservative sort of person at all, and she was not raised by conservative parents. Her views tended to be rather more progressive than Richard Nixon. But that didn't matter at all as she started to read the book. She

read about his upbringing, his family, his education, his start into politics, his various political campaigns, his presidency, and the scandal that forced him to resign in disgrace in Watergate. All of these topics were covered in the book and they were covered in such great detail that Miss Tent knew that she was going to write an assignment on Richard Nixon. To her, even though she felt disgusted by his actions and thought him unpleasant, she did feel fascinated by the type of person that he was and how he felt very tragic to her. All these thoughts and feelings came to her at once and they felt so overwhelming to her that she had to take stock of herself for a second or two. So Miss Tent, once she decided to leave, checked out the book (along with some other books on Richard Nixon), and went home to write her assignment. She worked very hard on the essay, studying nearly all night, and she was very pleased that it got her a high mark from her teacher. Now normally Miss Tent would have stopped thinking about Richard Nixon once she had finished her assignment. But for some reason, some really strange reason that to this day she can't explain, she didn't want to stop learning about Richard Nixon. In fact she wanted to learn more and more about him. So that is what she did. She finished high school, got a job, and met Mr Fizzle. All the normal things a person does as they move from their teenage years into adulthood. But one thing stayed the same for Miss Tent. Her drive, her hunger, and her ambition to learn everything about Richard Nixon consumed her day and night. It was like a fire burning inside her that had kept flaming on in her heart since that fateful day in the library. She not only knew about nearly every detail of Richard Nixon's life, but she also managed to nearly buy every book on Richard Nixon or any books related to the former President that she could get her hands on over the years. About three bookcases full of Richard Nixon related books filled the home of Mrs and Mr Fizzle. Whilst they were not as annoying as Mr Fizzle and his room full of umbrellas of many different shapes and colours, it was still a bit disconcerting walking into the Fizzle's main living area and coming face to face with many books on Richard Nixon. Unlike Mrs Fizzle however, Mr Fizzle did not really mind about all the Richard Nixon books. He did use to question it, but he soon shut up once Mrs Fizzle told him why she liked reading about him so much and why she found him so fascinating to learn about over the many years.

So, Mr and Mrs Fizzle, with their room full of umbrellas of all different shapes and sizes, and their many bookcases filled with books related to former US president Richard Nixon, were spending their first night at the new house. The night was silent, not a sound could be heard from outside at all. The trees were silent, no animals were about (save for Percy who was busy washing himself in his bed), and the moon was fast asleep. Inside though was where the real story was taking place. For Mrs and Mr Fizzle were looking at the fireplace in their bedroom. The fireplace was blue and brown bricked, and at the side stood the usual fire making and tending equipment that one would expect a fireplace to have at its disposal. However there was one strange thing about this fireplace. One thing that stood out to both Mrs and Mr Fizzle as soon as they had walked into the room their first night in their new house.

'There is no wood for this fireplace!' Exclaimed Mr Fizzle as he carefully looked at and observed the fireplace.

'Really? Are you sure?' Asked Mrs Fizzle as she started to unpack her gear from her suitcases.

'Yeah. I'm sure. I can't see any wood anywhere.'

'Well maybe it is in the garage? You should go and check it out.'

'I'm pretty sure I didn't see any wood down in the garage last time I was down there.'

'When was that?'

‘About half an hour ago.’

‘Well maybe you can go back again and check?’

‘What? No wood is just going to magically appear out of thin air. That is just so silly. You think Percy is just down in the garage chopping up some wood or whatever?’ asked an increasingly tetchy Mr Fizzle.

‘I was just offering a suggestion.’ Said Mrs Fizzle defensively.

‘Yeah, I know. I’m sorry. It has been a long day.’

‘True. Hey, why do we need wood anyway? I mean when has it ever gotten cold on the Gold Coast? I can’t ever remember it getting so cold that we needed a fireplace. I always thought it was strange that this house had a fireplace and a chimney.

Mr Fizzle thought it strange too that this house that they had just moved into had a fireplace and a chimney. It was most confusing to him. He did want to ask Mrs Fizzle about it but due to them both being busy not only selling their old house, but also buying and moving into this new house, he just hadn’t found the right moment or time to bring this situation up to her. He had thought about why this house needed a fireplace in the first place. I mean Mrs Fizzle was absolutely right. They were living on the Gold Coast. It never really got that cold to even want to have warm fire going in the room. And even if it was cold there were heaters that you could buy from the shops. All you had to do was get down in your car (or by public transport if that was how you got around), drive down to the local shopping centre, browse the many stores that would have a heater, purchase one, take it home and try it out. Soon enough you will feel warm in your very own home. It was that simple. You didn’t have to waste time not only chopping wood, but also lugging it up to the fireplace every time you wanted to start a fire. So to Mr Fizzle having a fireplace and a chimney did not make any sense to him at all.

‘Yeah, good point. This fireplace seems so silly.’

‘Why would anyone want to build one on the Gold Coast?’

‘No idea. What should we do about it?’

‘We can always renovate it. You know I’m sure it wouldn’t be that hard.’

‘Renovating? Are you serious? I mean we have just spent the past few months basically moving out of our old home and into our new home and now you want us to renovate?’

‘I don’t think it would be that difficult to do. It always seems so easy on those renovation shows.’

‘They have a lot of help though, plus their budget is probably much bigger than ours.’

‘Have you got a better idea? I mean are you telling me that you are happy to have that big fireplace just sitting there not getting used and taking up space all the time?’

‘Of course not. But I just think there has to be a better way. Look it is getting late, can’t we talk about this in the morning?’ Yawned Mr Fizzle as he checked out the fireplace once more, still trying to find out its purpose in the house.

‘Ok. I suppose so. I am getting pretty tired myself. Been such a long day with all that moving in and getting settled. As well as getting Percy safe and comfortable in his new environment. It isn’t that easy for animals to begin life in a new home. They are not like people, they need some more time to

adjust to their surroundings. I remember one time, back when I was growing up with my family, I think I was only about nine or ten. Whatever. But around about that time I moved houses with my parents and my dog Rufus. You remember me telling you about Rufus? Little fox terrier he was. Quite a handful he could be, had lots of energy. Anyway, Rufus got really, well not scared, but he didn't really act like his usual jumpy self the first few days we were living there. Of course after that he settled down fine, but these past few days have reminded me of how Rufus reacted to moving to a new home all those years ago. Now with Percy, well he might be different. You should go check up on him. I haven't seen him since I fed him a couple of hours ago and I didn't notice anything too bad about him. He seemed ok to me. But he might be different now at night. So go check up on him, John. John, are you there? John?'

Mrs Fizzle turned around to the direction of the fireplace. Mr Fizzle was not there. That was strange to Mrs Fizzle as she swore that John was there a few seconds ago. She remembered hearing him sneezing. But now he was not there. Mrs Fizzle walked over to the bathroom to check if he went in there. She looked in the spacious spa, the luxurious shower, and the pleasant sauna. But he was in none of those places. Mrs Fizzle knew that that would be the case, Mr Fizzle would not have had time to get to those places, and Mrs Fizzle would have heard him. However she, due to the shock of Mr Fizzle disappearing, was not really thinking logically. Which was strange as she was a much more logical person than Mr Fizzle. Mr Fizzle would often do very illogical things such as having dinner for breakfast or even trying to see if he could talk backwards for an entire week. So the fact that Mrs Fizzle was reacting like this proved the seriousness and the uniqueness of the situation. Yes, people can disappear, but they do not just disappear out of thin air. Mrs Fizzle walked back into the main room. She walked over to the fireplace, the last place that she had seen John, the last place where he had sneezed whilst listening to her talking about Percy. The fireplace stood there, immovable and without any wood at all. Mrs Fizzle leaned down next to it. Right down next to the fireplace. She looked inside, and what she saw made her gasp. In the fireplace was Mr Fizzle's wedding ring. This shocked her as Mr Fizzle always kept his wedding ring on since the day he married Mrs Fizzle all those years ago. The wedding was small, not too lavish, and the food and atmosphere was fantastic. There was all sorts of food there from little sausage rolls that you could dip in sauce, to caviar (Mrs Fizzle enjoyed caviar but Mr Fizzle did not). Everyone was having a grand old time smiling and laughing away into the night. It was the happiest, or one of the happiest (that day she discovered that book about Richard Nixon was pretty great), of Mrs Fizzle's life. Seeing that wedding ring, gold and shining like a bright star, brought back so many happy memories for her. But it also scared her because seeing that wedding ring in the fireplace without Mr Fizzle wearing it meant something bad must have happened to him. She was sure of that. Something awful had happened to him on today of all days. Not that any day would be any better, but this was just a kick in the guts after a long and tiring day of settling into their new home. She just wanted to lie down on her brand new bed next to John and fall off to sleep. She wanted to feel the warm and comforting sheets on her as she drifted off to sleep dreaming about jelly donuts and fish who performed movie stunts for a captive audience. But she couldn't go to sleep, not now, not ever. John was missing and all that was left of him was his wedding ring, that wedding ring that he had always worn. Knowing that she couldn't just lay right next to the fireplace all night (although she did really want to do that) Mrs Fizzle reached into the fireplace and grabbed Mr Fizzle's wedding ring.

'What the…' said Mrs Fizzle.

As soon as she had grabbed the ring there was an invisible force, some kind of guiding hand that pulled her into the fire place and through the chimney. Mrs Fizzle tried to make sense of where she was, tried hard to make sure that she was ok, and that she was not dying. The world kept spinning

around her as she continued to be guided by this invisible hand pushing her into something. Red, blue green blurs were all she could see. Was she still in the Gold Coast she thought? It didn't feel like the Gold Coast, in fact she wasn't sure what it felt like. Maybe like one of those rides in those theme parks? Yeah, I think that was it she thought to herself. Of course remembering bits from her past was the only way she could cope with the facts that not only was John missing, but now she had been pulled into the fireplace and out the chimney and now, for what seemed like ages, she was being forced somewhere by this invisible hand.

Suddenly the blurs stopped. Mrs Fizzle found herself going down a very large slide. A very large red and white slide that was thousands and thousands of kilometres above the ground. This slide seemed to stretch for miles and miles. Mrs Fizzle looked around her. Apart from this enormous slide she could see nothing around her. Absolutely nothing. There was just this slide that she was sliding down really fast, incredibly fast, so fast that she wondered if this time she was going to die. This slide reminded her of the big slides that she went on in the water theme parks. Lining up in the midday sun, sweating and hungry, lining up behind other sweaty and hungry people for a few seconds on a water slide. However this was different, for one thing this was the longest time that Mrs Fizzle had spent on a slide, and another thing was that she was sliding down on cushions. Yes, thousands upon thousands of cushions were on the slide. All different types of cushions. Red cushions that you might find in a guest bedroom. Small cushions that people would put in a living area, and big cushions that take up heaps of space and are hard on the head. The strange thing was though, that even though Mrs Fizzle was sliding on these cushions she wasn't getting hurt at all. In fact it was quite comfortable and relaxing for her. No skin was peeling off her due to the cushions. She wasn't getting any marks on her skin or anything like that. It was just a nice comfortable ride down the slide. In fact it was so comfortable that Mrs Fizzle had almost forgotten her terrible situation that she was currently in at the moment. All she wanted to do now, right at that very moment, right at that very second, was to just lay back and relax while she slid down the slide.

But then the slide stopped. Mrs Fizzle lay frozen on a green lounge cushion. She wondered what was happening at that moment. Now it was not so relaxing for her. She could not move her arms or her legs. She tried to scream, scream as loud as she possibly could on the off chance that someone might hear her. Might hear her and rescue her from this awful place. But no sound came out from her lips. None at all. She was mute. She was a statue in the middle of nowhere. All alone without Mr Fizzle there beside her.

Then she felt the green cushion give her an almighty push. Before she even realised what was happening Mrs Fizzle was pushed out of the slide and flung into the air. Mrs Fizzle was rushing through nothing, the slide way behind her. She saw up ahead a door. A grey door with a red door handle. It was about seven feet long and about twelve feet high. A big wooden door that Mrs Fizzle would crash into at any moment. At any second Mrs Fizzle would be dead. She thought back of good times, trying to think of something positive. She thought back of the first time she met Mr Fizzle. It was a Saturday afternoon. It had been raining all morning but the sun was out in the afternoon. Mrs Fizzle had decided to go to the library. She loved going to the library. She went as often as she could go. She went when it was sunny, cloudy, rainy, windy, or even if it was snowing. Miss Tent, as she was known back then, would have spent her entire life in the library if she could. Every day she would go in there and look at all the books. She loved reading non-fiction books. Apart from reading about her favourite subject in former Republican President Richard Nixon she also liked to look at other non-fictional stuff such as history, politics, the arts, and even books on trains. Well on that particular Saturday Afternoon Miss Tent went to the library because she had some books she needed to return as they were overdue. So she went, taking the bus as her car was still at the repair

shop after she crashed it at a roundabout, and returned her books. While she was at the library, just browsing the non-fiction section, when she noticed a young man trying to close an umbrella. It was a red and green striped umbrella and was currently being forcefully dealt with by this gentlemen. Miss Tent tried to ignore this man and his umbrella. She just wanted to grab some books and go home. But this young man was now cursing and spluttering all over the library trying to close the umbrella. She looked over at the library staff. They were nowhere to be found as usual. So, with a heavy sigh and a roll of the eyes, Miss Tent marched over to the young man, and proceeded to close his umbrella.

'Thank you.' The young man said trying not to look too shocked.

'My pleasure. I just don't like it when noisy people trying to ruin the experience for everybody.' Said Miss Tent in a haughty manner.

'Hang on a second. I didn't mean to be so noisy. I was just trying to close this umbrella.' He said pointing to his now closed red and green striped umbrella.

'You didn't have to be so noisy.'

'Well I'm sorry. I'll try to be a little quieter next time. By the way, my name is John. John Fizzle.' Mr Fizzle said.

'Nice to meet you, John. I'm Lynda Tent.'

'Oh that is a nice name. So where are you from?'

Mrs Fizzle smiled, even though she was about to head straight into a solid wooden door, at the memory of her first meeting with John. It had seemed like only yesterday, the memories of a few years ago as clear to her right now at this present time. Lynda loved to remember things. She always thought that reflection was good for a person because it could help you grow throughout life. Lynda liked to believe that she had grown as a person. Sure she had made mistakes, burnt a few bridges, and done things that she had regretted. But she always thought that she had learnt lessons out of those miss-steps. Now she was going to die Lynda could look back at her life with a certain degree of contentment. For any moment now she was going to crash into the big wooden door.

But that did not happen. For the big wooden door suddenly swung wide open and Lynda went straight through it and tumbled onto some bright green grass next to a big solid oak tree. Mrs Fizzle looked around. The sun was beaming down, she could feel the heat of it on her neck, and the magpies were busy trying to get some food out of the ground. However there was something different about these magpies that Lynda noticed. They were green. Not black and white, but dark green. Lynda was trying to wrap her head around the fact when she saw John a few metres away carefully looking at the ground. She raced over to him, running as fast as she could, she wasn't tired anymore. Seeing John there, in the flesh, looking for something, gave her energy. Lynda raced over as fast as her legs could take her. Running like the wind.

'John!' She shouted as she neared him.

John looked up and saw Lynda running towards him. He smiled as they both embraced one another.

'Where have you been?' asked John after they had both finished greeting each other.

'Well where have you been?' queried Lynda.

'It is a long story.'

‘I don’t mind. I mean I don’t think we are going anywhere for the moment.’

‘Well alright, but don’t interrupt me like you usually do.’

‘When have I ever interrupted you?’ asked Lynda angrily.

‘Remember that last Christmas? I was telling that story about the trolley and the rabbit?’

‘You were taking so long with it though. You just kept rambling on about nothing. I thought you were never going to finish it.’

‘But you shouldn’t have done that though. I thought it was quite rude of you.’

‘I’m sorry. I won’t interrupt this time I promise.’

‘Ok. Well I was standing by the fireplace, just checking it out, and listening to you talk about Percy, when I decided to look up to the chimney. So I put my head inside the fireplace. Before I knew it, this force, this invisible force pushed me up the chimney and away from you. Soon I found myself being hurtled through the air. Going really fast, I don’t think I have ever gone this fast before. Everything around me was all these different blurs. Swirls of nothing but strange colours and shapes. I did not know what was happening. Suddenly the blurs stopped and I found myself on this slide. This was the biggest slide that I had ever seen. I don’t think I have ever seen a slide as big as this one. I mean I remember going to those big waterslides in the theme parks. But this was like a hundred times bigger than that. Another strange thing was that I was sliding down on cushions. Now these cushions were all different sizes and shapes. Large red ones, small purple ones, and anything in between. The weird thing about the cushions was that it didn’t hurt me at all. I thought it would have taken some skin off but nothing like that happened. In fact I thought it was quite comfortable. I was so relaxed and sleepy that I nearly closed again. Before I could do that though the slide stopped and so did I. I could not move a muscle. I tried to move my fingers but they just stood there by my sides frozen. All I could do was think about how I was going to get out of this situation. Suddenly the cushion that I was lying down on gave me an almighty push and I hurtled into the air. Away from the slide and straight into this big wooden door. I thought I was going to die. I thought that I would crash straight into the door. I started thinking about you Lynda. About how we first met all those years ago, about our wedding, about the past few weeks. It was nice to think about all those things, about the good times that I have had. It kept my mind from the fact that I was about to die. But the strange thing was that I did not die. No, the door swung open and I found myself here. I took a few seconds to recover from my landing, and then I looked around me and saw where I was. I couldn’t believe it! First it was daylight. Not the night that I had just left on the Gold Coast. Secondly I noticed that the magpies were all green. Not black and white but a dark green. I was just trying to wrap my head around that when I looked at my hands to check if they were not injured when I noticed that my wedding ring was gone! I felt awful, I felt really bad. I always had worn it and now I had lost it. At first I thought that it was in my pockets so I checked there. No such luck. So then I thought that maybe it somehow got loose from my finger and dropped somewhere here when I landed. So I methodically and slowly started to search all around here. I was just getting started in my search when you came running up to me.’

‘Wow,’ said Lynda, ‘that is what happened to me. Where on earth are we?’

‘No idea. Can you help me search for my wedding ring please?’ asked John as he continued to look at the ground.

‘Wait a minute. I think I have it here.’ Said Lynda as she searched in one of her pockets.

‘Oh really? Wow! Thanks!’ Exclaimed John as Lynda handed him his wedding ring.

‘So where do you think we are?’ said Lynda looking around her.

‘I don’t know. Do you want to go and see if we can find a house? Somewhere to stay maybe?’

‘Yeah that sounds good. No point hanging around here.’

So Mr and Mrs Fizzle set off into the unknown. Past the mighty oak tree and the dark green magpies. Through the bushes with the red coloured ants and the blue leaves. They both walked for what seemed like ages. They walked up hills with their grubby weeds and weird smelling flowers. They also negotiated paddocks with their wire fences and purple cows. Jelly rivers and metal bridges also came across their path. It seemed like they were never going to find anyone or anywhere, that they would just be doomed to walking this strange land alone until they both collapsed and died from starvation, when they came across this massive grey building. It looked about a thousand kilometres high and about ten million kilometres long. A big grey bricked building about a hundred metres away from this small hill that John and Lynda were resting on for the moment.

‘Oh thank god.’ Sighed John as he sat down on the grass.

‘How bloody huge is it?’

‘Yeah, it looks really big.’

‘Should we go and check it out?’ asked Lynda.

‘Now? But I feel a bit tired. I want to rest here for a while. It has been a long day.’ Yawned John as he started to close his eyes.

Lynda started to yawn too. John was right she thought. This had been a long day. Not only did they have to settle into their new house, but she and John had travelled through the fireplace and out the chimney where they have landed I some strange world. It looked to her as if it was like a normal world, but somehow different. For one thing the magpies were of a dark green, and the cows were purple. Also the pathways seemed to be made of wood, and the rivers of some jelly substance, a kind of blue jelly. Luckily there were metal bridges for John and her to cross because she would not have been able to navigate through all that jelly. Thinking of this strange world she wondered what Percy would have made of it all.

‘John! You awake?’

‘I was about to be. What’s up?’

‘Percy! He is all alone by himself. Who is going to feed him? He’ll starve to death.’ Panicked Lynda.

‘I know, I am worried about that too. But there is nothing we can do. I think the best thing is to get some rest.’

‘Yeah, I suppose you are right.’ Said Lynda as she started to close her eyes.

Lynda, although assured by john not to worry about Percy, could not help but worry about the cat. Percy had been with Mr and Mrs Fizzle for many years. In fact they had brought him at a local pet shop after they had gotten married. John wasn’t keen on the idea at first Lynda remembered, but it wasn’t a big issue with him. They got Percy on a Monday morning. Lynda could still picture in her mind going into the pet shop and looking at all the different animals. The birds were all in their cages making a lot of racket, the dogs were looking out at potential owners, and cats wee just licking

themselves and minding their own business. This was a medium sized shop. Not too big, but not too small. Lynda could still smell the mixture of birdseed and dogfood. The owner of the pet shop was a small old man by the name of Rebus. He had big round glasses and liked to do the crossword on the front counter in between serving the customers and running the store. He had a couple of helpers in regards to doing the cleaning and other duties, but Lynda couldn't remember their names at all. She didn't forget Rebus' name. She remembered him because he actually recommended Percy to Mr and Mrs Fizzle. John and Lynda were taking about what pet to get. John wanted a dog, but Lynda wanted a cat.

'But a dog would be so cool! Cats just aren't that interesting.' Pleaded John to Lynda.

'I just think a cat would be better. I do like dogs, but I want to get a cat first before we decide on a dog.' Said Lynda as she looked around the store at all the different animals.

'But why a cat? What's wrong with a dog? They're such loyal pets. Cats just sit there and mock you all day.' Argued John.

'I find cats amusing, dogs are far too predictable for me. I remember one time when…'

'Excuse me,' said a softly spoken voice from the side 'would you two like any help?'

'No, thanks. We're fine.' Said John in a dismissive tone.

'John! We do need help. Yes please.' Pleaded Lynda to the store owner.

'What do you want? By the way, my name is Rufus. I noticed that you two seemed to be having a little trouble deciding.' Said Rufus smiling sweetly at them.

'Well…' Hesitated Lynda.

'She wants a cat, and I want a dog.' Interrupted John.

'Well, let's see what we can do. Come along now.' Smiled Rufus gently.

So Rufus took Mr and Mrs Fizzle throughout the pet store. They looked at all different dogs of all different breeds. Pit bulls, Bulldogs, Golden Retrievers, Border Collies, and heaps of other different types of dogs. But John wasn't really happy with any of them. He just didn't feel like they would make good pets. It was hard to put into words for him, but he just couldn't see himself looking after any of those dogs. John, like Lynda, loved dogs. He used to have a small Maltese dog by the name of Harry when he was growing up. They used to go everywhere together. To the parks, the rivers, and even down to the shops for some ice cream. Every Sunday John would ride down to the local ice cream store where he would sit out in the sun and eat two scoops of chocolate ice cream. Harry was given a small bowl of water by the owner of the store a Mr Smith. Harry was a very energetic dog and lived to be about 14 years old until he died of natural causes.

'Nahhh. I'm sorry, I don't like any of those dogs.' Said John after Rufus had just finished showing them a friendly old beagle by the name of Bud.

'Shall we try the cat section?' Asked Rufus as he locked up the dog cage and put Bud back.

'Ohhh yes please!' Said Lynda smiling to herself.

So Rufus took Lynda and John over to the cat section. There they both looked at the cats. Some cats were tabby, others were white, and quite a few were black. Lynda could not decide which one she wanted. They all looked so interesting to her. Growing up she never had a cat. She always wanted

one. She thought cats looked so great in how they all would just do all these funny things. But her parents preferred dogs. Lynda loved dogs, she adored them. She had a great time growing up and playing with her dogs. However she did want a cat. Her friend in High School Kylie had a cat. It was a white cat with light green eyes called Wally. Wally always used to be so entertaining the way he would just try and climb up onto the furniture and the television set. He also used to just lay on the floor and try to bite shoes. He was great fun. Unfortunately Lynda's parents, no matter how much or how often she would beg and sulk, never got a cat for her.

'Oh, that is just so many!' said Lynda as she looked around at all the different felines.

'Yeah, you're right. Let's go.' Muttered John trying to head straight out the door.

'John! I haven't finished looking yet. Be patient.' Said Lynda glaring at Mr Fizzle.

'But you just said you couldn't decide. What more do you need to do?'

'I might change my mind. I will go when I choose too and not because you want to get to your umbrella store.'

'Well I know what umbrella I want. That yellow umbrella with those blue squares. Saw it the other day and I knew right away that I was going to buy it. But you on the other hand had no real idea what you were going to buy when you walked into this store.'

'I knew I wanted to buy a cat.'

'Oh well that's real helpful.' Replied John sarcastically.

'Please,' Interrupted Rufus 'I think I might have something that could solve all your problems. Just wait here for a second.'

Rufus left the Fizzle's and headed into a different section of the shop. He was gone about a couple of minutes. John and Lynda stood waiting by the cat section.

'Where has he gone to?' Wondered John.

'Probably gone to get away from your petty arguing.' Snapped Lynda as she wiped a fly off her sleeve that had been bothering her for a while.

'Me? Bother him? I'm just showing my own opinion. That's all. You're the one who…'

Rufus returned with a friend. A fluffy friend that was licking himself and looking at both John and Lynda. Mrs Fizzle's heart melted as she looked at the cat. This is what she wanted, this was the cat she had always dreamt of growing up. A white and grey cat.

'Oh he is so precious! What's his name?' Asked Lynda as she started to stroke the cat.

'Well he can be called whatever you want it to be.' Gently smiled Rufus.

'Let's call him Danger.' Said John.

'Danger? Seriously John? What a stupid name.' Mocked Lynda.

'Well what do you suggest we call him?'

