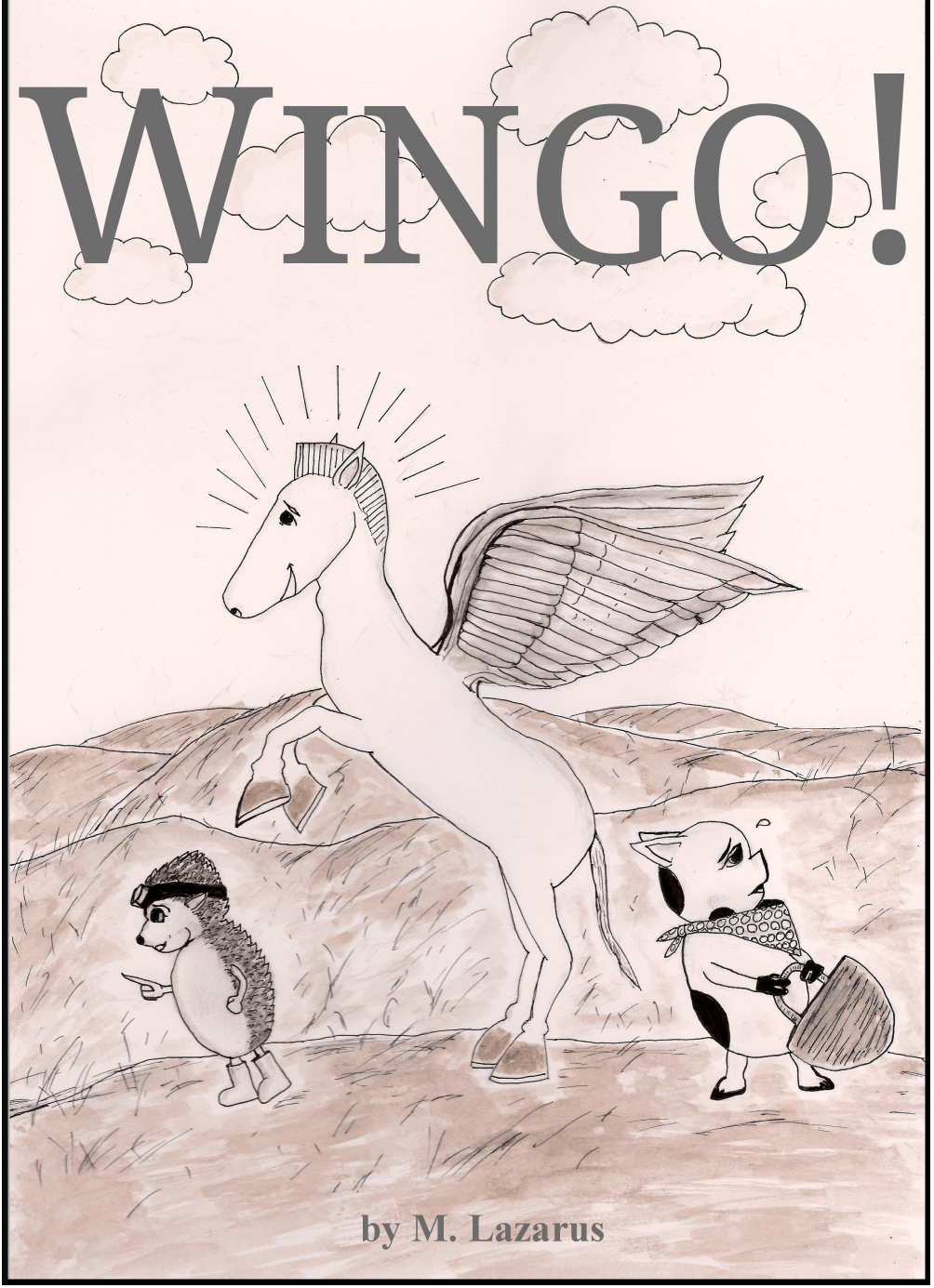
WINGO!



by M. Lazarus

Wingo!

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Chapter One - Goodbye, Wingo

The cheerful sound of the morning birds at Georgiana Fields drove a very sleepy Wingo out of his bed. He yawned and stretched his wings and trotted out of bed. Today was the day. He checked his mane was reasonably neat, because Mum was always on at him about keeping it tidy. The young horse wasn't quite sure how his hair ended up in messy tufts pointing in every direction while he slept. Yawning some more, Wingo headed out to the front field. Before him were the familiar hills of grass, waving slowly in the wind, as if they were saying "Good morning, Wingo! What took you so long to get up?"

And, naturally, awake long before him and bustling about their business, there were Mum and Dad.

"Good morning, Wingo!" they said to their son, and presented him with a lovely breakfast of fried carrots.

As they knew, carrots were Wingo's favourite food (and in particular, fried carrots), so today was clearly a special day, but Wingo knew what it all really meant and gave a deep sigh.

"How are you today, lad? It's an exciting time for you!" said Wingo's Dad.

"I s'pose, Dad," said Wingo, with a most impressive yawn.

"Are you ready for your first day on the job?" asked Wingo's Mum.

"Of course, Mum," said Wingo with a roll of his eyes. Honestly, what an awful big deal they made out of doing a tiny bit of work!

Wingo's Mum had a big red flower behind her ear, and was humming happily to herself in a dreamy fashion, which was somewhat embarrassing to Wingo, but this was nothing compared to the shamefully battered straw hat that Wingo's Dad had decided to wear for the holidays. This hat was half as big as Dad and flopped about so much that Wingo's pa could hardly see a thing from underneath it. What is one supposed to do with one's parents, after all? thought Wingo to himself with an affectionate sigh.

"Now, son, remember, you need to take care of the delivery business as best you can while we are away travelling," Wingo's Dad said, "And if things get bad, you just get in contact with Mr. and Mrs. Sea Otter, okay, m'lad?"

Wingo nodded. He was a grown winged horse, after all. He'd helped Mum and Dad with the deliveries heaps of times before and it was all much too dull to worry so much about.

"You don't need to get all bothered about it, Dad," Wingo said, "You and

Mum enjoy your holiday. I'll take care of everything while you are gone."
"Don't worry, Mister and Missus Wingo," said a bright reedy voice from somewhere in the field, "I've got the brains to help ol' Wingo out."
"Mornin', Fiz," said Wingo in the direction of the excitable little voice.
"Where are you, Fizikosophiste?" said Wingo's Mum, peering about. Her son squinted across the field of grass, and eventually found a patch that was pushed down by a small shape. He trotted over. "Hullo there, Fiz," he said, to the little hedgehog friend of his, who was lying on the grass, belly up to the sun, with her special goggles over her eyes.
"Hullo, Wingo," she said. His hedgehog pal appeared to be deep in thought.
"Well, Fizikosophiste!" said Wingo's Mum, "What are you up to there in that field?"
Fiz sat up and took off her goggles so that she could give an earnest look to Wingo's parents.
"Well, Mr. and Mrs. Wingo," the hedgehog explained, "I've found that a good heapin' heap of sunshine helps me think real hard, and I have ever so many things that I need to invent, and your field has the best sunbeams around. They really get my noggin goin'."
"Well, well!" said Wingo's Dad, who never quite understood what went on in Fiz's head.
"Just make sure that you keep an eye on Wingo while we are gone," chimed in Wingo's Mum.
"Gee," admitted the hedgehog, as she adjusted her bag of scientific stuff, "I'm afraid that I might forget, with all the other thinkin' I'm doin', but don't worry, I think that Sniffle will be along soon, and she's awful good at rememberin' to tell us things."
Wingo flapped. "Honestly, Mum and Dad, don't worry even a smidgen. I shan't be a bit lonely and promise I'll do all the dashed little things you told me to do and Fiz will help me and Sniffle too-"
"Yes? Achoo!" said Sniffle, who had just arrived at Georgiana Fields. Sniffle was Wingo's other best friend, and she was a quiet little piglet who liked to wear a handy handkerchief around her neck.
"Tally-ho there! How are you, young Sniffle?" said Wingo's Dad with a wave, as Wingo's Mum checked that he had packed extra coats, in case it was cold on their holiday. One never quite knows where you will end up when you are properly holidaying.
"Achoo!" said Sniffle, who was, unfortunately, allergic to almost everything that she smelled.
"Sniffle, dear, are you sure you are all right?" said Wingo's Mum.

"Oh, you know, how poor ol' Sniff is," said Fiz the hedgehog, who had lain down again to get the most of the brain-inspiring sun, "She's always sneezin' away."
"Well, if you're so gosh-darn brainy, Fiz," said Sniffle with indignation, "Why don't you invent something to help with my sneezings?"
Fiz rolled over in the sun and scratched her head. "I'm awful sorry, Sniffie ol' pal, but I'm trying to invent a self-saucin' pudding machine at the moment. I'm afraid that I haven't any thinkin' time to spare just yet. Your silly little sneezles will have to wait a bit."
Sniffles harrumphed. She didn't think that there was anything silly about her sneezes and, in fact, they were often very large sneezings and not at all little.
Wingo smiled at his friends. They were always at it like this. It was Wingo's job to make sure they didn't make each other too cross. The young horse steered his cranky friends so they were face to face and patted them warmly on the back and told them to make-up like jolly good pals. Because of Wingo's unstoppable friendliness, Fiz and Sniffle soon found that they couldn't keep up their scowling and broke down into giggles at the sight of each other looking ever so serious.
"Are you sure you know how to handle everything?" asked Wingo's Mum once again, fluttering her feathers, as she did when she was anxious.
"Oh, of course, Mum," said Wingo, "It's just boring delivery stuff."
"Fizikosophiste, Sniffle," said Wingo's dad, "I'm deputising you girls to help our Wingo, if you'd be so good. Roger that? You two keep an eye on our young fella. Make sure he does what he has to."
"Yez, yez, certainlies," Fiz declared, although she was much more interested in a passing cloud.
"Do not worry," declared Sniff, who was a reliable sort of piglet, "I'll make sure that Wingo gets his work done."
"Grand! Righto, well, I suppose we'll be off then," said Wingo's Dad.
"Don't forget to eat properly, and do try to keep the house clean, Wingo dear. Are you sure you will be all right, my little darling?" said Wingo's Mum.
"Honestly, Mum and Dad," said an exasperated Wingo, "It's not rocket science. I promise I'll take care of everything while you are away and will probably have no interesting fun at all. Now off with you two, and have a splendid time!"
Wingo's Mum gave her son a kiss and she and her husband spread their glorious wings and launched themselves into the air, sailing off into the distance.

Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle waved at them until they were just specks in the sky. The young winged horse hoped they would have a lovely trip, even if he was stuck here at Georgiana Fields.



Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle waved at them until they were just specks in the sky.

"Wingo," Sniff said meekly, "I'm a bit peckish. Have you anything to eat?"
"Help yourself, Sniff. You know where the pantry is."
With a nod, the little piglet scurried off into the house.

Fiz had put her sun-goggles back on and was wandering about, looking for the best sunshine for thinking.
"You must be excited, Wingo," the hedgehog declared, "Just think! Left alone to look after everything, like a proper grown-up!"
"Oh, it shan't be all that fun, I'd imagine, Fiz," Wingo said, "Proper fun is adventures and daring! Why, did you know, long, long ago before they moved here to Georgiana Fields, Mum and Dad had all sorts of adventures of their own? It must have been ever so exciting for them. Mum used to fly with the Lightning Riders, and Dad was a proper explorer in jungles and caves and sky-cities all over the world! To think, they got to go and have all sorts of heroic adventures and I'm stuck here delivering letters and parcels." The very thought of it made Wingo give a little kick at the ground.
Fiz had by this time found a satisfactory spot for sunbathing.
"D'y'know, Wingo," Fiz said, "I think, with a big enough catapult, I could probably shoot myself to the moon."
"Don't be so silly!" Sniff responded, as she munched on a lovely red apple she had found in the pantry, "How would you get back?"
Fiz thought about this some more.
"I'd build another catapult, of course!" the hedgehog said.
Wingo slumped a little.
"It's a pity that nothing interesting ever happens to me. I think I'd be jolly good at doing interesting things."
"Never mind that sort of thing right now," said Sniff, "I've got something much more important. I've found a carrot pie! Come and have a piece, you two!"
And so the trio sat out in the lovely sun in Georgiana Fields and spent a while chewing away at the carrot pie. Sniff took little determined bites of her food, while Fiz kept measuring bits and pieces before eating them, no doubt as part of her research into the science of self-saucing pies.
Wingo, who normally loved carrot pie, chewed away slowly at his piece rather sadly. Sniffle found them some elderflower juice to wash it all down, but despite Fizz and Sniff's efforts, Wingo was still awfully low.
"Just once," he kept saying, "Just once, I'd like to do something properly adventurous!"

Chapter Two - Wingo and Friends Get to It

That night, Wingo prepared beds for his friends so that they could stay over. To be honest, Wingo was happy to have some company. His house at Georgiana Fields was much more lonely and empty without Mum and Dad than he expected, so he was even pleased to have the comforting noise of Sniffle and Fiz quarrelling over who should get which bed. Eventually, Wingo declared that they could each use one particular bed tonight, and then swap next time so that everything would be fair. Even when this was settled, it still took Fiz a while to fall asleep, since she was chattering away about what she thought dreams might be made of, but eventually, overcome by Sniffle and Wingo's tired yawns, even she became quieter and quieter and mumbled her way to sleep.

Wingo dreamed of wearing a glorious silver-white helmet with a crest, and a set of shining armour just like his Mum used to have, and he was dashing into all sorts of perilousness. Just at the point in his dream when he was about to knock the enemy (which consisted of hordes of rabbits) all about him, he was woken by Sniff nudging him and asking what was for breakfast.

Yawning, Wingo replied, "Oh, you decide, Sniffie. You know where everything is and you are a jolly good cook too."

The little pig stood thoughtfully. "I think, yes, I think I shall make pancakes for breakfast," she said in her quiet voice.

"Pancakes!" declared Fiz, who came running into the room, "Good one! I'll help you, Sniff!"

Sniffle looked rather unsure about the idea of Fiz helping. Indeed, as she saw the brainy hedgehog's eyes widen, Sniff had the awful feeling that Fiz was about to have one of her ideas.

"Eureka! I've just thought up a smashin' idea!" beamed Fiz, "Let's see how high we can stack them pancakes! Why, I'll bet if I can plan the right shape for the pancake towers, we can get 'em high enough to reach the clouds! Come on, Sniff, let's get going! Come and help us, Wingo!"

"Yes, do get out of bed, Wingo," pleaded Sniff, hoping that the young horse could help distract Fiz from helping her long enough for Sniff to actually make breakfast.

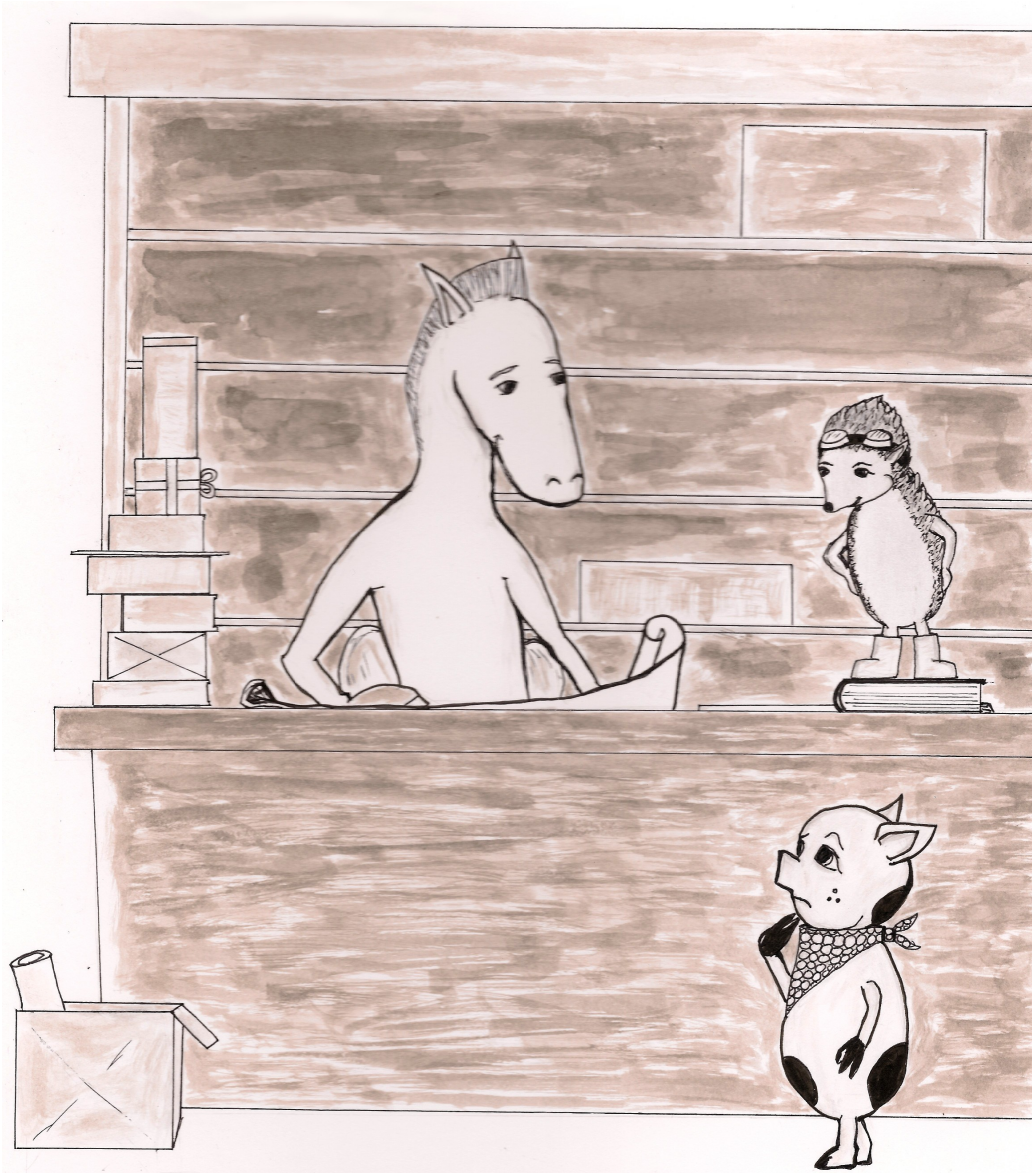
"Lots to do today, Wingo," said Fiz, hopping from foot to foot excitedly, "Your first day on the job, all on your ownsome!"

