

# DROPPY

**A SERIOUS RABBIT  
WITH A SILLY  
NAME**



**ZUZANNA SAMSEL**

Zuzanna Samsel

# Droppy

*A Serious Rabbit with a Silly Name*

Droppy. A Serious Rabbit with a Silly Name

By Zuzanna Samsel

Cover design: Paweł Jaskólski

Editing and proof-reading: Anna Krasucka

Typesetting: Tomasz Atłowski

Translated from the Polish: Ewa Dratwa

All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution of all or part of this book in any form is prohibited. Making copies in any form will result in copyright infringement.

Copyright© 2024 by Zuzanna Samsel

Self-published book

First edition

Warsaw 2024

ISBN 978-83-973663-3-6

[www.bobek.com.pl](http://www.bobek.com.pl)

*I dedicate this book to my loved ones  
and to all those who need a boost of  
confidence, and the courage to take the  
first step...  
so that the next step can follow.*

# CHAPTER 1

One evening in May, a crowd of parents gathered outside a small school on the outskirts of a town. Divided into smaller groups, they were discussing lively various topics as if they were best friends, even if many tried hard not to show that they did not share the others' opinions. Only a few did not engage in the conversation, hovering alone on the fringe of the group. The loud conversations quietened as three large coaches entered the car park, one by one, wrapping everyone with a peculiar mixture of exhaust fumes and the smell of hot tyres. Something squeaked, hissed, the doors in each coach opened and kids, even more chatty than their parents, clearly happy with the trip, started to spill out into the car park. Excited, some exchanged their impressions loudly before they even reached their parents. The place got as noisy and crowded as a beehive. Ms. Molly stood on tiptoe on a kerb for some time, trying to spot her son in the buzzing crowd. Billy was the last but one to leave with only the teacher behind him. As usual, the boy was alone, with a look on his face that expressed neither disgust nor satisfaction at the trip to the famous settlement of the First Humans. It was hard to say whether he thought of the trip as a success or a waste of time. *'Was it more interesting this time than previously? Maybe at least nothing unpleasant happened to him?'*, Molly wondered. He passed the crowd in a wide arc, not saying goodbye to anyone. His backpack dangled inertly at his elbows, as if he was not aware of holding it. Molly felt her stomach churn.

'Hi sweetheart', she reached out her hand to cheerfully tussle his hair in greeting. She craved hugging him as

tightly as she could. Billy dodged. He took her hand and, without a word, started walking towards the car.

‘So, how was it, what did you see, what did you do?’, she fired, trying to strike up a conversation about how he felt but she had a premonition.

‘It was alright, I guess...’, Bill started with fake enthusiasm<sup>1</sup> so as not to arouse his mum’s suspicion. ‘You know, the usual, nothing mind-blowing, but it was quite interesting and obviously tiring because the area was huge. There were activities in a lot of the houses, and I liked that. There were people dressed up in costumes from bygone eras, re-enacting scenes from back then. For example, we saw how glass beads were blown over a fire, or how a potter and a blacksmith worked. We also tried simple dishes from those times. I liked cottage cheese with nettles...’, he stopped there, as if the words had brought back a memory.

‘Did anyone else taste it?’

‘No.’

Molly was hoping for more than a handful of scant and dry trivia but all the way home, she did not hear a word about the trip. She knew something was up again but felt she shouldn’t push him.

In the evening, when she came to tuck him in to sleep, he told her shyly that the kids had teased him again. He had volunteered to blow glass and, according to the kids, he looked like a blowfish. Then they teased him about nettle on his teeth because he had tasted that strange mush. He was eating it, hiding from the prying eyes of the class. Unfortunately, Tim and Fred, the most malicious creatures Billy knows, made sure to

---

<sup>1</sup> Enthusiasm – delight, great satisfaction

draw everyone's attention to the way Billy was eating. They joked that he would probably get sick so should be avoided on the way back, bound to soil his trousers. Finally, they laughed at him when he was talking to the coach driver about the workings of the engine and the average fuel consumption. They didn't understand a thing but conjured up loudly a vision that becoming a bus driver would be the highlight of Billy's professional career. As if that wasn't enough, they distributed a drawing they had made, of Billy with a silly face, driving a tractor loaded with smelly manure. He found this drawing on the bus floor when he was getting out. On the way to the Settlement, he sat next to a girl from his class. For a split-second, Molly was happy; that was before she found out that the girl had been late and got on the coach at the last minute. The seat next to him was the only one available. The girl was nice enough to share her puffcorn with him, but Molly was no fool. During the tour he probably dragged himself behind the group; she didn't even ask. On the way back, he sat beside Mrs Pills, his class teacher, for several hours **contemplating<sup>2</sup>** the scenery behind the window.

'You know, sometimes I think I prefer them teasing me to pretending that I don't exist.'

Mum kissed his forehead to let him know she was there for him, and that most certainly he existed, but she struggled to hold back the tears. Words stuck in her throat for a moment, as if they had suddenly become tangled in a knot and she needed a moment to untangle it.

'Billy, you're a very brave and clever boy,' she looked him straight in the eye, combing through his long fringe, and put her hand on his cheek for a moment.

---

<sup>2</sup> Contemplate – ponder, reflect on something

‘I like to play computer games too,’ Billy continued, ‘but that is practically all they talk about. All that matters are the games, shoving in the corridor, and football, day in day out! It’s madness!’ Billy’s voice kept rising, as if he had finally allowed his body to let go of the built-up tension. ‘It’s impossible to talk to them, Mum. Every time I start talking about something I’ve learned they seemed to be bored stiff. Once at a recess I said to Alfie, who sat near me, that the clouds looked like a train from a western film. He looked up and said that all he could see was something like flowing cotton wool and he was gone right away. They have no imagination!’, concluded Billy and made a gesture as if his head was about to explode. ‘They don’t look at the sky, they don’t listen to music, they don’t want to play outside after school, and when they see birds, they throw sticks at them. I can talk to the girls, but they stick together and sometimes act strangely’.

Mum said: ‘I think that a lot of these children don’t know what they’re missing. And I think you’re not missing much. Don’t feel sorry for people who don’t understand you. Sometimes that one precious friend is worth waiting for. So, don’t let weak friendships be forced on you - they will crumble in a moment of trial, like any weak structure. I’m sure that a person who is on the same wavelength is not far away and you will meet them soon,’ she persuaded, trying to comfort him.

\*\*\*

A few days later, on a Friday afternoon, spring arrived in town for good. After a long and grey winter,

Billy was as thirsty for sunshine as a fish for water. With such fine weather, he was uncomfortable staying inside for a long time. So, when school was over, he left his backpack at home, called Blobby and shouted to his mum that he was taking the dog for a walk. Blobby was a small, snow-white West Highland Terrier and his best friend. They had been almost inseparable for six years, since school started. They only separated during the holidays, when Billy was on summer camps. Once he even tried to smuggle Blobby in his carry-on backpack. He cut air holes and packed her food instead of his titbits for the road, but the dog wriggled inside so much that the secret was out before they left home.