'How about Dan.?'

'No. I had a bully at school called Dan. He used to tease me and steal my lunch.'

‘Well what about Percy?’

‘Percy sounds good. I like that name.’

‘So do you want to buy him?’ Asked Rufus.

‘How much is he?’

‘About one hundred dollars.’

‘Well that is not too bad. What do you think, John?’

‘Yeah. That’s good.’

So John and Lynda brought Percy from Rufus and took him home. There Percy settled in nicely in his new environment. Over the years Percy caught many birds, scratched lots of furniture, and ate the finest cat food. He was treated like royalty by Lynda. She doted on him night and day. Gave him cuddles, stroked him, and would play with Percy by dangling bits of string in front of him. John on the other hand treated Percy, not with hatred or anything like that, but with a cold indifference. Sure he sometimes patted the cat, but never that often.

That was years ago though, and now the Fizzle’s were stuck in the middle of this strange place with no idea where they were or what was going to happen to them. Remembering how they got Percy only served to make Lynda more worried about what had happened to him. What would he eat? How would he eat? Would he be worried about what had happened to them? All these questions ran through Lynda’s mind as she tried to get to sleep. Eventually she did manage to drift off to sleep. There she dreamt of fish skating on a metal top, yellow drops of sun bouncing on a trampoline, and a rat walking a tightrope in front of a million cars. Really strange dreams, so vivid that she could picture them in her mind. She was just about to go over to see the rat finish walking the tightrope when she suddenly woke up. She was lying on a bed, a soft white bed. Slowly but surely she began to look around her. Next to her was John still sleeping away peacefully like he usually did. John never had any weird dreams, in fact he could hardly remember any of them. Mr and Mrs Fizzle often talked about dreams. Lynda believed that were significant but John thought that it was a load of old hogwash.

Mrs Fizzle looked around her. They were not outside anymore. They were in a clear white room. The whitest room that Lynda had ever seen in her life. No dust or dirt to be seen anywhere. It looked very clean. Mrs Fizzle was never a big fan of cleaning. She did it because she had to and not because she enjoyed it. John didn’t like to clean either, but like Mrs Fizzle he helped to maintain the home.

‘John, John!’ Whispered Lynda to john as she shook him awake.

‘Uh, huh what?’ Groggily replied John as he woke up.

‘Look at all this.’ Said Lynda pointing at the clean white room.

John looked around him. His eyes slowly adjusted to the harsh glare of the whiteness. He had just been having a nice sleep when he was rudely awoken by Lynda. Though he could see why she had done that. He wondered about where they were and how they managed to get from sleeping on a grassy hill to now being in this white room. Were they in that big grey building that they both saw before? They must have been John thought.

‘It’s so clean.’ Marvelled John as he checked out the floor.

‘I know! It looks so nice. But also a bit creepy.’

‘Yeah. It doesn’t feel right.’

‘Where do you think we are?’

‘I don’t know. My guess is that we are in that building we saw before.’

‘Yeah I thought so too.’

‘Shall we go and check out where we are?’ Asked John as he slowly moved his feet out of the bed.

‘Ok. Let’s go.’

Mr and Mrs Fizzle were just about to leave the comfortable bed when a four foot candy cane with arms and legs walked up to them. Not ordinary human arms or legs, but green thin legs and slender red arms. It also had eyes, but they looked like they had been painted on at the sides. They seemed to somehow move though. The candy cane wore on top of its head a grey battered hat. Both Lynda and John recoiled in shock. They had never seen anything like this before. John looked around for something to protect him and Lynda with but he could find nothing. Lynda tried not to cry or make any noise in the hope that this candy cane would ignore them. She didn’t get frightened often. Her main phobia was public speaking. She dreaded having to go up and having to talk in front of lots of people. Her heart would always beat just that little bit faster, and she would start sweating and shaking before she even got up to speak. Of course that lead to her giving terrible presentations that made her look very foolish. But seeing this candy cane was a whole different experience. She just wanted to crawl away, crawl away out of this weird place and go back to her new home with John and Percy where Mr Fizzle could go and look at him umbrellas and she could re-read books about Richard Nixon.

‘Don’t be afraid.’ Said a gentle voice.

Lynda and John looked around to see who was speaking. There didn’t seem to be any speakers anywhere in the room. But then they realised that it was the candy cane that was speaking. That was odd because it had no mouth but both John and Lynda managed to hear this candy cane very easily.

‘Who are you?’ Asked John eyeing the candy cane suspiciously.

‘Please sir, madam, no need to be alarmed.’ Said the candy cane.

‘Alarmed? I’m sorry but John and I have just woken up in this strange place and you are telling us not to worry?’ Mocked Lynda.

‘I just wanted to make you two were ok.’

‘Why wouldn’t we be ok?’ Asked John.

‘Umm, well it is a long story, and I’m not sure I am that good at telling stories. Glenda, that’s my wife, she always tells me that I’m a pretty good at telling stories. But I’m just so confused with all that’s been going on lately with the King about to host his first public appearance since the ferry wars.’

‘Ok,’ said Lynda ‘Well first things first. What’s your name?’

‘My name is Ont.’

‘Well nice to meet you, Ont. My name is Lynda.’ Said Lynda as she shook Ont’s hand.

‘And my name is John.’ Said Mr Fizzle as he reached over to shake Ont’s hand.

‘Oh I do like that name John. Find it such a solid name. Also like Lynda. Knew a Lynda once. A very sickly young woman. Always had a cold or something like that. I remember…’

‘Excuse me, Ont,’ Interrupted Lynda ‘but can you please tell us how we got here? ‘John and I just want to go home. You see we just purchased this brand new home and we were going to spend our first night in it but John here got sucked into the fireplace, then I did, and now we are here talking to you.’

‘Well we found you and John lying down in the grass.’

‘So? Nothing wrong with that. I thought it was very comfortable.’ John said.

‘Oh I agree we do have very comfortable grass here. But you see it wasn’t the grass we were worried about. No, it was the yakyas.’

‘The yakyas?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Yes the yakyas. They are these really awful creatures. Only come out at night. They like to eat whatever they can get their hands on. Magpies, rats, cats, dogs, cows, bees, flowers, trees, and even humans.’

‘What do these yakyas look like?’

‘Well they look, umm they look about two feet tall with a furry back and a scaly front. They have eyes as stalks and they have yellow webbed feet. Their claws are very sharp and they like to sneak up behind their prey and kill them with their claws.’

‘Damn. That does sound scary. Thanks for bringing us here. But do the yakyas have any predators themselves?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Well they have the devrids. They like to eat yakyas. But the problem with the devrids is that they are slowly becoming extinct.’

‘Oh no!’ Exclaimed John.

‘Yes. I’m afraid so. There used to be so many of them years ago but now they are all slowly dying off and we can’t work out why. We have had hundreds upon hundreds of scientists, the very top minds in this building working on the problem but we have not been able to come up with a solution. Would you like to see a photo of a devrid?’

John and Lynda both nodded affirmatively so Ont walked over to the white dressing table and opened the top drawer. After carefully feeling his way through he found the photo and walked back over to John and Lynda.

‘This was taken about three months ago.’ Said Ont as he handed them the photo.

Mr and Mrs Fizzle both looked at it. The devrid looked very tall, had grey fleshly skin and a head in the shape of a metal box. The eyes were of a brown colour and its lower body had no legs, instead it had a set of wheel like a bike. It was on a small cliff and was holding a couple of sticks in its furry hands.

‘They look….different.’ Said John.

‘Yeah, wow! They look so interesting. The wheels, and their heads shaped like a metal box! What the hell is this place?’ Quizzed Lynda to Ont. It seemed so strange to Mrs Fizzle. Seeing the devrid, with their funny shaped heads and their wheels as legs, it occurred to Lynda that this may be all some kind of strange practical joke or a dream. It just seemed so bizarre to her that this was all happening to them.

‘You and John’, said Ont as he gathered the photo from John, ‘are at the Jarted Building. This is the biggest building on the Ratew Island.’

‘Wait, we are on an island?’ Asked John.

‘Yes. This is an island.’

‘But the building looked so big on the outside.’

‘It is big. This building has over a trillion different rooms and about a billion different floors.’

‘So the island must be pretty big then?’

‘Yeah, it can take a while to walk around it. About a couple of years I think it would take someone to walk all the way around. Of course you would have to be fit, and be aware of those yakyas. Probably why not many actually attempt to walk around the island…’

‘But is this earth?’ Interrupted Lynda as she started to walk towards the door.

‘Earth? What is that?’

‘Ummm where we live.’ Said John with a worried look.

‘Well I have no idea what that is, sorry. We are on the planet Eard.’

‘Eard? Never heard of it. Come on, John, let’s get out of here.’ Said Lynda opening the plain white door.

‘No wait!’ Shouted Ont as he raced over and quickly shut the door. Lynda looked at him with a mixture of shock and confusion.

‘What the hell did you do that for?’ Yelled John as he raced over to Ont and Lynda.

‘I’m sorry, John. I’m sorry, Lynda. But it is not safe for you two to go out there at the moment.’

‘Not safe? Not safe?’ Hissed Lynda. ‘How are we any safer in here with you? This is just so stupid.’

‘Well the thing is, you need to have visitor badges.’

‘What for?’

‘Because if you do not have them then you will be jailed.’

‘That seems a bit harsh. I understand jailing someone for murder. But to put some in jail just for not wearing a badge doesn’t seem right to me.’ Said John.

‘I don’t make the rules up.’ Said Ont. ‘I just don’t want to see you two get jailed. The jails we have here are awful. They are all dark and grimy. Plus they chain you up the walls where these gyles can come and nibble at you. I have never been to jail before, but I have heard stories.’

‘Gyles? Is this another strange creature?’

‘Strange? No they are just little circle shaped creatures. About the size of your fingernail. Annoying they are. Really can get into your home if you don’t clean up properly. I have had so much trouble with them over the years. Had to call around a hat to get rid of the gyle problem. Paid a lot of money for that. Still it was worth it.’

‘So when are we getting our badges?’ Queried John. ‘We just want to get out of here. Don’t we, Lynda.’

‘I just want to go home and see if Percy is all right. He’s all alone in the house. He’s probably starved to death by now.’ Moaned Lynda.

‘Who is Percy?’ Asked Ont.

‘He is a cat. You do have cats here on Eard? Surely you do.’

‘No, I have never heard of the word cat before. We have many different types of animals on this island. But I can honestly say that I have never ever heard of the word cat. Sorry.’

‘Well cats are usually small, fluffly, and very cute. I think I have a photo of him in my pocket.’

Lynda checked around her pockets for the photo. She knew which photo she would show Ont. It was the one where Percy was up on the fridge. Lynda remembered that day well. It was a Tuesday afternoon and she had just gone back from picking up some groceries. Just a few pieces of fruit and some steak for the dinner that night. She had always loved steak, and John did too. But they often disagreed on how to cook it. John liked the steak medium, and Lynda liked to cook it rare. They would often have great big arguments about the way to cook the food. However they did manage to sort out any differences by cooking their steaks separately.

Anyway, Lynda was just putting the steak in the fridge when she saw a head at the top of the fridge.

‘Hello there.’ Said Lynda smiling.

‘Meowwww.’ Meowed Percy stretching out his claws.

‘I wonder how you got up there on the fridge. Oh my you look so cute. Just a minute while I go and fetch my camera.’

So Lynda raced off to get her camera. She could have used her phone to take a picture, but seeing Percy up on the fridge laying there looking quite precious, Lynda thought that getting the camera would be much better. The camera on the phone wasn’t that good, and she actually preferred the camera for sentimental reasons. Her mother had given it to her as a Christmas present a couple of years before she had passed away from liver cancer.

‘Good, you haven’t moved. Now just stay right there.’ Said Lynda as she returned with the camera. It was a black coloured camera but had been looking a bit dusty due to not much use over the last few years.

‘This does need a good clean. God I have been so neglectful lately with looking after this house.’ Said Lynda looking around her after she had just taken a picture of Percy. ‘I really must start cleaning more thoroughly.’

So Mrs Fizzle did try to keep the place tidy, and she did manage to get John to help too. He was not that clean on cleaning like herself, however he too realised that the house was getting a bit messy so he did his share too. But that was all the way back then, and this was now. Thinking of Percy wasn’t

going to help them escape from this weird place. What the hell was Eard? Some kind of second earth? This was just too weird for her.

‘Here you go.’ Said Lynda showing Ont the picture of Percy.

‘Oh well that creature sure looks…different. And you say it is called a cat?’ Queried Ont as he carefully studied Percy.

‘Yes, this is a cat. We call him Percy and he gets fed cat food as well as some crunchies.’

‘Well I would have called him Fluff-fluff.’ Said Ont as he handed the photo back to Lynda.

‘Fluff-fluff?’ Mocked John ‘What a silly name.’

‘I think it is quite a reasonable name.’ Said Lynda.

‘Why thank you.’ Said Ont smiling warmly at Mrs Fizzle. ‘I just thought of it.’

‘Well that was very smart of you, Ont.’

‘So what else is so awesome about this Percy cat?’

‘Cats are so great with the funny little things that they do. I remember…’

‘Oh god, here we go again.’ Sighed John. ‘Always going on about that damn cat. Day and night I keep hearing about it.’

‘Well you can just leave if you don’t like me going on about it so much.’ Retorted Lynda putting the photo back in her pocket.

‘No!’ Pleaded Ont ‘I implore you please stay! I do not want to see you jailed just because you didn’t have your visitor badges.’

‘When do we get our visitor badges?’ Enquired John ‘I don’t want to be stuck here for the rest of my life.’

‘I was just about to do that now. So please excuse me while I go off to the badge room where I will be able to create your badges. Now tell me again how to spell your names please.’ Said Ont as he took out a notebook from under his grey hat.

‘I am John. That is J O H N.’ Said John carefully spelling out his name.

‘Right. And you?’ Asked Ont as he scribbled down John’s name on the pad.

‘I am Lynda. L Y N D A.’ Said Lynda trying not to roll her eyes at this whole mess.

‘Ok. You stay here and I will go and get your badges. I won’t be too long so don’t worry.’ Said Ont as he opened the door. He then quickly shut the door behind him and locked it so as to keep John and Lynda inside.

Lynda groaned when she heard the sound of the lock. ‘For heaven’s sake! I just don’t understand why we need to stay here.’

‘Well you heard Ont. I don’t want to go in one of those dirty jails. Those gyles sound awful.’ Shuddered John.

‘Oh we won’t be going to jail. I’m sure Ont was just messing with us.’ Scoffed Lynda as she began to look for a way out of the room. The door was a no go area being locked and all, however Mrs Fizzle

did spot an air vent in the back corner of the room. So she decided to go and check it out. It was about seven feet from the ground, and just wide enough to fit her through. There was a couple of white wooden chairs and a cream coloured table about three feet wide and six feet long so she would no trouble getting to the vent, the problem would be taking the cover off so she could actually get in the vent.

'What are you doing?' Asked John as he watched Lynda put the chair on the table.

'I'm just looking for a way out. You can help by handing me that other chair over there.' Said Lynda pointing to the left of John.

'But Ont!' Pleaded John

'Oh who cares what he thinks.'

'Do you want to get into trouble?'

'John he's a goddamn candy cane! Why are you taking advice from a piece of candy?'

'Well he seemed legit.'

'Legit? We just met him, John. We don't know what he is really like.'

John looked away hurt. Lynda may be right he thought but she didn't have to rub it in. Mr Fizzle was just worried about what would happen to Lynda if they both got caught. He didn't really care about what happened to him, but seeing Lynda suffer in the awful jail would just tear him apart. John had always been a cautious man, even when he was young. Sure he had the odd bumps and bruises growing up but he never really had any broken bones. He remembered the time he chickened out riding his bike over this small ditch because he was afraid he might hurt himself. Of course the other kids made fun of him due to that. That in turned caused him to lose his other friends at school, not they were good friends to him. They always made fun of him and called him names. But that was then and this was now. He couldn't keep dwelling on that stuff. No, he had much more important things to worry about. This Eard that he and Lynda were in looked just so strange with talking pieces of candy and that strange creature. What were they called again he wondered. Ah yes! Devrids. With wheels as legs and their heads shaped like metal boxes. Such a strange looking creature, yet he did feel sad that they were dying out.

'John? The chair!' Said Lynda urgently.

'No. I'm sorry Lynda but I won't do it.'

'Fine. I'll just put this chair away and we can spend the rest of our lives in this miserable hell hole.'

'I just don't want to see you in jail.' Said John.

'We will not be going to jail!'

'How do you know that? This is such a weird situation Lynda. I don't know about you but I do not want to spend the rest of my life in jail chained to a wall.'

'Oh god John I don't want to be stuck here forever.'

'Ont won't be that long. Look I'm sure he'll come back with our visitor badges soon.'

‘I really can’t understand why we need visitor badges in the first place. I mean it I such a large building who the hell is going to notice if we have badges or not? Just seems pointlessly petty to me.’ Said Lynda as she continued to struggle with the air vent.

‘I know. It seems petty to me too.’ Agreed John.

‘Then help me escape.’

‘No.’

‘Fine,’ sighed Lynda ‘I’ll do it myself.’

Lynda continued to try and force the vent cover off. She had wanted the other chair because it would have made it a tiny bit easier to get the vent open. But because Mr Fizzle had refused to handle her the other chair she had to stretch a little bit further to get to the vent. Her arms strained as she tried to reach it, but she could only scrape the top of her fingertips to the bottom of the vent. She kept on trying. Her arms continuing to try and reach the vent. Lynda’s face sweated, her heartbeat started to race, and her legs turned to jelly. This was far more exercise than she was used to. Back on earth she may have gone for the odd walk or so but she never really was that interested in exercise. Probably because she never thought she really needed it. She had always kept a healthy weight, never had any real health problems throughout her life (except for the odd cold or two), and her diet was well balanced and healthy. Lynda had been fooling herself that she was fit. But as she desperately tried to reach the vent with her tiring arms she realised that it was not the case at all. Walking all those miles the other day on Ratew Island really took a lot out of her. However because she was in such a strange place she didn’t really think about her fitness levels. She just kept on trudging along besides John.

‘Oh I give up!’ Said Lynda as she moved down from the chair and got off the table.

‘Well that’s for the best.’ Smiled John.

‘No it’s not. Now we are stuck here.’

‘Don’t worry we will be out soon.’

‘Yeah no thanks to you.’

‘I was just worried…’

‘Why didn’t you give me that chair? And don’t give me that rubbish about jail.’

‘I was just concerned about you. That’s all.’

‘Excuse me but I can look after myself. I don’t need a wishy washy wimp to look after me.’ Said Lynda angrily.

‘Sorry.’

‘Don’t you sorry me. Aren’t you even the least bit pissed that we are virtually prisoners here? I mean that just pisses me off so much.’

‘Of course I am annoyed at Ont for doing that. Doesn’t mean I want to risk our lives for nothing.’

‘God I’m sick and tired of you being cautious all the time. It really annoys me. Like that other week in that traffic stop where you wouldn’t go even though you had plenty of time to do so.’

‘I had no gap to go into!’ Protested John.

John and Lynda were still arguing when Ont opened the door and came in with two brand new badges. The badges were blue in colour and had black lettering. One of the badges had the name ‘LYNDA’. The other badge had the word ‘JOHN’. Ont walked over to the Fizzle’s and handed them the badges.

‘Here you go.’ Smiled Ont ‘It was a bit tricky getting them.’

‘You took your time.’ Snarled John as he snatched the badge from Ont.

‘I do apologise for being so late. But there was a long queue in front of me and so I did have to wait a bit. Plus I saw this excellent book at the bookshop. It was about the yakyas and how they behave. Most fascinating.’

‘John, he is trying his best.’ Said an annoyed Lynda.

‘Why thank you, Lynda.’ Beamed Ont ‘You have been most kind.’

‘Well I just think it pays to be nice to other people. Of course that is to say he hasn’t got a point. I mean locking us up here so you can get these silly badges seems rather pathetic to me.’

‘It may be pathetic to you. But we do have rules here for a reason.’ Lectured Ont ‘Rules bring order. Without rules this planet of ours would crumble into anarchy.’

‘Yeah I understand But the visitor badges do seem a bit excessive.’ Argued Lynda.

‘We do have that rule for a reason.’

‘What is that reason?’ Asked John as he put on his badge.

‘Well about fifty years ago or so, before we even had this badge rule, a visitor came into this building and killed four spoons.’

‘Four spoons?’ Asked Lynda ‘Don’t you mean people?’

‘No. I meant spoons.’

‘Was he a spoon himself?’

‘No, he looked just like you two with your weird skin colour and that white thing in your mouth.’

‘They are called teeth.’

‘Oh well you learn something new every day. Anyway, he got caught and executed for his crimes. But that awful incident caused a bit of a stir in this building. For that was the culmination of some pretty awful behaviour by people who would visit this building over the years. There were protests by thousands of people. There were riots everywhere. It was only when the Queen made a ruling about the visitor having to wear badges’

‘Seems fair enough.’ Said John.

‘She also ruled that visitors have to live under stricter conditions than the inhabitants here.’ Said Ont.

‘What kind of conditions?’

‘There are quite a lot of conditions, and I simply can’t remember them all. But you are not allowed to go into certain areas of this building.’

‘But we are new here. We won’t be able to know where we can and can’t go.’

‘Don’t worry there will be a sign telling you if you are not allowed into a particular section of the building. Now what else was there? Ah yes! Visitors who want to work get paid significantly less than the Ratews’

‘How much less?’

‘About a tenth of the pay.’

‘That doesn’t seem very fair.’

‘Well maybe they shouldn’t all be such blood sucking murderers.’ Ont said politely.

‘Look, who cares about all this?’ Argued Lynda. ‘Let’s just get out of here.’

‘Hey, Ont. Why were we rescued?’ Asked John.

‘Because we didn’t want you to get eaten by the yakyas.’

‘But what you have been telling me people here would probably be glad to see us eaten by those creatures?’

‘Yes. No doubt there are a small section of this society that would have that happen. But although we do have some stricter guidelines regarding visitors please do not mistake it for cruelty. We are not murderers, just simple Ratewesians who wish to live a peaceful life.’

‘Fascinating.’ Said Lynda rolling her eyes ‘Really, it is. But we really have to leave.’

So Lynda and John, after saying goodbye to Ont, left the room. Ont was staying behind to tidy it up. The room being so immaculate because of his hard work in not only sweeping and dusting the floor, but also by making sure the bed is nice and clean for whoever was going to sleep on it next.

Once John and Lynda had left they were faced with something that they had not quite seen before. Before them stood a huge room. It was so big that you could probably fit about a thousand stadiums in there side by side. The floor was partly carpeted with a blue and white zigzag pattern along these rows of doors that seemed to stretch for miles alongside the same door that John and Lynda had both left from. John tried a door but it seemed to be locked with a sign saying ‘TO OPEN DOOR GET KEY FROM LOTSED BUILDING’. In front of them was a large city with buildings and parks. The buildings were of many different colours and stretched for many floors. The parks not only had lakes with ducks it also had playgrounds with slides, and a walking track where one could exercise if they wished to or just go for a small stroll.

‘What in the hell?’ Wondered Lynda as she looked at a river that was flowing about a few feet from where they were standing.

‘I don’t get it. Aren’t we inside?’ Asked John as he looked up. He could see the sky, but I felt different. It felt artificial. It wasn’t like the sky back home on earth, nor was it like the sky in the outside of this building.

‘They must have really good scientists.’

‘Yeah.’

‘Should we go and find out where we go to get out of here? Ont wasn’t very helpful.’

‘No he wasn’t. Ok.’

So John and Lynda started to walk into the city. They passed many different types of shops. There were bookshops with at least a thousand books in them. A clothing store that sold t-shirts, shorts, pants and some hats. Some stores that had sold this weird kind of food. Lynda noticed that these food stores had what seemed to be food in them, but it didn’t look like proper food. She tried to get a better look but they were in a hurry so she just kept on walking. The other strange thing was that there didn’t seem to be any cars around, nor were there and sort of buses, trains, carriages, or even bikes. Everyone seemed to be walking. There were millions of different creatures that were all walking, running, hopping, jumping, wheeling, and crawling along. Some of these creatures were ones that John and Lynda had seen plenty of times. Like cows, dogs, and cats.

‘Wait. There are cats here.’ Said John as he watched a red one quickly dart between the feet of an elephant.

‘Bloody Ont.’

‘Why would he lie to us about that?’ Asked John as both he and Lynda started walking towards a nearby fountain that had what looked to be a large map of the area next to it.

‘Because everyone lies John. That’s what they do. You have lied, I have lied, every one lies!’

‘Well I never try…’

John suddenly stopped in his tracks. To the right of him stood two big spoons and three little spoons. They were all sitting at a small table eating a strange kind of substance. John was too far away to see, but from what he could make out it looked kind of faint purple in colour. It seemed to be a sort of sludge. Kind of like a badly mixed porridge. All in one large off white bowl that all these spoons seemed to be eating out of with great delight. Their tiny arms were resting against the table, and their long legs were kneeling at the seats as they desperately gobbled up the purple sludge. Their arms and legs, like Ont’s, were not human. They had silver arms and silver legs that were made of metal. Their mouths were painted on the head of the spoon along with their eyes and ears. But for some strange reason the food that they were eating managed to be consumed. John, being not a doctor but an office worker, was not sure how that was possible.

‘Brent! Stop that.’ Said one of the big spoons.

‘But Mum.’ Whined a little spoon ‘I’m hungry.’

‘Well you shouldn’t have skipped breakfast.’

‘You should listen to your mother.’ Said the other big spoon who was the father of the family.

‘Ha Ha mum yelled at you.’ Taunted one of the other little spoons.

‘Shut up Reba.’ Said Brent.

‘Reba. Please eat your lunch.’ Said Mother Spoon.

‘I have, mum.’ Said Reba defensively.

‘Come on John. Let’s go.’ Said Lynda pulling Mr Fizzle away from the group of spoons.