"Oh, bother to that," said Wingo crankily, "I don't want to deliver silly old

packages. I want to do something exciting and bold."
"Come on now, Wingo," Sniff added, tugging at one of the horse's wings, "It isn't like you to stay down in the dumps. Why don't you hop out of bed and we will see where the day takes us?"
"To pancake towers miles high!" said Fiz.
Wingo smiled despite himself. Between Sniffie's kindness and Fiz's liveliness, he found his grump fading. He got out of his bed and flapped his wings.
"All right then, you two. Fiz, how about you organise the things Sniffie will need to make breakfast, while Sniff gets the frying-pan going. Meanwhile, I'll make us all a nice cup of mint tea."

Wingo eventually managed to convince Fiz that they should probably hold off on building a giant pancake pyramid, mainly by encouraging her to eat so many of Sniffle's lovely breakfast treats with carrot and apple jam, that the brainy hedgehog was too full to move, much less attempt to reach the clouds with pancakes. Wingo and Sniffle had also eaten their fill and everyone decided that they would need a second mint tea before they could think about they would do next on this lovely day.
At last, Wingo decided that he couldn't put off the chores his Mum and Dad had left him for any longer. With drooping wings, he set about tidying Mum and Dad's office, while Sniffle cleaned up after breakfast. Sniffle always insisted on doing both the cooking and cleaning-up herself, because she was rather proud for a shy little pig, and felt that Wingo and Fiz were likely to do a hopeless job that was not up to her standards.
Fiz, being the cleverclogs of the group of friends, went through all of the local deliveries on the list and worked out how Wingo could fly most quickly to each place. With his delivery bag on, loaded up with little parcels by Sniffle and directed by Fiz, Wingo had delivered six letters and three boxes by lunchtime and was awfully worried about how he could keep up this dull work for all of the time that his Mum and Dad were away.
"Are there many more for today?" Wingo asked Fiz glumly.
"Just the one more, Wingo," answered Fiz, who was struggling with a map that was several times larger than she was and which was threatening to fold down on top of her.
Sniffle and Wingo came to the rescue before Fiz could get too wrapped up and lost in the map by holding down opposite ends, while Fiz pointed at a spot on the map.
"That's where we have to go next - Zumer Beach!"

"That looks awfully far, Fiz," Sniffie said nervously.
"Well, it will make for a bit of change, at least," Wingo added.
Fiz did some calculations and number juggling in her head.
"I think if we leave now," the hedgehog said, "We oughta be able to deliver it by this afternoon and hopefully be back by this evening!"
"What do you mean, we?" Wingo asked.
"Well, Zumer Beach sounds smashin', doesn't it?" Fiz replied, stomping on a corner of the map that kept flipping open, "An' you know how sunbeams help me think, an' I could do some studyin' of all the lands from up in the sky for an idea I'm havin' about makin' a train."
The nervous little pig did not seem quite so keen on the idea.
"Well, Fiz, gosh, I don't know..." Sniffle said cautiously.
"Oh, go on, Sniffie! Zooks! We will get to see some rippin' new countryside, and you might find some new ingredients for your bakin' and cookin'!"
The idea of finding some new fruits and spices did appeal to Sniff, but she was not yet entirely convinced until Wingo smiled down at her.
"To be honest, friends, I would quite like the company. It is a dashed long way to go alone, after all."
Fiz clapped happily.
"Then it's decided! Let me just get a few instruments packed!"
"And I suppose I'd better get a basket together of snacks for us," Sniffle added.
Wingo nodded in approval.
"Tip-top!" said the young horse, "I'll just have another quick look at the map and get the package, and then we'll head off, shall we?"
Fiz and Sniffie scurried off to get ready.
Carefully, Wingo traced the directions Fiz had indicated on the map that led far, far away to Zumer Beach. His Mum and Dad were always going on about how important it was to get the directions completely right and remembered in the delivery business. Then, Wingo went hunting for the package. It was nothing much to look at, just another cardboard box wrapped up carefully in brown paper and string and addressed to 'Mr. Grampa Turtle, House-on-Stilts, Zumer Beach'. Wingo wondered if that was all he was going to do for the rest of for ever - fly brown-paper parcels all about the place. Would it matter to anybody if he didn't bother? He shook his head. No! He may not enjoy it, but he'd promised Mum and Dad he would look after things, and he wasn't about to let them down. By Gusts and Gales, Mr. Grampa was going to get his package, no matter what!



"To be honest, friends, I would quite like the company.
It is a dashed long way to go alone, after all."

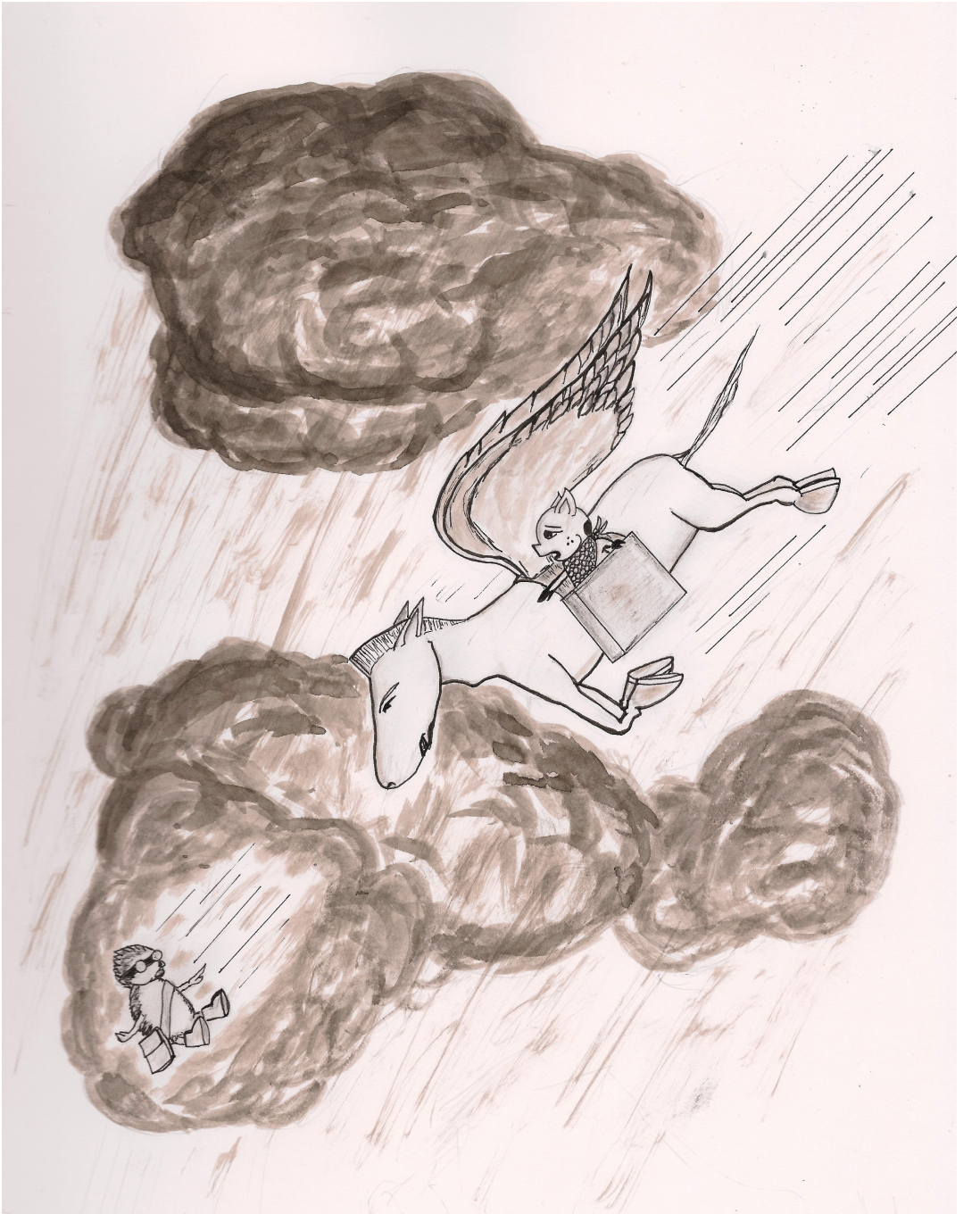
Chapter Three - On Their Way and Off they Go

"Hurry up, you two!" Wingo shouted, "I don't want to leave too late!"
The young horse had put had on his delivery bags, one large pouch hanging over each of his sides. Even with the package to be delivered to Zumer Beach and various odds and ends (such as some carrots for the trip) there was more than enough room for his small friends to clamber into the bags and have a seat.
"If we get good winds, we should be able to cut half-an-hour from the trip, according to my calculations," declared Fiz, who hopped into the bag on Wingo's left. She wriggled around, shoving down beside her a telescope, some rulers, various bits of string, a compass, a small windsock, and various other essential scientific instruments, before taking a seat on top of the package.
"Achoo!" sneezed Sniffle, who came running as fast as she could, swinging a large basket filled with food along with her and mumbling "Oh goodness, oh gosh, achoo!". Among the many things that would make Sniffle sneeze, she also tended to become very achooish when she was worried, and unfortunately, there seemed to Sniff to be so very many things to worry about. "Oh my! Achoo! I'm coming, wait, wait, wait. My, my, I do hope we won't be too cold up there in the air."
Wingo winked at Sniff.
"I shall try not to go too high, Sniffie."
The little pig adjusted the handy handkerchief around her neck. In preparation for their little mission, she had picked out her warmest red kerchief, and she only hoped that it would be enough. Why, the little pig knew that there were all sorts of cold things up there in the sky - rain and snow and hail! It would be a wonder if they didn't all get a gosh-darn good chilling!
Now, Wingo had splendid eyes, just like his Mum and Dad, and as he squinted at the horizon he did spy some darker clouds far in the distance. He would have to make sure that he avoided that patch of grey grumbly weather, which he imagined should be easy enough. His wings twitched impatiently. Wingo was a horse of action! If he had to be a mail-horse, at least he could look forward to stretching his wings a little bit in the open skies.
Fiz pulled out several pocket-watches all strung along on the same chain, tapped at several of them and tutted. They would have to leave right away if

they were going to be on schedule.
"Come on, Sniffie!" Fiz said loudly, waving her chain of watches impatiently.
"The sooner we get rid of this package, the sooner we can be back for a nice mint tea!" declared Wingo.
The little pig managed to push her big basket into Wingo's right bag, and with some help from the young horse, she took a leap into the bag after it.
Unfortunately, they were all delayed a little bit longer as Sniffle ended up falling into the bag-seat head first, and it took her a good few moments to turn herself around. When her flustered ears eventually popped up the right way around from the top of the bag, Wingo asked "Ready, all?"
Fiz lowered her goggles over her eyes.
"Readies!" the hedgehog said.
"Oh, I suppose I'm ready," Sniffle said uncertainly, tightening the extra-warm handkerchief around her neck.
"Tally-ho, then, let's be off!" shouted Wingo.
He began running down the slope of the field, galloping faster and faster and faster until he gave a sudden jump into the air and spread his wings. For a few seconds it felt exactly like they were falling, but Wingo started flapping away and, before they knew it, – woosh! – they were climbing higher and higher into the air, as Georgiana Fields fell away beneath them.
Wingo was off and flying!
While he was up here in the air, the young horse could forget about work, thinking about nothing but stretching out and speeding through the sky. He imagined himself diving and whirling and rolling and fighting, just like his Mum and Dad must have done on their adventures. He was right in the middle of imagining that a whole flock of dangerous arrows were flying at him, like he had heard his Mum had faced in the Deserts of the North, and was doing a splendid little swoop (if he did say so himself) when he was brought back to reality from his daydreams when he heard Sniff make a noise that was part yelp and part sneeze.
"Say, Wingo, keep it steady, would you?" Fiz shouted over the rush of the wind. She was waving around what looked like a jam-jar attached to a stick. "I'm trying to catch some cloud-water for study!"
Wingo apologised and tried to focus on flying along more gently, following their planned path towards Zumer Beach. As they travelled along past the parks and the river and the towns, Fiz kept up a chatter of questions about all sorts of numbers to do with winds and distances and the like, none of which Wingo or Sniff had the slightest idea of an answer for. Meanwhile, Sniff would regularly dive into her big basket of treats and hand around snacks,

which would hush Fiz up for a little bit and also help them all keep their strength up.
Wingo had just finished munching a carrot, when Fiz shot up to her feet in her bag-seat with concern on her face. She had a sort of trumpet to her ear that she swivelled this way and that, listening to heaven knows what.
"What's up, Fiz?" Wingo shouted over.
"Hm," Fiz said with a frown.
"Oh my. Hm, you say? Is Hm bad?" asked Sniff.
"Could be, could be. There's a funny sort of sounding wind coming from all directions," said Fiz.
Wingo now gave some attention to the temperature and movements of the air, just like his Mum and Dad had taught him. They were always saying how important it was for a flier to understand the weather and how it changes.
"Hm," said Wingo. Now he too was frowning.
"More Hm? Achoo! Oh goodness! Achoo! My poor nose! Whatever is it?"
"I think a storm is coming, Sniff. That must be what Fiz is picking up. But don't worry, I've had heaps and heaps of flying practice in the rain and that sort of thing, and this is just a silly old delivery. I'll just get out of the storm's way and-"
"Wingo, I think that might be trickier than you think," said Fiz, who was peering into the distance with her telescope. In a moment or two, Wingo could see what Fiz was staring at. A great big, boiling, grey and black heap of clouds was coming towards them, and it seemed to cover the entire sky!
"Can we go back?" squeaked Sniff.
Wingo shook his head.
"It's moving too fast, we shall have to try and get above it."
Indeed, no sooner had he said those words then the storm swept over them, and Wingo was thrown about in the air by angry gusts! He was buffeted this way and that, forwards and backwards, upside-down and then right-way up and back again - as if he was no more than a tiny toy horse. Fiz and Sniff held onto the edge of their bag-seats for dear life, as Wingo valiantly tried to fight back against the roaring wind. There was terrible cold rain in the storm clouds that hit at the trio and stung their eyes, and between that and the darkness the storm-clouds cast, Wingo could not see a blasted thing. He gritted his teeth and stayed brave and flew as best he could. Sniff had pulled her handkerchief over her head to try and protect herself from the cold rain. She was squealing in fright, but the cruel storm was so loud that she could not even hear her own little noises. No matter how he fought against the elements, Wingo was horrified to realise that his wings were beginning to get

tired, and try as he might to beat back the storm, he had no say over where he was thrown across the dark sky.
Just then a wall of cold air smacked into Wingo with a BOOM!
The young horse tumbled across the sky and for a moment he had no idea which way was which. It took him a good terrifying moment or two to manage to get his wings flapping again.
After that particularly bad knock from the storm, Wingo squinted over at the bags where his friends were sitting, only to realise with a shock that Fiz was no longer there!
Desperately, he pushed back at the roaring wind, shouting at Sniff to see if she could see any sign of Fiz.
There was a flash of lightning that brought fearsome light to the dark clouds. Over there? The terrified little pig pointed at a falling, spinning shape that must be Fiz. It simply must!
With all his might, Wingo dove through the storm towards the falling shape. Down, down, down he flew, harder than he had ever flown in his life.
There! Yes! It was Fiz!
Sniff undid her handkerchief and holding tight to one end, she extended this makeshift rope to Fiz as Wingo pushed through the noise and wind towards her. Closer and closer they fought through the storm - until Fiz managed to snatch the end of the extra-thick handkerchief! Sniffle leaned back and hauled Fiz into the bag. She held on tight to Fiz as Wingo used the very last drops of his strength to try and land safely.



With all his might, Wingo dove through the storm towards the falling shape.

Chapter Four - Lost in the Mooch Mountains

Wingo did not so much land as fall more or less safely down to the ground with a great big BUMP. He collapsed to the ground. The young horse was sore all over, but most of all, there was a terrible pain in his wings. He certainly didn't think he would be able to fly again just yet, at least not until he had a bit of a rest.
He cursed himself for a silly horse. How many times had Mum and Dad warned him not to try and go through storms, no matter how strong a flier he was? Well, there hadn't been anything else for it, he supposed, and thank goodness, they had all survived in one piece.
Fiz was a little bit jittery after her experience. Sniff put her handkerchief around Fiz's shivering shoulders. The stunned hedgehog still had her goggles on over her eyes and was very quiet.
"Well," she said at last, "That was quite an interestin' experience, but I don't think I'll do it again just yet. I think, p'rhaps, I will have to invent some seatbelts."
"Is everyone all right?" Wingo asked, and he looked over his friends carefully for any sign of harm, even though he barely had the strength to raise his head at the moment.
Sniff quickly patted herself all over, checking to make sure that she had all of her limbs, her little curly tail, and finally her head and nose. She nodded with relief. Everything seemed to be there.
"Phew," said the little pig, "In future, I would probably also prefer to watch a storm from somewhere warm and safe indoors, with a nice hot cocoa and a good warm blanket to hide under."

Wingo inspected the landscape. He hadn't the foggiest idea where they had ended up. Wherever they were, you couldn't see the sky, as thick grey mist hung low over mountain-tops. The ground was grey too, all uncomfortable crumbly bits of grey rocks and stones, occasionally broken up here and there by dips filled with dirty grey sand. Oddly, when the wind would blow through this lifeless and colourless place, it sounded to Wingo sort of like somebody giggling far away.
Fiz raised her goggles and blinked her eyes, looking about.
"Where are we?"
Now Wingo had tried to be a good young fellow and had listened to most, or

at least some of the lessons his Mum and Dad had taught him about the delivery business. He had learnt all about winds and land and many sorts of delivery routes, and he'd been going over maps of all kinds of places all over the world ever since he was a baby horse, but no matter how he racked his brains, he couldn't recall ever learning about the grey mountains in front of them.