The whole place was turning green again. They headed for the nearby park, where they could fully enjoy nature's beauty. Usually, at this hour, there is hardly anyone there. People are still at work and when it's warm, Billy can roll around on the grass with Blobby unrestrained. In the park, he let her off the leash. She ran gleefully towards the pinecones lying on the ground and fetched one for him, expecting the throwing and fetching game to start right away. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a squirrel in the distance, timidly placing its front paws on the grass, still clinging to the trunk of a pine tree with its hind legs. Without a second thought, Blobby darted towards the squirrel, leaving only a spit-out cone in her wake. Billy was about to summon her when suddenly something rustled behind that tree, followed by an unexpected series of firecracker explosions. The dog started to run towards him when more explosions were set off between Billy and Blobby. The boy froze. He only had time to see the panicked Blobby, with her ears flattened, darting towards the bushes that marked the end of the

park. Billy turned pale and took off running after her. He called out to her for a long time, looked under every bush, every park bench, but there was no sign of Blobby. Finally, he started asking the passersby if they had seen a small, white and frightened dog. Unfortunately, no one had. After an hour of fruitless searching, he had to come to terms with the idea that Blobby, his Blobby, was missing.

He was so angry with those firecrackers. Truth be told, he was angry with whoever had the idea of setting them off in a park, for no occasion at that! Anger mixed with worry filled the gaping hole in his heart, which was burning like a wound sprinkled with salt. He had probably never felt so bad before. Not even when his beloved bicycle was stolen outside a shop.

He walked into the kitchen with his boots on and a yellow leash dangling inertly in his hand. When Molly looked at him, his eyes filled with heavy tears.

‘Billy! What’s happened? Where’s Blobby?’

‘I don’t know,’ he mouthed, then threw himself into his mum’s arms and cried like he hadn’t done in a long time.

She was very worried. She stopped whatever she was doing and called dad first. She asked him to look around on his way home from work; maybe Blobby was running around somewhere. Then she called all the local shelters and vets. They did not have any little white West Highland Terrier, so she instructed Billy to find the best photo of Blobby and, after a while, they were printing out a large pile of missing dog notices.

‘Get dressed, we’ll hang it up in all the main places. I’m sure someone will find her.’

Billy appreciated his mum’s efforts. In fact, this organised search helped him manage his despair. At least

he was doing something; he was no longer overwhelmed by helplessness. Hope rose in him anew. They pasted the notices near bus stops, shops and entrances to major buildings, including schools. As they attached the last notice, with a longing flick of his hand Billy stroked the muzzle of the playful dog looking up from the photograph. He looked around as if Blobby was about to come out suddenly from around the corner. He wished she would, and all these efforts would prove unnecessary, but it was not the case. He grew sad again.

‘We have done everything possible. All we can do now is wait. Maybe someone will take her in, and tomorrow they will see the missing notice, and they will call us right away.’ Mum broke the deepening silence by putting her hand on his shoulder.

‘What if something has happened to her? She ran blindly!’

‘I think she is a smart dog and has avoided the busy streets like her life depended on it. Now we need to go home, I’m sure dad is already there. To make this unpleasant day a bit nicer, we can stop at a sweet shop on the way, if you like’, suggested Mum.

‘I could use some sugar. Today was very bitter. Just be quick because Dad might have found her,’ sighed Billy, putting the duct tape into his rucksack pocket.

Unfortunately, no wagging tail greeted them at home. At night, for a long time Billy couldn’t fall asleep. Blobby always slept with him, and without her the bed seemed unbearably big and uncomfortable. He squirmed and wriggled, unable to calm an avalanche of thoughts. Mum and Dad had been long asleep, the house was shrouded in a deafening silence. He felt lonelier than ever and even considered sneaking into his parents’ bedroom,

but decided he was probably too old for that. He reached for an extra cushion from the chair and hugged it like it was Blobby. Outside the window, the weather seemed to reflect his state of mind. After a beautiful day, strong winds had come through the night, bringing with them an almost palpable anxiety. It wasn't until around one o'clock in the morning when, exhausted and overwhelmed by the events of the past 24 hours, Billy slowly began to fall asleep, listening to the restless hum of the trees outside.

\*\*\*

He found himself in a shiny red cable car, gliding on a single cable over a beautiful green valley. A pink sky stretched in the background. At first, he felt happy and free, just like on a holiday. He looked out of the windows, admired the steep slopes and contemplated the majestic mountains. Suddenly, down below, he saw Blobby, running down the valley along with the car. He called out to her and tapped nervously on the window, but Blobby did not hear him. In a second, the state of bliss burst like a soap bubble. Immediately, memories of the park popped up and his adrenaline levels surged. He had to catch Blobby and save her! He shouted her name, tried to get out, but to no avail. The car glided onwards in an undefined direction. There was that sense of helplessness again. Blobby bounced sideways and disappeared among the tall trees. He was so close... Suddenly, the dream changed, and Billy ran as fast as he could along a forest path. Through the crowns of the strange trees, which seemed to loom like clouds, the sunrays broke through pleasantly. The edge of the forest was in sight, and he seemed to be heading there. All

around him a deafening silence hung. All he could hear was his rapid breathing in his head. He was wondering why he was running, when suddenly something hit him hard from the right, and he fell into a deep hole full of moss and perfectly red wild strawberries. He rubbed his slightly sore knee and without a moment's hesitation, tried to get out. However, despite his hard efforts, the walls of the pit were so sandy that he fell back to the bottom.

'Hey, are you alright?'," suddenly someone called out over his head.

Billy looked up, but against the light he saw only an outline of a figure disappearing over the edge.

'Yes, will you help me get out of here?!', he shouted to the stranger in confusion.

'You must want to see the exit!'

'There is no exit here!'

'Because you're stuck in this belief. Get rid of it.'

'How do I do that?'

'Imagine a way out and believe, then you will see,' explained the voice confident in what it was saying.

It sounded rather unbelievable, but Billy didn't have too many options. After all, he had nothing to lose so he closed his eyes, took a deep breath and imagined stairs along a wall of the big hole. After a few seconds he opened his eyes and... nothing.

'It's not working!'," he shouted upwards.

'Throw reason to the wind, anything is possible here. And if that's the case, believe that the exit is there.'