‘But this is just so…’ Whispered John.

‘Yeah I know. But the map is just over there.’

John finally pulled himself away from watching the spoons. He could have watched them all day. Seeing the spoons all gathered around the table eating this weird purple porridge was just mind blowing to him. The whole thing to him had been so fascinating. Sure, he like Lynda would love to go home. Back to their new house where they could lie on the bed, pet Percy (John didn’t mind Percy all that much but he didn’t like how the cat would often leave hair everywhere), go to their favourite restaurant, walk along the path next to the local beach seeing the sun set, go to the local theatre where they could see a Shakespearean play or a musical, and just spend time together without all this hassle. But john couldn’t help but sit back in wonder at the fact that there was a city in the building. He thought about how it worked. There were so many questions running around his head. How the hell did they fit a city inside a building? How could everyone breathe? Where did those other doors lead to? Why were there candy canes and spoons that acted like humans? All these questions and many more raced through John’s head. He had always been an over thinker. Even when he was dating Lynda before they were married he would often go through scenarios and situations in his brain so often that it would sometimes cripple him that he wouldn’t be able to do anything. This annoyed Lynda who would get mad at him for this. There was one time where Lynda and John were going to go on a date. But there was a bit of a mix up at the restaurant and tables were all full which that caused John to over worry.

‘John. It’s OK. We can just go to another place.’ Lynda had said after they had both walked outside.

‘But this was going to be so good. Now where are we going to go? Nothing open. This night has totally been ruined.’ Moaned John as he chewed his fingernails.

‘Oh well thank you very much indeed! I’m so glad that a night with me is awful for you.’

‘Sorry Lynda. I didn’t mean it like that.’

‘Well how else did you mean it?’ Asked Lynda, her temper rising.

‘I just meant the night was ruined because we have nowhere else to go.’

‘Well what about your place? Or my place?’

‘That isn’t the same.’

‘Oh for god’s sake John there is more to dating then just eating out all the time.’

‘But I was looking forward to it. You know going out to a nice place for dinner? I love dressing up and trying out new meals. Seeing the night life. This city comes alive when the sun comes down and I want to experience it all. I want to see the stars come out at night twinkling in the sky. I want to see the lights and smell the fresh air as we both walk down the main street. I just don’t want to be stuck home sitting bored out of my skull. Seeing that restaurant stuffing up our booking really put me off. I was so excited earlier today to take you to this place and now we won’t be to do that. Why can’t you see that?’

‘What’s wrong with going another night? Geez the world isn’t just going to come to an end just because we didn’t go and eat here. I’m perfectly happy just going to your place or my place just to have a meal. We don’t need to go out and experience the city. I mean it is nice here, don’t get me wrong. But the thing is that I feel that I’m much happier not going out all the time. Money is kind of important to me. Yes, I know it is important to you but you never had to save like I did. Your parents are so rich that you never have really known what it is like to be almost out of money. But I have. My

parents and I grew up poor. I remember one time when we couldn't have a Christmas because our electricity got cut because dad had lost his job at the supermarket. Don't you dare try and think that you know what I went through. You have no idea what it is like to have hand me down clothes or not be able to go to school camp because you can't afford it. I'm so sick of all these expensive restaurants and these fancy theatre plays you keep taking me to. What about just a nice simple home cooked meal or a picnic on the beach? It just feels like you are trying to buy my love with your money and I hate it.' Lynda said.

'Look I'm sorry Lynda. Can't we talk about this? I honestly didn't realise I came across this way. Please wait…'

But by then it was too late. Lynda had already walked off into the distance. It took a lot of apologies and a big talk between John and Lynda for them to sort it out. That was back then though, so many years ago, and this was now. There were much bigger problems to worry about for both Mr and Mrs Fizzle. John was torn between wanting to go home and finding more about this place. So in a way the map would hopefully answer both questions for him.

'Ok. We are here.' Said Lynda pointing to a spot on the map.

The map was about three feet high and about four feet wide. It was very clearly marked in which areas were which and where the visitors were not allowed to go. Everything was colour co-ordinated into four sections. John and Lynda were in the orange section of the city which meant that they were allowed to roam freely in it. The red section of the map stated that visitors were only allowed to this section during daylight hours. At night they were not allowed in that area. The blue section of the map was a total no-go zone for any visitor. A visitor who was caught in that area faced ten years of jail time. The green section of the map indicated that the visitors were only to be allowed in if they had express written permission from a judge.

'Damn. Ont was right. All these rules.' Said John as he looked over the map.

'Yeah. Guess he was. Still doesn't explain the cats though.'

'I don't care about that. Now where's the exit?'

'You don't care about cats or you don't care that Ont lied about the cat?'

'I don't care that Ont lied to us about the cat stuff.'

'You should have said that in the first place.'

'I didn't know I was being graded for my speech today. Ah! There is the exit.'

John pointed to the red section of the map. A spot at the outer edge of the area. The red section was about a few km's from the orange part of the city. Mr and Mrs Fizzle tried to work out how long it would take them to even walk to the red area.

'About at least three hours until we get to at area.' Said Lynda.

'Yeah. Hopefully we can get there before daylight.' Agreed John.

'Ok. Let's go.'

So John and Lynda both raced off to try and beat the sunlight. Weaving through the workers trying to fix a pot hole, running over some dogs who had decided to lie down and play trivia, dodging a couple of birds roller skating side by side, and slipping past the various creatures that were walking

the streets. Though street after street and park after park they raced through to the red section. However Lynda began to tire, as did John. There muscles started to weaken and their hearts continued to race at a thousand miles an hour. Being so unfit had slowed them down.

‘John…please……wait.’ Panted Lynda as she flopped down on a nearby park bench.

‘Yeah, I’m a bit tired too.’ John wheezed as he turned around to join Lynda.

The Fizzle’s both rested for a moment. Just trying to catch their breath before they went again. Walking all the way to the red section. Lynda looked around her. She could see a couple of hippos playing hopscotch on a path to the left of her. Behind her was a big metal high fence with various bushes and insects all milling around a rubbish bin. To the right of her there was a playground with swings and roundabouts but that was empty. In front of her was a river with a small red bridge and ducks quacking away.

‘I’m sooo thirsty.’ Said a parched Lynda.

‘There’s a tap over there.’ Said John pointing to the playground.

‘Oh so there is. You want to come over to get a drink too?’

‘Yeah. Ok.’

So Lynda and john both went and had a drink out of the tap. The water flowed down their throats, cooling their burning tongues and revitalizing them. The water was pure, much purer then what they would have had on earth. Lynda sucked at the tap eagerly, straining to get as much as she could. It was a full minute before John had a chance to get a drink. He too gulped down the water. Sucking as hard as he could to get it all down.

‘Damn. Needed that.’ Sighed John with a contented smile.

‘Yeah. Me too.’

‘I am still a bit hungry though.’

‘Same here.’ Said Lynda who could hear her stomach growling.

‘Where is the nearest place to eat?’

‘I did see a takeaway place across the road.’

‘Well let’s go there.’

‘But we haven’t got any money.’

‘No, no, it’s all good. Ont gave me some Ratewsian money to spend while we were here.’

‘When did he do that?’

‘When you tried to get that door unlocked.’

‘Well show me it.’ Gestured Lynda.

John reached into his pockets and pulled out a couple of rolls of notes. The notes were light red in colour and had a noughts and crosses marking on one side and pictures of various creatures on the other side. Ont had given John this money as he had feared that Mr and Mrs Fizzle would starve and die. It wasn’t Ratewsian policy to give visitors money, in fact it was frowned upon by the more

elderly residents, but Ont could not bear to know that he had sent both John and Lynda into a death trap. John had understood this, understood that Ont was looking out for both him and Lynda. He wasn't sure if Lynda would appreciate that being an independent sort of person. However he did reason that hunger would always overrule hurt feelings and wounded pride.

'There.' Said John as he handed some of the notes over to Lynda 'That should be enough for a meal or two, or at least until we get out of here.'

'Bloody Ont!' Grumbled Lynda 'I aint no charity case.'

'Do you want us to starve?' Asked John.

'No of course I don't want to starve. I like eating food like everyone else. I just hate how we got given this money without really earning it.'

'Well we did kind of earn it with what we went through with that slide and the chimney stuff.' Reasoned John.

'But that was just a trip, I just feel awful taking money from Ont. I know he did lie to us about the cat thing but I think he had our best interests at heart.' Moaned Lynda.

'Stay here and starve if you want to. My pride is still intact.'

'Yeah ok I'll come.'

So Lynda and John set off to find the takeaway shop. They walked past the playground with its black coloured swings, purple roundabouts that could lift up from the ground, and the plain old tap in the corner. Lynda could not wait to get something to eat. Yes, she did feel a bit peeved that Ont had given John money. He should have at least consulted her before he actually took all the cash. It was a bit rude for Mr Fizzle to just arrogantly take it from Ont without actually talking to her. They both wanted to get home (although Lynda was a bit concerned with John's fascination with this city. Sure it was a very interesting and curious place to have a whole city in the vast building. However they had more important thing to think about.), back on Earth, not on Ratew, where they could both go home and sleep in their own bed with their comfortable sheets and the familiar smell of the soft pillow to drift off into a peaceful slumber undisturbed by crazy candy canes or visitor badges; have a walk in the park where they can take their time and not have to worry about what they are going to eat or how they were going to get home; and see Percy the cat where they could play with him by dangling bits of string in front of him and stroke his head while they were all sitting down together watching a television program. This wasn't the first time that John had gone behind her back. Thinking about what he had done with Ont and the money she was reminded of a similar scenario a year ago. It was a Monday morning and the Fizzle's had decided to go for a trip to the movies. They were going to see a movie about the Watergate scandal. Lynda had been waiting for this movie to come out for weeks. The story of one of the biggest political scandals in history was something that she had always wanted to see and now was her chance to see it. So off they went to the local cinemas. Unfortunately when they got there the tickets were sold out. So John, who was buying the tickets at the time while Lynda went to the toilet, decided to buy tickets to another movie. It was not a movie about Watergate but instead a movie about a western. Lynda was just walking back to the movie theatre when John gave her the news.

'A western? Really?' Complained Lynda after John had told her about the situation.

'Well there wasn't much else on at that time. Only a family movie for kids I think.' Said john as he looked at the various session times on the big board.

‘We could have gone later. Why did we have to go now?’

‘But I thought you wanted to see a movie?’

‘Yeah, the Richard Nixon movie. You knew that. I have told you about it for the last couple of weeks.’

‘I don’t remember that.’

‘Seriously? You know I like Richard Nixon. But instead of buying tickets to a later session you just go ahead and greedily just buy some to a stupid western movie.’ Ranted Lynda.

‘Nothing wrong with a western. There are some good movies that have been westerns.’

‘All westerns suck. They are so boring. All that stupid dust everywhere.’

‘I don’t think there that bad.’

‘Look. I don’t care. You go and watch your stupid movie.’ Said Lynda as she stormed off into the distance.

‘Where will you be?’ Yelled out john.

But there was no reply. Lynda had been so upset with John that she had just left him there with his stupid mug holding onto the tickets. The nerve of that man! John had known for ages that she wanted to see that movie. She had talked about it for ages. She talked about it at the dinner table, in the car, in bed, while they were out walking, shopping for groceries, and even while going to see a play. She had talked about it so much that she was even starting to bore herself. But the point was that John should have known about how much she was looking forward to this particular movie. Not about a stupid boring western, but a really exciting film that told the story of the water gate scandal. The scandal that brought down Richard Nixon. Lynda had wondered to herself if John was even listening to her anymore. They didn’t really seem to talk to each other. All they did was just go through the motions day by day. So after John had seen the movie, and Lynda had gone for a look around the shops (she had seen some nice clothes and some rather fancy looking chairs but she didn’t bother to get anything.), they both met up at a café to discuss what had happened at the theatre.

‘I’m so sorry.’ Said John sitting down. ‘While I was watching the movie I realised how rude I was in not buying the tickets for that water gate movie at a later time.’

‘Ok. Well firstly I would also like to apologise for the way I ranted at you. That was unfair of me to do that. And I also accept your apology for not consulting me about the tickets. But there is a bigger problem here John.’ Said Lynda.

‘What’s that? Please tell me. I thought there was something more going on. I didn’t want to say anything.’

‘Of course there was something else going on! You know the movie tickets really don’t matter that much. But the point is what you did today showed that you don’t listen to me. You are just off in your own little world looking at various books on umbrellas and cleaning up your own umbrella collection in that awful room of yours. God how I hate that room.’

‘It isn’t that bad.’ Interjected John.

‘Yes it is. It is a goddamn pigsty with all the dust everywhere. It’s so dark and the umbrellas aren’t even stacked properly. Why just the other day I tripped over one of your umbrellas.’

‘What were you doing in my umbrella room?’

‘I was just trying to see if I could tidy it up a bit. I really should have asked you to do it you lazy sod. Anyway I had just gone in there when I suddenly tripped and fell on the floor. After I got up and switched on the light I saw one of your umbrellas smack bang near the door.’

‘Sorry about that.’

‘Anyway that umbrella stuff also illustrates the point I am trying to make about you not listening to me anymore. I have told you time and time again to tidy up your umbrella room. But you never listen. You don’t seem to hear a thing I say to you and it pisses me off so much.’

‘But I do listen to you. It’s just that I have so much on my plate at the moment with work issues and that new umbrella convention that’s coming to town the next month. I can’t expect to remember everything that you told me.’

‘I don’t want you to remember everything I tell you. I just want you to remember the important things. The stuff I care about.’

‘Ok. I’ll try and do that. But can you also not try and yell and demean me everywhere. Quite frankly I’m sick and tired of being humiliated by you everywhere. Yeah I know I stuffed up. Yeah I know I should listen to you more. But is that any reason to scream, rant, rave, hiss and just generally make me feel really small? No, of course it’s not. I’m a human, I deserve at least some respect. I don’t deserve to be shouted at for a whole five minutes.’

‘I never realised I did that. I’ll try to improve on that. It’s just that sometimes I can get so passionate about stuff that I can go a bit overboard. I just care so much that it flows out of my body, and sometimes what flows out of it is what you heard today and I am so sorry about that.’

‘This is good. Us talking.’ Smiled John peacefully.

‘Yeah, we should do it more often.’ Laughed Lynda.

And they did try and talk more often, thought Lynda as she and John arrived at the takeaway place. They really had made an effort to communicate more openly and honestly with each other. However other stuff like work commitments had gotten into the way of that. Seeing John pull out that money that Ont had given him had made Lynda realise that they weren’t really listening to each other anymore. They had gone back to the same old tired arguing with each other. The same old yelling and the same old insults. The funny thing was though that Lynda actually enjoyed the arguments, and she kind of suspected that John enjoyed them too. To her they made her feel alive, they made her feel passionate, they made her feel excited. She loved arguing, but she also realised that it wasn’t a healthy thing to keep arguing all the time. So she, along with John, tried to argue less. They tried to talk to each other without the sniping and the insults. But that was boring.

‘What shall we get?’ Asked John as they looked up on the board.

The takeaway place was a small, yet ambient room that was about a few kilometres from the big park that Mr and Mrs Fizzle had just walked from. There weren’t many creatures around. John spotted what looked to be a fork sitting in the corner drinking some strange kind of green substance from a thin glass. Lynda observed a cat, with grey and blue fur, delicately licking a bowl of plain white milk on one of the other tables while a dog, a golden retriever, was chewing on a bone next to it. At the table next to the two animals was a middle aged woman. She had frazzled grey hair, wore big round glasses and was busy reading something out of a book.

‘Nothing but sludge.’ Sighed John as he looked up at all the options. ‘Where’s a burger? I could go for one right now.’

‘Who cares about a burger? Clearly we’re not going to get any burgers from this place. Let’s go and order. I’m starving.’

So John and Lynda walked up to the counter and placed their order to the bowl that was serving them. The bowl, like Ont and those family of soon that John had observed earlier in the day, had arms, legs, and a face painted on it.

‘Hello and welcome to Yatyas.’ Smiled the bowl as he greeted John and Lynda. ‘How may I help you?’

‘Hello.’ Said Lynda ‘Can I please have the red sludge?’

‘Red sludge? Certainly.’

‘And I might as well try the blue sludge.’ Said John who didn’t really want to try anything, but like Lynda he was hungry so he thought he just might try it the once. He was an adventurous eater, but he wasn’t too sure about the sludge. He would try it, he didn’t want to starve.

‘Ok. Blue sludge as well. No worries. Anything else?’

‘Bottle of water for ‘the two of us please.’ Said Lynda.

‘Two bottles of water? That I can certainly do. Now that comes all to 42 haperts.’

John got the haperts out of his pocket and handed the correct amount to the bowl. John and Lynda waited idly by the counter while there meals were being served. Just watching as more different types of creatures came into Yatyas to try the different kind of sludge’s. Watches, forks, bowls, birds, pencils, cats, dogs, tigers, goats, robots, fairies, unicorns, ghosts, humans, and paper all lined up to order the various types of sludge’s on the menu. Suddenly the bowl came with both John and Lynda’s meals.

‘Thank you.’ Said John after he had grabbed the two different sludge’s.

‘Damn. No tables.’ Muttered Lynda looking around.

‘We can always go outside.’

‘But I’m tired. I want to go and have a bit of a sit.’

‘What about over there?’ Said John pointing to where the lady with the glasses were sitting.

‘You think she’ll mind?’

‘Well why don’t we ask her?’

‘Hello.’ Said John as he walked over to the table. ‘Do you mind if we sit here?’

The lady looked up with a startled expression on her face. ‘What? I guess so…’

‘Great’ Said Lynda as both her and John sat down next to her. ‘I’m Lynda by the way.’

‘And I’m John.’

‘John and Lynda….very nice names…my name is Mary but everyone calls me Moose.’

‘Why do they call you Moose?’ Asked Lynda.

‘I really don’t know….I don’t even like moose. Not even interested in it all….’

‘Oh ok.’

John and Lynda continued to drink their sludge’s in silence. John drank his blue sludge out of a tall yellow glass. The sludge didn’t actually taste as bad as he thought it would. In fact it tasted quite tasty to him. It tasted like a mixture of blueberry, rare steak, cheese, and salami. A combination that normally wouldn’t have worked so well, but somehow it did in this sludge. The sludge felt warm against his throat as he slowly drank it, savouring every last drop. Drinking the sludge, John was reminded of many years ago, back when Lynda and he had only been dating for a few months, when Lynda had taken him to this new restaurant. This was big as Lynda was often fond of staying at home rather than going out all the time and waste money. So the fact that Lynda was going to do this was a big deal. It was also meant to be a mystery to where they were going which made John even more excited. So on a Thursday night, when the moon was clear and the wind was still, John and Lynda went out to eat. Unfortunately though Lynda had chosen a cuisine that John had hated. She had chosen Mexican. John disliked Mexican food after a couple of bad experiences with it while growing up.

‘Mexican? No way. Let’s go.’ Said John after he had spotted the name of the place.

‘Wait you don’t like Mexican?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Yeah. I really don’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘Last time I had it I threw up. Made me really sick.’

‘Well maybe it was the food in that particular place?’

‘Please don’t make me go in there. I really don’t like Mexican.’ Begged John.

‘But we already booked the table. We can’t cancel it now.’

‘Sorry. I really am.’

‘I wish you had told me this sooner.’

‘But I never knew we were even having Mexican.’ Protested John. ‘This was a surprise for me.’

‘Ok I’m sorry about that. But can’t you at least come into this restaurant and try something? Please? You might like it.’ Smiled Lynda.

‘Ok. Let’s go in.’ sighed John.

So John and Lynda both went inside and were seated at their table. John felt awful at seeing all the Mexican food, and was seriously contemplating making a dash for that. However Lynda was having none of that.

‘Just try one thing. Please don’t go.’ She begged him.

John looked at the exit, then looked at Lynda with her pleading eyes. He thought of exiting, of just going away from the place and not eating any of the Mexican food. But would that also mean running away from Lynda? He had only been dating Lynda for a while, but John felt that he wanted to get to know her more. He wanted to spend more time with her. John felt comfortable with her. So

he decided to not run away, he decided to stay there and at least have some of the food. Just try a bite or two. Who knows, he had thought, it might actually be good?

Soon they both ordered their respective dishes, and chatted about everything. From work stuff, to their neighbours, to this restaurant, to about each other until their meals came. Lynda immediately started to gobble down her dinner. John, still a tiny bit unsure about the food due to his past bad experiences, dabbled tentatively at the dish. Finally he relented and put a small piece of food in his mouth. That experience of that meal hitting his taste buds was orgasmic. He wanted more, he needed more he craved more. He desired it. Seconds before he had detested the thought of letting Mexican food anywhere near his mouth. He was so serious about that that he had seriously thought about running away from this place and most possibly Lynda too. But now things had changed, John had thought as he continued to shovel more food in his mouth, now he just wanted more and more of this stuff. This was a delight, a pure and utter delight. The texture was divine, the taste was magical, and the smell! Oh how John wished that he could have gone back and re-experienced that time when the aroma of that heavenly meal first entered his inexperienced nostrils. The way it went through his nose and straight into his heart capturing it forever more. Soon, John tried to go and have Mexican food as often as he could. Lynda didn't mind this as she was quite partial to that particular type of cuisine as well. So they both tried to arrange to have Mexican as much as they could. There were times when they just had the normal vegetables and meat fare. But they tried as often as they could to have Mexican as much as possible. Thinking back at that whole experience with the Mexican food John was reminded about how he shouldn't discount things because of a bad experience or two. Drinking the sludge, while not as captivating as that wonderful Mexican food, was nevertheless quite a tasty little meal in its own right. Yes, it did not look very appetizing at all, and the word sludge is not something John would normally associate with food. But John, due to a combination of hunger and tired legs, decided that trying the sludge was better than not eating it all. The fact that it tasted so nice was a bonus.

Lynda, on the other hand, was struggling a bit to fit her sludge in due to its taste. This sludge tasted like a combination of strawberry, fish, chicken nuggets, and lemonade. Mrs Fizzle wasn't too fond of those ingredients, especially mixed together. To her it did not taste good at all. She wanted to chuck the sludge away into one of the electronic bins that moved silently around the table cleaning up scraps from the floor and letting customers put any leftovers in them. The sludge was a struggle to get through for her. But she managed to consume most of it. Like John her hunger meant that she was willing to eat almost anything. All that walking, running, dodging, and weaving had caused blistered feet and grumbling stomachs. So she was ready to have as much of that sludge as she could handle, no matter how horrible it seemed to her. She knew the value of food, she knew what it was like to go without dinner because you couldn't afford any groceries for the week.

Another reason Lynda didn't really like the taste of the sludge was that she was still missing Percy. She wondered, as she continued to slowly but surely drink the sludge, what Percy was doing at the moment. Was he chasing birds along the solid brown wooden fence? Was he lying in the sun stretching himself like he was having his own personal yoga class? Or was he, god forbid, dead? That last question was something that Lynda had tried not to think about at all. She had tried to distract herself from that by focusing on actually finding a way home. But sitting there, trying to finish the red sludge, she couldn't help think about Percy. She couldn't help wondering about the chance that he could be dead. She and John had been gone away from earth for a very long time. It seemed like hours to her, maybe even longer than that. And Lynda had not left any food out for Percy. Mainly because she wasn't expecting to go anywhere. She had no way of knowing that she would get sucked into a chimney, talk with a candy cane, and end up in a city inside a building drinking this red

sludge. Thinking about Percy, lying on the ground dead while ants crawled all over his furry body brought a tear to Lynda's eye. She hadn't had much experience with death. Most of her family were alive and well. She remembered going to her grandma's, who had died of a stroke in her retirement home, funeral and seeing all those crying faces sitting in the pews as her mother tearfully struggled to get through the eulogy. People in their black suits and dresses with blotchy red faces and tears streaming down their faces. Lynda had cried a bit too that day as she enjoyed spending time with her Grandma. But the one thing she most remembered about the funeral, and even after that, was tis sudden fear of dying that started inside of her. She began to obsess over the thought of dying, of the fact that once she had died there was no coming back. Lynda, having been raised in an atheist household, had no belief that there would be a heaven or hell waiting for her once she had passed away. She did wish there was something in the afterlife, but she knew in her heart that there was nothing. This fact did not help her growing fear of death at all, in fact it only served to enhance it as she lay in bed in the middle of the night with her red curtains softly blowing thinking about death. Thinking about what she would feel if she was close to dying. Thinking about what it would be like to know you were about to die. How would she feel? All these thoughts swirled around in her head for what seemed like weeks and weeks to her until they slowly went away (though sometimes they cropped up over the years as she grew up).

However that was many years ago, now Lynda, having gotten a tiny bit older and wiser, viewed death a bit differently to when she was a young child. Death now for her was something that happened to everyone. No one could cheat death. She was going to die someday. It could be today, it could be tomorrow, it could be years in the future when she is a little old lady holding hands with John on an old wooden park bench. However, unlike that little girl of so many years ago, Lynda did not fear death at all. She was ready for it. Death or dying wasn't that important to her. What was important to her was living, living every moment and making it mean something. Still, she thought, as she managed to get the last bits of sludge down, seeing Percy there dead will be awful. Seeing people, or in Percy's case animals, die was still sad to Lynda, no matter what she thought about her own death. She knew she would be absolutely devastated if John left before her.

'He's probably dead.' Said Mary absent-mindedly.

'I'm sorry?' Asked Lynda.

'My husband.'

'Oh. Why do you say that?'

'Because it has been about twenty years since I have last seen him.'

'Oh I'm sorry about that. Did he run away?' Asked Lynda.

'No this is how long I have been trying to get out of this building. My husband is still back on earth.'

'Twenty years? Wow.'

'Yep. About twenty years I reckon.'

'You don't seem very angry.'

'Oh I use to be angry. Used to rant and rave and be a menace. But I got jailed for about four years for throwing sludge at the local Ratewsian police force. Let me tell you that nothing is more sobering then being chained up on a wall and having your feet nibbled constantly by those annoying little things.'