"Hum, well, pals," Wingo said with a hint of embarrassment, "I'm afraid that I don't know quite know where we are at the moment, but I'm sure there must be someone about who knows where *they* are. We just have to find them. Simple, see?"

"Achoo!" sneezed Sniffle, "Oh my, oh my. It doesn't sound all that simple Wingo. There doesn't seem to be anyone around at the moment who might know where they are. Achoo!"

Fiz scratched her head and looked about her.

"Gooderness. That stinky ol' storm must have blown us very, very,very,very far off-course. Why, I wouldn't be surprised at all after a stinkin' storm like that if we were prob'bly three hundred thousand miles away from good ol' home and this Zumer Beach place we're lookin' for!"

"Oh my, oh no," squeaked Sniff, "We are lost!"

"Well, perhaps, just a little bit, " admitted Wingo, "But, cheer up, I'm sure it won't last long."

"'Course," said Fiz brightly, "I'm sure ol' Wingo can fly us out of here, quick as you like, zippity-zip!"

Experimentally, the young horse stretched his wings carefully, but before he could even do a single gentle flap he felt a sudden sharp pain on his right side. He shook his head and snorted with frustration.

"Teeth and tails!" Wingo yelped, "Bit of a bother, pals. Now don't panic, but I think I might perhaps have strained my right wing just a tad in that dash-blasted storm! Awful sorry about that, but I won't be flying for a bit. I do feel rather a bit of a silly lump. "

Sniffle and Fiz assured Wingo that there was nothing else he could have done and that he'd been very brave, not to mention that he was surely not any kind of silly lump. But what would they do next, lost far from home, and still having a package to deliver?

The three of them sat down on the uncomfortable stony ground to have a think.

Sniff rummaged around in her basket until she found a piece of bread wrapped in cloth. She broke the bread into parts and they all sat there thoughtfully chewing. All three of them agreed that it was fine bread, with

lots of good extra munchiness that was excellent for really having a good hard chewing-over of a problem like being lost in some grey mountains right smack in the middle of goodness-knows-where.
While they worked their way through their snack, Sniff took the piece of cloth the bread had been in and carefully used it to bandage Wingo's sore right wing as best as she could. Sniffle was terribly good at that sort of stuff, as both Wingo and Fiz agreed while the little pig bustled about.
"Now you keep that still for a bit, Wingo," said Sniffle, "And I'm sure that it will be as right as rain before long!"
"Why, prob'bly even righter than rain!" added Fiz.
Wingo nodded. Now was not the time to be down in the dumps. His pals were relying on him to get back home, so he'd have to stand firm and be brave.
"Fiz," said Wingo, "Have you got any gadget that might help us find out where this is?"
Fiz pulled out a compass from her backpack and ran about, pointing out which directions were north, south, east and west.
"The problem, I suppose," Wingo said, chewing on the last crumbs of his bread, "Is that we jolly well don't know where we are, so it's a bit tricky to know which direction we should go."
"Not to worry!" said Fiz cheerily, "We'll just find a signpost!"
The three lost friends all looked left, then right, but no helpful signposts could be found no matter how hard they searched.
Wingo twitched his ears. He could hear that giggling on the wind again. Maybe, just maybe, the noise wasn't the air babbling to itself, but there actually was someone laughing all the way up there in the mountains? Well, Wingo thought to himself, they had to go some way, and that way seemed as good as any, and besides, they'd have a better view of the land from up on the mountain slopes and might be able to find a town or some proper civilised place that might have some carrots to eat and mint tea to drink.
"Come on!" Wingo declared, and pointed over at the foggy grey mountains, "Let's go that way. I'm sure I can hear something over there."
"I suppose something is better than all this nothing," Sniffle said uncertainly.
"Oo! I hope it's something nobody has ever seen before!" said Fiz, who was always excited at the thought of discovering things.
"But hopefully not something scary," whispered Sniffle nervously, gulping and sneezing at the same time, which made her cough a bit.
Wingo, who was after all a young horse of action, had not even considered that the noise in the mountains might come from something scary. He was a

brave horse, and so long as it didn't turn out to be rabbits, he wasn't too worried. He just hoped it wasn't rabbits, for truth be told, although he was a growing horse, Wingo was rather afraid of rabbits, with their big teeth and ears and funny tails and, ever since he had been little, he had always been a bit scared that rabbits might sneak up on him and eat up all of his carrots, leaving him with nothing to eat ever again.
Well, whatever it might turn out to be, Wingo wouldn't let himself be scared. To prove this to himself, as he led his friends past the grey sands towards the colourless mountains, he started singing a little song his Dad had taught him:

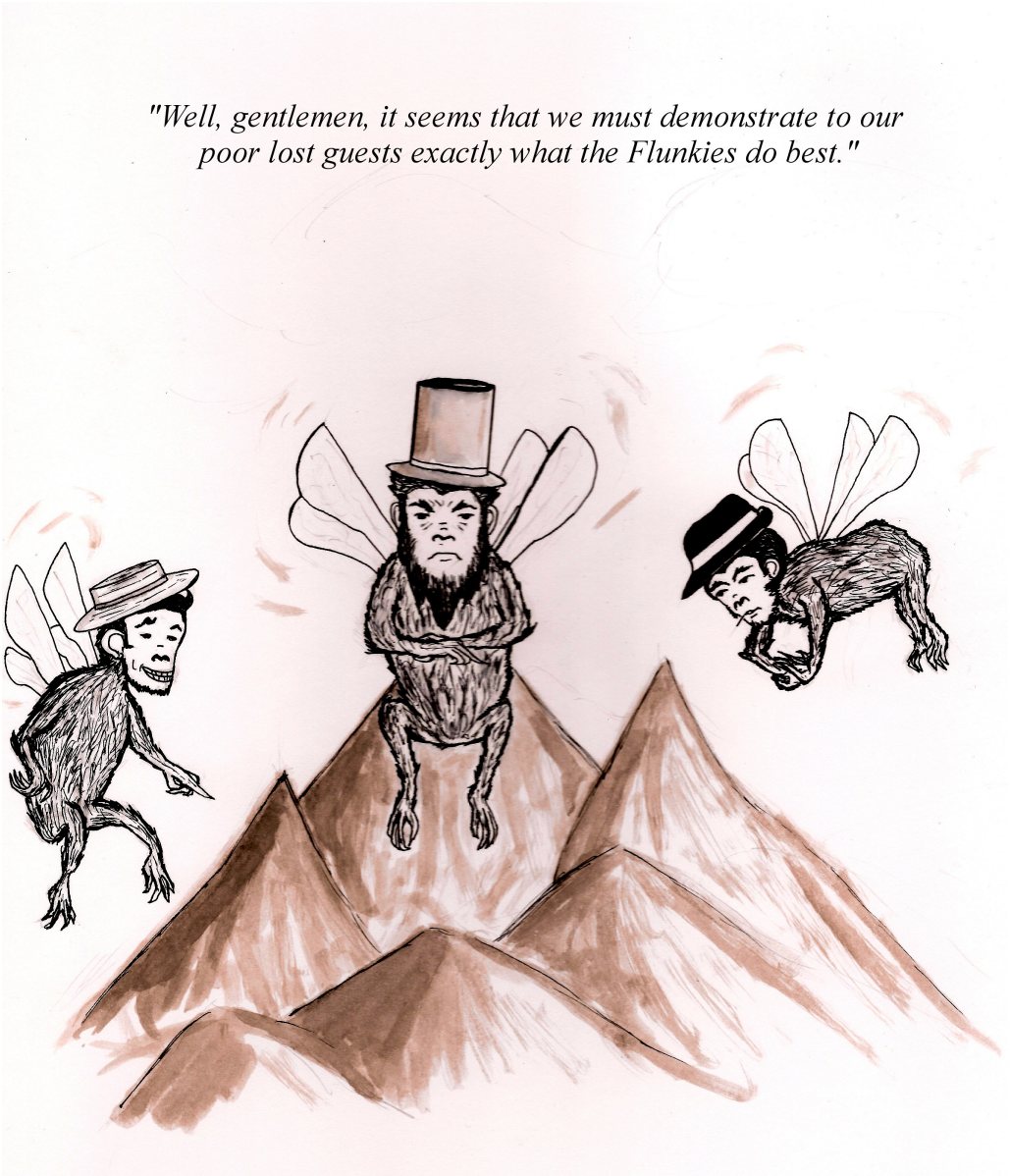
The spring breeze
brings the little bees
straight to the flowery smell,

And as long as it's sunny
they work at their honey
and all in the world is well.

Sniffle and Fiz soon joined in and added some new verses. Fiz was very good at making all sorts of noises by banging on her telescope or compass, and Sniff, although she would occasionally sneeze in the middle of a song, had a sweet little voice that went as well with Wingo's hearty singing as carrot jam goes with crackers, and soon the grey mountains didn't seem quite so spooky. They walked for some time, and went through a good many tunes until they eventually found themselves very high up. If they carefully peered over the crumbly rock edge of the mountains, the spot by the colourless sands where they had crashed looked tiny and far away. Otherwise, Wingo's keen eyes couldn't see any signs of life. In fact, even from up here, he couldn't see anything but more fog and more grey mountains. However, he was now fairly certain that the laughing noise was getting louder, so they would at least find out where that was coming from!
When he listened hard for just a moment, the giggling wind sounded awfully close now. In fact it sounded almost as if it was coming from just above them. Wingo looked up. Flying out of the fog, swooping in rings and cackling all the while was a vast number of creatures neither Wingo, Sniff nor Fizz had ever seen before in their lives. The noisy giggling fellows looked like short

and squat apes, covered in dark curls of fur, with wicked grins and beady eyes. These beasts each had a set of fluttering thin insect-like wings on their backs, but most oddly, each one was wearing a hat, and every hat was different from the last. The flying beasts wore big hats, little hats, furry hats, flat hats, – hats with brims and bobbles, tassels and trinkets, ribbons and ridges, and all manner of things. As they flew about, they chittered loudly and horribly down at the three friends. Wingo had no time for being afraid, and besides, at least they weren't rabbits, so he cleared his throat.
"Hello, how do you do?" said Wingo.
Fiz stared at the creatures through her telescope and marvelled.
"Zooks! I've never met any ones like you! What are you, anyways?"
Sniff elbowed Fiz.
"Don't be rude, Fizikosophiste, we've only just met them," whispered Sniffle to her curious pal.
Three of the beasts detached themselves from the group and flew down, hovering just above the trio. One had a straw hat with a flat top, the second was chewing a toothpick and was wearing a black gangster hat and the third, who was slightly bigger than the other two and seemed to be in charge, wore a dark blue cylinder-shaped hat that was almost as tall as he was.
"What are we, what are we?" squawked the one in the straw hat, "Fedora, dear chap, tell them what we are!"
"Sure, Boater," grunted the one in the small black hat, who squinted at them and growled: "We're the Flunkies, see? And we're in charge of the Mooch Mountains, see?"
Wingo looked around.
"Yes, I think I see. I'm Wingo, and these are my friends, Fiz and Sniffle." The little hedgehog and pig waved hello.
"Well, oh my, perhaps you might be able to help us?" Sniffle said meekly.
"I'm afraid we are a bit lost, you see," Wingo began, before he was interrupted by snorting laughter from the Flunkies.
"Sure, I see, I see" growled Fedora the Flunky, "You think yer a wise guy? What are you doing, coming here to the Mooch Mountains? This is Flunky territory, see? Ain't that right, Boater?"
The Flunky in the straw hat nodded and bared his teeth.
"Quite right, quite right," said Boater with a sneer.
"You bet, you bet," said Fedora in agreement.
"Silence, you two dirty fools," their boss in the tall hat roared.
"Sorry, Top," they both muttered. They hovered about and both looked bashful.

"Flunkies? How interestings," said Fiz, "And what do Flunkies do?"
The Flunky with the tall hat, who was apparently called Top, smirked horribly and stroked the fur under his chin.
"Well, gentlemen, it seems that we must demonstrate to our poor lost guests exactly what the Flunkies do best."
Fedora and Boater nodded and giggled.
"Flunkies," roared Top, "By order of the High Efemeram, CHARGE!"



"Oh dear!" squeaked Sniffle, and sneezed so hard that she fell onto her bottom.
At Top's command, Fedora and Boater and all the other Flunkies swooped down on Wingo and his friends, whirling all about and clawing at them. Fedora snatched away Fiz's telescope, Boater got his claws on Sniffle's basket, and Top snatched the brown package from Wingo's bag.
"Hey! Stop that! Give all that back!" said Wingo, but it was no use.
In a few seconds, the Flunkies had stolen absolutely everything that they could get their hands on from the poor lost trio!
"The Mighty and Most Glorious Efemeram will be pleased, my fellow Flunkies! We have done well today!" declared Top, as he shook the stolen package triumphantly over his head.
"I say that any day a Flunky finds something new to get is a fine day, isn't it, sport?" said Boater as he rifled through the basket and all the tasty treats that Sniff had made.
"You got that straight, Boater buddy," said Fedora, who seemed unsure about what Fiz's telescope was for, and was currently biting it to see how it tasted.
"We will add all these new things to our great heaps," Top proclaimed, "And let us take these strangers before the Startling and Flavoursome Efemeram, to see what orders will be given to we Flunkies!"
Before they could protest, Wingo, Sniffle, and Fiz were surrounded by a cloud of flittering, tittering Flunkies - and although they pushed and shoved to drive them back, there were far too many of the noisy things for the three friends to handle.
The Flunkies flew back and forth poking at their prisoners, herding them on up the Mooch Mountains. Wingo just hoped that this Great Efemeram, who appeared to be the biggest boss of the Flunkies, would turn out to be kinder and more helpful than the Flunkies themselves!

Chapter Five - The Stupendous and Astonishing Efemeram of the Flunkies

On and on, Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle were driven deeper into the Mooch Mountains by the Flunkies, who pushed them along stone paths and through a long dark tunnel, until they finally came to a sort of village. The Flunkies' home was set on a great rock plain, surrounded on all sides by the peaks of mountains that none of the trio felt they could climb. Without flying, the only way out of Flunky Town was the stone tunnel through which they had entered, and Wingo despaired to see that many of the Flunkies sat at the mouth of the tunnel in their hats, guarding the only exit.

There were very few proper buildings in the village of the Flunkies, and most were little more than columns made up of rock piles holding up roofs built from anything they had to hand at the time, from dried banana peels to broken umbrellas. What was most remarkable about the village was that everywhere about the place were different sized heaps, and in each heap was a jumbled collection of every object imaginable - toothbrushes, doormats, shoes, paddles, chairs, string - there did not appear to be either rhyme or reason to these collections of junk. Wingo and his friends stared at these piles with confusion.

"Oh my, what on earth could all these things be for?" whispered Sniffle.

"It's sure strange," said Fiz, who wished that she had her telescope so that she could get a better view of the piles that were further away.

"Why, I reckon these Flunkies are nothing more than a lot of thieves!" Wingo said, glaring angrily at the noisy flying creatures.

Top, Fedora, and Boater buzzed over towards their captives.

"I see you have noticed our heaps, lowly strangers," said Top smugly.

"Aren't they just the most charming things you've ever seen?" Boater said.

"You bet," said Fedora, "Why, my heap took years of work. Mugs like you could never get their paws on so much loot."

Top angrily slapped Fedora and Boater on the back of the head.

"Silence, you two! It is well known that I, Top, have the largest and greatest heap of all the Flunkies, for the Most Illustrious Efemeram chooses to give his orders to the Flunkies through me. Thusly, I have been blessed to become the richest Flunky here, with the largest and most splendid heap."

Fedora and Boater mumbled their apologies, but it was clear to the strangers

that if Top did not watch out, these two would be most happy to take his place as deputy of the Generous Efemeram and that both looked to the day when their heap of objects would tower over those of all other Flunkies.
"That's dashed rotten of you," said Wingo, glowering at the Flunkies, "stealing our things just to add to your heaps. Those things don't belong to you. You'll have to give them back, you know."
"What's all this stuff for, anyways?" piped up Fiz, "Seems awful silly to just make piles of rubbish for no good reason."
Sniffle tried to shush her friend, who had a troublesome habit of saying precisely what she was thinking, without thinking about whether that was a good idea or not. But it was clearly too late. The Flunkies were scarlet with rage, hopping and darting angrily up into the air.
"Rubbish? Rubbish?" roared Top furiously. His face was so swollen with anger that Wingo was half worried that it might burst. "These are the treasures of the Flunkies, taken from every land in the world, on the orders of the Efemeram! I would not expect foolish mudcloppers like you three to understand the greatness of the words of the Glorious Efemeram, our leader and font of all wisdom!"
"Well, I believe that stealing from others is wrong," said Wingo boldly, "You take from others for yourselves, and that is just dashed greedy and selfish!"
"Please, Mr. Top, Mr. Fedora, Mr. Boater," Sniffle said, "Would you return our things to us? I don't mind so much about my basket, but if we could perhaps have the food inside - you see we need it. And Fiz would ever so much like to have her telescope back, but most importantly, that package you took from Wingo, why that is not ours to give, you see. Wingo is delivering it to Zumer Beach - it isn't for us or for you, but already has somewhere it needs to go."
"Shut yer trap!" said Fedora in reply.
"Yes, silence, mudcloppers," said Top, "We will not return your things. They belong to the Flunkies now, by order of the Wise and Sagacious Efemeram. Yet, you have dared to question the orders of the Flunkies, and for that you will pay! You will be imprisoned until such time that the Just Efemeram can pass judgement on you for your unspeakable crimes."
"But we haven't done a thing!" protested Wingo, but he was drowned out by the cackling of hordes of Flunkies, who flew about, and before the three friends could do a thing, the flying thieves had dropped a cage down over them that made a dreadfully heavy CLUNK as it hit the stone ground. They were trapped!
Wingo tried his hardest to break through the cage, but the bars were simply

too thick and strong. As she was the smallest of the three of them, Fiz had tried to wriggle through the gaps between the bars, but had only succeeded in getting her head stuck. It had taken Sniffle a good number of pulls to unjam Fiz from the bars, and they both fell backwards onto the ground when Sniff finally managed to pop Fiz's head out.
"If only I hads some way to make a saw," said Fiz as she massaged the sides of her head, which were feeling a bit tender from being pulled out from the bars.
"It's getting late," Sniffle said gloomily, "Why, it feels like almost dinner time, and those nasty Flunkies took all our food. We haven't a thing to eat."
Indeed, the Flunkies had not even bothered to give their prisoners so much as a drop of water, but flew about the cage in their hats, hooting and throwing pebbles at the captives.
"Don't worry, you two," said Wingo, "If we can't get free now, we will just wait for our chance. A moment for bolting is bound to come! Let's try to get some rest for now, so we can get our strength up for our escape."
"I sure hope that their Efemeram fellow isn't as silly as these stinky ol' Flunkies," said Fiz with a yawn.
"Achoo!" whispered Sniffle, "I hope the Efemeram isn't too big. And that he doesn't have long, sharp teeth."
"Humph!" said Wingo, giving their flying captors a cross look, "Just so long as this Efemeram fellow isn't some sort sort of rabbit, well, Hail and Hurricanes, I tell you I'm going to give such a jolly good telling-off about these rotten Flunkies!"
Wingo's bravery about all things in the whole wide world (except rabbits) was of great help to Sniffle and Fiz, and they soon found themselves less worried about the future. With Wingo's help, they were sure to find a way out of this tricky picklement.
The three of them snuggled together for warmth and tried to ignore the terrible laughter of the Flunkies long enough to get some sleep.