Billy closed his eyes again and imagined a staircase of compacted sand, trying hard to cling to an

absolute certainty that they were there. Not that they were yet to appear. His expectations were accompanied by a thought that the stairs were not there a moment ago, immediately followed by a clear image of a smooth wall with no stairs. That was not the point. The boy's mind was telling him that this was silly; nothing comes from nothing. So, he silenced reason and focused on the sheer certainty that these stairs were there - since the very beginning. He smelled the slightly damp earth from which the stairs were made, saw their texture, even a root protruding from one of the steps. He could see every single detail, and the more he imagined, the more certain he was of their undeniable existence. He opened his eyes when he was ready. To his amazement, in front of him he saw the exact staircase he had just imagined! Unable to fully comprehend what had happened, but happy to have succeeded, Billy climbed them up quickly. He wanted to thank the mysterious figure for the advice when in front of him, he saw an azure-white rabbit standing on its hind legs, with rainbow eyes and a funny leather waistcoat with no fastenings. It looked like made from a basketball. The rabbit's ears were unusually long, except that the right one stood at attention, and the left one was flopped over. Between the ears was a small black tuft. The rabbit's fur was slightly dishevelled. Both its paws were white, giving the impression that it had gloves **integrated<sup>3</sup>** into its fur. It was undersized, reaching barely below the boy's knee. It looked smart and friendly.

'I see you've found my wild strawberries,' the rabbit said.

'Your wild strawberries?' Billy asked, slightly surprised.

---

3 Integrated – connected to something or forming part of a whole

‘I’ve been looking for them all morning. Something scared them off and I was chasing them when you bumped into me.’

‘So, it was you. I thought that you bumped into me.’

‘Let me put it differently. I’m from here and you’re a visitor, so it was you who bumped into me,’ replied the rabbit with complete certainty.

‘Wait a minute, this is my dream, so I’m hardly a guest’, Billy was about to start arguing but realised that this verbal push and shove would get them nowhere. ‘Oh, alright. Let’s say that we bumped into each other. So, you were chasing runaway wild strawberries...’, Billy paused for a moment, pondering the story, but decided it must be business as usual here. ‘OK, they are here’, he looked behind him to the pit he had just left. ‘Look, I’ve lost something too. Have you seen a small white dog, by any chance?’

‘I don’t think I have but if you’ve lost something, you need to find it,’ the rabbit said, as if it were a piece of cake. ‘You have been given an adventure to embark on!’, it added, slightly excited.

‘What do you mean I have been given an adventure?’

‘Everyone knows that. What’s wrong with you? Dreams would not have happened but for the adventure on the road that leads to the **punchline**<sup>4</sup>. The punchline only comes at the end of a dream, right? The whole dream takes place on the road to it, and because of the road we do all these cool things, and we experience different emotions, and have different thoughts about what is happening. This is how we exist. To stand in the punchline forever would be terribly boring. Don’t you think? Nothing would be happening, so why the dream?’

---

<sup>4</sup> Punchline – end point, surprising effect of storytelling

‘What does the punchline have to do with it? I’ve lost my dog.’

‘Kid, there is some helpful golden thought behind everything that happens here. You need to go through a sequence of events to find the thought and reach your destination.’ Facing Billy’s incredulity, the rabbit continued: ‘You won’t find the dog by standing still, will you?’

‘Right,’ Billy admitted, and mused over the rabbit’s words.

It was a strange creature. It seemed silly but intriguingly intelligent. Suddenly, its rainbow-coloured gaze shifted to something behind the boy’s back.

‘I need to go.’ The rabbit nodded towards the wild strawberries and slowly approached them. ‘Nice to meet you. Don’t bump into anyone anymore.’

Intrigued by whatever was happening behind his back, Billy turned around and, to his amazement, realized that the hole in the ground had disappeared. The wild strawberries were gliding down the tree litter into the forest, like a rippling carpet. Something poked him in the calf, and he saw the azure furry creature rushing after the wild strawberries, giving commands to them. Billy shouted at the rabbit to ask it a question, but suddenly the ground quaked. It became unbearably loud. The trees began to fold like pages in a book, and the dream blurred. Outside the window of his room a fire engine passed by on a call, making a terrible noise in the neighbourhood. Billy lifted his eyelids a little, but his consciousness was still suspended between dreaming and waking. Dazed, he looked at the blue lights fleeing across the ceiling and fell asleep again, unaware of a pair of terrified rainbow eyes watching him from the corner of the room.

## CHAPTER 2

In the morning, Billy woke up to a pleasantly sweet smell of waffles floating from downstairs. He stretched on his bed and looked towards the window. Bright sunrays were breaking through a gap in the curtains. Then he remembered the park, the firecrackers and Blobby disappearing into the bushes. His mood instantly darkened. He covered his face with his hands, took a deep breath and tried to collect his thoughts, looking up at the ceiling through his fingers. He thought that he heard something under his desk. He turned his head slowly in that direction and watched in suspense through the gap between his forefinger and thumb. At first, nothing alarming happened so he thought he misheard it. However, when the dustbin moved slightly, Billy's eyes grew wide and, slowly, he pulled the duvet up to his chin. The bin moved once more, and Billy spotted a blue tuft of fur sticking out from behind the bin's edge. He covered himself all over, breathing quickly. A snatch of a dream flashed before his eyes as he was shouting after some blue creature disappearing into the distance. 'No, it can't be!', he thought.

'Calm down Billy, it was just a dream, there's nothing there. It's just a hairball; something fell on it and shifted it. It was just a dream,' he mumbled it like a mantra, explaining the situation to himself. Just in case, he peeked from under the duvet once more. Instead of resolving all doubt, he came nose to nose with an azure furball, as large as life. Billy screamed and retreated instantly in the opposite direction. He fell off the bed, making a lot

of noise. The rabbit, also frightened, sprang for the door behind its back.

‘Billy?! Is everything OK?!’, dad called from downstairs.

Panting heavily, Billy looked panicked around the room. Meeting the rabbit’s terrified gaze, he realised he was in no danger. In fact, whatever was happening here, clearly they were in the same boat. He started to calm down, his curiosity replacing fear.

‘Yes, everything’s fine! I just fell off the bed! I’ll be right down!’, he replied, not letting the intruder out of his sight. ‘What did just happen? Are you some kind of an apparition?’, he asked, because he still couldn’t believe his eyes.

‘Well, excuse me!’, the rabbit was miffed, and the boy’s jaw dropped. ‘A-ppa-rently, I’m as real as can be!’, said the rabbit, slightly indignant. Then it straightened up and puffed up like a balloon.

The boy stood up and promptly opened the curtains. A multitude of dust particles rose into the air. The rabbit’s pupils narrowed from the sudden light that fell on its snout.

‘Listen, kid, I don’t know what’s going on here, but...’ it paused, ‘I don’t think it’s a dream anymore!’, it finished in a high whisper, putting its paw to its snout as if it were a secret.