‘So how did you end up here? John and I came up through our chimney back on earth. You see we both come from the Gold Coast in Australia and we had just recently purchased a house. We had just moved in and we were about to spend our first night there sleeping in our comfortable new bed when John here got sucked up the chimney. Of course at that time I didn’t know what had happened with John. I honestly thought that he was dead. I tried looking for him everywhere but it was only when I found his wedding ring on the fireplace that…’

‘Lynda she doesn’t need to hear your life story.’ Interrupted John.

‘I’m just trying to make conversation.’ Protested Lynda.

‘No you’re trying to do one of your boring monologues again.’

‘Again? What do you mean by that?’

‘You don’t remember the time that you lectured me for about five minutes about the correct way to stack a dishwasher?’

‘I may do that sometimes but that’s only because you never seem to listen to me. Anyway Moose I’m sorry for all that. I am interested to know if you got sucked up a chimney too.’

‘Well, yes I did actually get sucked up a chimney too.’ Said Moose. ‘It was in Melbourne. An old cream coloured wooden house that was rotting both on the inside and the outside. But unlike you I didn’t live in that house, but I was looking at it as an option to move in to that place because like you two I wanted to move. Unfortunately that place as a pigsty. It had ants crawling everywhere, it smelt awful, and there seemed to be a couple of missing floorboards. I was checking out the fireplace when I got sucked up it and landed here.’

‘Wow. How the hell have you survived here for twenty years?’ Asked John.

‘At first it was really tough. I tried escaping a few times but I never seemed to get to the exit before night fell, and I also got lost a few times. Then I was barred from leaving for a few years after I knocked down some precious dasde.’

‘Dasde? What’s that?’

‘Well dasde is the sludge that you are drinking right now. The dasde grows on the ground and is then mixed up. They do that because if you eat the dasde raw then you could get sick. Back then there was a shortage of dasde because of a drought and so apparently there was a law brought in that anyone who knocked down a box would find themselves in trouble. One day I was trying to escape again when I accidently knocked down a box of dasde that was sitting on an outside table. I got arrested, and although I didn’t get thrown into jail, I was banned from ever leaving this city for at least five years.’

‘What happened after the five years was up?’

‘I tried to escape again of course. But then I got thrown into jail. After I was released from jail I was so tired and run down that I just decided to live here. So I got a job as a dasde picker, then saved enough haperts to be able to buy a small flat. Then I got a job as a librarian.’

‘There’s a library here?’ Excitedly asked Lynda. While she was still desperate to get out of here and go back to earth, the fact that there was a library here eased the pain of being lost in a strange place.

‘Yes. This city has a big library. It is in the orange section which means that you are free to use it anytime.’

‘Cool. We should go there.’

‘But, Lynda.’ Protested John ‘I thought you wanted to get out of here?’

‘Oh I do. I mean I really want to get out of here. But we still might have enough time to go and look at the library.’

‘How far is the library from this place, Moose?’ Asked John

‘About ten blocks that way.’ Said Moose pointing at the direction that both Lynda and John had come from before.

‘Oh damn.’ Groaned Lynda ‘That’s too far.’

‘Yeah.’ Agreed John ‘So I guess we better get going.’

‘Wait. I’ll come with you.’ Said Moose as she gathered her things and headed straight out the door with Mr and Mrs Fizzle.

The three walked out the door when they noticed that it was not day anymore, it was night. They had all been chatting in there for so long that the moon had come out and the sun had drifted off to sleep.

‘Damnit.’ Said Moose ‘Not again.’

‘This happen to you before?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Yeah, nearly all the time. I get so far but then it turns night before I can escape. Or the job requires me to stay on later.’

‘Well I guess we better find somewhere to stay.’ Sad John trying to count his haperts.

‘Oh don’t worry about finding somewhere to stay. You can stay at my place.’

‘Really?’

‘It’s fine. Been a long time since I have talked with a human, like properly talked with them.’

‘Can’t we visit the library first?’ Asked Lynda.

‘I’m not sure it’s open.’ Said John

‘Oh, this library is open twenty four hours a day. It never shuts.’ Said Moose.

‘Can’t wait to see it. What else does it have?’ Enquired Lynda.

‘Well it has about five floors filled with books about Ratewsian history, sport, entertainment, politics, and many other kind of things. There is also a fiction section which has a floor of its own. There you can find romance, drama, horror, mystery, classical, westerns, fantasy, history, and children’s books. There’s also a…’

‘A what?’ Asked John.

‘Apparently there is a secret book there that tells you the best way to get out of the city. I have worked there for many years and I haven’t seen that book so I might be wrong. I did hear that it might be on a different floor that I work on so we might not be able to get it.’

‘Well why can’t we? I mean it wouldn’t be that hard to get onto the other floor.’ Said Lynda excitedly.

‘The main problem is Lynda that the floor where the book is located is off limits to visitors.’

‘Oh.’

‘But we can still have a look at the library, eh Lynda? Have a bit of a bit of a browse?’ Asked John to Lynda who was trying not to look too upset.

‘Yeah, I suppose.’ Sighed Lynda.

‘They might even have some Richard Nixon books for you to look at. I’m sure there are some books about him you haven’t read.’

‘We do actually.’ Replied Moose. ‘About four I think in our ‘Earth History’ section.’

‘Really?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Yeah. I remember seeing them the other day when I had to put some books back.’

‘So what do you think Lynda? Can we go?’ Enquired John.

‘Ok. Let’s go.’ Said Lynda who felt really excited for the first time in a long time. This day so far for her had just been one bad thing after another with being on another planet, talking to candy canes, walking around a city in a building, having to follow strict rules in the city because they were visitors, and now it was night time and they had to stay in the orange section of the city. But seeing a library could put a bit of sparkle back in her step she thought as she walked to the library with both John and Moose. Sure, it was a bit disappointing that they wouldn’t be able to have that elusive book that Moose was telling them about. However that didn’t seem to matter that much at the moment because they were going to her favourite place, the place where she would gladly spend the rest of her life: the library.

Lynda loved the library, it was her favourite place to be. Growing up she went there often, and in adulthood she went there twice as much. Seeing all the different types of books on the dusty shelves where one could just be transported into another time or place was really exciting to Lynda. Apart from the books about Richard Nixon, which she read over and over again as often as she could, Lynda also enjoyed reading mystery novels. She loved reading about the detective solving the murder, putting together the pieces of the puzzle to crack the case. Lynda didn’t really enjoy the violent aspect of the mystery genre. However she really loved trying to solve who was the murderer. Sometimes she worked it out, and other times the ending totally flummoxed her. Thinking about where she was at this moment, here on this strange new planet, Lynda thought that she was in a mystery of her own. Sure there was no big murder to solve, but the fact that she had no real idea where they were was a big enough mystery for Mrs Fizzle.

‘Moose, how come you are still a visitor here? I mean you said you have been here for twenty years.’ Asked John as they passed a clothing store.

‘Jail time. When you get thrown into jail you lose your chance of becoming a resident here. It can take years to be able to be able to even get that far. I got lucky but I managed to find work, the visitors who couldn’t were either jailed or just thrown out of the building and into the wild.’ Said Moose.

‘Jail?’ Asked Lynda fidgeting with her fingers.

‘Yep. So I say it is best you try and make your escape as soon as morning comes because you don’t want to end up outside the building. The yakyas will get you.’

‘Yeah we know.’ Said John ‘Ont told us when we first arrived in that room.’

‘Is Ont still there? Wow. I remember when he was there back when I first came here. Starting out he was. He was very nervous, but seemed very determined about the rules. Has he changed much?’ Asked Moose.

‘Well when we met him he seemed quite calm to me. What did you think, John?’ Questioned Lynda as the trio crossed a green cat trying to get some groceries up a long flight of stairs.

‘Yeah. Pretty calm. Got a bit jumpy about visitors.’

‘Oh, he really wanted us to wear our badges.’ Agreed Lynda.

‘Did he get all emotional about the visitor stuff?’ Asked Moose.

‘Yeah. Got really frustrated about the whole visitor thing.’ Said John.

‘It got so annoying.’ Said Lynda ‘I even tried to escape but John wouldn’t help me.’

‘Oh come on you know why I didn’t want to help you.’ Argued John

‘Because you were afraid of us getting jailed. I know. But I didn’t care about the jail stuff. You knew that.’

‘You heard what Moose said about the jail.’

‘Yeah it’s really bad, Lynda. It probably wasn’t worth you trying to escape anyway because you would have been caught by the police.’ Agreed Moose.

‘Humph. Whatever.’ Grumbled Lynda.

Lynda, Moose, and John continued to walk on underneath night sky. The paths were illuminated by the fluorescent streetlights and the moon and the stars shone brightly from up above. Everything was so clear, so crisp, and so fresh. Unlike the daytime there didn’t seem to be many residents out and about. They passed some plates having a scuffle in an alleyway, and there were some little spoons playing a game of cricket outdoors, but apart from that the city streets were empty. John breathed in the air as he walked across a lamp post.

‘You could live here.’ Mr Fizzle said looking around at the city nightlife. ‘It’s rather nice.’

‘But we won’t be, John.’ Said Lynda looking sharply at John ‘We have to go home and find Percy.’

‘Percy is probably dead by now.’

‘How can you say that? Percy might still be alive.’ Protested Lynda vehemently.

‘Well look how long we have been gone. No way would Percy have survived al that time on his own.’

‘He’s a resourceful cat. He would have gotten food somehow.’

‘Oh really? Wow I would love to hear how he would have been able to do that.’ Sarcastically replied John.

‘God just admit it John, you never really liked Percy.’ Cried Lynda struggling to wipe the tears away.

‘Oh of course I liked him. Don’t be so melodramatic. I’m just trying to be realistic here. No use having false hope, especially when logic dictates that no cat would be able to survive that long without eating or drinking.’

‘Drinking? No I left some water there for him.’

‘I saw that it was pretty empty.’

‘When was this?’

‘About six I think. Just before we had tea. I was putting some stuff in the cupboard.’

‘Oh well I filled that bowl up after tea. So Percy should be fine.’ Said Lynda.

‘Ok. Well maybe he won’t die after all.’

‘Glad we agree.’

‘We’re here.’ Interrupted Moose tiredly.

Mrs Fizzle and Mrs Fizzle looked up and saw a vast silver building that seemed to stretch beyond the night sky. Five levels full of infinite worlds. The library was made out of solid brown and grey bricks. Lynda marvelled at the view of it. To her it looked incredible. The biggest library that she had ever seen in her life. She thought about what kind of books would be in there. Would there be any books on Richard Nixon? Or maybe a mystery or two? She couldn’t wait to find out. Seeing the massive library reminded her of the library she went to back on earth. It wasn’t as big as this one as it only had one level. But it had heaps of books and audio visual equipment. Lynda would often go there and check out some books to take home and read. She would come into the library there and be hit with the sights of people trying to work out the self-check machine, the sounds of fingers tapping on the library computers, and the musty smell of books. It was both captivating and addictive. Going in there and just picking out a book from a shelf, just any old book and opening it up. Seeing that first word, then that first sentence, then that first paragraph, and then that first page. Getting hooked into the story that you have to sit down on one of the comfortable library chairs until you finish the book or you manage to drag your eyes away from the page long enough to look at the time and realise that the library was about to close and you didn’t get anything for dinner so you had to buy takeaways again. Of course sometimes the library did have its bad memories for Lynda. Well, not bad she thought as she walked up the steps with John and Moose, but memories that were maybe not quite as good. One such not quite so good memory actually happened about three months ago. It was a Friday afternoon. A rainy wind swept day it was with thunder and lightning. John was busy trying to fix a broken umbrella, and Lynda had decided to go to the library to get out this new mystery novel by acclaimed author Ferris Smith. Ferris Smith had only written a couple of books before, a couple of Historical novels set in Victorian England, but they didn’t sell that well so he had decided to turn his hand at writing a modern day mystery book. This had proved to be a masterstroke as this new novel sold three times as much as his previous ones. Lynda, who was always on the lookout for a new mystery book, chose today to go down to the library to get the book

out. She had first looked online to see if it was on the shelf as she did not want to drive all the way down there just to find out it was not there.

‘I’m going to go to the library.’ Lynda said to John as she started to walk out the door.

‘Just a minute.’ John shouted as he quickly jumped up from his umbrella room.

‘What is it?’

‘Can you get me a book please?’

‘A book about what?’

‘A book about an umbrella. It’s called Umbrella Annual 1982. I need it for a piece I’m doing on my website.’

John had his own blog where he wrote about umbrellas all the time. He did historical pieces about umbrellas, reviewed the latest umbrellas, and even managed to interview a couple of people in the umbrella industry. He had had that blog for a number of years, about three Lynda thought. Of course she never really bothered to read his blog. She did read a couple of entries but they were so dry and boring to her that she never read another one again.

‘Oh come on John. Why can’t you go and get it?’

‘Because I’m fixing my umbrella. It has a hole in it.’

‘You should throw it out then and get a new one.’

‘I simply can’t.’ John said haughtily.

‘Why not?’

‘Because I am taking that umbrella to the national umbrella convention next month.’

‘The one in Melbourne?’

‘Yes. That’s the one. Thousands of umbrella enthusiasts like myself all coming together to look at, compare, and talk about umbrellas. It is going to be such great fun.’

‘Uh huh. Sure. Anyway whatever. I’ll get that stupid book for you.’ Said Lynda as she headed out towards the car.

So Lynda drove off to the library in her silver sedan. She had had that car for about five years or so. It seemed to run well, and only needed check-ups every six months or so. Lynda never broke down in the sedan. It was a very safe and easy car to drive for her. The library was only about a ten minute drive from her house, but because of some minor roadworks that took about fifteen minutes. She eventually arrived at the library and her heart swelled with joy as she entered the building. She saw a young child trying to read out a book with his mother helpfully encouraging him, a frazzled library assistant trying to tell an elderly lady in a walker about her overdue book, and a rather large gentlemen with a white beard trying to check out some books at the self-checkout station. Lynda walked over to the fiction section and got out the new Ferris Smith novel from the shelf. From what Lynda observed it seemed to be the last copy in the library so she was glad to have a read of it. She started to flick through the pages, reading a sentence there and a passage here, and she liked what she was reading so she decided to check it out. She was just about to line up behind a middle aged

man with a bag of books and a young woman with three children and a pram when she suddenly remembered the book that John had asked her to get.

‘Damn. That stupid umbrella book.’ Whispered Lynda to herself. ‘I better go and get it.’

So Lynda walked away from the line at the self-checkout and made her way to the non-fiction section of the library. She carefully and methodically looked at every shelf in that section, but she could not find the book that she was looking for. Lynda even searched on one of the computers for the book but it did not turn up any results. Frustrated she walked up to the front counter.

‘Excuse me. But have you got the Umbrella Annual 1982?’ She asked the librarian sitting behind the desk.

‘No. I don’t think we have. Just let me double check for you. Won’t be too long.’ Smiled the librarian as he disappeared for a few minutes. He then came back shaking his head.

‘I’m sorry. But we don’t have that here. Are you sure that’s an actual book?’ He asked.

‘Well that what my husband said.’ Replied Lynda.

‘He must be wrong because it is not here, nor is it any other library around this area.’

‘Oh, ok. Well thanks for looking.’

‘That’s OK.’

Lynda, after checking out her own book, went out of the library and drove straight home. When she walked through the door she saw John still trying to fix his umbrella for the convention.

‘They didn’t have it.’ She said as she went past him and into the kitchen.

‘What?’ Asked John as he went out of his umbrella room and joined Lynda.

‘They didn’t have that book you wanted.’

‘The Umbrella Annual 1982?’

‘Yeah. I looked everywhere, and I even asked one of the staff but they said it wasn’t part of their catalogue.’

‘Oh really? But I thought I saw it in there.’

‘Wait a minute. When did you go to the library?’

‘A couple of weeks ago.’

‘So why didn’t you grab it?’

‘I had to go to a doctor’s appointment. By the time I got back it wasn’t there. I only asked for you to get it because I was fixing my umbrella and you were going to the library.’

‘So you had two weeks to go and get that mysterious book of yours but instead you decided to use me instead?’ Said Lynda disgustedly.

‘Look. I know that wasn’t the best…’

‘You think?’

They both continued arguing for a little while longer. Lynda couldn't remember exactly how that argument had ended. She thought that it ended up with John apologising for using her like that, but she wasn't quite sure.

'Wow.' Marvelled John as he, Lynda, and Moose walked into the city library.

'Yeah, wow. This is amazing.' Agreed Lynda.

This was no ordinary library, a library that John and Lynda would have found back on earth, this was a library that was unlike anything that they had ever seen before. For one thing all the bookcases seemed to be floating majestically through the air. Big wooden bookcases that glided through the room and about their heads in the vast space above. Another interesting thing was that the room that they were in seemed to be made of ice cubes, however they didn't feel that cold.

'Ice cubes?' John enquired.

'They are specially made ice cubes built for this room. Designed never to break and to always keep this place at a perfect temperature.' Said Moose as they all walked towards the floating bookcases.

'How do the floating bookcases work?' Asked Lynda. 'I mean is there a way of actually getting books?'

'See those computer screens over there?' Said Moose pointing to a huge row of computer screens that were lined up against the icy wall.

'Yeah.' Said Lynda.

'Well all you have to do is search for what type of book you want. Then on the screen you can press either 'Get Book' if you would like that book, or 'Go Back' if you do not want the book. If you press 'Go Back' then you will be taken back to the previous page. However, if you would like that book, let's say you want to check it out or just have a read of it, then you press the 'Get Book' button. If you press the 'Get Book' button then the book that you want will come gently floating down into your hands.'

'But what happens if you read the book and find out that you don't like it or that it was the wrong book?' Questioned John.

'If that happens all you have to do is lightly tap the book four times and say "Fly, fly away" and the book will fly straight back to the bookshelf.'

'Interesting. Thanks for that, Moose!'

John, Lynda and Moose continued to walk over to the row of computer screens. The library was bustling with visitors and residents all lined up waiting for their turn to go on one of the computer screens. Plates, humans, candy, water bottles, cats, dogs, and remote controls all lined up behind one another. No one seemed to be pushing in, or trying to make a scene due to the long wait.

'We'll just go over here.' Said Moose as they lined up behind a queue of about twenty visitors and residents.

'Damn this line is long. How long are we going to have to wait here?' Asked an annoyed Lynda.

'Depends. Could be about as little as ten minutes, or could be a couple of hours.' Replied Moose.

'I can't wait for a couple of hours.'

‘Well you will have to. Another rule here at Ratews is that you can only leave a line under special circumstances like to go to the toilet or a medical emergency. If you get out of line for anything else you run the risk of paying a hefty fine.’

‘Pity I have already been to the toilet.’ Sighed Lynda.

‘They sure have a lot of weird rules here.’ Said John.

‘Yeah they do.’ Agreed Lynda ‘Seems like a really awful place to live.’

‘I can’t say I disagree with you two.’ Replied Moose ‘There are a lot of really weird rules here. I mean one other rule is that you can’t wear one green shoe and one blue shoe but you can wear like one red shoe and one yellow shoe. Another rule is that you can’t fly a kite between the hours of two and three in the afternoon.’

‘That is strange.’ Replied John rubbing his feet. Mr Fizzle felt really tired. Walking for miles and miles had put blisters on his feet. His shoes were not really designed for all the traveling they had to do today. The walking, running, jumping, weaving, and hopping all over the place. He just wanted to sit down and rest his tired feet. Lynda probably wants to do the same John thought as he slowly made his way up the line with Moose and Lynda. Just sit down in a chair, doesn’t have to be one of those comfortable leather chairs, but maybe a nice solid chair and have a bit of a sit. Or even better, lie down in a bed, a nice bed full of soft sheets and a warm pillow that you can lay your head down in and fall asleep to dream about peaches trying to get a light red and yellow polka dotted gerbil out of a tree, or about going to the theatre and seeing the moon and the sun dazzle the audience with their tap dancing routine. But John was stuck here waiting in line. He hadn’t realised the place would be so busy. He just thought that he would be in and out of here in a few minutes or so then he and Lynda go back to Moose’s place and stay there for the night. Seeing this many people here surprised him, especially after walking all that way and seeing hardly anyone around. Looking at all the people, animals, and other creatures lined up John was reminded of the biggest umbrella convention that he ever went to. This was about four years ago, just when John and Lynda were at the early stages of their married life. They had lived in a run-down house with not many possession except for John’s umbrellas and Lynda’s Richard Nixon books. Lynda by that time had only a couple of books as she was forced to sell some of them due to lack of money. John too had to give away some of his umbrellas because of financial difficulties. He had only three umbrellas in his possession. So it was not a happy household. Constant sniping and arguing drained both Mr and Mrs Fizzle so much that they wondered if they should just divorce. However they decided that it would just be easy to try and work through their issues. So it was on a bright and sunny Thursday afternoon that John was reading the paper and Lynda was busy playing with Percy.

‘Woah. Lynda?’

‘Yes?’

‘You read the paper?’ Asked John.

‘Read some of it, but not everything in it. Why do you ask?’ Enquired Lynda as she nonchalantly dragged a piece of string above Percy’s head for him to play with.

‘There is going to be a new umbrella convention in town! In about a month’s time.’

‘Wow. Sounds thrilling.’ Yawned Lynda.

‘Ha very funny.’ Sarcastically replied John as he began to cut out the article advertising the convention.

‘You don’t expect me to go do you? I have got a ton of other stuff I want to do.’

‘No, of course not. You would probably just complain all the time.’

‘I would not! Mainly because I would never go to anything as unexciting as an umbrella convention. I know you love your umbrellas, and I also realise that it was hard for you to sell your big collection of umbrellas just as it was hard for me to give away most of my collection of Richard Nixon books. Still I would just be so bored looking at all those umbrellas just as I am sure you would probably be bored reading a Richard Nixon book. Anyway, what were you saying about me complaining?’

‘You seem to complain about everything. Why just the other day you ranted at me for fifteen minutes just because I put the washing on incorrectly.’

‘Yeah, that’s because you put it on the wrong setting. Your setting, while it may have been ok by you, was not ok by me because if you put it on that setting then the clothes do not get washed properly. That setting doesn’t work and I don’t know why. I think we may have to buy a new one but we can’t afford one right now so I guess we will have to make do with that poor one. Anyway, I don’t know about you John but I work very hard at my job, I work so hard at it and when I come home I have to do all this housework. Yes, I know you do your share too, and I know you work just as hard at your job then me. But what I am trying to say is that I don’t appreciate coming home, after I have been working so hard and my legs are aching and I just want to sit down and have some time to myself, to find that the clothes out of the washing machine have not been washed properly because you in your infinite wisdom decided to put the clothes on a lesser cycle, which may have saved time for you, but in the end we had to waste not only more time but also more water by washing the clothes not once but twice in a row. That is really annoying, I really dislike coming home after a long hard day at work where I have just been slaving away, only to find when I finally come home and just wanting to put my feet down for a couple of minutes, that the clothes that you had kindly washed and hung out for me, were actually really dirty and in need of another wash. So I, after a long day at work, had to get those dirty clothes off, put them in the basket, then carry them all the way back to the washing machine, open the lid, put the dirty clothes in the washing machine, close the lid, then choose not the setting that you put it on, but the proper setting that enables the clothes to look clean and presentable, then once I have chosen the proper setting turn it on, wait for the washing machine to finish its cycle, grab the basket again, turn the washing machine off, get the clean clothes out of the washing machine, put them in the basket, take it out side and carefully hang out the washing. Can you not see how annoying that is? Because it is so annoying to be having to do that.’

‘Ok. Yes, I understand. I won’t put the clothes on the wrong setting ever again. I’m sorry about that and I won’t do it again.’

And that was the end of that discussion. About a month later John went to the Umbrella convention that was held at a large hall about three blocks from where he and Lynda were living at the time. Lynda of course did not come so John trotted off by himself to go and check it out. The hall in which the umbrella convention was in was not any ordinary hall that would fit only a hundred or so people in, but it was a hall that could fit in about a couple of thousand people easily, maybe even more. And that was how many people were in the hall when John first walked in there. Two thousand people all milling about looking at all the different umbrellas. It had wooden floorboards where people could set up their umbrella stalls and everyone could just wander around and have a look at all the different kind of umbrellas that were on display and talk about umbrella related things such as the

different varieties and colours of umbrellas. The stage area of the hall was where experts could give presentations on umbrellas. All around him there were umbrellas everywhere. However what John most remembered about that day at the hall was how tiring it was for him. Lining up for half an hour or so just to speak to a man about umbrella handles. His feet started to ache and he got really bored and fidgety. If it wasn't for the fact that he loved umbrellas John probably would have been out of that hall in about ten minutes or so. Instead he continued to stay for a few hours until his muscles ached so much from all the standing that he went home.

'Hey, where's Lynda?' Asked Moose.

'She was behind me, wasn't she?' Asked John frowning.

'Yes, about a few minutes ago, then I go distracted by a couple of dogs arguing about a book or something. By the time I turned around she had gone.'

John, who had been daydreaming about the umbrella convention from a few years ago, looked around for Lynda. She was nowhere to be seen. He silently cursed himself for being so engrossed in his own memories. Mr Fizzle had been so busy thinking about stuff that happened so many years ago, and because he had been so busy day-dreaming about that stuff he had failed to notice that Mrs Fizzle had gone from the line. He started to panic as the line moved slowly forward.

'What on earth can we do?'

'Well we can't really leave the line, nor can we alert any of the library staff because they are duty bound to report any people, animals or creatures who have left or are leaving the line. Once they do that then the police come and charge you.'

'I have to do something. I can't just stand here while Lynda could be god knows where.' Furiously whispered John as continued to look around for Lynda.

'We simply can't.' Cautioned Moose.

However John was off before Moose could grab a hold of him. He was off in search for Lynda. Moose, with a loud sigh, raced after John. She didn't want to be responsible for two line-leavers. Being responsible for one was bad enough, but with two line-leavers Moose was at risk of being thrown in jail for about another five years.