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It was very early in the morning when they were rudely awoken after a poor night's sleep by Fedora and Boater and the other Flunkies banging on their cage with rocks.
"Awaken, mudcloppers!" boomed Top, "Awaken to face the terrible judgement of the Lofty and Serene Efemeram, you lowly ones!"
"Oh my," said Sniffle, "I haven't had any breakfast. I don't think that I am

brave enough to meet a Lofty and Serene Efemeram without having had any breakfast."
"Not to worry, Sniff," Wingo said as he stretched, "I'm sure we will manage to make the Efemeram see sense."
"I will show that stinky ol' Efemeram sense, you bet," declared Fiz, waggling her finger, "With drawings and sums, if I have to!"

At the command from Top, a flock of Flunkies lifted the cage up into the air. Boater and Fedora drove the captives past the great junk heaps of this-and-that and up to the highest point of the Mooch Mountains, just outside the Flunky village.
"Behold," boomed Top with a wave of his hand, "The Illustrious Efemeram, wisest ruler of the Flunkies!"
"The Efemeram! The Efemeram!" chorused the Flunkies.
It was a misty morning and there was very little light about, but when he squinted, Wingo thought he saw a great squat shape like a giant Flunky crouched there on top of the peak. This must be the famous Efemeram, ruler of the Flunkies, who held their fate in his claws!
"What orders, O Mighty Efemeram?" said Top, who took off his tall hat and bowed his head towards the shadowy figure. The other Flunkies likewise removed their hats and caps and nodded respectfully towards the Efemeram.
"What orders? What orders?" the Flunky hordes screeched.
A low groan came from the Efemeram and the Flunkies lowered their heads even further towards the grey ground.
Wingo carefully stepped closer to the large figure.
"Your Efemeramness," the young horse said respectfully, "We are sorry for disturbing you, but your Flunkies have taken some things that belong to us, and that simply isn't right, as I'm sure you'd agree. So, if you would be so good as to give them back, we will be on our way."
Again a groan came from the Efemeram.
"The Superlative Efemeram is displeased with your presence!" said Top.
"Did he say that?" said Fiz.
"I'm not sure, Fiz," said Sniffle, "But I don't speak Efemeram, so I can't be terribly certain."
Teeth and Tails! These noisy thoughtless Flunkies had the brown-paper package, and Mum and Dad had trusted him to take care of the deliveries! Wingo was not going to let any Efemeram, no matter how Great and Terrifying, stop him from doing that! Trying not to think about how large the Efemeram looked, Wingo took a step closer.



This must be the famous Efemeram, ruler of the Flunkies,
who held their fate in his claws!

"Back, mudclopper, back!" Top shrieked in a panic, his wings fluttering at a most rapid pace, "Do not dare approach the Unknowable Efemeram!"
Pushing Top to one side, Wingo took another step forward. He was unsure if the Efemeram was going to squish him or eat him or bury him beneath a mountain, but, by Gusts and Gales, he was determined to convince the leader of the Flunkies to release his friends and return their things!
There was a little more light now, and he was close enough to get a good look at the Lord of the Flunkies. Wingo blinked a few times to make sure that he was not seeing things, as he could hardly believe his eyes! Wingo paused cautiously, but the Efemeram did not squish him, did not eat him, and did not bury him underneath a mountain. The Efemeram did not move at all, because the Efemeram was just a big rock and nothing more.
Fiz ran up to Wingo, with Sniffle nervously in tow. The curious hedgehog eyed the Efemeram and thought for a moment.
"Why, he isn't even real!" she declared.
There were outraged shouts from the Flunkies.
"Not real? Blast it all, how dare you, you filthy little oiks! Of course he is real!" hissed Boater.
"Yeah, the Efemeram is the Head Honcho! Where do you think our orders come from, ya mugs?"
"He certainly looks like a rock," admitted Sniffle, "And I don't recall rocks ever telling me anything before."
"There you are!" said Fiz.
"Bosh and piddle!" spat Top, "You fools know nothing of the wisdom of the Loquacious Efemeram! He tells us where to go and what to take, so that we have so much now, and our heaps are rich and rise to the very sky!"
Just then, a gust of wind blew past them and echoed through a hole in the stone, making the groaning sound that Wingo had taken for the voice of the Efemeram.
"There you are! How could any silly sod deny that was the voice of the Splendid Efemeram?" said Boater.
"I think it was just wind," said Wingo.
"Balderdash!" sneered Top, "I distinctly heard the Radiant Efemeram command us to imprison these mudcloppers for a thousand years."
The Flunkies cackled and waved their hats in the air.
"That's odd," said Wingo, who had found a splendid little idea had come into his head, "I thought I distinctly heard the Efemeram say that Fedora should now become the deputy of the Efemeram and be rewarded with the largest heap of stuff."

This idea seemed to please Fedora, who replaced his hat on his head and grinned at the thought of getting Top out of the way and having the largest pile of junk among the Flunkies.
"Or perhaps I didn't quite hear properly, and the Efemeram said Boater should now have the biggest heap?" Wingo added innocently, "I'm afraid that I'm awfully hungry and it is very difficult to concentrate on what anybody is saying when your tum is making as much noise as mine is."
Well, now this plan was very much to Boater's liking, and he put his hat on at a jaunty angle and said "Yes, what a splendid wheeze, why shouldn't I be the new deputy, old sport?"
"You getting wise? It was me the Efemeram wanted," said Fedora, and gave Boater a rough push.
"Fools, the Efemeram chose me!" Top said with a snarl. He jammed his tall hat on tight and flew straight at Fedora and Boater, hitting them over and over.
"Dashed unsporting!" said Boater as he tried to fend off Top's blows.
"Yer time is over, mug. Fedora is stepping up now!" said Fedora as he gave a good strong kick at Top's rump. Before you knew it, every single Flunky was brawling and fighting over what they thought their rock Efemeram had said. Some were for Fedora, some for Boater, some for Top, and many were for themselves. There was such a tumult that nobody was paying attention to their prisoners.
"Now's our chance! Let's make a break for it!" Wingo said to his friends. He had to drag Fiz away from the Efemeram rock, as she was knocking on the surface experimentally, but the trio ran as quick as they could towards the tunnel that led out of the Flunky village. They were a few steps away from the unguarded exit when Wingo noticed that Sniffle was no longer running behind them.
"Fiz! Where's Sniffie got to? We need to get out of here!"
"Is that her?" said Fiz, pointing to a little figure scrabbling on top of the tallest heap piled up by the Flunkies.
"Hail and Hurricanes!!" said Wingo, "The Flunkies are bound to notice that we are missing at any moment! Come on Sniff, we haven't any time to waste!"
The little pig slid down the hill made of junk, bumping off broom handles and bottles until she clumped to the bottom, where she ran in a wobbling fashion towards Wingo and Fiz. She appeared to be carrying something. No, several somethings! Sniffle had taken advantage of the Flunkies' fighting with each other to get back Fiz's telescope, her own basket, Wingo's package

and all their other things!
"Achoo! Achoo!" said Sniffle, "Here I am! Oh my!"
"Good stuff, Sniffie!" said Fiz, taking Wingo's bag and throwing it over the young horse's back.
"Right, let's get out of here before they notice us!" said Wingo.
"Achoo! Yes, let's, if that's all right!"
"It's all been very interestin', but maybe it is time to go and discover somethin' else," agreed Fiz, and the three of them bolted down into the dark tunnel while the shrieking and battling of the Flunkies filled the air behind them.

And so the three friends ran and ran until they were too tired to go on. They appeared to have come some way from the Flunkies' lair, and there was no sign or sound of those creatures behind them. It was becoming awfully chilly, so Wingo led his friends to a little shelter beneath a rock that poked out and protected them from the cold wind.
Wingo gathered up some leaves and moss, and Fiz, using these bits and pieces, made up some make-shift beds for the three of them to rest in.
Meanwhile, Sniffle had got a little fire going, which warmed them all up a bit and also allowed the little pig to make up some nice mint tea, along with a lovely tomato and bean stew with all sorts of herbs.
Even if Sniff's cooking hadn't been delicious, the three of them were so tired and hungry that they would have gulped down their meal anyway, washing it down with the tasty tea.
"I must say," Sniff murmured, "I don't mind quite so much being lost and a bit scared now that we've all had something to eat and are a bit warmer."
"I'm sure we won't be lost for long," Wingo said, "My wing is getting better with every moment, so I should be in flying form in no time! Anyway, we shall soon find someone who can help us on our way to deliver our package. Not everyone around here could be like those loony Flunkies."
"It's awful excitin'. Who knows what we will see tomorrow?" Fiz said with a sleepy smile on her face.
The three of them snuggled down in their leafy beds, said their goodnights to one another and before they knew it, they had drifted off to sleep.

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The next morning they were woken by a sudden chill, which gave Wingo a most uncomfy wake-up. Wingo flexed his poor, cold, injured wing, but it still

gave him little squeaks of pain. It looked like he wasn't quite ready to fly again today. Fiz had leapt up from the makeshift bed, as excited for a new day as she was every morning, and running outside to measure things with her telescope and compass to see if she could find a smashin' place for them to walk to today. Wingo, on Sniff's instructions began to tidy away their beds (because Sniffle was a most neat and careful little pig), while Sniffle got on with making them some breakfast porridge, with all sorts of delicious dried berries thrown in. The trio sat down together to fill their stomachs.
"I think I can see somethin' over there to the north that looks interestin'!" declared Fiz through mouthfuls of breakfast as she peered through her telescope.
"Just as long as we find someone, Fiz. Someone who isn't the Flunkies, I mean," said Sniffle.
"Come on then, you two!" said Wingo, putting on his bags, "There's no time to waste! The sooner we get directions, the sooner we can be rid of this silly package."
Fiz and Sniffle nodded in agreement, packed up their own belongings, and the trio set off in the direction of the white blob in the distance that Fiz had pointed out.

And so they walked and walked, hardly even stopping for snacks and drinks. Sniffle shivered as they went along, and declared that she fancied that it was getting a tad more chilly. Fiz found her thermometer somewhere deep in her bag and after inspecting it, the hedgehog declared that her friend was spot on, and that the temperature was dropping quickly as they got nearer to the whiteness in the distance.
Closer and closer they hiked, and soon Wingo could see that they were arriving at great snowy lands, where there were cold lakes as far as the eye could see, and great bridges of ice that criss-crossed this way and that across the pale waters. Sniff crouched down to test the water but drew back almost immediately, for it was almost too cold to touch, much less drink!
"Look over there!" Wingo said to his friends, and pointed his good wing at what looked like a collection of white bumps in the distance. When Fiz got out her telescope, she could see that those white bumps where domes.
"Zooks!" said Fiz, "Why, they might be buildin's over there! How about that! A whole city out here in the chilly ol' snow! I wonder how they stay warm?"
"I wonder if they might help us get warm?" said Sniffle with a miserable sneeze.
"Let's go find out!" said Wingo.

Wingo led his two friends across one of the wider pieces of ice that stretched across the cold lake. They had to walk very slowly and carefully, for the ice under foot was terribly slippery, and none of them particularly wanted to have a dip in that freezing-cold water. Sniffle fell over several times, and once bowled into Fiz, so that the pair of them would have kept sliding along until they fell into the uninviting water, if Wingo had not managed to grab both of them just before they went over the edge of the ice bridge!

As they made their slow progress along the ice, they soon saw that the white domes where indeed some sort of buildings that had been built all along the different chunks of solid ice that stretched across the waters. As Wingo confidently declared, where there were buildings, there would probably be someone to live in those buildings.
Yet, it was strangely completely quiet in this frozen city. Wingo called out, but there was no sound but the echo of his voice.
"Perhaps they are all asleep?" suggested Fiz.
"Or-or m-m-maybe they all went on holiday to somewhere warmer?" said the shivering Sniffle, who thought that sounded like a pretty sensible plan.
Wingo was rather cross and disappointed at the missing locals, but he decided that since the three of them were here, they may as well go and have a closer look at the ice city.
"You're right, Sniffie, it is getting too cold out here," the young horse said, "Come on then, lets see if we can find some shelter."
Wingo walked forward and inspected one of the dome-buildings, looking for a good minute or two for a door to knock on, but with no success.
"Hey, Fiz, Sniffie," Wingo called out in a puzzlement about the lack of doors in these dome-buildings, "Have you seen a way into this ice-cube anywhere?"
There was no answer.
Wingo realised that he couldn't hear Fiz and Sniffle walking (or even slipping) behind him. Concerned for his friends' safety and hoping that they hadn't frozen into ice-lumps or fallen into the cold still lakes, Wingo raced back as quickly as he dared toward the ice road.
With a sigh of relief, Wingo saw that Fiz and Sniff were standing just up ahead.
"There you two are! Teeth and tails, I was dashed worried! Go on, say something, won't you two?"
Sniffle and Fiz stood still and silent.
"Pals? What's become of you?" Wingo said, but they didn't twitch an inch or even give a little sneeze.

It was as if some strange force was preventing his friends from moving at all! Just then, something did move. Several somethings all around poor frozen Sniff and Fiz. Pale shapes that a moment ago Wingo had taken for nothing more than snow and icicles noiselessly stirred themselves. Several more of the same pale figures were now rising out of the water all around the ice bridge and step by step, without saying a word, they were slowly coming towards Wingo! It looked like the inhabitants of the ice village had found poor Fiz and Sniffle first, and now Wingo too was surrounded by these eerie silent creatures with no way out!

Chapter Six - At the Cold Mercy of the Chillim

The silent things were on every side of Wingo, both on the ice and in the water. They had fish-like heads with a sharp fin on top and were covered all over in bright white scales. These thin unblinking creatures stood on two toothpick-like legs and each of them held long spears of some strange type of ice in their webbed claws. Their feet were webbed too, and that, Wingo supposed, must be very handy for swimming about under all that cold water and sneaking up on a young horse and his pals.

"Hello!" said Wingo, and tried to force himself to smile in a friendly fashion at the creatures. Truth be told, he didn't feel particularly welcomed by these icy fishlings, but he certainly wasn't going to show them that!

None of them said a word or shifted a scale. They just stared at Wingo.

"I say, that's Fiz and Sniffle, my friends, you have over there. You wouldn't happen to know what happened to them?" Wingo said. He was rather anxious to find out if his buddies were okay. What kept them frozen in place? "We are awful sorry to barge into your place and all that, but I'm supposed to deliver this parcel, y'see, and I'm afraid that me and my friends have gotten a bit lost. We ran into these odd fellows - the Flunkies, and well, they weren't much help, I'm sorry to say, and were dashed unpleasant chaps, so off we went, and here we are!" Wingo tried his most friendly grin, but there was still no response.

"What a thickhead I am!" thought Wingo to himself, "Why, I haven't even introduced myself. Mum and Dad did say it was always important to show good manners, especially when first meeting someone new. I'm Wingo, by the way," he announced with a little bow, just like Dad showed him when he told stories of how he used to visit the courts of far-away kingdoms.

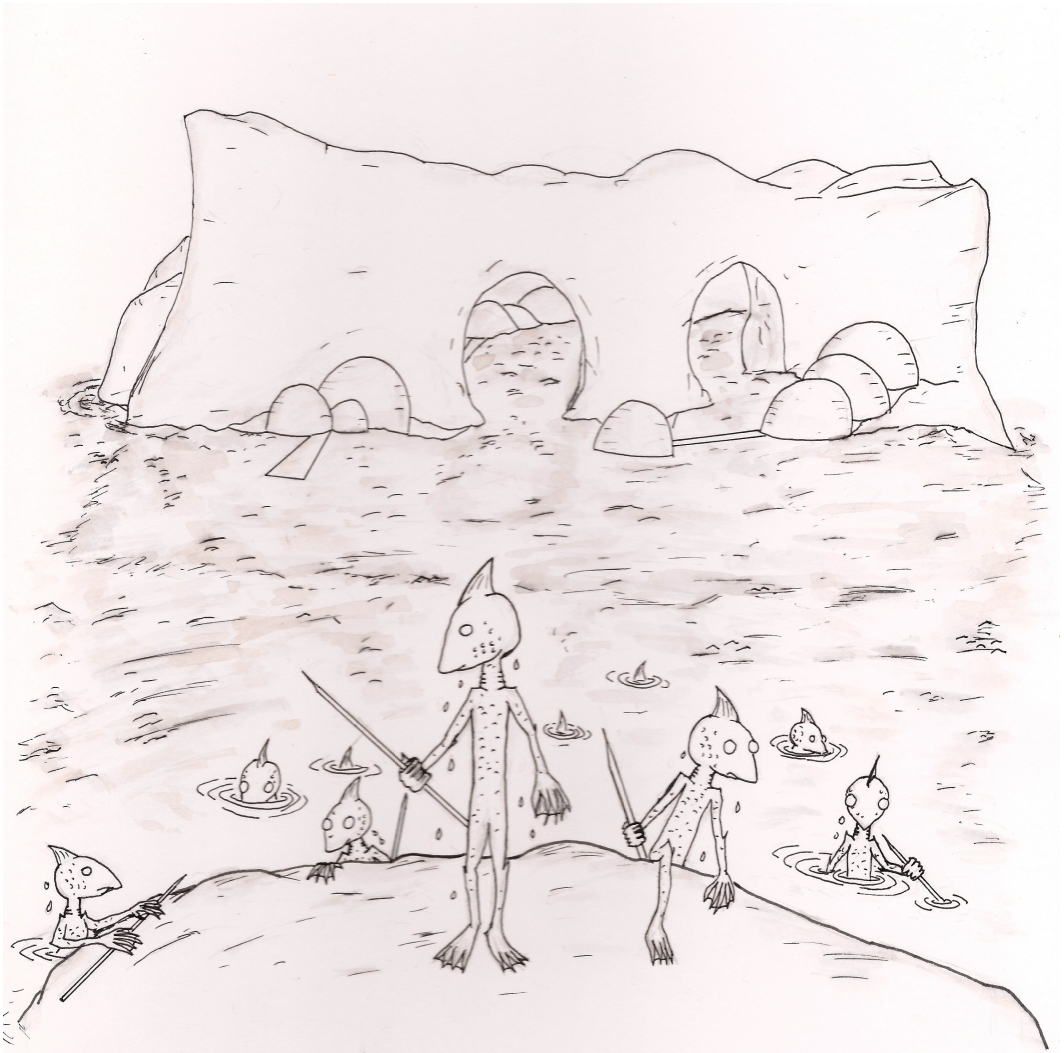
The fish creatures said nothing in reply.