Billy shook his head, initially unable to say a word.

‘So, I have lost my mind...’, the boy announced, smacking his forehead.

‘No, no, no, no. That will not be the punchline. There is something very odd about it, and this is the first time ever’.

‘The punchline! Of course! You are that rabbit with the wild strawberries, now I remember!’

‘That’s right! I was chasing my wild strawberries, and when you called out to me, everything I know disappeared! The strawberries must have fled to the Extreme Worlds’ End, and I found myself in this dark and alien place, watching you lie down and sleep soundly. What a waste!’ , the rabbit lamented.

‘Are you suggesting I am to blame?!’, Billy was nettled. ‘Who else? It was clearly your dream and... Ouch!’ . The rabbit paused suddenly. It clutched its cheeks and glared at the boy with its rainbow eyes. ‘You knew you were dreaming!’

‘Well, I guess I did but it happens to people sometimes. I have read about it.’

‘It happens, but oh-so rarely!’ The rabbit shot a finger into the air and started walking nervously from left to right. ‘Yes, that must be it,’ it concluded, plunging into an analysis.

Billy didn’t understand any of this.

‘Send me back,’ the furry creature blurted suddenly, as if it meant sending a package.

‘And how do I do that, huh?!’

‘You have brought me to Reality, then surely you know how to send me back to the Dream.’ It leaned suddenly towards the boy.

‘Rabbit, listen...’, started Billy in a serious tone, taking a step back. ‘I have no idea how you have got here. I haven’t brought you here on purpose! I don’t think I quite believe that I’m talking to a blue animal that doesn’t even exist... or exists in my mind. I may have gone mad. I don’t know but never mind. I know nothing about it! I don’t know any techniques or spells or whatever you are expecting!’

The rabbit's inquiring eyes stared at him in silence for a long moment, taking in the words. It looked as if it had frozen and was not even breathing. Billy froze too, waiting for the rabbit's reaction. With each passing second, the unnaturally long pause and the rabbit's entrancing stare became more and more awkward.

'I only want to go home!', the furry creature suddenly shouted like a small child.

'My sentiments exactly. You should go back there. Surely there is a way...'

'Yes, a way! Why don't you imagine sending me from your dream back to the forest?'

Billy decided it was a good idea to start. Something to sink your teeth in. He sat down on the bed with his legs crossed and closed his eyes. He recalled the wild strawberries on the run and the rabbit chasing them. In his mind, he kept repeating that he was giving it away to his dreams so that it could continue to chase fruits of its choice. He clenched his eyelids tightly, as if this would stimulate his visualisation.

'I don't think your faith is strong enough, I'm still here,' the furry creature cut him short.

'I'm afraid that in this world, it doesn't work as easily as in yours,' Billy said with resignation, as if he was about to give up.

'Oh, I've heard that reality is less susceptible to "imaginedom", but it was worth a try,' said the rabbit sadly.

'To what?'

'The power of imagination. The dream world is much more malleable in this respect.'

‘The dream world...’, repeated the boy, lost in thought. ‘What if we need to understand why you fell out of my dream to find some clue about how to send you back?’

‘Yeah, that makes sense! We have got an adventure!’. For the first time, the rabbit smiled.

‘There’s always a path to the punchline which includes a golden thought,’ Billy elaborated.

‘Hello, kid, I can see that the conversation we had in the hole was not in vain.’

‘Billy’, the boy introduced himself.

The rabbit looked at him, perplexed about what to say. Billy realized that he didn’t know if it had a name at all.

‘If we’re going to spend time together, it’s a good idea to address you somehow.’

‘Can you give me a name?’

Billy puffed out his cheeks, letting the air out slowly. He looked around, glancing at the rabbit from time to time.

‘Crunchy?’, he asked, the name rolling off his tongue. ‘No, it doesn’t fit... How about Snacky? No, that’s silly’, he was critical of himself. ‘Runner!’, he shouted enthusiastically but looked at the rabbit and decided against it. After a while, Billy added in an off-hand manner: ‘I could call you Droppy.’ Having said this, the boy laughed although he did not intend to.

‘Anything but Droppy!’, the rabbit’s snout turned sour.

‘Why not?’ asked the boy, amused.

‘You know perfectly well... I’m a serious rabbit; my name can’t make people think of droppings!’

‘A serious rabbit with a funny name. I love it’, Billy continued cheerfully.

The more the rabbit protested, the more Billy liked the name. However, he had to get up. In the morning, he normally went downstairs quite quickly. His parents might come in soon to check that he was okay. As he was getting dressed, the rabbit continued to argue and gesticulate but Billy wasn't listening. He wondered where his Blobby had slept that night and if she was okay.

'All right, all right. I'll give it a thought... For now, I'll leave you in this room. Don't go anywhere and don't make any noise. I need to go down for breakfast or else Dad or Mum will come up to get me, and they mustn't see you. When I come back, I'll put you in my backpack and we'll go where there are all sorts of books, also about dreams and the mind. Maybe we'll find something. I'll tell my parents that I'm going to the park to look for Blobby, my dog.'

'Sounds like a plan', the rabbit interrupted his reverie. 'Don't you grow any wild strawberries by any chance? I love wild strawberries.'

'I'll get you something.'

\*\*\*

Half an hour later, Billy slipped back into his room, clutching an old, empty backpack with air holes in it. He couldn't spot the furry creature anywhere. He looked in the wardrobe and under the bed, but didn't find it there either.

'Droppy? Are you there?'. For a moment he thought that maybe it had somehow returned to wherever was its place, or it had never been here, and he was delusional.

‘Call me that again, and I promise, I’ll leave you that horror on the floor at night,’ the rabbit warned and emerged from behind the curtain.

‘Here’s an apple,’ Billy smiled and tossed the round fruit in the rabbit’s direction.

The rabbit lurched, wagging its tail quickly, and leapt towards him, as if bouncing off a trampoline. It seized the apple in flight and dropped to the carpet with a graceful flip.

‘Got ya, you, you...!’ the furry creature said to the apple.

‘Wow, it was like my favourite action movie!’, the boy praised, impressed by the bunny’s feat.

‘Did you know that food doesn’t run away here?’

‘Really, it doesn’t?’, the animal wondered. ‘Maybe I’ll like this place’, it commented and bit into the juicy peel with appetite. ‘Ha! Who knew?’