Lynda quickly climbed up the brick stairs, her legs were aching and she had to stop a couple of times to catch her breath, however she knew that she had to do this. Moments earlier she had been standing in line with both John and Moose. Standing with them as the line moved slowly but surely up to where all the computer screens were. Mrs Fizzle, who loved the library, didn't love the library that much that she would be prepared to stand in line for an hour or two. She had wanted to escape straight away, but the words of Moose about being arrested for leaving the line had played on her mind. She had wanted to leave, but she also didn't want to get arrested. Yes, earlier in the day she had not been worried about the chance of being arrested at all. However, during the course of her time spent here observing the various residents and visitors, as well as hearing stories from Moose, Lynda had slowly changed her opinion about the situation. Like John, she didn't want to end up chained in jail. She had not believed Ont at first because it just seemed so silly to her that a visitor could be arrested for not wearing a visitor's badge. Earlier in the day though, when John and her were trying to get to the red section to escape, she saw a young man, not more than twenty years old being arrested for not wearing his badge.

'But but but I lost it!' Stammered the young man.

‘You have been detained for breach of law 36 subsection a.’ said the policebot.

The young man tried to protest some more but was quickly taken away by the policebot. That was another thing that Lynda had observed while traveling through the city with John. All of the law enforcement in the city seemed to be robots. Big silver robots with strong metal arms and legs. Their heads were square and instead of eyes, a mouth and ears they had a small computer screen as their face. This computer screen on the face seemed to be sprouting out random numbers and jumbled letters to Lynda. However she did not stop to observe what they really meant being that she was trying to escape this building along with John. What she had seen of the policebots was very intimidating. They had dragged that poor young man away without breaking a sweat. She had no chance to escape them she thought as she lined up with John and Moose at the library.

The conflict between wanting to go home and not wanting to get arrested had played on Lynda’s mind as she slowly moved up the line. She did want to go home back to earth with John, but she also didn’t want to get arrested and chained up against a wall for a number of years. Her mind raced between the two options. Her heart beat faster and her arms started to get shaky. Lynda knew that this was the best opportunity to escape and look for that book that Moose was talking about, the secret book that could enable all of them to escape the building and go back to earth. So she decided then and there to make a run for it. To leave the line and risk getting arrested so that they could escape this dreadful place. She looked over at Moose who was busy looking over at someone else, then she looked over at John who was daydreaming away while also rubbing his feet. She thought about telling them, but she was afraid that they might try to stop her, that they would tell her not to even think about it and she would still be stuck in this boring line. Lynda knew that she had to go now, so she quickly turned away from the line and began to run towards a staircase that she had spotted earlier when she had first entered the library. Within a few minutes, after dodging some emus who were arguing with a water bottle, she reached the brick staircase. Slowly but surely she began to go up the long and winding staircase.

‘Wait, could she have gone up there?’ Asked John to Moose as he pointed to a very long and winding brick staircase.

‘Yes, it is possible. But I’m not sure we should check it out. We shouldn’t get into trouble just for Lynda.’ Reasoned Moose trying to re-direct John away from the stair case and back to the line-up.

‘What? I’m not going to let Lynda get arrested. I’m not going to leave her. No. Why on earth would I do that? I mean you can just go back and re-join the line if you want to. But I’m going to find her.’

‘I just thought…’

‘Thought what? That I would just let her get arrested? That I would go back in line with you and leave her in this god forsaken city? No. I am not going to do that. She came for me in here when I landed in this place. She could have just left the fireplace alone and gone off somewhere else. But she didn’t do that. She went into that fireplace, and she landed here with me in this strange place. She left her comfortable life on earth behind with all of her Richard Nixon books and her cat Percy. Do you know how worried she has been about that cat? Do you understand how attached she was to cat? And you have the nerve to even think that I want to go back to that stupid line and wait while Lynda gets jailed and chained up to the walls?’

Moose looked at John with sad eyes. ‘Look, I’m sorry that Lynda has gone. I truly am. It hurts me to see you two torn apart like that, it really does. Reminds me of my forced separation from my husband William. Every day I carry a photo of him with me. It’s getting faded now but I can still see

his smile. Oh he had the happiest smile in the world. He always used to smile at everything because he was so happy. I remember one time when William and I went to one of the local parks on earth just to have some lunch. See nature and experience the nice fresh air. So anyway we went out and the sun was shining and everyone was…'

'Wait? Are you trying to distract me with this really boring and pointless story?'

'I just don't want you as well as Lynda to go off to jail.' Said Moose defensively.

John looked at Moose then looked at the staircase. Suddenly he raced over to the long and winding staircase but came face to face with a two policebots who were taking Lynda downstairs.

'Excuse me Sir but you are not allowed on the staircase.' Said policebot number one who seemed to be the more senior one of the two.

'But but but I was just trying to…' Stammered John.

'You are violating law 24 subsection c.' said policebot number two who proceeded to lift John off the ground and take him away with Lynda. John tried to look for Moose but he could not see her.

Lynda was also being dragged along by the other policebot. Her head was throbbing and her eyes were sore. She thought back of what had happened a few minutes ago as she continued to be dragged outside the library with her husband John. Lynda remembered finally reaching the top of the stairs. It was much harder then she thought it was going to be nevertheless after a few stops to catch her breath she had managed to reach the top. She wasn't that used to climbing that many stairs, and combined with the fact that she had just spent what seemed like hours traveling through the city with John and later Moose meant that it was just that little bit harder to get up the brick stairs. But she eventually managed to get up the stairs and ended up facing a bright blue door with a red and yellow striped handle. She tried to open it, but it was locked. She tried again and again without any luck at all. She strained and pushed at the door handle, not because she thought she would get anywhere, but because she felt angry that she had risked potential jail time just for a locked door and now John would be so worried about her that he too would leave the line and risk himself getting jailed with her.

'Bloody Moose!' Bemoaned Lynda as she started to make her way down the brick stairs. 'I can't believe she forgot to tell us about the locked door.'

Lynda was slowly making her way down the stairs when she came face to face with two policebots. She was unsure if they were the ones that she had seen earlier in the day, but they did look similar.

'Stop. You are not allowed on the staircase.' Said policebot number one.

'I was just having a look up here. That's all.' Replied Lynda trying to sound as calm as possible.

'You have violated law 24 subsection c.' said policebot number one who picked her up and took her down the stairs where she saw a flustered John and a worried Moose. She saw John trying to argue with the policebots but like her he was taken away and dragged down the stairs like a dog carrying an old bone. Lynda felt so guilty for risking her life as well as John's just for a stupid locked door. She couldn't even look John in the eye as they were both carried out by policebot number one and policebot number two. Lynda could only imagine how hurt and angry John must have felt at her for doing such a stupid thing, because now she had probably set back her and John's efforts to escape this dreadful city by at least a few years.

John and Lynda were bundled into a cylinder outside the library that was about twenty feet long, eight feet high, and about ten feet wide with holes for anyone unfortunate enough to get arrested to breathe through. The inside had a narrow walkway in which the policebots could walk up and down to check on any of the arrested in the cages. There were only about four cages in this cylinder. The outside was silver coloured and was floating an inch or two above the ground. The two policbots then put both John and Lynda in separate red cages.

'You are not to talk or communicate with each other in any way. If you do you will be electrocuted with this.' Said policebot number two showing them a small metal stick with what looked like to be a claw and the end of it.

'How long will we be stuck here?' Asked John.

'You are to stay in the cages until we reach our destination.' Said policebot number two. 'If you try to escape from these cages in any way we will kill you.'

John gulped as he sat down and tried to make himself comfortable in his cage. He couldn't see Lynda as she was in the cage next to him. However she could hear her crying and sobbing. He wanted desperately to go over and comfort her but he knew that would not be possible. So John sat back and tried to rest. He closed his eyes and tried to go to sleep. That proved to be difficult because as soon as he had closed his eyes the cylinder had started to move and it was making a lot of noise. There was no way that John could ever hope to sleep through all that. He had always had trouble sleeping, unlike Lynda he would often toss and turn all night long in bed until he finally drifted off to sleep. Though, John thought as the cylinder clanked along the city streets, he had never had to go to sleep with this much noise. The closest to it that he could think of was about six months ago when Percy start yowling outside Lynda and John's bedroom window during the middle of the night. Funny thing though was that he only yowled and meowed outside their bedroom window on the one night. Any night previously or after that particular episode contained no outside window noises by Percy. John remembered that it occurred on a Sunday night. Mr and Mrs Fizzle had just hosted a couple of guests for a quiet dinner and some drinks. It was getting late, close to midnight, when they saw the last of the guests off. Mr and Mrs Fizzle's bedroom at their old house was not as big as the bedroom in their new house. It had just enough room for a queen sized double bed that had soft and comfortable blue sheets. There were only two pillows for Lynda and John, and the curtains, with its ugly yellow flower pattern, were starting to fade.

'That Steven sure likes to talk.' Grumbled Lynda as she started getting ready for bed.

'Yeah.' Agreed John as he hopped into bed and turned on both bedside lamps. 'He kept going on and on about his new job. I got so bored with him.'

'I could see that. I like Renee though. She seems lovely.'

'I never got a chance to really talk to her, but I do feel sorry for her having to listen to Steven drone on and on all the time.'

'He's not that bad is he?' Asked Lynda turning out the main bedroom light.

'Not that bad? Steven and Renee were here for about six hours and I am pretty sure he spent like five hours talking about his work.'

'Really?' Asked Lynda as she hopped into bed next to John 'I never noticed that.'

‘Oh well he mostly just seemed to be talking to me I think. He talked a hell of a lot about his new work. He talked about his job, where his job is, what is job entails, his boss, his co-workers, how he got the job, how he found out about the job, the job interview, how he gets along with his boss, how he gets along with his co-workers, his first day on the job, what the place where he works at looks like, and even the colour of his pens that are on his desk. I’m telling you if it wasn’t getting late he would probably have talked about his work for days.’

‘Damn that does sound exhausting. I liked talking to Renee though. She was very nice I thought.’

‘She is the school teacher isn’t she?’ Asked John.

‘Yes. She teaches grade 4 Primary school. Been doing it for about ten years or so I think.’

‘That sounds awesome. Damn I wish I had talked more to her but Steven kept droning on and on about his job.’

‘Why didn’t you tell him to stop?’

‘I did, but I don’t think he listened.’

‘Oh. Where’s Percy?’

‘I don’t know. Don’t you usually look after him?’

‘Yes I do, but I just thought that you might have seen him outside or something like that.’

‘I only went outside to put out the garbage. I saw some frogs hopping along outside, and a few cars drive past, but I don’t remember seeing Percy. In fact I don’t remember seeing any cat at all.’

‘Oh ok.’ Said Lynda yawning ‘I’m sure he’ll be ok.’

So John and Lynda started to go to sleep. John began to close his eyes but a million thoughts about the events of the night combined with wondering where the cat was meant that there was no way of falling asleep. Lynda, unlike John, went off to sleep straight away. Her thoughts clear and her soul happy as she dreamt of cloudy hats and happy cats.

John however kept tossing and turning over and over again trying to get to sleep. John knew that he just had to be patient and wait for sleep to come but he wanted to go to sleep now. But he was very impatient and wanted to go to sleep now. Finally, after about twenty minutes of tossing and turning he felt ready to go to sleep. Soon he was going to join Lynda in the land of slumber.

‘Yooooowwwwwwwl.’ Came a strange noise.

John opened his eyes. What was that?

‘Yowwwwl.’ Came the noise again.

John sat up in bed. He worried that he might be hearing things, that it was just all in his head. But the yowls kept on coming.

‘Percy! He must be outside the window.’ John muttered to himself.

John looked over at Lynda who was fast asleep. He hesitated about waking her about the cat. He knew he probably should do it, but he thought that maybe he should try and sort out the issue himself and not wake her. By that time though he had fallen fast asleep and started to dream.

Unfortunately for John that was not the case though at the present time as the cylinder kept on noisily clanking and cluttering along. So he decided just to sit up and wait until they arrived to wherever they were going.

Lynda, who was in the cage next to John, sobbed silently to herself. She felt so horrible about this. That because of her impulsive behaviour she, along with John, had been taken away by these two policebots and bundled into this kind of cylinder where they would be taken to be jailed. She wondered where Moose was, if she had gotten caught as well as Lynda and john. Moose had broken the law too by leaving the line, although she hadn't actually gone on the staircase like Lynda and John had. Lynda hadn't heard Moose in any of the other cages, in fact Lynda had the feeling that it was only her, john, and the two policebots in this strange cylinder. She started to wonder where they would be taken. Would they have a chance to go through a court of law? For a trial? Or would they just be taken into a jail and just chained up like Moose? Moose had never told them if she had a trial or not. Maybe she felt that she needed to tell them? Whatever the case, they were going somewhere now, somewhere where they could be locked up for many years, and they had to figure out a way to try and get out. Lynda knew that she probably would not survive jail, and she thought that John would have not have done well at jail either. The noise of the cylinder rumbled around her as Lynda tried to think of a way to escape.

'Maybe if I try to test out the cages, then…' Lynda muttered to herself.

She knew that it was no use. The cages would have been bolted tight, and even if they had managed to escape from the cages the policebots would have killed them on sight. So all Lynda could do was just sit there and wait until they arrived to their destination. It was too noisy for her to go to sleep, even though she very much had wanted to. She had been up for what had seemed like ages. Time didn't seem to be that important here. Lynda had not seen any clock at all during the time here. No clocks of any kind. She wondered how they managed to do stuff like go to meetings if they didn't have any way to tell the time. Lynda felt lost without being able to tell the time, without any clocks to check. Lynda remembered back a few weeks ago when she lost her phone. It was a Wednesday morning and Lynda had decided to go to the local shopping centre to do a bit of shopping a bit later. John was busy at home working on his umbrellas, trying to fix them for yet another convention he had planned to go to. Lynda was going to shop for some cat food for Percy as well as some other stuff.

'Do you want anything?' Lynda asked as she walked out the door.

'No. I'm good.' replied John.

So Lynda hopped in her car and drove down to the local shopping centre. It wasn't a big place. Just enough for a couple of grocery stores along with other specialty stores that sold stuff like clothing or food. The carpark there was always full, so Lynda was a bit worried that she would not get a park, but she managed to find one between a station wagon and a plain white van. She then went into the shopping centre and went into one of the grocery stores. Lynda liked to shop here because it was close to where she and John lived. Plus they usually had a great range of products that were affordable. So Lynda went up and down the shopping aisle carefully picking out any items she needed to get. She got some cleaning products, sausages for the dinner that night, and the cat food for Percy. It was at the cat food section of the store that Lynda decided to check her pockets for her phone. She wanted to see what the time was, and she was also planning to ring her mother to organise a lunch date with her. But when she checked her pockets her phone was not there. She checked again and again but her phone was not there.

‘Dammnit.’ Lynda muttered to herself.

She then decided to retrace her steps in the grocery store to see if she dropped her phone anywhere. She went back to the meat section, the fruit and vegetable section, and she went back to the frozen section of the supermarket. But she could not see her phone anywhere. Lynda thought about asking to see the store manager to see if anyone had dropped off her phone when she heard a familiar voice behind her.

‘Lynda!’ Shouted John carrying her phone.

‘My phone! But where did you get it?’ Asked Lynda as she greeted John warmly.

‘It was left on the kitchen table.’ Replied John.

‘So why didn’t you just leave it there?’

‘I was going to but then I found out that I needed some umbrella stuff from here so I thought why not kill two birds with one stone and get the umbrella stuff while also giving you your phone?’

‘Well thank you very much for that.’

So Lynda put her phone back in her pocket and she and John continued on shopping. Looking back on that day, Lynda thought as she tried to keep her eyes open, there did seem to be a creeping panic in her when she went that however long it was she was without her phone. It wasn’t because she was afraid that someone had stolen her phone, nor was it because she had any kind of texting addiction. She just felt lost for those few brief moments when she did not know what time it was.

The cylinder kept on keeping on. It seemed to be taking forever. It swerved right, and it swerved left. It went up, and it went down. It even went, or so Lynda thought, upside down for a second or two because she went off the floor for a second. Finally, after what seemed like ages the cage doors opened and in walked the two policebots.

‘You will both come with us now. Failure to comply will result in your death.’ Said policebot number one.

Lynda and John were grabbed out of their respective cages and dragged out of the cylinder. There they saw that they were in some kind of underground tunnel. A long stretch of dark grey bricked tunnel that seemed to go for miles. They were on a plain white platform facing a green door with a blue handle. There seemed to be no sign on the door.

‘Where are we?’ Asked John.

‘Silence! You will be put in this room until further notice. Do not attempt to leave this room under any circumstance or you will die.’ Said policebot number two.

Policebot number two then opened the door where Lynda and John were greeted by a small and cramped room that was only enough for about two people. There was a double bed in one corner and a toilet and a basin the other corner. The floor looked very dusty and dirty. Without warning Mr and Mrs Fizzle were bundled into the room. The door locked behind them.

‘What are we going to do?’ Asked John

‘I guess we will just have to wait.’ Replied Lynda as she sat down on the bed.

‘I’m so tired.’

‘Me too.’

‘What the hell is going to happen to us?’

‘I don’t know. Look I’m tired. Can’t we discuss this after I have been to sleep?’

‘Yeah, ok. You’re right. Hope they don’t take too long.’ Said John as he lay down next to Lynda.

Soon both Mr and Mrs Fizzle were off to sleep dreaming about green waterfalls, a moose who liked to read, and silver gardens. While this was not unusual for Lynda to fall asleep straight away it was for John. However this had been such a long day for both John and Lynda that he feel asleep as soon his head hit the hard and lumpy pillow. There was no tossing or turning for John, no staying awake for what seemed like hours trying to go to sleep but being unable to. He would usually have had a million thoughts running through his head at this moment. But now his mind was clear and his body tired. It had been a long and tiring day for both himself and Lynda. Not only were they in this strange city with its weird rules, they were stuck here and were about to be jailed for years chained up against a wall. But at this moment John didn’t care about that because he was dreaming, he was dreaming about being in umbrella land. A place where millions upon millions of umbrellas all lived in this peaceful place. Little umbrella children going to school and learning about the weather, families of umbrellas all going out to have picnics on the grassy hill, and groups of umbrellas all playing umbrella tennis which was just like tennis except umbrellas were playing it. John dreamt that he was visiting umbrella land to fix some umbrellas who had been damaged by a recent umbrella parade. However when he got there he did not have his umbrella fixing equipment with him so he could not fix any umbrellas. Feeling sad he then had to leave umbrella land. Then for the rest of the dream he ended up running up these endless flight of brick stairs while trying to avoid moose. It was a most strange dream, and a very vivid one too.

John opened his eyes. He saw Lynda drinking out of a tall yellow glass the sludge that everyone in this city seemed to consume. Next to her was another tall yellow glass.

‘Come on and have your breakfast.’ Said Lynda as she finished off the last of her sludge.

‘How was it?’ Cautiously asked John as he got out of bed.

‘Awful. But it is something. We need to eat otherwise we won’t have any energy to escape.’

‘Escape? Do you really think that we can escape here? We will get shot the minute we even try to think of escaping.’

‘I am just trying to be positive.’

John walked over and started to drink his sludge. The sludge was a dull grey. It tasted like old boots and broccoli. He had never eaten or drank anything as disgusting as what he was drinking at that moment. John felt like throwing up. It seemed inhumane that anyone should have to drink this he thought as he continued to drink it. Mr Fizzle wanted to stop drinking it but he was also hungry so he continued to gulp it down. The lumpy sludge slowly making its way down his throat.

‘Damn. You were right. This is awful.’ Said John trying not to throw up.

‘Better than starving to death I suppose.’ Shrugged Lynda.

‘Yeah, true.’

The blue door suddenly opened and in walked the two policebots that had taken John and Lynda to this room.

‘You will come with us. Failure to do so will result in your death.’ Said policebot number one.

John and Lynda, not even trying to put up a fight this time, were dragged silently away back into the grey cylinder. They were then tossed into their respective cages and then the cylinder started to noisily move along again. Lynda rested her head and wondered how they would get out of this mess. She thought about her old life back on earth. About her trips to the library, about playing with Percy the cat, and about her job as a free-lance editor that she had been doing for years. She loved editing books, trying to fix up mistakes and errors that writers may have made. It made her feel good to try and edit manuscripts and drafts.

There was a loud explosion, then some gunfire. John and Lynda tried to make themselves as small as possible. John wondered if it was some kind of ambush, while Lynda tried not to make any noise at all. She covered her ears and her mouth. Her hands were shaking and her lips were trembling. She did not want to die, not at this moment, not at this point in time. She had other stuff she wanted to do, she just didn’t want to be shot and then forgotten about. Lynda wanted to see more of her own earth, she wanted to travel to Europe. Lynda had never been overseas and had always wanted to go. In fact she was planning to bring it up with John in the next couple of days. But that had all changed. Now she wasn’t worried about travel plans or settling into the new house, she was just worried about staying alive.

‘Excuse me,’ said a familiar voice ‘can you please get up?’

Lynda looked up and saw Moose standing with a gun and a smile. She had changed her clothes from previously and was now wearing what looked to be like army style clothing that was yellow instead of khaki. Her hair was in a bun and she kept looking around her nervously.

‘Lynda, we have to go now.’ Urged Moose.

‘What about John?’ Asked Lynda.

‘He has made his escape. Lynda, there is a bomb on this cylinder that is going to explode any minute now so would you please hurry.’

Lynda quickly got out of the cage and ran with Moose to outside the cylinder and with John and about two other people. She thought they looked like a man and a woman but she wasn’t sure. They ran for what seemed like ages underneath the tunnel until they heard a big bang. The cylinder exploded into a million little pieces. Lynda and John, along with their rescuers took to the ground as debris flew past them. They waited until the smoke cleared and then began on moving again. They had only gone a few hundred metres when Moose stopped them.

‘Ok. Let’s rest over here.’ Said Moose gesturing to a small platform next to a ladder. ‘John, Lynda, this is Harry and Emma. Harry and Emma this is John and Lynda.’

All four people exchanged pleasantries. Harry was a balding man who looked to be in his early 30’s. He smiled warmly as he greeted Mr and Mrs Fizzle but his eyes betrayed a certain coldness. Harry, like Moose, was wearing yellow. Emma was tall and had short red hair with a freckled face. She looked pissed off about something. She too was wearing yellow.

‘Come on Moose, why the hell do we have to take these two losers?’ She asked pointing over at Mr and Mrs Fizzle.

‘No, Emma, please don’t bring this up again. I told you why I needed these two.’

‘Yes but…’

‘Excuse me.’ Interrupted Lynda ‘But why do you need us? I can’t think how we would be able to help you guys?’

‘Yeah, all we want to do is go home.’ Said a weary John.

‘Oh, and you think we don’t want to?’ Asked a sneering Emma ‘Do you know how much I want to go home? Do you know how much I want to see my kids again? You have no idea what I have been through you stupid jerk. So just sit down and shut up before I shoot you in the head.’

‘Emma…’ Muttered Harry.

‘Look, I’m sorry about that.’

‘You’re not sorry. You’re like the rest of them. All talk but no action. I used to be like you, all selfish and arrogant. But that was before I went to jail.’

‘Now I suppose you’re a reformed person.’ Sarcastically replied John.

Emma without any warning then grabbed John by the neck and pinned him against the wall. John struggled to breathe as Emma started at him. She then put her gun to the side of his head.

‘Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t just put a bullet in your head right now you piece of shit?’

‘No don’t!’ Shouted Lynda racing over to John and Emma.

Harry held Lynda back as Emma continued to push her gun against John’s face.

‘Let me go.’ Protested Lynda struggling against Harry.

‘I’m sorry Lynda.’

‘Emma sit down and stop acting like an idiot. We have work to do.’ Ordered Moose as she got out a map from her pocket.

‘He was baiting me Moose!’ Shouted Emma. ‘I should shoot him right now.’

‘If you do then you will be no better than the policebots.’ Argued Moose.

John continued to be held up against the tunnel wall by Emma and her gun. He felt for sure that he was going to die. He wanted to cry out, to say sorry to Emma and try to reason with her but he knew that it was too late for any of that. Any minute he was going to die, he was going to be shot in the head by this Emma person. John had read that when people are about to die their life flashes before their eyes, but that did not happen for John. His thoughts were too scared and muddled to think of anything else but the fact that he had a gun pointed at his face. He wondered how Lynda would get on without him, whether she would go with this group or just continue on her own. He hoped that she would somehow find her way out of this awful place. That she would be able to get back to earth and live the rest of her life happily and in peace without all this trouble, without all this pain. He silently cursed the house, though more specifically the chimney and fireplace that had brought both himself and Lynda to this strange place. This strange and awful place with their strange rules and their weird sludge drinks that sometimes tested great and sometimes tasted awful.

‘Please let him go!’ Begged Lynda.

Emma looked over at Lynda, then she looked over at Moose, finally she looked at John. Everyone else dared not move, they all thought like John that she was going to do it, that she was going to put a bullet in his head. Seconds passed, though it seemed like hours to them all, and the only sound was heavy breathing. Finally Emma lowered her gun away from John's face.

'Next time I won't hesitate. You got that?' Threatened Emma as she released John.

John nodded, coughing and spluttering. He sat down trying to regain his composure. Lynda sat next to him and comforted him. Moose walked over to the two of them.

'Look I'm sorry about that. She has had a tough time of it recently. She watched her friend get shot by a couple of policebots a few days ago. She

'Moose?' Asked Lynda.

'Yes?'

'You seem a bit different to the last time we met. You were more timid.'

'Have to keep up appearances.' Replied Moose. 'But that's all changed now. The policebots know that I am a rebel.'

'A rebel?'

'Yes. Sorry I forgot to tell you my full story. You see when I was in jail I managed to meet up with some other visitors who were also angry at the way they had been treated. So we decided to form a group to try and topple this regime. We have only been going for a few years, but we have had some victories. They do make the failures worth it.'