"And who might you all be?" said Wingo, who was feeling rather more cold and nervous as the moments went by, and was now finding it rather tricky to keep a big smile on his face.

Finally one of the fishies opened their mouth slowly to speak. Wingo noted with a twitch in his feathers that it had rather sharp little teeth.

"We are the Chillim," said one of the creatures in a voice that did not have even the smallest bit of warmth.

"How splendid! And your name is?"



"We are the Chillim," said one of the creatures in a voice that did not have even the smallest bit of warmth.

"We are the Chillim," another cold fish repeated in exactly the same voice, "We do not need further names. We know who we are."

Well, that sounded awfully confusing to Wingo. What if one fish was talking to two others and he wanted the attention of one or the other? What was a name for, if not shouting it out at your friends?

"You are very warm," said a third Chillim.

"Honestly, I'm not really," said Wingo, "It's a lovely place you have here, mind, but it is rather cold. Look, I don't suppose you Chillim chappies know the way to Zumer Beach? We are in a bit of a rush to get there, y'see."
Two fish silently stalked over to Wingo and looked him over like he was some sort of specimen.
"The Chillim know and remember all that has been," said one.
"But you are three warmths," said another, "And we will not let you know unless you do as the Chillim say."
"Well, of course, we'd be more than happy to help you out, if we can, if you wouldn't mind giving us some directions..."
Wingo stopped himself short when he saw two Chillim reach over to Fiz and Sniffle and touch them with the points of their icicle spears. In a flash, the piglet and hedgehog shuddered and were moving again.
"Achoo!" said Sniff, "Oh my, that was unpleasant, I couldn't move a muscle!"
"It was the oddest feelin'," agreed Fiz, " P'rhaps that's what snowballs feel like all the time?"
Wingo was overjoyed to see his friends were well and released from whatever strange force the Chillim had used to freeze them in place. He was just about to ask the fish what exactly they needed from Wingo and his friends, when the Chillim wordlessly prodded them with their freezing icicles, herding the trio further into the city of snowy domes.
Eventually they came to one ice building which looked rather very much the same as all the others. One Chillim tapped a certain spot on the dome with the end of an icicle-spear. There was a creaking, crunchy noise, and an opening appeared in the ice wall.
"Achoo! I think they want us to go in," whispered Sniff.
"I suppose we better, then. We don't want to look rude, after all," said Wingo.
"Yez. Let's see what's inside," agreed Fiz.
So the three friends marched through the opening.
Inside was a bare room made of ice, without windows or any sort of decoration.
Wingo stopped himself just before he walked on to what he had thought had been part of the ice floor, but was actually a pool of water in the centre of the room.
He was about to turn around and tell the Chillim that he thought it was a dashed dangerous thing to keep a cold pool in the room, when there was the same crunching, creaking noise, and the opening to the room vanished!
Sniff, Fiz and Wingo examined the room, but they could not for the life of them make the hole open again. Wingo supposed you needed one of those

icicles the Chillim carried around to manage the trick.
"Look at that!" said Fiz in fascination as she leaned dangerously close to the surface of the pool in the middle of the room, "This here water must be like side doors for them fishies. They go swimmin' through all that nasty ol' cold water outside and can pop up in any of these icehouses!"
"But it is too cold for us to swim through," Wingo noted, testing the water.
"Choo! I'm afraid that I'm not a terribly strong swimmer, anyway," confessed Sniff, "So I suppose we shall have to wait and see what they want from us."
"Perhaps they want to freeze us and put us in a fishy museum?" suggested Fiz, scratching her head, an idea that made Sniffle even more worried.
Wingo shook his head.
"I hope not. It sounds like they want our help with something, and then they will give us directions and let us be on our way. For now, we wait. Sniff, have you got another snack in your basket for us, to take our minds off the cold?"
Sniffle bristled.
"Hmph!" she said, "Why, of course I do. I'll have you lot know that if I'm going to pack a basket of food I shall make jolly well sure that there is plenty for all of us!"
"I should never doubted you, Sniff," said Wingo with a smile, pleased that Sniffle was no longer thinking about being cold and scared. After all, if you had to be cold and scared, it was better to do it with your best friends in the whole world and to think about it as little as possible.
Sniff handed out some crackers with blackberry jam, and Fiz stopped measuring how long it would take to tunnel through the walls long enough to come and sit by the pool of water and munch away.
Wingo was on his eighth cracker and Fiz was trying to convince Sniff to see if they could make a raft from sticking crackers together, while Sniffle was indignantly declaring that she thought that was the most silly idea yet, when the wall opened again with the same crunching creak. Wingo gulped down the rest of his snack, wiped most of the crumbs and jam from his face and led the others out. The Chillim were waiting there quietly.
"Hello again," Wingo said.
"One night ago," began one Chillim, ignoring the young horse, "A terrible fire came from the sky."
"It fell into our lands," said another, "But it is too hot."
"You are warm," said a third Chillim, and Wingo supposed he was referring to them, "You will find the hot thing that fell and remove it. Sink it beneath the cold waters. Then we Chillim will tell you what we know so you may find the place you look for."

"Righto," said Wingo, "Got it. Find the hot thing. Chuck it in the water. Sounds straightforward enough."
"And where exactly is this hot thingamabub?" said Fiz.
Without another word, the Chillim led the three friends through the ice city and down a long winding path that took them towards a snowy valley.
"There," said one Chillim, pointing far across the valley with his icicle-spear.
Apparently, the Chillim had no interest in going any closer to whatever had fallen from the sky, as they all once again stood as motionless as ice sculptures.
"Well, we will take it from here!" Wingo said with a cheery nod and started marching in the direction of the hot thing, Fiz and Sniffle scuffling along behind him. Wingo turned back to look at the Chillim, but already he could no longer make out the white-scaled fish against the backdrop of all that snow.

Chapter Seven - How to Handle Hot Things

And so Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle trudged along through the snow. It was pretty tough going, especially for Fiz, who would be examining something with a magnifying glass and quite often fall into a rather large pile of snow, and then Wingo and Sniffle would have to dig her out again. That inquisitive hedgehog had done it so often now that she had pulled her goggles back down over her eyes to keep the snow out. Sniffle had also wrapped her handy handkerchief tight around her head to try and keep warm. With his wings pulled in tight, Wingo went stomping along as he led the way, his big steps clearing a channel in the snow for his friends to follow in.

"Gosh. Choo! Everything around here looks rather the same as everything over there," said Sniffle gloomily, "I do hope we are going the right way and we can throw this hot thing into the water and be on our way to somewhere just a tiny bit warmer."

Fiz nodded in agreement. 'Yez, it's all rather interestin' around here, but I need to get a good bunch of sun soon to get my brain workin' proper again. I think that's why I keep walkin' into these silly ol' lumps of snow. It's 'cos I haven't had enough sun lately."

"Well, just be careful, you two," said Wingo with concern as he turned around to check on his buddies, "I don't want you turning into a Frozen Fiz and Snowy Sniffle again."

Sniff did a little dance up and down to warm herself a bit more, in case she was in danger of almost turning into an icy pigcicle.

"I wonder how far we are?" said Fiz, "Say! If there was some woods around, I could invent us a real nifty ol' sled and we'd just whoosh along. It'd be much easier than all this walkin'."

"Or we might just crash faster," suggested Sniffle, who was rather glad that no wood was to be found.

"Chins up, pals. I'm sure this whole job will be a doddle," said Wing, "The Chillim fellows said that we are looking for something hot. Well, it's awfully simple. We just keep walking until we get warm, and then we keep going on until we feel hot, and then there we will be!" Wingo beamed at this triumphant bit of logic.

Indeed, the young horse's plan turned out to work rather well. When Sniffle first noticed that her nose wasn't quite as icy as before, Wingo steered them on towards the increasing heat.

"It's gettin' much pleasanter now," remarked Fiz, "Zooks! Look there! Little rivers made from the melted snow!"
"Not far now, I'm sure," remarked Wingo, "Then we just pop the burning whatsit in a lake somewhere, and clip-clop - off we go to Zumer Beach."
Indeed, Wingo's keen eyes could now see the flickering light of a small but bright fire over in a spot where all the snow had been melted away.
This must be the flaming thingamajig the Chillim were so very worked up about! Wingo was sure that he'd have this whole thing finished in a jiffy!
"Righto, Fiz, Sniffle," Wingo said as he inspected the little fire, "Any thoughts on how we can plop this burning stuff out in some water?"
"Perhaps if we throw some snow on it?" ventured Fiz, scratching her head.
The little fire made rather an odd noise. It wasn't the crackle of sparks and wood. In fact, it sounded rather like an angry quack.
"Achoo!" said Sniffle who was now feeling a bit shivery, despite being this close to the fire, "Did you two hear that? Gosh, I don't think fires are supposed to sound like that."
"Oh, I'm sure it'll quieten down once we shovel some snow on top!" said Wingo, confidently, "Then, splash! Into the water, and job done! Why there's a perfect little lake just over there!"
The fire quacked again.
"Sniff is right," said Fiz slowly, "That is rather a funny ol' noise for a fire to make."
"Don't be silly," scoffed Wingo, "I'm sure it's perfectly a normal fire noise for these parts!"
To prove that he wasn't going to be frightened by a tiny little fire that made noises, Wingo took a few steps towards the heat.
The fire made several, even louder, angry, little quacks, and Wingo stopped in his tracks.
"Go away!" said the fire.
"Oh gosh, I think it said something," said Sniff.
"Don't be silly, fires can't talk," said Wingo, although he wasn't quite as certain now.
"I've never seen a talking fire," piped up Fiz, "But maybe I just ain't seen one yet."
Wingo swallowed and thought about how brave his Mum and Dad had been on their adventures. He decided that he certainly wasn't going to be a cowardly little horse.
He'd show that fire!

Wingo took a few more steps, and the fire again quacked "Go away! Go away! Go away!"
The young horse fixed the fire with a very serious expression.
"Now look here, none of that, you. We were sent here to put you out, and if we don't, then the Chillim fellows won't let us know how to get where we are going! So be a good sport and stop making all that noise!"
Fiz took that to mean that they better start covering the fire in snow to put it out and had rolled together a rather sizeable glob of snow for the job, when Sniffle stopped her.
"Oh, wait a moment! We can't just put it out and throw it in the river now!" the pig declared.
"But we said we would take care of the thing," said Fiz who found the whole problem rather perplexing.
"Not a fing!' said the fire.
"What's that, fire?" Wingo asked.
"I'm not a fing. I'm a fireduck!"
Fiz had never heard of such of a word and got to wondering whether that was what talking camp-fires were called.
Wingo leaned closer to the flickering light and peered into the flames. There at the centre of the fire he could just make out the shape of a very young bird.
"Why, so you are a fireduck!" exclaimed Wingo.
"That does it. We can't throw a fireduck in the water, especially one that talks," Sniffle declared firmly.
Fiz thought that this was probably so, but was rather disappointed that she would not be able to use her giant snowball after all.
"Say, fireduck, where do fireducks come from, anyway? What are you up to here? The Chillim don't like your fieriness much, you know," said Wingo.
"Fireducks come from home," said the bird, as if that was an obvious fact that hardly need stating, "Where we gots hot springs to swim in and lavas and fings."
"But what are you doing here?" Sniffle asked kindly, "This cold spot is no place for a hot creature like you."
The fireduck seemed to think about this for a moment and then burst out in a sort of wailing cry while the flames around grew larger and burned hotter.
"Now, now, stop that, will you!" said Wingo.
"Oh, please do," Sniffle added, "We promise we shan't do anything mean. We just want to help."



"Why, so you are a fireduck!" exclaimed Wingo.

The fireduck stopped making all that noise and sniffed sadly.
"I got lost. I was flying with my mummy and I fell down into the cold and it hurt and, and-"
Again the fireduck started wailing.
"Sh, sh, none of that," said Wingo, "You know, we're just a bit lost too!"
"It is awful to be lost on your onesome and lonesome," added Sniffle.
"Not to worry!" Wingo said, "You ain't on your own no more, fireduck! We'll help you find your mum and get home, won't we?"
Sniffle and Fiz nodded in agreement.
"Yez," said Fiz with a wistful look at her splendid snowball, "I s'pose its probably better than throwin' her in the water."
This assurance seemed to calm the fireduck down, and as the creature stopped sobbing, the flames grew lower and lower until Wingo and his pals could see that there at the centre of the fire was a very small and scared fireduck, who had brightly coloured fuzz all about her.
"I'm Wingo, this is Sniffle and that's Fiz," Wingo said with a broad smile, "What's your name, little Miss Fireduck?"
The fireduck wiped the steaming tears from her face.
"My name's Penny," she said.
Fiz examined Penny the fireduck.
"Are you sure you are a fireduck? You look like you might still be a fireduckaling."
Penny the fireduck blew a raspberry at Fiz.
"I'm gonna have all my feathers soon, you wait and see!"
"Never mind that now, Penny," Wingo said in a very grown-up tone, "Right now we need to find your mum! Do you think you can hop on my back, so we can go looking for her?"
Penny looked doubtful.
" 'Cos you are not my mummy and not a fireduck I fink that I would be too hot for you and you would get on fire and not be able to carry me," the fireduckling pronounced in one breath.
"Hum. Good point," agreed Wingo, "You'll forgive me, but you do seem to get a bit explodey when you are upset, little duckling. I'd rather not end up a roast Wingo if you get a bit frightened. Any ideas?"
Everybody thought for a moment.
"Eureka! I got it!" said Fiz, "Sniffie, can I have some spare cloth?"
"Well, I'd rather not give you my neckerchief, because I'm sure you are going to do something to ruin it, but hang on-" Sniffle dug through the items in her basket and held up something wrapped in white material, "I've got this cheese

in a good strong cheese cloth! Fiz, you can have that cloth for your plan, and we'll all eat up this bit of cheese."
That struck Wingo as an excellent plan, especially the bit about eating the cheese. He and Sniffle fed Penny the fireduckling little crumbs of cheese, which she chewed in a rather suspicious fashion, while Fiz filled the cheesecloth with the hardest bits of ice she could find from her snowball, which she was very pleased was not going to waste after all. Finally, the clever hedgehog tied the cloth up into a sort of snow-filled bag.
"There you go, my newerest invention!" Fiz proclaimed, 'It's a special fireduck seat for little ol' fireduckies!"
Indeed, once this ice-bag was attached to Wingo's back, he felt a momentary chill, but as soon as he kneeled down so Penny could hop on his back, the duckling's warmth balanced out the cold from the ice-seat.
"Now you try to keep calm," Wingo admonished Penny, "And no burning Wingo, all right? I don't really want to test Fiz's new invention too much."
Penny nodded and declared solemnly that she would do her bestest to be a good fireduck.