Billy was on his way to the library while a quick crunch and quiet smacks came from his backpack. A few people gave the boy strange looks, but he just sent them a big smile and pushed on ahead. The municipal library occupied a small, historic building with large, heavy doors. Behind them stretched a spacious hall shrouded in silence, only occasionally interrupted by tapping on the keyboard. The rose window above the entrance let in light that fell straight at the top of a large desk with a smiling middle-aged librarian behind it. Billy liked her. She was always kind and patient with him. He admired her enormous passion for the library and the books. She knew everything about the collections. Since she took over from the previous, now elderly lady, a wind of change had blown through the library. There were comfortable beanbag chairs and smaller ottomans for browsing through the selected readings. The windowsills and bookcases were decorated

with plants, cascading like waterfalls. There were also regular workshops for children and adolescents, ran by the new librarian. Plus, there was considerably less dust. Billy whispered to Droppy sitting in his backpack to be super quiet and approached the smiling lady.

‘Hello Billy, it’s been a while since I last saw you’. The librarian was pleased to see him.

‘Good morning, well... I haven’t volunteered for any projects at school this term, maybe that’s why,’ he made up the answer hurriedly.

‘I understand perfectly well. I think the schools demand too much. Constant pressure, a fast pace, like in a corporation, and you are children after all. You could certainly use a break’.

‘Yeah, but the end of the year is coming, and I need to brush up on something. So, I’ve got a presentation to do about... about... dreaming.’ He scratched his head, trying to hide his embarrassment.

‘Oh, that sounds very intriguing. What exactly do you need to prepare?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That dreaming you mentioned... Would you like to review academic research on the sleep cycle? Psychology books? Or do you need something on fairy tales, fables and novels with a dream theme, possibly dream symbolism?’

‘Uhm, I’ll have a couple of books each of everything you’ve said,’ replied Billy, pleased that the lady prompted him where to look for what he was interested in.

‘Oh, alright’, the librarian sighed picturing the task ahead. ‘It must be a very elaborate presentation. What subject, if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Well... it’s actually for an inter-school competition. The English and biology teachers said they’d give me better grades if I make it to the finals. So, I want to do my best,’ Billy improvised.

‘Oh, if that’s the case, I’m off to work. Be so kind and wait in the reading corner on the ottoman. I should be back in 15 minutes at the latest.’

While waiting for the librarian, Billy pulled down the zipper of his backpack. Immediately, a pair of furry ears darted upwards, independently inspecting the surrounding like two periscopes. Finally, both their tips pointed in Billy’s direction and the backpack spoke up, imitating a talk through a walkie-talkie:

‘Come in, captain, bzzzzt, have we reached shore? Over.’  
‘Shoosh, yes, but hide your ears. I’ll tell you when you can come out.’ As there was no response, Billy added: ‘Out.’

The rabbit’s ears immediately disappeared in the backpack, as if it were hundreds of metres deep, just as the librarian emerged from round the corner with books up to her nose. Gasping heavily, she slid them off her shoulders onto the nearest table. Billy looked slightly apprehensive at the magnificent stack of various volumes. Some were very bulky - he had never seen anything like it before.

‘I think these are the most interesting items in their categories. You’re unlikely to take them with you all at once, so why don’t you sit here. No time to waste. It’s a Saturday and we are closing in an hour,’ said the kind lady, untangling from her hair a pendant that went astray.  
‘I’ll be fine, thanks.’

When they were alone, he put together several ottomans to mark a tight perimeter of his workstation, displayed

the books with the covers up and let the rabbit out. It hopped onto the books like onto a stage.

‘Ooh, la, la, lots of knowledge’, whistled Droppy quietly.

‘Where do we start?’, asked Billy

‘I don’t know. How about that cover with the white rabbit?’

‘It’s a famous novel and I think we can put it aside. Alice’s case was the opposite of ours: she was stuck in the dream world, trying to get home. Ultimately, all it took was an outsider waking her up. But... we can check out what they wrote about the rabbit in the other book.’ The boy reached for an old, dog-eared dream dictionary lying next to him.

‘Do they mention me?’

‘No, but it should say what a rabbit dream means. Let’s have a look.’ Billy leafed through the pages one by one until he reached the letter R. ‘Oh, there it is!’

‘Dreams about agile rabbits usually foretell positive changes and new challenges in life. A rabbit augurs good luck and is a promise of social success. It represents a chance for a new order in life if whoever dreams of a rabbit makes good use of the opportunities that fate affords. Sometimes it represents fear of someone mentally stronger and prompts to cast aside fears and resolve situations hurtful to the dreamer. A rabbit is also, of course, widely known as a symbol of fertility.’

Billy slammed the book shut and mused for a moment, staring at the bookcase in front of him.

‘No. Nothing about rabbits falling out of a dream,’ he said hastily.

‘Mind my whiskers’, he heard a quiet voice from under the dream dictionary.

‘Yes, of course, sure...’, the boy lifted the cover and freed the rabbit from its trap.

‘You’ve turned all pink,’ remarked Droppy, massaging its snout.

‘Me, pink? Come on,’ Billy denied, abashed. ‘So, you’re my good omen. That’s what it says here and... there’s nothing more here for us to solve our case,’ he changed the subject quickly, putting the dream dictionary back on the pile of discarded books. He immediately added the other two volumes.

‘Is it about fertility?’

‘No, why? I think it’s something to do with making money... It’s also about creativity, or imagination, isn’t it? Grandma often said that her favourite artists had fertile minds.’

Droppy shook its head and waved its paw at Billy, scanning the other books.

‘What about this one?’, Droppy pointed to a thick science volume.

‘The Power of Sleep,’ Billy read out loud and opened it to the table of contents. He read silently: ‘Why we dream, daydreaming, what happens during the REM phase...’, Billy looked ahead: ‘Rem? Like something geographic... A city in France?’ He raised an eyebrow in surprise and consulted the chapter.

He was immersed in the book for a long time, focusing so hard that his forehead ached from the frowning. The rabbit sat with its paws folded, staring at Billy hopefully, hardly blinking. Time seemed to drag on endlessly. The tension was building up; the rabbit found every minute harder and harder to stand. It began to shift its gaze nervously from the book to the boy. Then its furry fingers moved as if

it were playing a dynamic guitar piece. When, on top of that, its whiskers started twitching, something snapped in it.

‘Do you know how to get me home?’

‘Uhm... No, but I may have a clue. Apparently, there are four phases of sleep, and you need to go through each one in the correct order before you reach the REM phase when you dream. Do you get it? It’s like you need to go through three different rooms before you get to the dream room. In each room you feel slightly different, the body slows down the processes and organises the day’s information. So does the brain - in the next room it produces waves invisible to the eye at a frequency different to the previous one. You need to spend some time in a room to get the key to the next room. This is one cycle, and it can be repeated up to six times overnight. It’s fascinating!’

The rabbit blinked silently, waiting for the specifics that interested him.

‘Oh, Droppy...’

‘I thought we had a conversation about the name. If you step into something in the morning, don’t be surprised,’ the rabbit muttered, miffed, and crossed its paws.