'What are you doing now?' Asked Lynda curiously. This all felt so strange to her. Here she was, just a simple person from the Gold Coast back on earth, talking to what she had thought was a nice lady librarian. Now, as she watched Moose do a few quick calculations, everything seemed so different.

'Wasting our time rescuing you poor suckers.' Yelled out Emma.

'Shut up, Emma.' Replied Moose. 'Look I'm sorry about her but she has had a tough time of it lately. She means well though.'

'Means well? She just tried to shoot John.'

'Well look on the positive side. She didn't! Now come on Lynda I need to have a chat with you.'

'No. I think I would rather stay here with John. I'm not sure I fully trust you.'

'I just need to talk to you about your living arrangements that you will need staying at our headquarters. That's all.'

'Fine. But why do you keep saying that we are important? John and I are not that important. We just want to go home.'

'Everyone is important. That's what I meant. I don't want to view anyone as unimportant otherwise I'm like those policebots who don't care about thoughts or feelings, who are more concerned with trying to enforce these draconian and unfair laws unto this city. I remember before I was sucked into this place, back when I was still living on earth. I was in High School, about the eighth grade I think, and there was this kind of awkward kid in my class. Everyone seemed to dislike her, I honestly didn't think much of her because I had my own stuff to deal with at that time. But she was bullied

horrendously by my peers. She was bullied so harshly that she eventually she had to drop out of school. I don't know what happened to her, but I always felt guilty for not sticking up for her, for just ignoring her because I thought that she was unimportant to me. From that time forward I resolved never to make anyone ever feel unimportant.'

'I just miss our home so much. I don't want to fight this silly war. I just want to go and sit in my nice comfortable bed and play with my cat. I just want to go home!'

'I do too.' Acknowledged Moose. 'We all want to go home. But you see we can't. We can't go home. Yes I know they say there is an exit right in the red section. But that doesn't exist. Believe me I have been to the red section and there is no exit anywhere.'

'But didn't you say there was?' Asked a weary John.

'I didn't know if I could fully trust you two, so I had to keep some secrets to myself. I mean I had only just met you guys and I didn't know if you were spies.'

'Spies?'

'Yes we sometimes get spies in this city who try to infiltrate our group. These are visitors who get sent to jail and then they get offered to spy on their fellow visitors. Most of them accept because they know if they refuse they will be killed.'

'That sounds so awful.' Cried Lynda 'Ok. I'll come over with you then. You coming too John?'

So John, Lynda, and Moose walked over to where Moose had put out the big map that showcased the underground tunnels. Then Moose explained to John and Lynda what would happen next.

'We have about 5km of tunnel before we reach our headquarters. We have to be careful of policedog patrols. They often go around these tunnels and look for anyone that is down here. You see visitors are not allowed in the tunnels except to be transported by the policebots.'

'Damn policedogs.' Muttered Lynda.

'Ok. Let's move on.' Ordered Moose.

Moose, Emma, Harry, Lynda, and John packed up and kept on moving down the tunnel. The lights flickered up above them as they slowly trudged along. John, who was walking next to Harry, noticed that he had a scar on his left side of his neck. It was small, but noticeable enough for John to see it.

'Where did you get that?' Asked John pointing to the scar on Harry's neck.

'Oh this scar? Got it a couple of years ago. You see while I was in jail they put this tracking chip on me that also made me really angry. I used to just rip up tables and try to fight people. Everyone thought that I had gone crazy. It wasn't until I was in the headquarters that Moose noticed a tiny red light flashing in my neck. So she got our doctor to help remove it.'

'You have a doctor here? How big is your headquarters?'

'Pretty big. Almost like a small little community. We have plenty of food and water along with heaps of other supplies. Though I must confess it is starting to get a bit cramped.'

'Cool. Lucky those policebots or policedogs haven't caught you yet.'

'Well it has been close a couple of times. We have had to move around a lot in these tunnels. Just a couple of weeks ago there was some increased policedog activity around in our previous

headquarters so we had to find another place. Unfortunately when we moved some visitors got left behind. We don't know what happened to them.'

'Damn. Hey, does Emma have that chip too?'

'Emma? No, she just has some anger issues I think. This is the first time that I have been out with her outside of the headquarters. We usually go out in different groups you see but this time Moose wanted to change it up a bit. '

'You ever go out in these groups much?' Enquired John.

'I usually go about three times a week I think. We usually have enough people volunteering to do this so fortunately, or unfortunately if you feel that way, I don't have to encounter those policebots or policedogs all that often.'

Up ahead, only a few metres or so, Lynda and Moose were having their own discussion.

'No, Lynda. I don't like to kill. But sometimes you have to do things you don't like.' Argued Moose.

'I agree with that.' Replied Lynda 'I just thought that using guns wouldn't be the best way to try and win hearts and minds.'

'What the hell are you talking about? We don't want to win hearts and minds. Why on earth would we want to do that? All we want to do is try and get rid of this tyrannical government.'

Lynda, whose feet were starting to hurt again, decided to keep her mouth shut. Not because she agreed or disagreed with what Moose was saying, but because she did not have a great interest in what she had to say. Lynda did find politics interesting. Her love of Richard Nixon material proved that. However this was a battle that Lynda had no interest in. She did not want to go and fight for Moose and get herself killed. She did not want to see John die, and she did not want to die herself. Lynda appreciated the fact that Moose and her rebel group had been forced through these laws to take such desperate measures. But she was not sure if they would work. She also felt confused about what their exact aims were. Was it to overturn the laws, or was it to overturn the government? Or maybe they wanted both? Lynda did not know, and she did not care. All she wanted to do was to go home.

Moose, Emma, Harry, Lynda, and John kept on walking in the tunnel when Moose put up her hand. There was a strange beeping noise up ahead. John could see the outlines of what looked to be a policebot.

'Shhhh. Come on let's hide.' Whispered Moose.

But it was too late. There was a flash and a bang. Shots rang out into the musty tunnel air. John and Lynda hid at the side of one of the nearby platforms as the fighting continued on. They both covered their ears and tried to make themselves as small as possible. The gunfire lasted for a few seconds, maybe even longer than that. It seemed to be going on forever. Finally there was silence. John and Lynda slowly got up and saw a most horrific sight. Everyone was dead. The two policebots were lying next to each other with their metal bodies full of bullet holes, Harry was lying next to them bleeding with dead eyes, Emma was slumped on the ground, and Moose was slumped against the other side of the tunnel wall.

'Dead, they're all dead.' Muttered John as he walked among the dead.

'John, quick let's get back! I hear someone coming.' Urged Lynda.

There were more policebots coming. Lynda could hear them coming through the tunnel. They seemed to be coming from both sides. She quickly dragged John away from all the bodies, away from all the pointless bloodshed. She would grieve for them later, but now was the time to try and escape, to try and get out of the tunnel. But she could see no escape. The policebots came ever closer.

‘Find the escaped prisoners and kill them.’ Said a policebot.

Lynda continued to look around for an escape. The sounds of metal footsteps came ever closer. They were closing in on them. They were both going to be killed right here in this tunnel.

‘Lynda! Look at this.’ John pointed out.

Lynda looked and saw a manhole cover about twenty metres away from them. She looked at the shadows of the policebots as they moved ever closer. Their creepy metallic sounds filling the stale tunnel air.

‘We have to go now, John.’

‘We’ll never make it. We are going to die. I know it Lynda.’

‘No we are not. Come on.’

With that Lynda then raced to the manhole cover and opened it up. John followed quickly behind her. The sound of bullets and lasers filled the air as Mr and Mrs Fizzle went into the hole. They both expected to at least land on some ground, but instead they found themselves falling through clouds, and not just normal white or grey clouds but blue clouds in a white sky. They fell for what seemed like eternity, just falling through these blue clouds. They fell until they landed into an ocean. A big vast ocean that seemed to be endless. John and Lynda tried to stay afloat, but they had not much experience swimming. They had had a few lessons before, but not enough to know how to stay alive in the sea. All they could both do was to just try to keep their heads above the water.

‘We need to hang on.’ Gasped John.

‘I’m trying.’ Said Lynda.

Suddenly a small row boat came into view. It was wooden and had enough room for about three people. A spoon was rowing the boat. A big silver spoon that looked like the one that John had seen yesterday in the city. It then stopped the boat and helped John and Lynda to get in. Their clothes, which had been soaking wet from being in the ocean only moments before, suddenly became completely warm.

‘What happened to our clothes?’ Asked Lynda.

‘I don’t know.’ Replied John. ‘It’s very strange.’

‘Nobody really knows!’ Said a jolly voice behind them. ‘Our scientists have been trying to work out why this has been the case for ages.’

‘Thank you so much for rescuing us!’ Said John to the Spoon. ‘I’m John.’

‘And I’m Lynda.’ Said Lynda.

‘Pleased to meet both of you. My name is Wally. So what are you two doing out here?’

‘Do you mind if you just give us a few minutes?’ Asked John We’ll tell you all about it a bit later.’

‘Sure. That’s fine.’ Reassured Wally.

Lynda sat down and started to cry. She cried not only for the bloodshed she had seen before, but also for the terrible time she had been having recently. Being stuck in this strange place without any chance of ever returning to earth. And now she was stuck in the middle of all this water on a boat with this strange spoon. Lynda thought about, as she continued to cry, what a strange place this was and how it wasn’t really the good kind of strange. It was not the kind of strange you could have laugh at or view as fun. No, this was a kind of strange that made you feel terrified and worried about what would happen next. Lynda felt relieved that she had been rescued, but she also felt wary of the spoon. She did not know who she could trust at all. The only person she felt she could trust right now was John. Anyone else was probably not worth it or had a different agenda. As she wiped her face with her hands, she thought of Moose and her group of rebels. Whilst she was grateful for Moose, Harry, and Emma for rescuing both herself and John, she was unsure of the violent methods they used. All she had wanted to do was to just go home, and maybe she did kind of feel at that time that going with Moose and her rebel group would have been the best option for them. But now she wondered if that would have worked out. Would Moose have helped them to find their way home, or would she have just dragged them into their pointless conflict?

Lynda continued to cry, and John, who had sat down next to Lynda, cried too. John cried because like Lynda he hated to see all this killing, all the blood being spilt. All he had wanted to do was to just go home and go back to his umbrella room. Just go back to his umbrella room and play or fix all his umbrellas. John hadn’t felt comfortable with going with Moose and her group of small rebels and he suspected that Lynda didn’t like them much either. John was not a man who liked violence no matter how justified people might think it was in certain situations. Yes, he did realise that the laws in that city were fairly draconian and they probably needed to relax a few of them, but trying to blow up policebots or doing any other dangerous or illegal activity that they thought might help their cause. John did not think they were the right people to make a change anyway. Emma to him seemed most unstable. He was still shaking, even in the boat, of the recent memory of getting a gun shoved in his face by her. John was sure that he would never forget that for as long as he lived. Even if he did manage to escape this place along with Lynda he was never going to forget those brief moments when he was certain that that he was going to die.

‘Excuse me.’ Said Wally ‘But we will have to go shortly. It is going to get dark very soon.’

Lynda and John both stopped crying and looked across at Wally. They both felt a bit guilty for crying.

‘Sorry about that.’ Said Lynda ‘It’s just that we have had a bit of a tough time of it recently.’

‘Oh? What happened?’

‘Well it’s kind of a long story.’ Replied John.

‘I don’t mind.’ Said Wally as he started to row the boat. ‘We have some time before we actually reach the island.’

‘An island?’ Asked Lynda

‘Yes. An island. Don’t worry I’ll tell you about it later.’

‘I don’t know if we should trust you though.’ Said Lynda cautiously.

‘I just wanted to have a bit of a conversation with you guys.’ Said Wally. ‘I have been out here for hours and it can get very lonely.’

‘Why shouldn’t we trust him?’ Argued John. ‘Besides, he seems harmless enough.’

‘Oh, I’m not sure.’ Said Lynda.

‘Oh never mind.’ Snapped John. ‘I’ll tell you what happened to us, Wally.’

So that is what John did. Over the course of the boat journey John told Wally all about their adventures. He told him about how the house that they had purchased on Earth had a chimney that took them to this strange place. He told him how they both walked until they came across the big grey building. He told them about candy canes that looked like humans, about strange sludge’s that sometimes tasted excellent and sometimes tasted awful, about the strange new rules in the city, about how there was a city inside of the building, about the library and how you couldn’t go to certain places there, about the policebots and getting arrested, about getting rescued by this rebel group, and about seeing this rebel group all get killed and having to escape through a manhole.

‘And then we found ourselves trying to stop ourselves from drowning. I thought we were going to die until you came along. So thanks for that.’ Finished John.

Wally looked at both John and Lynda. He looked at them for a few seconds with his grey eyes. Lynda thought that he was going to throw them off the boat. That he was just going to chuck them back into the sea. Suddenly Wally started to laugh. A big deep laugh. He laughed so much that John thought he was about to fall out of the boat.

‘Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. That is the funniest story I have ever heard.’ Laughed Wally. ‘It really is. You are a great story teller, John.’

‘But that’s all true.’ Protested John. ‘I tell you that it is all true!’

‘Oh really. You expect me to believe that you went through all that?’

‘I’m telling you we really…’

‘John, it doesn’t matter.’ Interrupted Lynda ‘It doesn’t matter what he thinks. The point is he rescued us. Do you really want us to get thrown back in the water?’

‘No, I guess not.’ Answered John.

‘Throw you in the water?’ Asked Wally ‘Why on earth would I want to do that?’

‘Sorry.’ Said Lynda. ‘I just feel a little nervous.’

‘Oh, that’s understandable being in this sea.’

Soon silence fell as Wally continued to row the boat. The only sound being the crashing of the waves, and the birds from up in the white sky.

‘Wally?’ Lynda asked. ‘Where are you taking us?’

‘Spoon Island.’ Replied Wally.

‘Spoon Island? Is that an Island made of spoons or an Island where spoons lived?’ Enquired John.

‘Why it’s an island where spoons live on of course. An island made of spoons? What a delightfully odd concept.’ Wally chuckled as he continued to row towards the island.

‘Is there any way we can get back to earth?’ Wondered Lynda out loud to herself.

‘Back to earth? I don’t even know where that is? Besides you have no need to go back to this earth place. Spoon Island is a great place to live. You will learn to love it I’m sure. We get many humans through here. You can stay over at my house for a bit.’

‘Oh that’s very kind of you, Wally.’ Smiled John. ‘Isn’t that good of him, Lynda?’

‘No, that is not good, John. I don’t want to be stuck on an island for the rest of my life. I want to go home. Our home, John.’

‘Well it wouldn’t hurt just to stay here for at least a few days. Get rested, enjoy some of the sights of…what exactly is there to do on Spoon Island, Wally?’

‘Oh there are many things to do on Spoon Island! You can go to our local spoon museum where you can see the history of Spoon Island as well as some information about famous people who have lived or are living on the island. There is also a theme park, shopping centre, a couple of hotels, a park, and heaps of other stuff.’

‘Must be a pretty big island.’

‘Big enough. Takes about two hours or so to do a circuit of the island.’

‘Wait. You have cars here?’

‘Yeah, we have cars here. Not that many though. I haven’t got a car. I just usually catch one of the two buses that are on the island. They are very run down and keep having to get fixed up all the time.’

‘Anything else we should watch out for?’ Asked Lynda thinking of the Yatwas that Ont had told them about.

‘Well not really. Nothing I can think of at this moment. There have been these rumours of these Spoon Scientists kidnapping humans and experimenting on them. Although I personally think that’s just a very silly rumour.’

‘I’m not being part of any experiments.’ Protested Lynda who was in half a mind to jump out and take her chances with the sea.

‘Look Lynda he said it was just a silly rumour.’ Reassured John ‘Besides it’s not like we have anywhere we can go.’

‘Yeah, you’ll be alright.’ Agreed Wally as he continued to row the boat.

‘Ok. I’ll go on the Island.’

Spoon Island soon came into sight. John and Lynda looked at the faint outline of what looked to be tall purple buildings and yellow trees. A small jetty was just ahead of them. Wally rowed the boat onto the jetty and tied it up. He then helped both Lynda and John to get out of the boat.

‘Welcome to Spoon Island!’ Beamed Wally.

‘Thank you for taking us here.’ Said John happily. Although he wanted to go home like Lynda he thought that the idea of an island where spoons and humans lived together sounded quite interesting. John was looking forward to exploring the island, if only for at least a few hours or so.

Lynda however was not so happy. She did not want to be stuck on this Spoon Island. She wanted to try and find a way back to earth. Sure, the island did look kind of nice, and it would be fun to explore

it with John. But she knew that more hours wasted looking at an island when they could be looking at ways of trying to get back to earth was not a good thing. She could not stay on this island anymore then she could have stayed on that city that they had just escaped from. Her home, the home of her and John, was back on earth. Back on the Gold Coast with their cat Percy.

Wally, Lynda, and John continued to walk across the jetty. It was starting to get darker. But there was still enough light that John could see some trees that seemed to be shaped like diamonds up ahead, some lush indigo grass, and what looked to be a road. Except it was not a normal earth road, this road, from what John could see as they walked closer to it, was made of metal.

'A metal road?' Asked John. 'Doesn't that get hot?'

'Hot? No, it's actually quite cool. It isn't hot at all.' Reassured Wally.

'Ok.'

'Good. Now my house is about a couple of kilometres up that way.' Said Wally pointing to his left.

So Lynda, Wally, and John hopped onto the metal road and started the journey to Wally's house. The sun was beginning to set for the night, and the birds from up above were going back to their nests. Lynda trudged along behind John and Wally. Her feet were beginning to get tired again, and she had started to feel a bit hungry. She didn't mind walking at night, but she would have preferred doing it back on earth. Lynda would often go for an evening stroll around the block a couple of times or more. The circuit was about two km's and it gave her a good work out as well as helping with her fitness. Though, she thought as she continued walking, after the last couple of days her fitness left a lot to be desired. John didn't join her as he liked to sit at home and read a book. As Lynda continued to walk on the metal road she was reminded of a couple of months ago, back when she was on earth, that she saw the strangest thing. It was a Friday night, and John and Lynda had just finished their tea and washed up.

'I might go for my walk now.' Said Lynda as she put away the last of the dishes. 'Are you sure you don't want to come, John?'

'No I'm fine.' Replied John. 'I have this really great action book that I want to finish.'

'Well ok. Have fun.'

'You too.'

So Lynda walked out into the cold night air. The streets were quiet save for the odd car passing through. She walked under the bright streetlights. Last night she had only walked around the block once, so tonight she thought that she would go around the circuit at least three times if not more. She checked her mobile phone and saw that it was only about seven-thirty at night. Lynda estimated, as she continued to walk quickly, that it would take her about an hour, maybe less, to do walk around the block about three times.

She was just coming around back past her house for the first completion of the circuit when she spotted a pale figure up ahead. Lynda tried to ignore it, thinking it was just another person up ahead. But as she got closer she saw that the pale figure was not only floating, but that it was not shaped like a human at all. It was shaped like a pair of squiggles and dots all mixed together. Lynda moved ever closer to it, just to get a glimpse of what it actually was. She crept ever more closely, her breathing was shallow and her mind was racing. What is this thing? How long has it been since that strange creature has been there?

Suddenly the pale figure disappeared. It was gone. Out into the night sky. Lynda looked around to see if it had gone somewhere else. But she couldn't see it again. She wondered if she had been imagining things. That maybe the pale figure was just part of her over-active imagination. Earlier today she had been editing a book about a ghost so she thought that maybe that was it. That she had gotten so involved in this ghost story that she was now seeing ghosts when she was out for her nightly walk.

A bit shaken Lynda decided to cut her walk short and go back to the house. When she came inside she saw John reading his action book.

'Hello. I'm back.' Announced Lynda as she walked through the door.

'Wow. You're back early.' Said a surprised John.

'Yeah I know.'

'What happened?'

'Oh, you'll think I'm crazy.'

'No I won't.'

'Ok.'

So Lynda proceeded to tell John the story of the strange ghost she thought she had seen while out for her evening walk.

'Yes, you are right.' Said John after Lynda had finished telling her story. 'That is crazy.'

'I know. But it really didn't feel crazy. It felt normal.'

'I'm pretty sure that it is not normal to see a ghost, Lynda.'

'Well if you were out there walking with me instead of sitting on your lazy behind I wouldn't have to try to convince you about what I actually saw.' Argued Lynda

John and Lynda continued to argue for a couple of minutes more before they got bored and John went back to reading his action book and Lynda decided to play with Percy for a bit.

Lynda, still walking on the metal road with John and Wally, wondered if that ghost she had seen a couple of months ago was real or if she had just been using her imagination. Though that did not really matter now. All that mattered was for them to find a way back home.

'Just up here.' Said Wally pointing to a house a few metres up the road. 'Ah damn! I forgot to turn on my outside lights.'

'That doesn't matter. It doesn't look that far is it?' Asked John.

'Oh no. It's only a couple of metres or so to the door.'

Being night time the house was hard to see. Wally, John, and Lynda were just getting off the well-lit road, and on to Wally's dark driveway when a van pulled up. John and Lynda turned around. A group of three spoons dressed in lab coats ran out and grabbed both of them. Wally, who was busy trying to get the door unlocked, was knocked out by a spoon from the van and left by the side of his door step.

John and Lynda were quickly bundled into the van. They had no time to protest or even speak before they were speedily driven away.

‘Where the hell are we?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Silence!’ Said Scientist Spoon number one. ‘You have been chosen to be experimented on! You should feel proud.’

‘Proud?’ Argued Lynda. ‘Proud? What in the hell?’

‘Shhh Lynda!’ Warned John.

‘Don’t shhh me John! I don’t want to be experimented on.’ Retorted Lynda.

‘If you don’t keep quiet I will kill your partner.’ Warned Scientist Spoon Number Two

‘Ok. Fine.’ Agreed Lynda. She wanted to say more, to rant and rave about this whole situation. But she knew it was pointless. These spoons obviously had a job to do and they were going to do it. She didn’t want to waste her energy. She knew it would be no use. She was tired of yelling all the time, at yelling at people who did not care to even listen to her. So all she could do was just sit back and be with John until they arrived at the destination.

‘You will sit down and be quiet or you will both be killed.’ Said Spoon Scientist Number Two.

‘No, we are not meant to kill them, we are meant to deliver them to Jack and then help him with the experiments.’ Said Spoon Scientist Number One.

‘But what happens if they try to escape?’

‘Well then you can hold them down. Don’t shoot them though. I forgot to pack my first aid kit.’

‘They do not need any care. Look at them. They look fine.’

‘Yeah well they do now but if you shoot one of them and they end up bleeding over my nice new van I won’t be very happy.’

‘Oh I can shoot without bleeding them.’

‘Ha, no you can’t.’ Mocked Scientist Spoon Number One.

‘Yes I can!’ Argued Scientist Spoon Number Two. ‘I did it the other day.’

‘Did what the other day?’ Asked Scientist Spoon Number One.

‘I shot a human and they didn’t bleed.’

‘Really? That seems strange.’

‘No I really did. It was a couple of weeks ago.’

‘Was that when you were out by yourself in this van?’

‘Yeah. I was driving along when I saw this human just lying there on the grass. It was on that hill. The Sap hill. So I pulled over the van to go and check on this human. It didn’t speak to me when I called it. So I shot it. I then drove off because the human looked dead. Was very pleased with myself I was.’

‘You idiot that was a mannequin on that hill. I threw it out of my van the day before.’

‘Are you sure?’ Asked Scientist Spoon Number Two.

‘Why of course I’m sure. I threw it out on Sap hill.’

‘Oh.’

‘Yeah, so don’t go shooting anyone in my van please.’

John tried to stay as quiet as possible during this exchange between the spoons. He felt really guilty for all this. For getting so caught up in Spoon Island that he had forgotten about home. He had forgotten about the new house back home, about his umbrella room, and most importantly of all he had forgotten about what Lynda wanted. John had selfishly only considered his own feelings. John had not really thought about what Lynda had wanted even though she had explained it to him over and over again. He looked across at Lynda who was looking out into nothing with a blank look on her face.

‘I’m sorry.’ John whispered to Lynda.

Lynda looked at him. She didn’t feel mad at John because there really was nothing to be mad about. They had no choice but to go to Spoon Island. Mr and Mrs Fizzle could not have survived in that water for much longer. She thought of Wally lying there beside his front door and wondered if he was dead. She had seen so much, far too much for her. Lynda like John did enjoy the odd adventure. But for here an adventure was a random drive somewhere or maybe a holiday interstate. It was not being chased by policebots or thrown into vans by a couple of Scientist Spoons who were going to take you to a strange place where they would experiment on you. She remembered the last holiday that she had planned to go to with John. It was around Christmas time. Lynda and John had decided to go to a nearby beach town. She couldn’t remember the name of it. But that wasn’t important because they never ended up going. What had happened was that the night before they were planning to go away Percy got a bit sick. He kept on throwing up over the carpet and he wouldn’t eat his dinner for that night. So Lynda had decided to take him to the vets in the morning.

‘But we have to leave by about eleven though.’ Argued John.

‘No we don’t. Besides a sick cat is more important than a silly holiday.’ Said Lynda.

‘Can’t you just take Percy to a vets now?’

‘There’s no vets open at this hour. Believe me I checked.’

‘Damn. That is unfortunate.’

‘Look, John. I know you were really looking forward to the holiday, but I think we might have to cancel it. Especially if there is something really wrong with Percy. I don’t want to go off and have a holiday and enjoy myself because I know I will feel guilty about what would happen to him.’

‘I’m sure the people at the cattery will gladly look after him.’

‘Yeah that’s true. But that wouldn’t stop me worrying about him and if he will be alright. That reminds me that I better cancel Percy’s cattery stay.’

‘But we have already booked the hotel. It was the only spot I could get at such short notice. If I cancel that then we won’t be able to go. Everywhere else is full up due to the Christmas Season. Plus we paid for that cattery thing.’