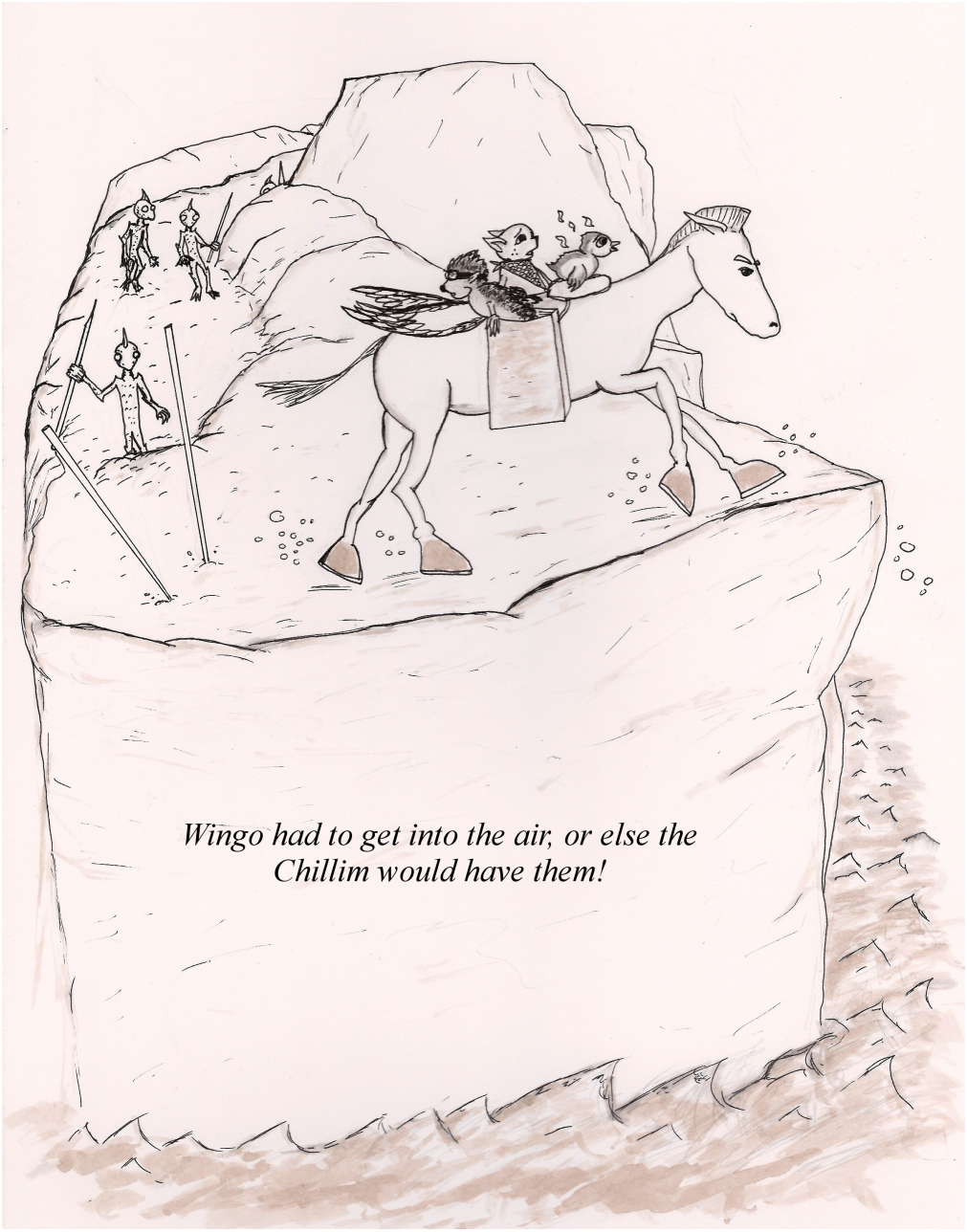
Wingo and his friends supposed that Penny's mum would be rather keen to get her baby back and was probably looking for her right now, and so they were all on their way to find a high lookout spot, when Sniffy gave a terrified sneeze.
"Wingo, Fiz l-l-l-look!" the little pig stammered.
As silently as snowfall, the Chillim had appeared around them, and while Wingo was never entirely sure what the cold fishes were thinking, they certainly appeared to be somewhat unhappy with the work of Wingo and Company, because the Chillim all had their freezing icicle spears aimed right at them!

Chapter Eight - The Chillim Chase

Fiz waved hello at the Chillim, but there was no response from them.
"They look like they might be a bit cranky," whispered Sniffle.
Wingo smiled his friendliest smile at the cold fish.
"Hello there! As you can see, we've found what was causing your little melting difficulty, and what d'y'know, it wasn't just a hot thing, it was Penny here! She's awful lost and is looking for her mum, but we'll soon have the fireduckling on her way and-"
"It is hot," interrupted one of the Chillim.
"As agreed, if you wish to know what the Chillim remember," said another of the cold fish, waving an icicle spear in disgust at Penny, "You will plunge the burning into the ice and water until the hot becomes cold."
Wingo was horrified. How could they think of doing such a thing to a poor defenceless little fireduckling?
"Now look here, we certainly shan't do that, y'hear?" the young horse declared, "We promised we'd help you with your fire problem, and we shall, but in our own way!"
"And it isn't a thing, it's a fireduck called Penny!" squeaked Sniffle, who was trying her best not to be too scared by all those icy fishies, but she still had to hold on to Fiz just a tiny bit for support.
All these goings-on were making the little fireduckling upset again, and Penny was starting to sob and Wingo felt his back becoming warmer.
"Teeth and Tails! Listen here, Chillims, we dashed well won't let anyone hurt Penny, and that's that!" Wingo said and stomped forward to stare the nearest Chillim in the face.
All of the Chillim recoiled back a few steps. Had Wingo succeeded in scaring off the cold creatures? No, the Chillim seemed to be muttering about the heat...
"They're afraid of Pennyduck's fires!" said Fiz.
"Stay close, everyone" Wingo muttered to his pals, "We are going to make a break for it!"
Wingo stomped fiercely towards the Chillim, driving them back another few paces, but the fishlings were beginning to recover themselves, and were poking their icicles at the gang. Just one touch from those spears and they'd be frozen to the spot!

Already, the Chillim were getting braver with their icicles and were advancing on Wingo and his friends, jabbing the sharp cold points of their weapons from every side. The young horse took a deep breath. It was now or never!
"Usual plan, pals!" shouted Wingo, "Run!"
And with that, he broke into a determined gallop through the ranks of the Chillim with Penny holding on tight to her seat, while Fiz and Sniffle hurried just behind them as quickly as they could.
As they pushed through the hordes of the Chillim, the pale fish bared their sharp little teeth and stabbed with their icicles again and again. Wingo kicked to his left and right, sending the thin fishies flying on all sides, but there were so very many of them rising from the snow to replace the ones he knocked down! With horror, Wingo saw that one Chillim spear had been hurled straight at Sniffle and it was just about to turn her into a little frozen piglet! Without thinking, Sniffie swung her basket of snacks up into the air and the icicle struck that instead! Sniffle dropped her basket immediately, for it had become all frozen and icy and was too cold to touch, and with frightened sneezes, she dashed after her friends.
Wingo chanced a quick glance behind to make sure Fiz and Sniffle were still there, and thankfully, the hedgehog was pulling the poor frightened piglet along as ice-spears rained down behind them. Unfortunately, a horde of Chillim was also still there, and was chasing after them by sliding effortlessly along the snow and ice. There didn't seem to be any way for Wingo and his friends to outrun their pursuers, and to make matter worse, the young horse could see that just up ahead was a cold river! Wingo knew there was no way that he and his friends could get across the water quickly enough to out-race the Chillim. There was only one chance!
"Everybody on board!" Wingo shouted to his friends, "I'm going to have to try to fly us out of here!"
The young horse just hoped that his injured wing was strong enough for the job!
Wingo scooped Fiz up into her bag-seat, and the little hedgehog grabbed the first things that came to hand, which happened to be her telescope and compass, and making a quick calculation in her head about the best angle, she threw them at the closest Chillim. The compass knocked one Chillim in the leg, and the telescope spun splendidly in the air until it conked another cold fish on the head, which knocked him into several Chillim behind. This manoeuvre gave Sniffle enough time to grab on to a strap hanging from Wingo's bags.

There was precious little distance to the river. Wingo had to get into the air, or else the Chillim would have them!
"Hang on, everybody" he said, "Tally-ho and here we go!"
The horse flapped and flapped, ignoring the pain in his injured wing. He had to get into the air! He simply had to!



Penny the fireduck gave a scared quack.
" 'S only ten steps to the river!" declared Fiz.
"Come on, Wingo!" said Sniffle.
With a last burst of effort, Wingo beat the air with his wings. A step or two more, and they were going to fall into the chilly river! But just when it looked too late and he was just touching the edge of the dangerously cold water, there was a WOOSH and Wingo felt himself leave the snowy ground. He had done it! He was up!
He knew he couldn't fly for long, but he simply had to get as far away from the Chillim as possible. He gritted his teeth and ignored the pain.
"Are they still after us?" he shouted over the cold wind.
"Can't see! Threw my ol' telescope at 'em!" replied Fiz.
"Oh gosh!" said Sniffle, "Achoo!"
"Quack!" said Penny, who was trying very hard not to burn with panic.
Wingo felt a spasm in his weak wing. He couldn't stay up in the air. Squinting, he tried to find somewhere soft to land.
"Get ready everybody," he shouted, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to crash again!"
With a great big thump, Wingo did precisely that, skidding into a large bush which was not anywhere near as comfortable as it had looked from the air. Fiz, Sniff, and Penny all went flying off and fell into various parts of the bush.
Wingo shook his head to try to throw off the dizzy shock of hitting the ground.
"Sorry about that, everyone," said Wingo, who was feeling quite dazed from his impact with the ground, "Everybody in one piece?"
"Yez," said Fiz, "Your crashes are improvin'."
"I think I'm all here. Choo! I just need a moment to find me," said the muffled voice of Sniffle from somewhere deep inside the bush.
"Sorry Wingo," Penny the fireduck said quietly, "I got just a little bit scared and I fink I maybe burned up a few leaves here."
"No shame in being just a little bit scared," Wingo reassured Penny, "Just make sure you don't start a bigger fire." Figuring that it was better to be safe than sorry, Wingo shooed the fireduckling away from any other things she might accidentally burn.
Fiz ran around the bush they had landed in, calling out Sniffle's name. There was a large sneeze from the top of the bush.
"Sniffle!" Wingo called out, "Where on earth have you got to?"
"Oh gosh, I don't mean to be a bother," the small pig said, "But would

somebody mind helping me down from here? I'm beginning to feel a bit funny in my ears."
"There she is!" said Fiz pointing out the source of the voice, "Silly ol' Sniffie!"
Sniffle was high up on the top of this large bush, jammed upside-down between a bunch of twigs.
With some difficulty, Wingo eventually managed to untangle Sniffie from the bush and return her safely to the ground.
"Hail and Hurricanes!" the young horse said with a sigh, "That was a close one!"
"I fink we were all very brave," Penny declared.
"How is your wing, Wingo?" Sniffle asked, and now that she was facing the world the right way up, she proceeded to inspect the poor injured appendage.
"It doesn't hurt too badly, honestly, but it still feels awfully weak," the stout-hearted horse said.
"Who knew deliverin' parcels could be so hard?" Fiz said with a shake of her head, "But hopefully we'll soon get directions to Zumer Beach and we can all have a luverly lie down in the sun. I'm sure it's very good for sore ol' wings, as well as for brains."
Sniffle looked a little bit downcast when she realised that she had lost her basket of goodies to the icy Chillim, which made Fiz a bit down too, because she remembered that she had chucked her telescope and compass at those cold fish and she didn't have them any more either.
"Cheer up, pals!" Wingo said with a comforting smile, "We'll march on and get there in the end! But first things first, we need to get Penny back to her Mum!"
The thought of her missing mummy made Penny start to gulp mournfully.
"Don't cry, Penny, " Sniffle said quickly, being keen to stop the fireduckling from firing up again with her hot tears, "Why, I'll bet your mum is flying about looking for you right now!"
This thought gave Penny pause and she stopped being sad to declare with all certainty that her mummy was the bestest, brightest flyer of all fireducks and would probably find her any second now.
"Eureka! I have a good ol' idea!" Fiz declared, raising her finger in the air, "We jus' wait until it gets all dark, and then make a fireduck signal that can be seen for miles an' miles an' miles!"
"I suppose Penny is certainly bright enough to work as a fireduck light in the night," Wingo agreed thoughtfully, "And we shall all make a jolly lot of noise and I'm sure that Penny's mum will hear us before we know it!"

As they all agreed that was the best course of action, and since Wingo had managed to crash on a cliff that had a pretty good view of the sky for looking out for other fireducks, they decided to have a sit down and wait until it got a bit darker so that Penny's light could be more easily seen. Besides, all that running and flying and crashing had made them rather more tired than they had realised. They passed the time chatting and trying to keep Penny from going to sleep by asking her all about the boiling hot land of her home.
When the afternoon began to wear on and the day began to fade, Wingo decided that they better start trying to signal to any fireducks looking for Penny.
With encouragement from Wingo and Sniff, who were standing at a safe distance, and Fiz, who was standing inquisitively at not so quite a safe distance, Penny the fireduck screwed up her eyes and tried to burn as brightly as she could, quacking for her mummy all the while. Wingo, Fiz, and Sniffle also helped out by shouting for Penny's Mum, while also keeping a constant eye on the skies.
After quite some time, their throats had become so sore that they had to take a break. This led poor Penny to despair of ever seeing her mummy again, and naturally, she once again burst into a shower of burning hot tears.
"Mummy!" she wailed and quacked.
Why, none of them wanted to see the poor fireduckling so upset, but they couldn't think of a single thing to cheer her up. All Penny wanted was her Mum. Brighter and brighter she burned as she cried. When she gave a particularly big wail, her fiery feathers gave out the biggest flash of light yet, illuminating the darkening heavens.
"Hang on a minute, what's that?" Wingo said, looking off into the distance. He was sure he had caught sight of something in the sky after that last flash of fire from Penny.
"Could be another cloud," suggested Fiz, who wished that she still had her telescope with her to check.
"Perhaps you got some ash in your eye?" said Sniffle, peering out into the gloom.
Penny, meanwhile, was not at all interested in opening her eyes, as she was far too busy sobbing. But Wingo now felt certain that he could see something not too far away. Gusts and Gales, why, it looked like a bright arrow flying past!
"There!" said Wingo, "Can you see that?"
Fiz experimented with using each of her eyes one at a time, and Sniffle squinted so hard she could barely see a thing.

Wingo saw the light at the front of the arrow detach itself and fly towards them.
"Hullo! Penny's Mum! Is that you? Over here!" Wingo called out, and Fiz and Sniffle joined in with what remained of their poor worn voices, even though they still couldn't quite see anything.
Yes, Wingo was sure he could hear the light making a quacking noise as it flamed across the sky in their direction. The light grew brighter every moment and the quacking grew louder, until flapping above them in plain sight was a plump mother fireduck with feathers that burned with splendid blue, yellow and orange light.
"Oh, now I see it," said Sniffle.
"Me too," agreed Fiz.
"Penny! Penny!" the big fireduck cried out as she flamed down towards the ground. There was a WOOMPH sound as she came to land like a great meteor, and she immediately came waddling over towards the fireduckling.
By this stage, Penny had realised that something was up and had stopped crying just enough to open her eyes.
"Mummy!" Penny shouted when she caught sight of the radiant fireduck, and she ran straight to her mother.
"Where on earth have you been, my baby?" Penny's mum blubbed as she hugged her daughter, "I've been ever so worried since you wandered off!"
Penny enjoyed the hug for a good while, and when she felt assured that she was safe back with her Mum, she then assumed a most serious look.
"I've been having adventures with my new friends, Mummy," said Penny, "This is Wingo, Sniffle, and Fiz. They saved me from nasty Chillerfishes who wanted to throw me in some horribubble cold water. Then I ate some cheeses and all sorts of scary things happened, but I was trying real hard to be brave."
Penny looked up at her mother pleadingly, "Can I go on adventures all the time please, Mummy?"
Penny's Mum frowned at the thought.
"It was a narrow thing, Mrs. Fireduck, but Penny was a grand little trooper and we all came through all right in the end," Wingo explained.
"Thank you, strangers," Penny's Mum said with solemn gratitude, "You have all done me a great kindness in looking after my baby girl."
Wingo bowed in a courtly fashion. Fiz saluted smartly and Sniffle blushed.
All this made Penny the fireduck giggle.
"If there's any thing I can do for you, let me know at once!" Penny's Mum said with determination.
"Well, there's just the one thing, Mrs. Fireduck," said Wingo hopefully, "We

need to deliver this brown-paper package to Zumer Beach, but I'm afraid we are rather lost. Would you be able to tell us the way?"
Penny's Mum shook her head slowly.
Their faces fell and Penny looked like she might start crying again.
"Oh well," Sniffle said sadly.
"P'raps if we walk around in bigger and bigger circles, we will eventually find it?" suggested Fiz.
Wingo's head drooped just a touch. Were they ever going to able to deliver this pesky parcel?
"Hang on!" said Mrs. Fireduck, "I'm afraid I may not know the way, but I think that I can point you in the direction of someone who may. What you need to do is to travel straight towards the Krannog of the Kyloes in the Rolling Plains. It isn't too far from here and they should at least be able to put you on the right track. Why, if you hurry now, you shall get there before it gets too much darker."
Penny's Mum pointed them in the right direction, and with the most sincere apologies, and many protests from her daughter, Mrs. Fireduck explained that she had to get her poor Penny home. Penny wanted to go along on more travels with her new friends, but Mrs. Fireduck was having none of it. Eventually the fireduckling only gave up on her stubbornness when Wingo promised that they would visit Penny soon, but that she should go home for just now. Penny reflected on this for a bit, then satisfied with this arrangement, she immediately changed tack and started hurrying her mother on, so they would be home in time for dinner.
And so they all waved goodbye to the fireducks, as mother and daughter waddled off and then launched themselves into the sky, one big point of light followed by one little spark shooting further and further away. Wingo, Sniffle and Fiz kept waving at them until they could no longer see the fire of their feathers.
"It's always nice to meet new people," said Sniffle, who was often a little bit teary-eyed at goodbyes.
"There is a lot more dark ol' night around without the fireduckalucks here," said Fiz as she looked about.
"Well, we better get a move on then, I suppose!" Wingo declared, "Not a moment to lose! Let's get to those Rolling Plains!"

Chapter Nine - Run to the Rolling Plains

And so the three friends hurried along, keen to find the Kyloes of the Rolling Plains before it got too late in the evening. All about them was a broad, flat plain of darkest green grass. There was a gentle whooshing sound as the grass swayed back and forth. Fiz was just remarking that the Rolling Plains were rather flat, when Wingo found himself tripping over something. He looked about quizzically, but he couldn't spy anything much about the place except the broad sea of green grass. Certainly there was nothing Wingo could see that would be worth tripping over, so he shrugged and led his friends onwards. Yet, only a few steps later, the three friends all found themselves stumbling, as if the ground beneath had suddenly become unsure.

Wingo leaned over to get a closer look at the earth.

"How odd. It's dashed hard to walk properly hereabouts. Funny sort of land, this," Wingo remarked.

"The ground is moving, an' a hill is comin' towards us," said Fiz.

"Achoo?" sneezed Sniffle in confusion.

"Don't be silly, Fiz, who ever heard of that-" Wingo began, but he had just noticed that the whooshing sound they had heard when they first arrived was now building up into a rather loud crashing roar.

"I think Fiz is right, Wingo," said Sniffle with a little panic in her voice.

Wingo looked up and saw Fiz pointing in the distance.

'Yez. Look at that ol' thing!" the hedgehog said in awe.

Wingo's mouth fell open in amazement. Where the plain had been entirely flat just a moment ago, a hill appeared to be coming towards the friends, and it seemed to be growing as it went.

"Should we run?" squeaked Sniffle, but before Wingo could even start coming up with a plan, the surging hill was upon them, the ground shifting beneath their feet and rippling past them. The three friends scrabbled and ran as best as they could, but they were stuck on this travelling crest!