‘It means...,’ Billy continued unabashedly, ‘that sleep isn’t equally deep all the time. Maybe something got messed up that night and I mixed up the rooms, or you got sucked through a quasi<sup>5</sup>-door from the last dream room into the first one, and then I woke up...’, Billy felt as if he had been standing aside, listening to himself, and lost his initial enthusiasm. ‘You’re right, it does sound ridiculous.’

,I am here. Whatever happened and however ridiculous it sounds, I am standing here, on the other side. I don’t

---

<sup>5</sup> Quasi – used to show that something is almost, but not completely, the thing described

recall any other rooms except yours. You may be right, something got messed up then but...’.

‘Maybe I should read about sleep disorders’, Billy didn’t let the rabbit finish, and was opening a new, big volume of academic reading. The rabbit only rolled its eyes.

Having flicked through heaps of books on the phases, hygiene and physiology of sleep, dictionaries of dreams and guidebooks, even a book on the neurobiology of dreaming which turned Billy’s brain into mush with its scientific terminology, the boy still didn’t feel any wiser as to how the creature had been transferred from his dream to the real world. He sincerely doubted if anyone, ever, has described a similar case.

‘Droppy... I don’t think we’ll find anything more here. I wonder if the only thing left is a tea-leaf-reader. They deal with all sorts of unearthly subjects, but I wouldn’t expect them to know what to do in this case either.’

‘Are we going to have tea and snacks?!’, the rabbit was so intrigued that he missed being called by his less than favourite name.

‘No, tea is not in the cards... I mean someone like a witch’.

‘Wow! You’ve got witches here?!’, a shadow flickered across Droppy’s gaze, but so did a glimmer of hope.

‘It’s not quite what you think. They’re not dangerous, they don’t fly on broomsticks, they don’t eat frogs, and they don’t have wands or potions.’

‘Nah! What kind of witches are they if they can’t do anything?’

‘They have different... uhm... work tools. They predict people’s futures from cards, from a crystal ball or from

hand lines.’ Billy extended his hand vigorously, showing the rabbit the patterns on the insides with his finger. ‘Apparently, some know how to talk to ghosts. They do some other things, but I don’t know what. People seem to treat a visit to a fortune-teller more like entertainment or the last resort than a main support. I’m not sure whether to believe them or not, but we must try everything if you want to go home.’

‘OK, let’s do it. Do you know any witches here?’

‘I can only think of an amusement park. This weekend there will be a riverside festival opening the season. They always set up a small funfair with different attractions. There’s a rollercoaster, merry-go-rounds, a haunted house, candyfloss and stuff like that. There are witches that read cards, look into a crystal ball, read the palm to see what will happen in the future. They are called fortune-tellers. Last year there was one fortune-teller, Eleonora. Aunt Jill had her palm read. Mum teased her that she wanted to know if uncle was going to propose. Mum said that if she waited a bit, she would find out.’

‘Did your uncle propose anything? Did the fortune-teller work?’

‘Silly you, uncle was supposed to ask her to marry him’, Billy laughed at Droppy. ‘Come, the library is closing soon.’

‘Everything alright?’, a voice behind the boy’s back suddenly called out.

‘Get down,’ whispered Billy in warning.

The rabbit immediately splayed on its belly and crawled behind the ottoman as flat as it could. Using his foot, Billy slipped his open backpack towards the rabbit and turned slowly to the librarian.

‘Yes, I’ve just finished!’ with a big smile, he waved a sheet in the air and, as soon as the blue fur all disappeared in the backpack, he stood up and quickly put the last open books together in a neat pile.

‘I thought you were talking to someone.’

‘Oh, that’s me. When I talk to myself, I absorb knowledge better. As you can see, we were alone here.’

‘We?’

‘I mean me and you’, Billy felt his heart pounding. ‘I need to go now. Thank you so much for your help.’

He squeezed between her and the doorframe and ran out of the library to the street, catching air as if he had emerged from under water. While his stomach was clenched with emotion, it was also empty, so after he cooled down, he took the course back home. His mum was making his favourite dish for lunch, a springtime quiche with young beet leaves and feta cheese. He loved vegetables in any form and, after a long winter, he always looked forward to the taste of the first new vegetables. At lunch, somewhere between the first and third piece of quiche, he persuaded his parents to accompany him to the evening festivities. They were pleased that, despite the recent events, he wanted to go out.

## CHAPTER 3

The opening of the Season was always a big thing, attracting crowds of residents from all over the town. The stalls were bursting at the seams with food, colourful toys, souvenirs and seasonal “things that may come in handy”. People bent over them and contemplated with utmost seriousness which to choose, as if they hadn’t seen anything like that in the shops they visited on a daily basis. It’s funny how certain items at festivals suddenly seem more attractive to people than before.

Centrally located was a barbecue bar with a powerful hearth. A circular wooden counter was built around it to access the BBQ from all sides. It filled the air with extremely aromatic smells. No wonder people were drawn to it like moths to the flame. The ten-strong team could barely keep up with serving the eager customers. In the tents, various activities were offered to suit age and interests. Adult gourmets could partake in a session of tasting wines from across the region. And so, there was something for everyone. The proximity to the river and ambient lighting provided by bulbs strung between the trees, giving off a soft, warm light, added to the charm. A small funfair was set up right next door, as the opening of the season attracted many families with children.

Right at the entrance, Billy and his parents were handed a flyer with the event schedule. It was teeming with competitions, raffles, concerts, shows and performances for the young and the older. The special weekend was to end with the arrival of a big rock star, followed by fireworks and releasing sixty lanterns to

mark the event's round anniversary. People commented in delight that the organisers had managed to cram so many attractions into just a two-day programme. Billy gave the flyer back to his dad and looked at girls dancing by the fire with garlands on their heads. They exuded a strangely magnetic, almost magical aura. The dancers' long hair was flowing to the rhythm of their steps, accompanied by the sound of the ukulele played by their red-haired friend. The girls seemed surreal<sup>6</sup>, ethereal<sup>7</sup> and free - a feast to the eye. They danced, oblivious to the people watching them. Oh, how Billy envied them this sense of liberation and carefreeness. Deep down, he longed to feel that way too: to stop worrying about what others thought of him, to be himself, his true self - free of fears, limitations, just minding his business. When he started to ponder why he didn't feel like that and what was stopping him from changing it, the rabbit in his backpack began to wriggle, until it finally kicked him in the ribs.

Billy collected himself. He turned his back to the bonfire and steered his parents towards the funfair. With a smile, he announced that this was where he wanted to start the evening. As his dad was eyeing a high striker with a huge hammer, Billy suggested he would go to the haunted house by himself; his parents could do something fun in the meantime. They would all meet again in half an hour. Things went more smoothly than he had anticipated, so without hesitating, he moved towards a signboard with a large skeleton with glowing eyes, ominously inviting him into a house of horrors. He didn't get there, however. Moments earlier, he turned into a side alley, leading to a large, somewhat isolated

---

6 Surreal – bizarre, absurd, unusual

7 Ethereal – fleeting, subtle

tent of Eleonora the fortune-teller. There it stood, the same tent in the same place as the year before.