‘They’ll both refund it.’

‘No they won’t. I checked on the hotel website and they have a no refund policy.’

‘I didn’t know that. Did they say anything about refunds due to family emergencies?’

‘I don’t think Percy qualifies as family.’

‘Doesn’t qualify as family? What on earth are you talking about? Of course Percy would qualify as family. I mean I consider him family.’

‘Well I don’t. I think he is a nuisance. I do not like him at all. He’s always bringing those dead birds inside the house. Plus he scratches me every time I try to pat him.’

‘That’s because you pat him the wrong way.’

‘No I don’t.’

‘Yes you do! I have seen you when you pet Percy. You always do it so roughly.’

‘Sorry. I’ll try to be a bit gentler next time.’

‘Good. Look I’m sorry that we won’t be able to go. But maybe we can go some other time?’

In the end Lynda took Percy to the vets. Percy had to stay overnight and it cost a small fortune to fix him up but Lynda was prepared to pay that much money for him. John cancelled their holiday. He was right about there being no refund for the hotel, however they did get a refund for the cattery. Unfortunately though they didn’t get another chance of having another holiday. After Christmas and the New Year they decided to move house, and then all of this happened. Lynda thought about all of that. She hadn’t regretted taking Percy to the vet’s, but she had regretted not going on that holiday. It was just unfortunate timing that it happened.

Finally the van stopped.

‘Come on.’ Said Scientist Spoon Number One ‘Get out.’

Lynda and john were bundled out of the van. They were in what looked to be a sort of underground carpark. The whole area was grey and had white pillars throughout. From what John and Lynda could see there looked to be heaps of spaces for cars but no cars actually in the spaces. It was very quiet. Only John, Lynda, and the Spoon Scientists were actually in the carpark. There was a cart and train tracks by the side of the underground carpark. It was to the left of where they all were standing. The cart was purple and looked like it could fit two people on it. The tracks were leading to a dark tunnel.

‘Get in the cart.’ Said Scientist Spoon Number Two.

‘And if we refuse?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Well then we will shoot you.’

‘But your spoon friend told you not to shoot us.’

‘Hang on a minute. First things first. One I am not his friend. We just work together. And two the only reason I didn’t let him shoot you was because I was afraid he’d mess up my van.’ Corrected Scientist Spoon Number One.

‘So you are just going to shoot us like we’re nothing but a bunch of tin cans?’ Asked John

‘If we have to.’

‘Well I refuse to get into that stupid cart of yours.’

‘I do too.’ Agreed Lynda as she stood side by side with John.

‘Ok.’ Sighed Scientist Spoon Number One. ‘I guess we will have to do this the hard way.’

Scientist Spoon Number Two got out a gun from his back pocket. John and Lynda stared at it. It didn’t look exactly like a gun back on earth. For one thing it was completely clear, and the other thing was that it was shaped like a half circle. Lynda straightened her back and stared even harder at the two scientists. She looked at them with cold hard eyes. The sweat was coming off her face and her whole body was shaking but she knew that she just didn’t really care anymore. She wanted to die, she wanted all of this to end and for her to never have to go and try and escape from policebots or drink that disgusting sludge. Lynda was ready for it to all to end. She had kept hoping, somewhere in the back of her mind, that it was all some kind of crazy dream. That she would just wake up and be back in her nice new bed with Percy by her side and John snoring next to her. That she would be able to and walk on Earth and not have to worry about this stupid place anymore. About having to know where to go next, or trying to escape policebots, or having to wear visitor badges.

‘Lynda. Please.’ Urged John. ‘Let’s just go. I don’t want to die.’

John, like Lynda, was shaking and sweating too. However, unlike Lynda he didn’t also feel as brave as her. Having Scientist Spoon Number Two pointing a gun at both of them reminded John of Emma holding a gun up against her face. The thought of having to go all through that again didn’t sit well with John. He felt a bit stupid for being so stubborn with Lynda but that partly came up due to a sense of guilt for landing them both into all this. But he was not a hero, he was just

‘No, John. We have to do this.’

‘You might want to, but I don’t. I just had a gun shoved in my face not that long ago and I did not like it one bit. So please stop being so stubborn and get in the cart with me.’ Begged John.

Lynda looked back at John who was looking at her with pleading eyes. She was prepared to die, to get shot. However seeing John there looking so worried, scared, and upset she knew that maybe it would be better for her not to die. She could see how devastating it would be for John if she was killed by these Spoon Scientists. So she decided to stand down and get into that purple cart with John.

‘Ok. Fine.’ Said Lynda reluctantly.

So John and Lynda got into the purple cart and sat down. There were four cushioned seats, all coloured a light blue. Each seat had a seatbelt that fitted across the stomach and waist but not around the shoulders.

‘Put on the seatbelts. It will be a very bumpy ride. A lot of twists and dips in this place.’ Warned Scientist Spoon Number One.

‘Well thank you for your concern.’ Replied Lynda sarcastically as she put on her seatbelt.

‘Excuse me.’ Asked John as he too also put on his seatbelt. ‘But why are you so concerned about us wearing seatbelts? I mean only a couple of minutes ago you were ready to shoot myself and Lynda?’

‘Oh that?’ Laughed Scientist Spoon Number One as he walked over to a sort of control panel. ‘Of course we weren’t going to shoot you. How simply barbaric. Don’t worry, we’ll kill you in much more interesting ways.’

And with a smile and a push of the button he sent both John and Lynda on their way down the dark tunnel.

The cart rolled along into the darkness. Slowly at first, but then it seemed gather pace as it went on. John could not see anything at all. Not even his hands. Faster and faster the cart seemed to roll along somehow just knowing where it had to go to. John was scared that he was about to get flung out of the cart it was moving so fast. He tried to hold on to something but his hands could only grasp air. The wind cut through him like he was a piece of fruit. He wondered how Lynda was coping but the cart was moving so fast that he didn't think that she would have heard him anyway.

The cart suddenly stopped. A light came on from up above John and Lynda's heads. A spoon, who was dressed as a guard with a gun helped them out of the cart and lead them to a group of other guards who proceeded to silently direct them through a silver metal door. John, Lynda, and the group of spoon guards walked through the door and came across a most interesting room. They both looked around and saw that they were now in what looked to be a room full of scientific equipment. There were lots of Scientist Spoons that were all running about doing these really weird experiments. Lynda saw what appeared to be a lot of contraptions that she had no idea about including what looked to be a sort of mirror, but it wasn't an ordinary mirror. It seemed to be moving inside. Lynda couldn't exactly see what was moving in that mirror or if her eyes had been playing tricks on her because she kept getting pushed along by the guard spoons. Although Lynda wasn't a scientist, she had no passion for that kind of thing, she still wanted to check out the moving mirror. There was something about it, but Lynda did not know what that something was. The rest of the room, which was as big as a sporting field, was filled with blackboards, whiteboards, computer screens, rockets, fish sword fighting with hats, and thousands of test tubes that were filled with liquids of many colours. Lynda felt a bit overwhelmed with all the scientific stuff that was going on around her. She had never been much for science stuff having found the subject boring at school. The intervening years did nothing to spark any love for science for her. However Lynda right now, even though she was about to get experimented on by these weird and dangerous spoon scientists, couldn't help but be interested in all the little experiments and equipment that were going on around her. She was especially interested in the mirror that seemed to be moving inside. She thought that if she and John ever managed to escape they would have to find that mirror again.

Lynda and John were then moved into what appeared to be the head office. There was a desk, a bookcase and a pot plant. They were then forced to sit down in these imposing wooden chairs. John looked around and saw no clock. It seemed like Spoon Island, like the city they had just been to, did not really know the concept of time. Not that john really cared about that. Unlike his wife he did not need to know what time it was every minute of the day. He could go for hours without even looking at the clock on his mobile phone. As he sat on the hard wooden chairs, John thought of what kind of torture the spoons would do to him and Lynda. He did not know how much he would be able to survive it. But he didn't want to dwell on what was going to happen to him. So instead he decided to focus on some more positive thoughts. John thought back to his last happy memory. It was with Lynda of course, and it happened about a week ago before they had moved house. It was at the park. Now John and Lynda at their old house lived quite close to a park. It was named Jad Park and it was quite a reasonable size. There was a playground with slides and swings for the kids, an area for families to have a BBQ or a picnic, plenty of birds for any birdwatcher to look at, and a walking track for anyone who wanted to keep fit. Besides the park there was a river, although it was far too dangerous for anyone to play in it. They were walking in Jad Park, on their way to a BBQ, when they saw a lost dog. It was a golden retriever, and seemed to be sniffing some bushes up ahead.

'Oh. I wonder where that dog's owner is right now.' Said Lynda.

‘I’ll go check it out.’

‘Ok. But be safe.’

‘I’m just going to see if that dog’s collar has a phone number. That’s all.’

‘Yeah, but I’m always a bit wary about dogs on the loose.’

‘It’ll be fine. Don’t worry.’

‘Ha. You say that. But when I was younger, about primary or high school I think I got chased by this pit bull for like a couple of blocks. One of the worst experiences of my life. My heart still races just thinking about it.’

‘Ok. I’ll be careful.’

With that john walked over to the dog and checked it out. The dog, contrary to Lynda’s fears, was quite friendly. It sniffed and wagged its tail as John gently patted it.

‘Who’s a good doggie? Hey, where’s you master? Where’s your master?

John looked at its collar and saw that it was called SPOT. He also saw the phone number of the owner.

‘Not a very imaginative name for a dog.’ John muttered to himself. ‘Hey Lynda, come over here. This dog isn’t mean at all. It’s really friendly.’

‘You sure?’

‘Yeah, it isn’t scary at all.’

‘Oh, ok.’

So Lynda walked over to where John was and cautiously held out her hand for Spot to sniff. Spot did so, sniffing Lynda’s hand with the utmost care and attention.

‘Ha that tickles.’ Giggled Lynda. ‘Guess that wasn’t so bad after all.’

‘See? I told you. You want to give him a pat?’

Lynda slowly put her hand out to pat him, she patted Spot tentatively at first, but as she grew more confidence she stroked Spot with more purpose.

‘Damn I wish we could keep him. Have you called the owner yet?’

‘I was just about to do that now.’

So John, with his phone in his hand, got the collar of the dog and rang the phone number on it.

‘Yes, hello? Do you have a dog named Spot? Golden Retriever and very friendly? Well he’s currently right down at Jad Park at the moment. Are you anywhere near there at the moment? Oh, ok. Yeah we’ll see you in a few minutes the.’

‘So? What did they say?’ Asked Lynda as she continued to play with Spot.

‘Well that is their dog. Apparently it escaped their back fence about fifteen minutes ago. There’s going to be a young man to come and collect Spot in a few minutes.’

‘It’s a pity we can’t keep him.’

‘You have certainly changed your tune. What happened to being scared of dogs on the loose?’

‘Well I guess it was a fear of mine. But seeing Spot here being all friendly like with me it has made me realise how silly I was to be scared of dogs on the loose. I mean of course I will be cautious if I see any other dog on the loose, but I won’t be scared. I’ll just treat each dog on how they are at the moment not how I think they are.’

‘That sounds reasonable. But even if we do get a dog, which I have always wanted as you well know, it will have to get on well with Percy. You know what Percy is like with dogs. He does not seem to like any of them and he does not seem to like them. So I don’t really know how any dog would get on with Percy.’

‘We can train Percy.’ Argued Lynda

‘Yeah, I suppose you are right. Though it might be hard to train a cat. I wouldn’t even know where to start.’

‘We can learn together.’ Smiled Lynda.

John was just about to agree with her when a young man came up in the distance. He looked to be in his 30’s and had a small bushy beard and thick black rimmed glasses. Spot who had been playing with Lynda came running up to the man and greeted him with a big lick.

‘Ha ha hello boy! You been a good doggie?’ Asked the man as he stroked and patted Spot.

‘He sure has. Hey, I’m John. You must be Will?’ Asked John as he shook Wills hand.

‘Yes. Thanks for looking after him. We were so worried. Looking all over the block we were. We were just about to check this park when we got a call from you.’ Explained William.

‘Ok. By the way, this is my wife Lynda.’ Said John as he introduced William to her.

‘Pleased to meet you Lynda.’ Said William as he shook her hand.

‘Nice to meet you too.’ Smiled Lynda.

‘Well once again thank you for finding my dog. But I better be going.’

So William walked off into the distance with Spot.

‘That was interesting.’ Said John

‘What do you mean?’ Asked Lynda.

‘How happy I felt seeing William being reunited with Spot. It made me feel really warm inside.’

‘Yeah, that did feel really good. I hope Spot doesn’t get lost again.’

‘Me too. That would be awful.’

‘Hey, did you like my idea of training Percy?’

‘Oh, yeah. I was thinking that maybe after we move house we could start training him.’ Suggested John.

‘Ok, after we move house sounds good.’ Agreed Lynda.

John looked at the time on his phone.

‘Oh dear. We are running a bit late for the BBQ. We best get going.’

‘OK. Let’s go.’

So John and Lynda walked on towards the BBQ as the day slowly drew to a close. John remembered that special feeling that he had seeing Spot and William be reunited. He hadn’t had that feeling since. The stress of moving with all the different types of furniture and other stuff such as all the umbrellas and Richard Nixon books was bad enough. However coupled with the fact that they both had landed on this strange planet where not only have they been forced to drink disgusting sludge’s, had guns pointed at them as well as being forced to follow these really weird rules, but they were also about to be cruelly tortured by these spoons in white lab coats who had the nerve to call themselves scientists, meant that John felt that happiness was a feeling he was never going to ever feel again.

A spoon came in, whilst John was remembering about Spot the lost dog in the park, wearing a white lab coat with a badge on it with the words ‘HEAD SCIENTIST: SIMON SPOON’. He had a small grey beard and wore glasses. Lynda wondered how the glasses managed to stay on his spoon face. She felt that they must have surely fallen off by now.

‘Hello.’ Beamed Simon the Spoon Head Scientist. ‘My name is John and I am the Spoon Head Scientist!’

‘What the hell are you going to do to us?’ Questioned Lynda.

‘Oh why now come on, where are your manners? I do not believe we have been properly introduced.’

‘I’m not going to tell you my name.’

‘Why in polite society I do believe that you are supposed to introduce yourself after I have introduced myself. Failing to do so is quite rude and is looked down upon.’

‘No! I’m not telling you my name!’ Protested Lynda.

‘Just tell him, Lynda!’ Urged John.

‘Oh be quiet, John!’ Snapped Lynda.

‘Oh, so pleased to meet you Lynda and John. I hope you have a great time here.’

‘You are going to torture us.’ Said John ‘I am not sure that we will be having such a great time to be honest with you.’

‘Torture you? Oh no.’ Chuckled Simon the Head Spoon Scientist. ‘We’ll just only want to experiment on you. There will be no torture here. That would be most barbaric.’

‘Why bring us though?’

‘Oh well you two seem like the perfect couple to experiment on, especially with these new inventions that I have created recently.’

‘I’m not sure I want to go though.’

‘Oh I am sorry but you have no choice. If you do not come with us then I will make you watch while I slowly torture your husband. Would you like to see that?’

Lynda shook her head in silence.

‘Good. Now come this way.’ Said Simon the Spoon Head Scientist.

With that John and Lynda were taken down a maze of corridors flanked by a guard of spoons. They walked to the left, to the right, backwards, forwards, and even upside down. Past rooms made of fire and ice, of rooms filled with balloons, and rooms which seemed to have rivers in them. Finally, after what seemed like ages John and Lynda were bundled into a room. In that room stood two cages. The cages were about seven feet high and only about four feet long. They were solid black metal and were slightly elevated from the ground.

‘Get in.’ Said Simon the Head Spoon Scientist. ‘No talking in the cages to each other or any type of non-verbal communication or I will kill the both of you. You are to only speak when I speak to you.’

Lynda and John, with the help of the spoon guards, got into their respective cages. Lynda looked across at John. She wanted desperately to reach out and reassure him that everything will be alright. But she could do nothing, all she could do was just stand in the cage in silence.

‘Now.’ Said Simon. ‘For my first experiment I am going to test your ability to stand this new invention of mine. It is called a nightmare head box.’

John walked over to a corner of the room and pulled out a helmet from a box. The helmet was red in colour. It looked like an ordinary motorcycle helmet with a visor. There were what looked to be two thick cords, about twenty metres in length that came out of the top of the helmet.

‘Hmm, I think I’ll use the nightmare head on you John. Yes, yes. I think that will work.’

Simon got one of the guard spoons to help him connect the two cords to what looked to be a nearby power board with lots of switches and buttons of all different sizes, colours and shapes. The spoon guard then connected the two thick cords to two separate holes. Simon opened John’s cage door and put the helmet on John’s head. He then walked out of the cage, making sure to close the door behind him, and walked back over to the power board.

‘Ok, John. I’m going to turn these two switches on, now at first you might feel a sharp pain, but the rest should of this experiment should not be that painful as you go into a deep sleep. Of course I have only tested this on dogs before and they seemed to be fine, so I’m you humans will be the same.’

With that Simon turned on the two switches. John, whose eyes were completely covered by the visor, experienced a sharp pain. Then he saw a blue sky. A bright blue sky. He looked around and saw that he was on top of a grassy hill. Down below stood a few rocks and what looked to be a woman wearing yellow clothing. John looked behind him and saw a fire that was coming up the hill. A huge orange fire climbing up the hill. John could smell the smoke. The only way that he could escape the fire was by running down the hill. So he ran down the hill, he ran as fast he could, he ran as far as his legs could take him. Then he stopped, because Emma was pointing a gun at him. She was back from the dead and had a rifle aimed at John’s head. She looked at him with her teeth bared and her lips curled.

‘Emma! What the hell are you doing here?’

‘This is a nightmare, I’m your nightmare. It doesn’t take a genius to work that out.’

‘I don’t want you to shoot me.’

‘I have to though. Your worst nightmare is a combination of me shooting you, and dying by fire.’

‘So that’s why I’m here.’

‘Of course that’s why. Didn’t you hear what Simon said? This is a nightmare box. You don’t just put the helmet on and then fall into a happy dream land. You put the helmet on and have a nightmare.’

‘Oh, ok. But the problem is I don’t feel like I am in a nightmare just yet.’

‘You will be in a second.’ Grinned Emma.

‘Oh, what does that…?’

Before John could finish Emma shot him right in the face. The pain was so great that he fainted. When he came to he saw Emma holding a gun against his head again.

‘Mmm, that didn’t take as long as I thought it would.’ Mused Emma.

‘What wouldn’t take so long?’ Asked John who was very confused about this whole situation.

‘You head getting back together again.’

‘Together again?’

‘Well I shot you in the face and your head exploded.’

‘That doesn’t sound scientifically accurate. But I’m not a scientist so I suppose I’ll believe you.’

‘You’re damn right you’ll believe me!’

‘Ok. So why did my head go back together after you shot it?’

‘Because I am going to shoot it again and again. I’m going to shoot your head so many times that even when you wake up you will still have visions in your head of me pulling the trigger and that awful pain that comes with it. And I will be so happy doing this.’

‘Wait, why would this make you happy? I don’t understand that.’

‘Because I’m still mad at you for those comments you made.’

‘The comments? I can’t remember that.’

‘Don’t you remember? The one’s in the tunnel?’

‘No, I’m not sure though. I think you may have misheard me.’

‘I did not mishear you. I remember how you made fun of our situation. Of the fact that I lived in such a horrible and repressive place. That really pissed me off that did. I think that anyone would have done the same in my situation. I really think that you should count your luck stars that I didn’t shoot you back in the tunnel.’

‘Well I am sorry about that. But that is no reason to try and kill me. That seems to be most unproductive.’

‘Too late.’

And with that Emma shot John in the face again. John fainted, then woke up again in his nightmare to find Emma pointing the gun at him again. Then she shot him again. And again. And again. And again. She shot John so many times that John wondered when it was actually going to stop. Was his nightmare ever going to end? He quickly looked up at the hill and saw the fire slowly creeping down.

'Don't worry, John. That fire isn't going to get down here. Well it won't unless…'

'Unless what?'

'Well unless you try to escape from me. Or if you try and grab the gun off me or do anything that causes me not to get the chance to shoot you in the face over and over again. If you do not let me shoot you in the face over and over again I am going to direct the fire to come and slowly burn you in such a way that you will be praying in your head for me to shoot you for the rest of eternity.'

John looked at Emma and sighed.

'Ok. I won't try to escape. I just want you to be careful.'

'Careful? This is a nightmare. I am not meant to be careful at all. I am supposed to make you really suffer. I am meant to make you really hurt. This is a nightmare box scenario like I said. I am not here to give you a good time. I want you to experience pain and suffering beyond anything that you could ever imagine. So shut the fuck up and sit down before I make that fire come back down that hill and slowly burn you.'

John with downcast eyes cringed and prepared to be shot in the head again by Emma.

Back in reality Lynda watched, silent tears rolling down he cheeks, John as he rolled around in the cage with the Nightmare helmet still on him. Her red eyes saw him crash against the cage door. She wanted to comfort him, to hold him tight next to her and tell him that everything would be ok. But all she could do was watch in tearful silence as John struggled with whatever nightmare he was having. Lynda feared of what the nightmare head box would hold for her. Would it be just a random nightmare? Or would the nightmare be more specific to her? As Lynda watched John thrash about she thought of what kind of nightmare would await her. She had been scared of large roaming dogs before, but that encounter with Spot the friendly golden retriever had changed all that. Maybe public speaking? That's a fairly common fear she thought. Lynda really hated public speaking and tried to avoid it as often as she could. In High School she had to do a few speeches and she always hated it. Lynda would often get very nervous standing in front of all her classmates and doing a talk on something. It didn't matter what she talked about (even if it was on her favourite subject of Richard Nixon), or how many times she practiced her speech at home, she still got really nervous and scared doing it in front of people. Her worst high school experiences were all somehow connected to the public speaking. Which honestly proved that her high school experience was not that bad. If the worst thing that happened to me was I got scared of giving speeches in class then I had a pretty good high school life Lynda thought. So in that case Lynda was looking forward to having the nightmare head box if it was

'Ok. I think that's enough.' Said Simon.

With that he turned off the two switches in the power board, and removed the cords. He then walked over to Johns cage, opened it, removed the helmet and took it with him as he shut the cage door behind him.

'That wasn't so bad was it?' Smiled Simon.

John, in between coughing and spluttering, looked at Simon with absolute contempt. He wanted to say something, but he remembered Simon's threats against them earlier, and it did seem like he meant it. So he chose to remain silent. John wanted to scream, shout, yell, whisper and talk. He wanted to get out of the cage and take Lynda with him to go back home to earth. He wanted to blow this whole awful island up. But he couldn't do that, he had to stay in the cage. It was just too risky and pointless to do all that. Besides, John had seen enough death for one lifetime.

'You may look at me like that, but trust me this will be only good for you. Now, let's see what we shall do for your lovely wife Lynda. Should I use the nightmare box helmet on her? Or should I do something different? I think I might do something different this time. I have seen enough of that nightmare box helmet for now. Maybe I'll use it again later, but not today. No. Now, what shall I do for Lynda? I think I shall do…I know!'

With a leap Simon raced out of the torture/experiment/Christmas party room. Lynda and John waited in fearful silence as the spoon guards pointed their guns at them to make sure that there was absolutely no chance at all for escape. A few minutes later Simon returned holding what appeared to be a small metal object in the palm of his hand. It was too small for either John or Lynda to see exactly what it was, but it seemed to have some of metal claws.

'How are you, Lynda?' Sweetly asked Simon.

Silence.

'I said how are you, Lynda?' Asked Simon even more sweetly.

Even more silence. Lynda looked firmly at the ground.

'Well it seems we have already forgotten our manners for today. Spoon guard? Shoot her.'

The spoon guard raised its gun and pointed it straight at Lynda.

'How do you think I'm feeling?' Snarled Lynda as she looked at Simon with her puffy red eyes.

'There that' wasn't so bad now was it? I'm so sorry you are not feeling too good. But maybe my next experiment will help you feel a little bit better because I know it will make me feel heaps better! Oh my I can't wait until you get a load of this.'

Simon slowly walked over to Lynda's cage and showed her the tiny metal thing in the palm of his hand. Lynda could now see more clearly what it was. It seemed to have wheels, tiny black wheel on the bottom of it. The body of the contraption was made of metal and was shaped like a rectangular jaw with metal teeth marks on one side of it. Lynda looked sat with a mix of curiosity and horror.

'See?' Said Simon after he had showed her the metal thing. 'You like it? No, don't tell me yet. I call this the mejaw. I call it that see because it is made of metal and is kind of shaped like a jaw. I invented this just the other day. You know, I was just playing around in my laboratory when I came up with this mejaw. I'm quite proud of my effort. It's virtually indestructible except for this small bottle of potion in my coat pocket that is the antidote that will defeat it. I have to be very careful that I do not drop this antidote otherwise this whole island is doomed. Anyway, you may be wondering what was the point of me making as something as horrible and pointless as this mejaw. Well there was no point to it at all! I just wanted to create something destructive. Now you Lynda are going to be the very first subject for my mejaw experiment. All I have to do now is turn this mejaw on and watch it as it makes its way towards you. Now you may thing that you are safe as your cages are above the ground. But this mejaw can fly so you have no hope ha ha.'

With that Simon released the mejaw from his hand and switched it on at the floor. The mejaw whirled into life. The black wheels on the bottom of its body spun furiously around and around as it moved around the room. It started to move towards the spoon guards, not towards the cage as Simon had wanted. Lynda looked at the mejaw as it quickly moved towards the guards. Their silent faces were a mixture of horror and determination as they grabbed their guns and tried to shoot the mejaw. Bullet after bullet was put into this monstrous contraption. But as soon as the gun fire had died down the mejaw somehow healed itself so that it had no bullet holes. Lynda did not understand how it was possible, but she was glad that it wasn't going after her or John yet. The mejaw leapt in the air and opened its metal jaws. It then started eating all the guard spoons one by one. It did not take long for it to eat all the guards. Only about a couple of minutes or so. After it finished off the spoon guards it turned its attention to Simon who was crouching behind a chair hoping not to be seen by the mejaw.