"We will have to try to run over the other side!" shouted Wingo over the shifting roar of the hill, and the trio scrabbled and fell and picked themselves up again and before they knew it, they had been carried to the very top of the hill.

For a moment they could see across the plain, where waves of other hills were washing in their direction like a sea made of grass-covered earth, before the ground shifted again and they found themselves plunged downhill.

"I suppose that was sort of fun?" remarked a somewhat dazed Wingo as he picked himself up.
"Zooks! This is the most tricksy ol' ground I've ever walked on!" confessed Fiz.
"Ouchoo!" added Sniffle in a sneezy groan, as she had once again ended up on her head, and was starting to get rather tired of all these falls and crashes and bruises.
Before they could recover, a second hillwave surged, lifted them into the air and again dumped them downhill on the other side.
Wingo felt like that was enough of that.
"Oh my. Hopefully that was the last one," Sniffle said.
Fiz shook her head. "I was countin' the time between the hilly-waves," she said, "And I think there should be another comin' along in just another few seconds."
The rippling of the grassy earth seemed to support Fiz's counting, and indeed, the hedgehog was proved correct, as they were once again lifted and dumped by the rising earth before they even had a chance to stand up properly.
Wingo was beginning to wonder if he would ever be able to get up and walk again without these ground tides sweeping him off his feet.
"What are ye doin', ye dovie bampots?" shouted a gruff voice from an oncoming wave of grass.
The voice came from a bull with long furry fur that was a deep black, with horns that poked out of the shaggy fuzz on his head.
Fiz suggested that a dovie bampot may well be a very nice thing to call somebody, but the way the lump of shaggy fur had said it, Wingo and Sniffle were sure they were being called big stupidheads, rather than anything flattering.
"Hello, sir," Wingo called out, as he tried to right himself, "I was wondering if you could help us? We're looking for the Kyloes of the Karnockle or Kranogged or somesuch."
"Fancy comin' to the Rollin' Plains and not even knowing how t' walk proper! Ye glaikat bampots!" grumbled the bovine, convincing even Fiz that he was probably calling them silly fatheads after all.
Grumbling loudly to himself all the while, the furry fellow surfed down the shifting slope of the hill towards them with surprising grace, and boomed crossly "Ach! Come on, then, ye clamjamfry o' bamsticks, walk as I do, 'n maybe we can get you out o' here."
They carefully watched the way the grumbling chap walked, how he shifted as the ground shifted, and how he didn't resist the force of the hillcrests, but

let himself be carried along up and down them without a moment's thought. In time, Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle had improved their hill-surfing enough that they hardly ever fell over or were dumped by the grass waves. They followed the furry grumbler up and down the rolling plains, all the while he kept up a steady stream of grumping and resolutely ignored all their questions, until finally they came to a gentler part of the hill sea where there were only small ripples of movement on the ground, and Wingo thankfully found that he was no longer rocked about about quite so much.

In the midst of this calm spot was a large house made of wood and stone with an inviting rickety pier out the front that swayed and bobbed ever so slightly with the passing hill movements.

Wingo cleared his throat.

"Pardon me, sir, and thank you for helping us with that spot of bother, but would you mind doing us a further favour and leading us to the Krannogle of the Kyloes? You see, we are terribly in need of some directions."

The furry beast turned and glowered at Wingo.

"I ain't no sir, ye wanwitty cuddy. And I did lead ye bampots and coofs to the Krannog. Can ye not see, ye stymies, as well as not walk proper-like? There's the blasted Krannog right there, ye see?

"I do!" declared Fiz cheerily, waving her hand about.

The black furry bull turned to them with a scowl and was just about to call them blasted flitter jumbits or something like that, when there was a clopping sound and an equally large cow came out of the hill hut.

She had hair of similar length and furriness to the black bull, but hers was a lovely red colour, and, in contrast to the constantly scowling bull, her face was wide and covered from side to side with a rosy smile.

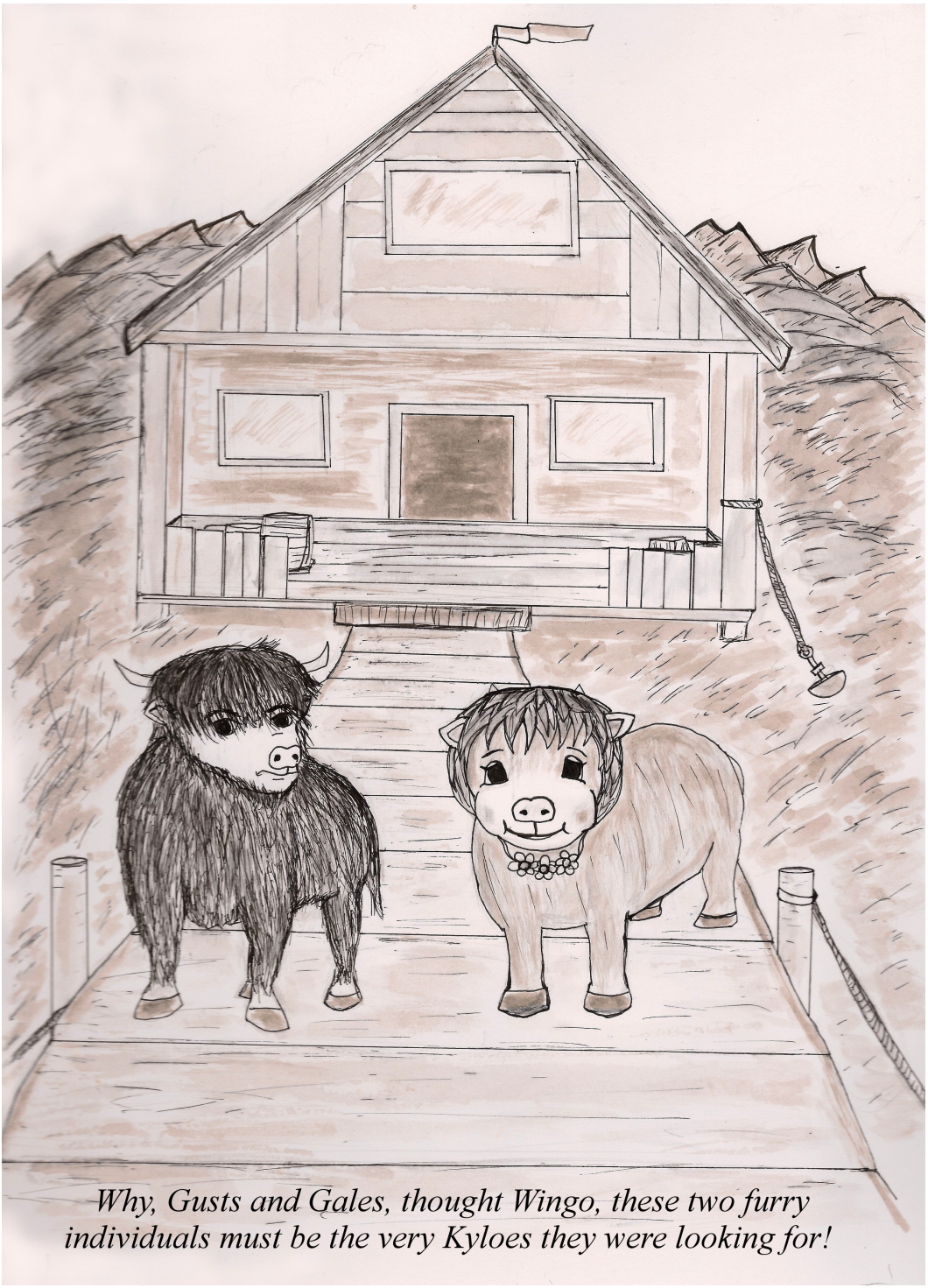
"Oo, Mister Kyloe," she said with delight, "Have ye brung us some guests then? How loovely!"

Why, Gusts and Gales, thought Wingo, these two furry individuals must be the very Kyloes they were looking for!

He gave the furry lady a little nod of a bow and introduced himself and his friends.

"Can ye believe it, Missers Kyloe," the grump said to the lovely broad lady who appeared to be his wife, "These goonie charlies were floppin' all abou' the rough hills worse than a set of newborns!"

Missers Kyloe fixed him with a stern look. "Now you stop that scowlin' an' nonsense, Mister Kyloe," she said firmly, "It is rare as can be for us to get any visitors here in the plains. A drop o' company may even do yer blasted mood some good, ye old mulligrumph."



Why, Gusts and Gales, thought Wingo, these two furry individuals must be the very Kyloes they were looking for!

The gruff bull was about to open his mouth to protest, when the good lady Kyloe cut him off. "In any case, ye've no cause for gettin' all crankley, me fellow. Where's that blasted lot of sweetstalks I jus' asked you to go pick fer tomorrow? Honestly, Mister Kyloe, it was one tiny thing I asked ye, and ye were probably off in yer own lil' head, surfin' away an' forgettin' all about yer poor sufferin' wife!"
Mister Kyloe could only get a few incomprehensible half-answers out while Missers Kyloe went on scolding him as they went into the house.
Wingo, Fiz and Sniffle stood outside uncertainly.
"Well what are ye waitin' for?" rumbled a chastised Mister Kyloe to the trio of friends.
"Aye, come in an' have a cup o' tea an' a bite to eat, me little ones. Ye look famished!" added the cheery voice of Missers Kyloe.

Inside, the Krannog-hut rocked back and forth ever so lightly on the grass sea, but the three guests soon got used to that. Wingo was about to launch into a further explanation about how they got a tad lost, but Missers Kyloe would not hear a word of it until she had given her guests a bite to eat, something warm to drink, and a small rest. She brought out a bowl filled with fried breaded-balls, explaining that she had just made a batch of these this morning, and she was pleased Wingo, Sniffle and Fiz had arrived in the Rolling Plains, because she had made far too much for herself and Mister Kyloe (who gave a sulky grunt, to show that he thought he could probably finish off the breaded-balls on his own) and that her young guests could snack as much as they liked while Mister Kyloe put the tea on.
Wingo thanked Missers Kyloe and took one of the breaded-balls, chewing it slowly. Underneath the crunchy shell was a lovely mixture of sweet and savoury grains that had been seasoned with pepper and tiny touch of spicy heat. They were delicious and made a a very satisfying 'moonch' sound when you bit them. Before he knew it, Wingo had chomped down a second, and then a third, and then a fourth. Sniffle, who prided herself on her table manners and had been delicately nibbling at a breaded-ball, nudged Wingo to get him to slow down his munching. Looking over, Wingo saw that Fiz was holding on to a breaded-ball in each hand and appeared to have managed to cram several into her mouth at once, despite Sniffle's urgent whispers about showing some table manners. Wingo had not realised how famished he was, but he did try to eat a bit more politely, concentrating on remembering to close his mouth and not get crumbs everywhere. By this stage, Fiz was cutting open breaded-balls in order to examine them more closely, while

Sniffle desperately tried to keep the hedgehog from dropping bits of food everywhere. None of this seemed to bother Missers Kyloe terribly, and she simply beamed at her guests and demanded that they eat more.
Eventually, they had eaten as much as they could fit in their tums. Wingo felt the snack had done him a power of good after all the running and flying and crashing. Sniffle complimented Missers Kyloe on the tasty treats and asked if she could please have the recipe perhaps, making the cheery lady beam all the more and say 'Oo!' quite a lot.
Mister Kyloe then brought in some good strong tea, which was just the thing after those breaded-balls for resting and chatting. Wingo declared that the Kyloes had a splendid house, or Krannog, or hill-sea houseboat, as the case may be, and the guests were properly grilled with questions from Missers Kyloe, with the occasional humph and grumph from Mister Kyloe as he heard about their travels.
'The thing is, Mister and Missers Kyloe," Wingo explained, "We were told you might be able to help us get to Zumer Beach, so that we can deliver this lumpy parcel. D'you happen to know where it might be?"
"Zumer Beach?" said Mister Kyloe, "Never heard o' it!"
"Oo, I'm sorry, me little ones," said Missers Kyloe with a shake of her head, "But don't ye fret, there may be another way to find out."
"I' the Forest o' Lastlight," Mister Kyloe whispered with reverent fear.
"A forest will know how to get there?" Fiz said.
"No, silly!" whispered Sniffle.
"Silly bampot," Fiz giggled back.
Wingo shushed them and asked the Kyloes to go on.
"There's a most strange and mysterious creechur i' th' Forest," said Mister Kyloe, "a creechur that knows all the comin's an' goin's of all th' unknown world. If ye find this creechur, it will tell you what ye need to know, fer a price."
"Oh gosh," said Sniffle, who did not relish the idea of going into a dark forest to chase a mysterious and terrifying beast.
"Mister Kyloe, what is this creature called?" said Wingo quietly.
Mister Kyloe looked deeply into the eyes of each of the guests in turn, and in a low voice said:
"Th' Neverlope."
A great silence fell upon the room when this name was mentioned and Wingo felt like his skin was prickling and his hair was standing up. But being a brave young horse, he threw off the feeling with a chuckle and jumped up, ready for action!

"Well, what are we waiting for, Fiz and Sniffle?" declared Wingo, "Let's thank the Kyloes for a jolly fine snack and be on our way."
Missers Kyloe shook her head vigorously and motioned for Wingo to sit down.
"Oo, no, no, young Wingo, ye can't just find that creechur in the Forest o' Lastlight whenever ye please. Only i' th' darkest part o' the night can the unearthly creechur be found. Besides, th' Forest itself is plenty full o' spook and scare before ye even find the creechur. I would'n'dream o' ye young-uns goin' there without a good supper first! Ye need t'have a full stomach before ye head off t'face th' world, I always say!"
Mister Kyloe nodded his head in agreement at this bit of wisdom from his wife.
Well, Wingo could see there was no point in arguing with the Kyloes, and since Sniffle had lost her basket of food and they didn't know when they would next find such a pleasant and cozy place to eat, they gratefully accepted Missers Kyloe's invitation.

Missers Kyloe got a stew going, and Sniffle, who was always keen to improve her own cooking, followed the lady of the house about the kitchen, peering with interest at everything that was going on. Meanwhile, Fiz was quizzing Mister Kyloe about all manner of things concerning the Rolling Plains, such as why they rolled, and how, and had they always done that, did they get good sunbeams around here, and what was the biggest hill wave he had ever been on. Poor exasperated Mister Kyloe found that Fiz, with all her excited curiosity, hardly even seemed to notice how much he grumped, and he was forced to try and answer the sprightly hedgehog's questions as best he could manage. Wingo himself was rather sleepy and sore, so he just lay down and closed his eyes, listening with a smile to Fiz's unending questions, Mister Kyloe's harrumphs and garrumphs, and the clank and bustle of Sniffle and Missers Kyloe in the kitchen.

The stew produced was scrumptious and hearty and as they chewed away, they all sat on the gently rocking long porch-pier out the front of the Krannog, watching the night deepen and the bright and beautiful stars make their winking appearances. Mister Kyloe proudly said that the Rolling Plains had the clearest skies and best views of stars anywhere in the world, and that you wouldn't get this sort of view of the night sky in any other place. This led Fiz to start pointing out what she thought various groups of stars might be called, and as it transpired Mister Kyloe was himself something of an

amateur stargazer, so the two fell into various long arguments about what the proper names of the constellations were. Missers Kyloe and Sniffle were deep in conversation about the best way to cook potatoes, and Sniffle was furiously copying recipes from a sprawling cook-book belonging to the long-haired bovine lady. Missers Kyloe had also applied a new bandage to Wingo's sore wing, despite his insisting that it felt much better, which was more or less true. She had paid him no mind, and eventually Wingo found it easier to let her fuss over him. Even now, in the midst of her teaching Sniffle various tricks of the art of cookery, Missers Kyloe would regularly clomp over to check Wingo's bandage.

In time, a big bright moon rose up in the sky and gave a soft light to the grass sea around the Krannog. It was such a calm and gentle pale light, that everybody fell silent and just enjoyed the sight.

Eventually, Mister Kyloe cleared his throat.

"Well, if ye wallies are gonna go into the forest to look for the Neverlo- for that creechur, 'n I don' think it is a very clever idea, mind, but if ye are goin' to do it, now's the time."

Wingo nodded.

"We aren't afraid of the danger, sir," the young horse said, his face set in determination, "and we really must find our way to Zumer Beach. I promised my Mum and Dad I'd look after their delivery business while they were away, y'see? Gusts and Gales, I jolly well won't let them down!"

Missers Kyloe also seemed reluctant for these young-uns to go travelling into the Forest of Lastlight, but she could see that Wingo was firm in his duty. If this creature was the only one who could tell them the way, Wingo knew that they would simply have to meet and convince it to help them.

There was a round of fond thank-yous from Wingo, Sniffle, and Fiz, which were met with a replying volley of come-and-visit-us-soons from Missers Kyloe, and even a few reluctant humphs from Mister Kyloe that sounded almost friendly.

Because she knew that the snack basket had been lost, Missers Kyloe had given Sniffle some breaded-balls, some biscuits and cake, and various other odds and ends to eat, all wrapped up in a thick blanket that Sniffle slung over her shoulder.

Mister Kyloe led them across the calm of the hill sea and the three friends found that it was even harder not to be swept to the ground in the dark when you couldn't see the waves and ripples of the grass, which made Mister Kyloe snort in despair all the more, but eventually they arrived at the outskirts of a large forest of old gnarled trees that were twisted amongst each other.

"This is as far I go, dovies," Mister Kyloe said with a slight tremor in his voice, "Good luck to ye all, 'n' I hope to see ye again."
With a deep breath, Wingo prepared to enter into the darkness.