‘Droppy, we’re visiting a fortune-teller. Stop wriggling,’ Billy whispered, admonishing the rabbit in his backpack.

‘Can I see what she looks like?’

‘No,’ he cut it short. ‘Focus. Three, two, one, I’m in,’ he said, motioning to the entrance.

Inside, the atmosphere was strange. The orange, subdued light from a tiny lamp and a few candles made the interior cosy. But then, some objects, like a talisman with a crow’s foot hanging on a standing mirror, made more sensitive visitors grimace in disgust. On the ground lay a patterned carpet, tired of life. In the past, it might have been red. Today, its colour could at best be described as grey and brown. A little to the right of the entrance stood a rather large round table covered with a heavy tablecloth. In its centre was an impressive crystal ball the size of a football. Sitting at the table was a slightly bored woman with dark, wavy hair pinned up in a bun. Her huge earrings glimmered in the candlelight, adding a hint of magic to her image. It gave Billy hope that she would answer his question. As she looked at the boy in silence, he felt really intimidated. At the sight of such a young man, she hesitated, but after a moment, with an open hand she indicated a chair at the table. Billy sat down uncertainly, placed his backpack between his feet and took a breath.

‘I have come with an unusual problem.’ He checked on the fortune-teller waiting for him to continue. ‘Something seems to have fallen out of my dream. Does it happen? Have you heard of a thing like that?’

‘Kid, I think you need to speak more precisely so that I understand correctly what brings you here,’ she replied in a majestic voice.

‘I mean, literally something transferred from my dream to reality. I don’t know how it happened or how to undo it, so I’m counting on you.’

The fortune-teller did not let her confusion show. She reached to the heights of her cosmic-spiritual knowledge and answered as wisely as she could.

‘Well... In fact, matter doesn’t exist, it’s an illusion made of the same material as the spirit world and the dream world... They are one.’ Billy pricked up his ears. ‘Almost half of people recognise the inner world and do not recognise the outer world. The other half do the opposite. They accept the material but reject the existence of the inner world altogether. It is like existing in half, and one who exists in half cannot be whole, cannot be happy. Are you either of these cases? Are you happy?’

‘Well... not lately. I seem to have a problem with the “exterior”.’

‘You see kid, it is possible that the material of which you and your life are made needs to be seen in its entirety,’ said the fortune-teller **enigmatically**<sup>8</sup>, pleased with herself.

‘Maybe, but I need at least to know how something falls out of a dream to understand it and find a solution.’

‘Has it occurred to you that you might be complicating things?’, she replied, glancing up casually.

‘I thought that maybe you have seen something like this before and could help me. You are my last resort’. He wouldn’t take “no” for an answer.

‘I’m afraid I don’t know the answer to your question. I specialise in fortune-telling and ghosts, not dreams. I can consult the cards or my crystal ball to see what fate will

---

<sup>8</sup> Enigmatic – mysterious, not fully elaborated

befall you. It's forty dollars.'

'Forty dollars?!', Billy straightened up in his chair. 'I don't have that kind of money but I'm not here for fortune telling, I need guidance.'

'Hon, that's what I do, that's my job. I'm sure your parents don't work for free either,' the woman replied, now impatient, and held out her hand in front of her. 'Ten dollars for, as you put it, 'guidance', and then off you go'.

'For this conversation?!', Billy was outraged and astonished.

'What were you thinking? Once you step into this tent, you pay for my knowledge. I have listened to you and given you hints. If you make an effort and grasp the deeper meaning, you will surely find what you are looking for. Well, that's worth ten dollars, isn't it? You've got that much, right?', she asked, looking at him suspiciously with her cold, black eyes.

Billy knew he was in trouble; he was disappointed and angry. The feeling spread throughout his body in a hot wave until it dried up in his throat and pulsed in his temples.

'I only have a silver chain...', he said reluctantly.

'For heaven's sake, does this place look like a pawnshop<sup>9</sup>?!', the fortune-teller was outraged, stood up, and leaned on her crystal ball. 'Ooof!!! A RAAABBIT!!! A RABBIT! I CAN SEE A RABBIT!', she moved away so violently that she knocked over her chair and pressed her back into the tent's wall.

Bewildered by her reaction, Billy looked quickly at the ball in the middle of the table. Beyond any doubt,

---

<sup>9</sup> Pawnshop – a place where money is lent against various assets

it was showing a slightly misshapen, double-sized head of Droppy's with squashed ears. It blinked its rainbow eyes and looked left and right, orienting itself. It wanted to wave to the boy but gave up before it pulled its paw inside. It must have been very cramped in there.

'Are you a witch?', a muffled voice came from the ball.

The woman covered her mouth and slumped to the ground. Billy decided to seize the moment of shock, reached under the table, grabbed the rabbit by the legs, and pulled it out like a cork from a bottle. He quickly put the bunny into his backpack, ran out of the tent and hid behind the nearest tree.

'You were supposed to stay in the backpack!', Billy shouted upset, looking inside.

'Right, but I so wanted to see what she looked like,' the rabbit said innocently. 'I rolled out quietly but all I could see were your legs, and that bright opening above my head. I had to look around and... and I guess I helped you, didn't I?' 'Basically, yes, but it was quite a ruckus... A crystal ball, pfft. That fortune-teller stank. A fraud and a swindler!'

Billy slumped down on the grass, leaning against the tree trunk. He combed through his hair, trying to collect his thoughts, when suddenly two tall boys loomed up in front of him. 'Oh no', he thought.

'What's this, Bill? Do you believe in fortune-tellers?', Fred asked accusingly, looking at the tent from which Billy had run out.

'Did you want to find out if you'll have a girlfriend?', Tim added, taking a step forward. 'You don't need a fortune-teller - you scared off even her; you need a miracle!', he burst out laughing.

'Back off. Take a hint. Nobody wants you here!', Billy

got up quickly on his feet, sensing even more trouble.

They were alone, out of the way, in the shadows. He felt they wouldn't miss the opportunity to go one step further than in school.

'A nobody like... you?', Tim lowered his voice ominously. 'Cause I can't see anyone else... Bi-lly', he came even closer, accenting the first syllable of the boy's name.

Silence fell. The tension building up in the air was palpable.

'What's in that nasty backpack of yours?', Tim took an interest in the backpack lying near the tree.

Billy got really worked up. His heart was hammering so hard it was about to jump out of his chest. He had to do something, and he had to do it now.