'Let us go!' Yelled out Lynda 'Come on. You have to help us.'

'I don't have to help anyone.' Yelled out Simon as he got up out of his hiding place from the back of the chair.

'Don't be stupid. Come on, Simon! Help us out please!'

Lynda looked at him with desperation in her eyes. She knew that if they had any chance to escape Simon had to help open the doors. Besides opening the cage doors manually, you could also operate them electronically from the power board. Lynda had noticed Simon mentioning that to one of the guards when John had his nightmare box helmet on.

'I'll leave you two disgusting humans here to die. I would love to stay and watch you two get eaten alive by the mejaw but I have to hurry. It is a good thing I have my antidote in my pocket.' Sneered Simon as he got the antidote out of his pocket and started showing it off. It was a really tiny test tube with a cork in the top and it held a clear white liquid inside of it. He tossed the tube from one hand to the other like he was a practicing juggler. The mejaw moved ever closer to him. Simon was just about to put it back in his coat pocket when he dropped it. The tube went out of his hands an d crashed onto the floor. Shattering into a million pieces. The clear white liquid slowly spread out of the floor and moved towards the mejaw. The mejaw lifted its metal jaws and out came a laser. The laser then destroyed the clear white liquid with frightening precision.

'Oh no.' Cried out Simon. 'What have I done? I just wanted to do some experiments. Find out stuff. I've become a monster. I'm no monster, I'm just a spoon who wanted to be a scientist. What the hell have I become? There's nothing I can do now. This whole island is doomed and it's my fault!'

'You can still help.' Said John. 'Just go and get the cage doors open for us please.'

'Ok. Give me a couple of seconds. I'm closer to the power board, plus it will be easier than fumbling around with the keys. When I open the cage doors you just run as fast as you can and never look back. Is that understood?'

'Yes.' Said John and Lynda.

He raced towards the power board. Trying to outrun the mejaw. Simon ran as fast as he could, as fast as his legs could take him. He ran all the way to the power board. But the mejaw was fast too, it was very fast. It quickly moved towards Simon. Spinning its wheels furiously it raced towards Simon who was just about at the power board. Simon quickly turned and pressed open the cage door buttons. John and Lynda quickly jumped out of their cages and towards the door. They glanced at

Simon who was at the moment being slowly eaten alive by the mejaw. He didn't seem to be crying or making any sort of noise at all. He seemed to be silently lying on the floor. It was almost like he had accepted his fate. The mejaw methodically made its way up Simon's spoon body, not stopping at any time.

'Go!' Yelled out Simon before his head fell back. He was no more.

John and Lynda went out of the torture/experiment/bi-annual egg race door and started to run along the corridor. The corridor was narrow and completely grey. It seemed to stretch out like a maze with doors scattered all along the side. The bright lights up above illuminated the pathway. Lynda and John walked left, they walked right and they walked in all directions.

'Where are we going, Lynda?' Asked John. 'I swear we have passed that blue door before.'

'No we haven't passed the blue door.' Argued Lynda. 'Besides don't worry. I know where we are going. Remember that mirror in that room?'

'What room?'

'The big room with all the scientists. Look are you sure you are ok? That nightmare box thing didn't look that good.' Said Lynda with a concerned look in her eyes.

'No, I'm fine. I think. I don't really know. Besides it doesn't matter about me, all I'm concerned about is getting us home.'

'I am too. Still I am worried…'

'Don't be please. Now look, what were you saying about a mirror?'

'It was when we were being brought to Simon's office. The guards dragged us through that really big room. I think you were on the other side of me so you probably would not have seen it, but to the left of me I saw a mirror. It was a full length body mirror, and looked golden in colour, but that wasn't the interesting thing about this mirror. The interesting thing for me, of what I could see of it was the fact that there was something moving inside the mirror?'

'That doesn't help us in getting home though.'

'Maybe it does, and maybe it doesn't. But we have got to try. At this moment I am willing to try almost anything to go back home. I don't know about you John but I would be perfectly happy never to be arrested, tortured, or be part of an underground terrorist group. I just want to go back home and just go to sleep.'

'Yeah, so would I. But where the hell is that big room though? I feel like we have been going around in circles.'

'It does feel like that. I think we should…'

But Lynda stopped. She could hear the mechanical sounds of metal coming ever closer. She turned around and saw that the mejaw was quickly coming up the corridor. Coming straight for herself and John.

'Quick John! Let's hide in one of these doors.'

'But the mirror.' Protested John.

‘Well the mirror won’t be much use to us if we are dead.’ Said Lynda as she dragged John in to one of the rooms with her. Closing the red and green striped door behind them, John and Lynda found themselves in what looked to be like a small wooden room. Everything in the room seemed to be made of nothing but wood. It had no windows, just a wooden wall, a wooden floor and a wooden roof.

‘Oh come on let’s go.’ Said Lynda ‘I think that mejaw thing is gone.’

‘No.’ Said Simon ‘Look!’

Lynda looked and saw that a purple umbrella was bouncing in the room, then a yellow umbrella joined the purple umbrella. This was followed by a red umbrella, a black umbrella, a white umbrella, a green umbrella, a yellow umbrella, and an orange umbrella. Soon there was about a hundred umbrellas all bouncing in the wooden room that somehow seemed to have gotten bigger. They were bouncing up and down and side to side.

‘Wow! This is incredible.’ Marvelled John as he looked at all the umbrellas bouncing around. This was like a dream room for John. It was a room that he could have happily spent the rest of his life in. He didn’t need no family, no friends, television shows, no movies, no sports, or anything else at that moment. All he ever had wanted and will always want was in that room at that very moment. He wanted to stay in this room forever. Earth was just a distant memory for him at that moment.

‘John. Please let’s go.’ Said Lynda worriedly. She looked at John who was staring at all the umbrellas bouncing around in the room. She knew that she had to drag John away from all the umbrellas otherwise he would spend the rest of his life in this room just happily watching all the umbrellas bouncing around in the room until he either died from thirst or starvation.

‘No, Lynda. Let’s just stay a while. It won’t be that bad. I mean look at all these umbrellas.’

‘Yes, I know, they look really nice. But we have to get back home. We have to get back to earth.’

‘No we don’t. Who wants to go to earth anyway? It’s just a silly place that doesn’t understand anything about umbrellas. Maybe if it did it would be a better place to live. We can discuss umbrellas all the time, we can read about them, and we can do all sort of other exciting things.’

‘What? Are you listening to yourself right now? Because you have gone completely mad. Talking about how great umbrellas are and whatnot. Fine, I grant you they have their place in this world, but they are not as important as you like to think they are!’

‘Yes they are! They are most important. They are more important than you or anyone else could ever dream of!’

‘You don’t mean that.’ Sighed Lynda.

Lynda knew that it was no use talking to John. She would have to physically drag him or push him out of there and away from all those hypnotic bouncing umbrellas. So with a deep breath she grabbed John’s right hand and slowly dragged him away. John, who was too busy watching all the umbrellas, didn’t even notice at first that Lynda was moving him towards the door. Lynda had just gotten the door to the outside corridor open when John realised what was going on.

‘Hey, what are you doing?’ Asked John.

‘I’m just helping you.’

‘Helping me? You’re trying to hurt me.’

‘You’ll thank me later.’

With one final push Lynda managed to get John out of the bouncing umbrella room. They both collapsed on the corridor floor as they tried to catch their breath.

‘Thanks for that.’ Said John as he got up off the floor.

‘That’s ok. Just didn’t want you to get stuck in there forever.’

‘Shall we go find that big room?’

‘Yeah ok let’s go. I just hope that mejaw has gone far away from this place.’

‘Me too.’

So John and Lynda continued to walk down the corridor. They walked to their left, and the walked to their right, they walked upside down, and they walked on the side of the walls. They passed the room of fire, they glanced at the room of ice, and they saw a couple of fish swimming in the room that had a river in it.

‘Oh I think we are getting closer.’ Said Lynda excitedly.

‘We better be. I don’t think I can take much more of this.’ Said John tiredly.

‘I think it is just over there.’ Said Lynda pointing to a great big grey metal door about fifty metres in front of them.

John and Lynda walked over to the big grey metal door. But there was one problem. There was no handle or anything to get inside of the big room. Lynda and John desperately searched all around the door, looking for anything that would enable them to get into the room. Suddenly the familiar sound of that whirling wheels and mechanical clattering of metal was creeping ever closer to them.

‘Hurry.’ Cried out Lynda as she looked over her shoulder.

‘I’m doing by best. There just doesn’t seem to be anything here.’ Said John as he kept randomly pushing at the metal door hoping something would happen.

The mejaw moved closer and closer towards John and Lynda.

‘Either find something or we will have to just go somewhere else, John.’

‘Where the hell could it be?’ Asked John as he continued to bang the metal door with increasing force.

The mejaw was only a few feet away.

‘I’m going to count to ten, John. If by ten you haven’t found anything that will let us into that room we will have to move to another place. I don’t want that. So please hurry.’ Said Lynda who at this moment did not wish to become mice meat due to a homicidal metal machine that was getting closer to them.

‘Yeah, ok. Not that I will need it anyway I don’t think.’ John replied. He, like Lynda, wanted to get inside the room too, but it just didn’t seem to be happening for some very strange reason. He didn’t really want to move to another place either because it might be ages before they find another door

that leads to the room. Being flanked by all those guards when they had been in that room had meant that he had not noticed the layout of that room or how many doors lead into it.

‘Ok. One.’

The mejaw moved closer.

‘Two.’

John banged harder at the door.

‘Three.’

The mejaw was getting even closer.

‘Four.’

The metal door was not budging no matter how hard John tried.

‘Five.’

Lynda could almost feel the metal breath of the mejaw.

‘Six.’

John saw a small hole in one of the corner of the metal door.

‘Seven.’

The mejaw was almost in striking distance.

‘Eight. Oh please just hurry, John, please.’

John bent back the small hole and found the tiny green button.

‘Nine.’

The mejaw was snapping at Lynda’s heels.

‘Ten. We have to…’

‘Got it!’ Said John after he had pushed the green button.

The metal door swung open. John and Lynda raced inside. The door shut again just in time to block out the mejaw from entering the room. Lynda looked around for the mirror. But there seemed to be something different about the place. Something that she couldn’t quite work out.

‘Wasn’t there lots of spoons here?’ Wondered John out loud as they walked together in this big room that was obviously the centre of all the big and many science experiments/torture that the spoon scientists did.

‘Yeah, you’re right.’ Replied Lynda. ‘There doesn’t seem to be anyone here.’

‘Maybe they all heard about the mejaw?’

‘Maybe.’

‘They probably have some kind of communication system. Like a radio or something.’

‘Eh probably. Now forget about the communication whatever and please help me find that mirror I was talking about.’ Urged Lynda.

‘Ok. Fine. I still don’t know what kind of mirror you mean though.’ Said John.

‘Oh don’t worry. You’ll know it when you see it. Let’s just keep walking.’

They continued to walk on. The science centre room was so big that it would have taken John and Lynda about four full days to actually properly explore every corner of it. However John and Lynda did not have the time to go and exploring every part of this room. For one thing they had no food with them and were getting awfully close to starving. All the torturing and running around in endless corridors, as well as being transfixed by bouncing umbrellas, had meant that both John and Lynda were becoming awfully hungry. Their stomachs were feeling very empty at the moment. John and Lynda were feeling so hungry that they would have even gulped down some of that awful grey sludge from the policebot prison. Anyway, they would have died before the four days had run out. Another thing was that the mejaw, who at this moment was methodically comping its way through the thick grey metal door. The mejaw probably would be finished chomping the door down in about an hour or so, maybe even quicker than that. There was no way that John and Lynda could ever hope to survive the four days with the mejaw after them. So they had to find the mirror quickly. They were just walking past a table full of test tubes and beakers when they came across a plate holding a gun. This plate had medium sized yellow arms, tall blue legs, and its mouth, eyes, ears, and noses were all painted on the plate itself.

‘Stop!’ Cried out the plate. ‘Who goes there?’

‘I’m John, and this is Lynda.’ Replied John cautiously.

‘What is your business here?’

‘We’re just here to see the mirror. Now can you please just move out of our way?’ Said an irritated Lynda who was perfectly content to never ever see another gun as long as she lived. Having firearms pointed at your face by clearly unstable spoons and a plate was not an experience she wanted to repeat anytime soon. Lynda was not in the mood to play another game of twenty questions.

‘If you do not state your business here I will be forced to shoot you. Now I am sorry about that. Really I am. But I do have to follow the rules otherwise there would be disorder and we can’t have that now can we?’

‘Lynda, please just tell him otherwise I will.’ Said John whose knees were starting to shake. He looked like he was about to throw up too. Seeing the gun pointed at him by this deranged plate brought back nightmare visions of Emma repeatedly shooting him in the face over and over and over again on that huge grassy hill with the raging fire up above. He did not want this plate to shoot them, and he did not want Lynda to keep aggravating the plate with her aggressive remarks.

‘Ok. We’re just here to see the mirror.’ Lynda told the plate. She wanted to keep arguing with the plate, but she could see that John was not enjoying it.

‘There are no mirrors here.’ Spat out the plate.

‘Well firstly there are hundreds of mirrors here. Just look all around you, and secondly I don’t have time to talk to a stupid plate. Besides, where are all your spoon friends?’

‘Lynda…’ Said John.

‘Spoon friends? Those spoons are not my friends! Never have and never will be. I really dislike spoons I do. You know, just for that insult I think I am going to shoot you right now. Just stand perfectly still…’

Then the plate dropped flat on the floor. Right on the ground floor. John and Lynda looked at the plate, waiting for it to get up. John slowly walked over and felt the plate.

‘I think it is dead.’ Said John.

‘How the hell can you tell that?’ Asked Lynda who had not really gotten her head around the concept of plates, forks and spoons being living creatures instead of the inanimate but useful objects that they were back on earth.

‘I don’t know. I just do. It probably died of a heart attack or something.’

‘Don’t be silly. Those plates wouldn’t get heart attacks. It’s a goddamn plate not an actual real-life human being who you know actually has a heart.’

‘You don’t know that. You don’t know this plate’s diet or body structure. It might have a really terrible diet full of foot which was high in fat and sugar. It might not have gotten enough exercise because of a busy work schedule and a huge family to help look after. And it might actually have a heart inside of its plate body. I don’t know. I mean we could find out I suppose but I wouldn’t really trust myself with any kind of surgery, especially a surgery that involves an actual plate.’

‘Well…oh come on let’s just go.’ Sighed Lynda.

Lynda and John, after John had stopped to throw up behind a singing pot plant, continued to walk forwards searching for that elusive mirror that Lynda had glanced at. They had just been walking for what seemed like ages (when in actual fact it was only about half an hour) when Lynda spotted it.

‘There it is! John!’ Yelled Lynda with delight.

‘That it?’ Rhetorically asked John. To him that mirror didn’t look that impressive. But then again he wasn’t really an expert in mirrors so his opinion didn’t really count for anything. On the other hand, if the mirror was an umbrella than John’s opinion would have counted for something. But it wasn’t so it didn’t.

So there it was. The mirror that Lynda had quickly glanced at when she was being pushed through this big room by the guards. It had been a stroke of good fortune that she had seen it, but none the less she had seen it so she was able to recognise it. It was exactly like she had described it before with it being a full length body mirror and gold coloured. But the actual mirror itself was something else. Instead of the mirror showing your reflection it instead had a swirl of black, purple and green colours moving around the mirror. Sometimes slowly, but sometimes quickly. Lynda stood there like she was in some sort of trance. Mesmerised by all the colours that seemed to be moving around the mirror like they were in some sort of intricate ballet routine.

‘Lynda?’ Asked John.

‘What?’ Replied Lynda snapping back to reality.

‘The mirror? It looks nice but I’m not really sure how it is going to get us back to earth.’

‘It will. I’m pretty sure it will. All we have to figure out a way to…’

Lynda looked at her hand, or what was left of it. While she was talking to John she had put her hand against the mirror without thinking about it and found that her hand could go straight through the swirls.

‘Your hand. What the hell.’

‘That’s strange.’ Said Lynda pulling her back.

‘Yeah, that’s really strange.’

‘Maybe if I put my whole body in there?’

‘No don’t. You’ll be crazy to do that.’

‘It wouldn’t hurt to try John. Better than just sitting around here waiting for that mejaw to come and get us.’

‘Oh that mejaw won’t be coming to get us. That is very silly. Did you see that metal door? It was very thick. There’s no way the mejaw could have gone through that.’ Scoffed John.

But John was wrong, John was very wrong indeed. Because the familiar sounds of the turning black wheel and metallic chomping of the mejaw were very close. Lynda and John turned around to see yet again the mejaw coming ever closer to them. It was only a few hundred feet away, its mechanical jaws going faster and faster and faster. It was not stopping for anyone or anything and soon it would reach John and Lynda where it would eat them both alive. Eat their feet, their legs, their wait, their stomach, their back, their arms, their neck their shoulders, and their head. It would eat it all and it would not stop for any cries of help, of any screams of pity. It would just keep on eating them until they were both gone forever.

‘John! It’s coming! Let’s get in this mirror.’

‘Damn. Guess I was wrong about the mejaw. That is one determined metal monster.’

So Lynda and John both went inside the swirling mirror and out of the way of the unstoppable mejaw and the torturous Spoon Island. Lynda first, then John. Once they were inside the mirror they both found themselves pushed by a mysterious force. It was like an invisible hand was guiding both of them through what looked to be some kind of really strange tunnel. To John the tunnel looked orange and grey with little red dots that flashed in and out all around him. He tried to speak to Lynda who was floating by his side but nothing came out of his mouth. Not a single word. He tried to speak again. But no sound. So John just gave up and looked at the orange and grey colours of the tunnel with all the flashing red dots all around him as he waited for this strange ride to end. He really did not know where it was going to stop. He hoped that Lynda would be right and that they would finally be back on earth. He was looking forward to finally going back home. To coming back to earth and sleeping in his very own bed without having to worry about being tortured or anything like that. John thought about what he would do, the one special thing that he would do if Lynda was right about this mirror and he returned back to earth, if all this was just an unpleasant distant memory. He decided, after some but not a long deliberation, that he would have a bowl of nice hot chicken soup. He wasn’t sure why he wanted a nice bowl of hot chicken soup (although he was sure that it probably would be much better than a bowl of cold chicken soup) but right at that very moment, as he watched the red dots flashing above him, all he wanted was to grab a bowl of soup and hopefully it would taste like chicken. He was thinking of different soups and how they all tasted when he suddenly found himself starting to get pulled even faster through the tunnel. He was being pulled so

fast he thought that he would break in half. The tunnel became just an incomprehensible swirl to him as everything went dark.

Lynda on the other hand saw the tunnel as a yellow and white striped thing with ants drawing clouds on the side. She looked over at John who was floating beside her and tried to speak to him. But nothing came out of her mouth too. So she decided to try again. Still nothing. Realising that it was pointless trying to continue this she decided just to keep looking at the yellow and white striped tunnel which had those funny little ants all drawing clouds. Lynda actually thought that the ants were really quite good at drawing the clouds. Though she was not really an expert on art so like John and his view on the magical mirror her opinion on it counted for nothing at all. But still she thought it was pretty entertaining watching the ants do their stuff, or at least far more entertaining than watching that awful mejaw contraption trying to destroy everyone and everything. She wondered what would possess someone to build such a stupid and dangerous thing. What the hell where they thinking building that she wondered? Lynda felt a bit guilty for leaving such a horrible thing on Spoon Island, but as she thought about it a bit more she realised that there was nothing that she or John could have done. They were just an ordinary couple from the Gold Coast. They weren't heroes who were going to save the day and get everything back to normal. All they had wanted to do was to just go home, and hopefully this mirror was going to take them there. Lynda continued to muse about the actual point of the mejaw, as well as the awful experiments she saw on Spoon Island, when she suddenly found herself being quickly and forcefully along the tunnel, much more quickly than she had before. Everything around her was a blur as she kept going faster and faster and faster. Soon all the colours disappeared and all she could see was nothing.

Lynda opened her eyes. She saw John lying next to her rubbing his eyes. She then saw a chimney behind her and John. Then she saw a bed near them. Could it be she wondered? Yes! It had to be! They were both home. Lynda could feel it, she could sense it, and she could see it. They were out of that horrible place with those policebots with their harsh rules and that horrible sludge with its horrible taste. Now they could walk in a park without name badges, go to the library without worrying about leaving any lines, and they could eat normal food! A nice juicy steak that bleeds. Or a spaghetti with tomato sauce and parmesan cheese. Or even a succulent pizza with the mouth-watering toppings of pepperoni and chilli. Lynda was looking forward to eating a pepperoni and chilli pizza. It would be much better than that horrible and disgusting sludge that they were forced to eat. But food would have to wait for now because they were finally, after what had seemed like an eternity, back home on earth!

'John! Our bed!' She cried out as she raced towards their big king sized double bed with all their soft sheets and the comfortable mattress. The smell and the feel of an actual warm bed, considering the cold and hard beds that they had been forced to sleep on, was enough to make her weep for joy.

'Oh my! We really did it. I can't believe it. I thought we would never get out of there.' Said John as he joined Lynda in revisiting their earth bed. He was amazed that they had finally gotten back on earth and that they could just go and do normal stuff without having to be scared of having a gun pointed in their face or being tortured by a sadistic Spoon named Simon in the name of 'science'. He started thinking about tomorrow, for he was far too tired to do it right now, and checking out his umbrella room to see if everything was in perfect working order. He also thought about getting a nice bowl of hot chicken soup for his lunch tomorrow. Although he couldn't remember if there was any packets of soup left downstairs, or even if there was any soup at all.

'I must admit I had some doubts too. But…'

‘What’s wrong?’ Asked John.

‘Percy. I have to check if he is OK or not.’ Replied Lynda.

‘Wait, don’t you just want too…?’

But it was too late, Lynda raced away from the bed and started checking everywhere in the house. She checked in the bathroom, the sauna, the spa, the toilet, under the bed, in the kitchen including all the cupboard doors, and she even checked behind their couches. She was just about to go back upstairs and get John to help when she heard a sound. A faint sound at first, but a sound that was getting stronger and stronger with each passing moment.

‘Meowwwww.’

‘Percy!’

There, swishing his tail and looking quite pleased with himself was Percy. His white fluffy tail happily swishing from side to side. Lynda cried out tears of joy as she picked up Percy. Her fears that he would be dead had been unfounded thankfully. Those frightening visions she had of finding Percy with ants, thousands and thousands of ants, all over him had not become a horrifying reality. Percy was here in all his fluffy glory purring away as Lynda gently stroked him.

‘Well there you are. How did my little Percy wercy survive hmmmmm?’

‘Meowwwwww.’

‘Did you come out of the laundry then? Let me just check.’

From what Lynda could see it seemed as though that Percy had indeed just come out of the laundry. So Lynda walked over to the laundry and found his cat bowl still a quarter full from dinner. She wondered how and why Percy’s cat bowl was so full considering that both she and John had been away for what seemed like a few days. Confused, Lynda called down John.

‘Yes. What is it?’ Asked John as he raced down to the laundry.

‘Hey, before we left. Did you feed Percy?’ Asked Lynda.

‘Yeah, you told me to. Because I think you were busy sorting out some stuff in the lounge room.’

‘Oh yeah. I remember.’ Reminisced Lynda as she started to stroke Percy. ‘I think I was trying to sort out the carpet floor. It had a bit of a mark on it and I was trying to clean it off.’

‘Yeah, and why you were cleaning the carpet I fed Percy. Why did you ask me then? I don’t understand.’

‘Because I think we have been away for like at least three or four days it seems like yet Percy’s bowl seems to be pretty full still. I don’t understand that. He should have eaten it all. He shouldn’t even be alive now I come to think about it.’

‘Yeah. That is strange. Just a minute.’

John went back up to the bedroom. Lynda, carrying a very content and purring Percy, followed him up. There John went straight to one of the bedroom drawers and pulled out his mobile phone and turned it on. John wasn’t a big user of technology, but he did understand its importance. He never was one for getting the latest gadgets or anything like that. All he wanted was a phone that could make and receive calls, text and be texted, and go on the internet.

‘My phone says it is the fifth today.’ Informed John.

‘The fifth? No, that can’t be right.’ Said a confused Lynda. Where the hell had they just been she wondered?

‘It also says it is 10:30 PM.’

‘Ten thirty? But that’s near about the time when we were sucked up that stupid chimney.’

‘Eh. Who knows?’ Said John stifling a yawn. ‘All I want to do is get into bed. I can’t believe how tired I am. Oh well I can really if I think about it. I mean we just have been through a lot. So right now I want to lay my head down on that nice looking pillow over there and just drift off to sleep. ’

‘Yeah, me too.’ Agreed Lynda who was struggling to keep her eyes open. ‘Do you mind if Percy stays with us? I promise he won’t bite.’

‘Mind? No of course I don’t mind.’ Laughed John as he came over to stroke Percy. ‘This kitty cat can sleep where ever he likes.’

Tired and just wanting to go to bed, John and Lynda showered, changed out of their dirty old clothes and hopped straight into bed. They were both too exhausted to even think straight. Questions about how they would fix the chimney, if they should move house, them seeing a psychologist after all the torture they went through, taking Percy to the vets to get him checked out, if John’s umbrella room with all his different umbrellas of all shapes and sizes was still ok for him to take it to the many umbrella conventions, if Lynda still had all her Richard Nixon books on the bookshelf still sitting there waiting to be re-read yet again, and actually talking about what the hell they saw in there would have to wait for tomorrow. For tonight John and Lynda were fast asleep with Percy by their side in their comfortable bed back on earth.

The End.