'The only nasty thing here is your breath!', he retorted. But Tim felt inspired; grist to the mill, as they say. He smiled wryly. He looked as if everything was going his way, and he was gloating over the moment.

'Hey, Fred, come and see what we've got!'

'Leave it!', Billy shouted, moving towards Fred.

Then Tim seized him by the collar and pressed against the trunk. He nodded to his mate to check the backpack.

'These are not sandwiches, right?', he wheezed a few inches above Billy's face.

'Tim, maybe we shouldn't,' Fred hesitated.

'Are you cracking up? Give me a break, Fred!', Tim replied.

Billy seized the opportunity created by the exchange. He jerked forward towards Tim to knock him off balance and gave him the strongest kick between the legs in Billy's life. Tim automatically bent in half and collapsed like

a log with a groan. Unfortunately, he was still holding Billy by the collar, so Billy tugged at him. They both scrambled on the ground like fighting dogs.

‘Let-go-of-me!!’, Billy shouted.

‘You’ll be sorry,’ Tim said with his teeth clenched, red with pain and rage.

Next, Billy pushed off from him with his feet, hard enough for Tim to let go. He turned around and was ready to get up when he landed face down in the grass again. He nearly hit his head on a protruding root. Tim did not give up. Reaching out to his opponent with only one hand, he still managed to grab Billy’s ankle firmly.

‘Freeeed! What are you looking at? Catch him!’, he yelled, spitting saliva into the air.

First, Fred froze but came to his senses and, as if on autopilot, threw himself at Billy. He must have been unsure if he was doing the right thing because as soon as Billy felt Tim let go of his leg, he rolled with Fred without too much resistance, landing over him with his fist ready to go. For split seconds, time seemed to have stood still. Billy felt the metallic taste of blood on his lips; he realised that he was panting hard and fast. He was about to strike when he looked into Fred’s terrified eyes and gave up at the very last moment. He sprung up from the ground, grabbed his backpack and, without looking back, started to run towards the high striker where he had an appointment with his parents. Like a coward, he reproached himself. Everything inside him was screaming. Halfway there, he came to his senses and realised that his looks would trigger off too many questions from his mum. He didn’t want anyone to see him now, let alone ask him questions. He had such an

adrenaline<sup>10</sup> rush that he felt like hiding in the dark and banging with his bare fists on a random tree, screaming at the top of his lungs. He couldn't meet his parents looking like this. So, he ran to the other end of the funfair and hid behind a T-shirt stall to cool off.

'Are you alright?' anxious, he asked Droppy who was shaken up after the run and let the rabbit out of his backpack. His hands were shaking.

'I guess. How about you? You don't sound like a champion.'

'Because I'm a coward!'

'Come on, as far as I'm concerned, you've shown prowess! Who knew?'

'Who knew that a nobody like me could fight back? Is that what you mean?', Billy hissed angrily, still driven by rage and humiliation.

'That's not what I meant, I just...'

'Stop making excuses! Stupid rabbit! If it wasn't for you, none of this would have happened! School is going to be a disaster!'

Droppy fell silent. He hadn't expected an attack when deep down, he was grateful and even admired the boy.

'What are you staring at?!', Billy yelled and buried his head in his knees. At this point everything was too much and too hard for him.

The stunned rabbit flattened its long ears and stood still for another short moment, looking at Billy in disbelief. Its big eyes glazed over with tears. Suddenly, one tear slipped out and coursed down its snout. The

---

<sup>10</sup> Adrenaline – the hormone that causes a surge of energy in our body, a desire for action

rabbit wiped it away by reflex and looked bewildered at its wet paw. It had never cried before. 'So, this is how you need to feel for eyes to make drops', Droppy thought with sadness.

\*\*\*

When Billy raised his head, Droppy was no longer there. He looked around confused, but there was no sign of the rabbit. He felt a familiar sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach and in his heart. Just like yesterday when Blobby went missing. What have I done?!, he reprimanded himself. He sprang to his feet, wiped his face with a sleeve and looked at the watch. The half-hour agreed with his parents had passed. But he could not leave Droppy alone in a strange place. He looked anxiously in all directions. He strained his eyes but to no avail. He shuffled his feet, wondering what to do, until he couldn't stand it and kicked the first stone that came across. He was angry, but not at anyone specific, not at fate, but most of all at himself.

He decided that Tim and Fred had surely gave up and gone; cautiously, he stepped out into the main alley. He looked everywhere for azure fur or big ears. He thought it would be clever to look for the rabbit at the food stalls, but it wasn't there. Instead, he saw his parents going from one stall to another and anxiously inquiring about him. Clearly, they were worried.

He felt strangely sad at the sight, but instead of running up to them, he quickly hid behind someone so they wouldn't notice him. He needed more time! He ran

through the entire festival area but did not find the rabbit. When, resigned, Billy returned to the meeting place, he suddenly spotted Droppy, sitting on an illuminated prize shelf, in a booth with moving targets.

It didn't move, it looked just like the stuffed toys, but Billy had no doubt it was Droppy. They were only fifty feet apart. He was so relieved! He was about to run there when he saw a bald gentleman reaching from behind the counter for the rabbit and handing it to a chocolate-haired girl. She had hit popping up cans five times in a row. Of course, she had to choose Droppy! The boy was disconcerted. She reached out for Droppy and tenderly patted its cheek. Tucking it under her arm, she turned and ... walked to the car park with her parents.

Billy couldn't believe his eyes. He felt like such a fool, powerless and disillusioned with himself. At that moment, his upset parents sprinted to him. Mum got to him first. She hugged him tightly and, with tears in her eyes, took a good look at her son.

'Where have you been?! Are you OK?!'

'I've been here all the time. First, I got stuck in a candyfloss queue, and this haunted house took me a bit longer than I planned. It's amazing how people are scared away by spooks with a bit of electronics. I've done it twice,' Billy stammered, as if reciting a poem, still tracing the rabbit disappearing into the darkness.

'We asked the staff. You were not there,' Dad said in a strangely measured tone, removing a dry blade of grass from the boy's temple. 'Did you get in a fight?', he commented on Billy's cut lip.

'On the way out, I bumped into Tim and Fred, bounced and fell.'

‘I see... You just bounced off them and fell on your face instead of your back?’, Dad was not born yesterday.

‘Yes. Can we go now?’, Billy said curtly, glancing nervously towards the car park.

All he could think of was getting there as soon as possible and trying to get Droppy back. Maybe somehow, he could convince the girl to give it back or trade it for something. With every second of delay, a pain in his stomach grew stronger, so he seemed all jittery. Dad took in a deep breath, looking at him as if he could read Billy’s thoughts.

‘OK, but this is not the end of it. Enough excitement for today.’