Chapter Ten - The Forest of Lastlight

From the moment they first stepped into the forest, Wingo felt like there were strange things watching from the dark corners. Although they knew that a good bright moon was high above them, the trees of the forest had weaved their long grey arms together so tightly that they could not properly see the sky, and only occasionally would enough moonlight trickle through the ceiling of branches to light their path.
"Achoo! Did you hear that?" whispered Sniffle.
"I heard lots of things Sniffie," Fiz whispered back, "Who knows what I jus' heard?"
Indeed, now and then again they would hear strange cries and hoots. Sometimes, there was rustling in the trees when there was no wind. The three friends hadn't the faintest idea what could possibly make such eerie noises. Wingo supposed that it was a little bit better to definitely know something spooky was out in the shadows of the forest, rather than just wondering if there was anything there at all.
"Chin up, pals," Wingo said reassuringly, "Why, all we need to do is simply find this Neverfellow the Kyloes told us about and then we'll know where to go, quick as you like!"
"Just so long as we don't have to stay in this creepy forest-" Sniffle began and gave a little squeak and jumped surprisingly high into the air when Wingo clomped on a dry white branch on the ground and it broke with a crack.
"False alarm, Sniffie, it was just a twig," whispered Wingo.
"But the sound might bring some monsters runnin', I s'pose," Fiz said thoughtfully.
Wingo argued that monsters probably heard branches cracking all the time in this forest, and that would hardly be a good enough reason for them to get out of their comfortable monster beds.
Treading very carefully and always nervously looking about them, they wandered through the dark of the forest for much longer than any of them would have liked. They had been enjoying a few minutes free from scary noises when they suddenly heard one of those odd screeching cries and a THUMP, and something bounced off Wingo's head.
"Ow!" said Wingo.
"Were you scared?" asked whatever had bounced.
"Sorry?" said Wingo, who was rather confused by the whole incident.

"Come on, be honest, were you scared?" said the small lump that had dropped from the branches.
"Achoo!" said Sniffle, by way of admitting that she had been quite startled.
Wingo squinted through the gloom. The lump that had thrown itself at him looked like a sort of small furry bird.
"Hello?" said Wingo, who couldn't think of anything else to say in this sort of spooky forest situation, but he believed that 'hello' was probably a good thing to say wherever you went.
"Be honest with me," said the lump, " Were you scared?"
"I suppose, a bit?" ventured Wingo.
The lump righted himself. He looked essentially like an owl who was not very good at flying, and was all eyes and eyebrows, tiny wings, and the most extraordinary large feet.
"Who are you?" Fiz said, half panicked and half curious.
"Oh, I'm a Vreer," said the owl-like lump, as if there were lots of Vreers about the place and it was no particular thing to be one, "I'm practising my scaring."
"Very good," said Wingo in an absent-minded fashion, "Wait. How's that?"
The owl-lump sighed.
"Well, it's obvious, isn't it? That's what we Vreer do!"
"Do what?" asked Wingo.
"Well, we hang from a branch and wait until someone comes through, see? And then when they're all nervy and just underneath, you drop down and Vam! fall right on top of them and scare the bejeepers out of them."
"Oh," said Wingo, frowning, "Why?"
"What do you mean, why?" spluttered the Vreer, "It was what my Mum and Dad did, and my Grandmums and Grandads and all the rest! We have a long proud tradition of dropping down from branches to scare other creatures!"
The Vreer puffed up with pride.
"Well now," said Wingo unsurely, "Have you been doing it long?"
"You might need a bit more practice," Fiz added, " 'Cos I was only a bit scared."
The Vreer slumped and looked rather downcast.
"I'm still in training, and I'm not a natural scarer, I have to admit, not like the rest of my family. But my great uncle wasn't a natural, and he got so good that he once scared someone's fur white!"
"I was awful scared, I can assure you," Sniffle said.
The Vreer blushed and shuffled his feet.
"Shucks," he said, "That's very nice of you to say so."


"Oh, I'm a Vreer," said the owl-like lump, as if there were lots of Vreers about the place.

"Say, we're looking for the Neversomeone here in this forest," Wingo put in, "Have you come across anyone like that?"
The Vreer gasped and his big eyes got even larger.
"You are looking for the Neverlope!" he whispered, "Are you sure? Why, even the scariest of the Vreer get a bit twitchy thinking about that!"
"Well, we've heard that this Neverthingo knows all sorts of things," Wingo explained, "And we quite badly need directions to Zumer Beach. We've been walking around for quite a while, bumping into spooky trees and hearing all sorts of troubling noises, but we haven't found hide nor hair of this mysterious fellow. In fact, we haven't even got the faintest idea what a Neverwhatsit looks like, which may make it quite difficult to know if we have found one."
The Vreer leaned forward and spoke in a low voice,
"They say that the Neverlope casts no shadow. They also say that the Neverlope can walk in the air and eats dreams. If you really absolutely, completely, and definitely must find the Neverlope, I've heard that it can only be found when the moon is at its highest and brightest in the forest."
"That's jolly kind of you to be so helpful," said Wingo.
The Vreer nodded and smiled and his face lit up as a thought occurred to him.
"I say! Would you mind if I climbed back up the tree and had another go dropping down on you? I'd be ever so grateful."
The trio shuffled awkwardly. Sniffle was not especially keen to be scared again, even if she knew that the Vreer was just going to fall in his silly way, but Wingo felt it was the polite thing to do.
"I tell you what," the young horse said, "We will all close our eyes and count to twenty-three, and then you can try to scare us again."
The Vreer clapped in delight and his eyes shone with joy. He scrabbled back up the tree while everybody else kept their eyes shut tight, except Sniffle, who had half an eye open just in case.
They waited for a moment and then there was a thunk sound and Fiz said "Ouch".
"Choo!" squeaked Sniffle.
Wingo opened his eyes, and saw the Vreer beaming at him.
"How was that? Was that scarier?" the owl thing asked.
"Oh yes, very scary," Wingo assured the little fellow, "Well done! If you could do a bit more shrieking when you jump out of a tree, I'm sure that might help even more. You just keep practising and I'm sure that you'll soon end up being one of the scariest Vreers ever! It was very nice to meet you, Vreer, but we'd better be getting along now."

"Keep on scarin'!" Fiz called out cheerfully as she rubbed her head.
"But not too much," Sniffle added, and the trio left the Vreer climbing back into his tree and went along in search of the brightest, highest moonlight that would lead them to the Neverlope.

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It took them rather longer than they expected to find the highest, brightest moon, even though Fiz could see quite well in the dark if she remembered to take her goggles off. They were starting to worry that they would never ever find any sign of the Neverlope as they crept cautiously through the hidden noises of the Forest of Last Light, but eventually Wingo lifted his head and drew in his breath. There, just above them was a gap in the basket roof of the forest - an opening where they could finally see the sky, and hovering bright and heavy was the largest moon any of them had yet seen. They were awestruck for quite a while, but as Wingo looked about, he saw that the moonlight shone upon a vague mist flickering in the night.
"Look at that!" Wingo declared.
"Yez indeed, look at that!," Fiz said, although she was not entirely sure what they were looking at.
"That mist must lead to the Neveryoucallit," Wingo explained, "So long as the moon lights that silvery stuff, we should be able to find the one who can tell us how to stop being lost!"
"Well, I suppose that's a good thing," Sniffle said, unconvinced.
" 'Course it's good!" Wingo declared, "Let's get going!"
They chased after the silver-white trail as fast as they could, terrified that at any moment a cloud would cover the moon and hide the path from them. After some time, they came to a spot where two old large trees had grown leaning towards each other and had twisted their branches together high above, making a sort of pale wooden gate. There was something extra unnerving about this part of the forest which made Sniffle, who was sensitive to such things, start to do many little sneezes.
Wingo thought about all the extraordinary adventures his Mum and Dad had in times gone by, and he thought to himself that if they had been brave as can be in those days, then he could manage just a little spot of courage just now. Swallowing hard, Wingo stepped forward through the gate of branches. Tiptoeing carefully, Fiz and Sniffle followed just behind.
There was complete quiet in this part of the forest - no Vreers, no hoots, no cries, no rustling, just the biggest, most imposing silence the trio had ever

come across. Nothing much happened for a bit, and Wingo was becoming concerned that maybe they were in the wrong spot after all, when there was a strange whisper upon the air, and as he looked up into the patch of moonlight sky above, he could see the most ethereal and remarkable beast galloping across the sky. He had no doubt that it could only be the Neverlope. The beast looked a touch like a deer, but its antlers and tail were made of cloudy smoke, and as the Vreer had said, the Neverlope cast no shadow upon the ground as it ran through the sky towards them. It grew as it approached them, filling up the space in that nook of the forest so that Wingo, Fiz, and Sniffle had to crane their necks to look at the gigantic apparition.

The Neverlope's hooves touched gently upon the ground and it exhaled a fine silver mist.

"Wingo, Fizikosophiste, Sniffle," the Neverlope said in a voice that was the loudest whisper they had ever heard, "I am the Neverlope, and I know what you seek."

"Yes, hello," Wingo managed to say, his voice suddenly rather feeble, "If you don't mind, we would please like to know how to get to Zumer Beach. I- I don't suppose you would mind helping us, would you, if you have time? Please and thank-you?"

The Neverlope snorted and looked up at the moon. Wingo saw that where the creature should have eyes, there were instead bright milky pools of light that he could not look at for long without his hair standing on end.

"I am the Neverlope," the huge deer of mist and light said, "I know much. But what will you give me, if I tell you what you want to know?"

"Achoo!" sneezed Sniffle, producing one of the biggest sneezes she had ever had. After a second or two she managed to recover herself. "I-I-I, oh gosh, oh goodness, I'm afraid that I haven't much to give you, b-b-besides some very tasty fried breaded-balls."

"Um, I- I used to have a t-telescope," put in Fiz meekly, "But I threw it at a fishy."

"I care not for any of those things," the Neverlope declared in a voice as still and as terrifying as midnight.

"Well, how about dreams?" ventured Wingo, "That's what you like, isn't it?"

Slowly, the Neverlope nodded.

"You can have one of my dreams, I suppose," Wingo went on, "If it will mean we'll find out how to get where we are going and I can deliver the brown-paper package."

"Oh my, no, gosh, Wingo," Sniffle said with tears in her eyes, "That sounds ever so terribly frightening."

"We- we should learn a bit more first, see if we can think up somethin'." agreed Fiz uncertainly.
Wingo shook his head.
"I appreciate that, friends, but we haven't time and we've looked and run and flown and this is the first time that anybody has actually said they would help us, so if the Neverlope wants one of my dreams in exchange for directions to Zumer Beach, well, fair enough, say I."
Sniffle and Fiz found themselves a tad choked up at the silly bravery of their horsey friend.
"And what dream will you surrender to me?" the Neverlope whispered as it looked down upon Wingo.
The young horse thought deep for a moment and chewed his lip. When he had decided, he looked up at the great deer with antlers of smoke.
"Neverlope, you may have my dream of having adventures like my Mum and Dad."
"Oh, no!" Sniffle and Fiz chorused, but Wingo nodded his head. He had made up his mind, and could be a very stubborn young horse when he had decided something. If the Neverlope had to have a dream, he would have Wingo's, and that was that.
"Very well," whispered the Neverlope, and the creature brought its vast head down from the tops of the trees towards Wingo and breathed deeply. A sort of brightly shining fog began to form around Wingo's head, and if Sniffle and Fiz looked at it just right, they thought that they could see images of Wingo's Mum and Dad doing daring deeds in that fog. It was all rather nerve-racking for the piglet and hedgehog, but Wingo himself seemed to have fallen into a kind of trance.
The Neverlope breathed deeper and the dream-fog was drawn from Wingo up towards the strange beast. Mouth opened wide, the Neverlope swallowed Wingo's dream like a sigh.
"It is done," whispered the Neverlope.
The huge deer of mist turned and slowly walked back into the sky and when a cloud brushed past the moon, the Neverlope vanished from sight.
Wingo blinked his eyes a few times, yawned, and promptly dropped to the ground, falling into a deep sleep. Indeed, it was as if there was a strong sleepiness in the air, because Sniffle and Fiz found it very hard to keep their eyes open, and they both stretched and made themselves comfortable next to Wingo on the forest floor, and before they knew it, they too were snoring gently.

Chapter the Last - Deliveries and Dreams

When Wingo woke up and looked about him, there was sunlight trickling down through the knitted branches of the Lastlight Forest. Why, they had slept the whole night through! As is often the case when you think about yesterday when you first wake up, Wingo was not entirely sure whether last night had happened or not.

Sniffle woke herself up with a sneeze, and nudged Fiz until she bounced up from the ground.

The little piglet was awfully concerned about Wingo, and inspected him whenever he wasn't looking, but as anxious as she was, she couldn't find any permanent harm from the young horse's meeting with the Neverlope. In fact, given that Wingo had been brave enough to give up his dream of adventuring like his Mum and Dad, and Sniffle knew how much that had meant to him, she was careful not to mention last night at all, and would periodically have to shush the curious Fiz from asking him awkward questions.

All in all, Sniffle decided Wingo didn't seem to have been harmed by the loss of his dream (although Sniffle thought that you never could tell what was going on inside someone), and just appeared a little bit dazed. In fact, Wingo looked just the tiniest bit more grown-up, Fiz and Sniffle agreed as they talked quietly amongst themselves.

"No need to whisper," Wingo said cheerily and stretched his wings out.

"Yez there is," disagreed Fiz, who was shushed before she blurted out that they were whispering because they didn't want to worry Wingo.

"Oh gosh," Sniffle said, slumping slightly, "We've been through, well, through all of that, and we still don't know how to get to Zumer Beach. I feel as if we shall never deliver that parcel."

"Not to worry, pals," Wingo said as his eyes went a bit cloudy, "Why, I think I know the way now. Isn't that jolly odd?"

Indeed, it appeared that the Neverlope had done as promised, and for the loss of his dream, Wingo now seemed to see a path through the forest that was quite invisible to Sniffle and Fiz. Wingo trotted along quite happily, jumping over fallen logs, cutting through mazes of bushes, all the while moving as if he were only half awake. Fiz and Sniffle scurried to keep up with their friend, but eventually he led them up a large fallen tree trunk that formed a sort of ramp. There at the top of the tree ramp was a cluster of leaves, but as soon as Fiz touched them, they swayed to one side and revealed an exit from the

Forest of Lastlight! Just beyond lay the wide blue sky and the cheery sun. Fiz jumped up and down with excitement to finally be in sunlight again, and immediately pulled her sun goggles down.
"Y'know, I think my wing is all healed now," Wingo said with a wink, "And I rather feel like having a bit of a fly. Shall we?"
Fiz and Sniffle agreed that it was splendid that Wingo was feeling better, and once Sniffle was more-or-less convinced that his wing was strong enough now to carry them through the air again, the hedgehog and piglet hopped into their seats in Wingo's bags, ready for take-off. Wingo lazily ran a few steps across the tree-ramp and leapt off the end into the air.
There was a moment when Sniffle felt like they had rushed Wingo and he was just going to crash into the ground once again, but the young horse flicked his wings two or three times and effortlessly began to rise and glide through the air.
With the same sleepy smile on his face, Wingo dove and wheeled through the sky. Fiz cheered every time the young horse swooped, while Sniffle covered her eyes and sneezed anxiously. Wingo just felt wonderfully free and content to finally be able to race through the air again.

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Wingo flew for quite some time, until they spied a long stretch of white sand down below, right next to the green of the sea twinkling in the sunshine. They had reached Zumer Beach, at long last!
Wingo came down to land and ran some way along the shore before he could slow to a trot. He looked around and yawned, as if he was only just now coming to his senses.
Overjoyed to have some more good proper sunshine to help her brains get into action, Fiz promptly adjusted her special goggles and threw herself down onto the sand, lying on her back to soak up as much of that golden warmth as possible.
Sniffle made various noises of concern and disapproval and worried that she might burn if she stayed out too long in the sun. The little piglet wrapped her neckerchief around her head to try and make some sort of sun-hat.
Wingo squinted out at the sea. It was rather bright here at Zumer Beach, but the waves made a pleasant and relaxing sighing sound as they washed lazily back and forth.
"Come on Fiz," declared Wingo, as he shook himself into alertness, "We've come all this way, let's not forget that we have a package to deliver."

"Just one more minute," Fiz protested. She continued to lie there in the sun without showing any intention of moving. After waiting for what he presumed was almost certainly as long as a minute, Wingo nudged Fiz until he had shifted her more-or-less to her feet.
Wingo's keen eyes had spied some sign of activity just a little bit further along the shore, where there appeared to be much splashing and hullabaloo going on at the water's edge, so with an encouraging word, he led his friends in that direction. Sniffle, who was still keen to get into some shade and perhaps have a nice cool drink, got behind the sunbathing hedgehog and pushed her along the beach.
The source of the commotion was three young turtles - two girls and one boy. One of the girls and the boy were running about and shouting, attempting to add and repair all sorts of towers and walls for a most impressive sandcastle, while the other girl giggled and noisily splashed sea water at the defences.
"Hello there!" Wingo called out.
The three little turtles stopped and stared at the strangers with a moment's curiosity, then returned to the much more important business of sandcastles.
"I have a package here," Wingo went on. The young horse checked the parcel he had brought all this way. The brown-paper parcel was a bit scuffed and grubby and perhaps just a bit worse for wear, but Wingo could still make out the address.
"It's for Mr. Grampa Turtle. Have you little chaps seen him about?"
The three little turtles stopped again and eyed Wingo gravely.
" 'Course we've seen him," said one of the girls, who was slightly taller than the others.
"Grampa and Gramma live here, y'see," explained the little boy in a squeaky voice.
"Their house is jus' up there past the rocks," said the smaller girl.
Wingo thanked them for their helpfulness and complimented them on their sandcastle. Fiz had some rather good ideas for improving their buildings, but was convinced by Sniffle that she might perhaps give these turtles her views on the subject a little bit later.
The three friends climbed over the rocks and found a rickety wooden house perched on stilts that looked over the dunes of Zumer Beach out onto the ocean. Around the house were shady trees flopping back and forth in the breeze. Sitting there on the front porch in a rocking chair was an old turtle wearing large, black, thick glasses, who was rocking back in forth in time with the sea and thoughtfully chewing some seaweed.
Wingo, Sniffle and Fiz called out to the old turtle, which took quite a few

goes and the loudest voices they could muster because he was rather absorbed in his rocking, his watching the sea, and his slow chewing.
Eventually the old turtle noticed the visitors and through his thick glasses he peered down at them from up in his stilt-house and smiled in a confused fashion.
"Hello there, sir, my name is Wingo and these here are my friends, Fiz and Sniffle," the young horse called up when he had attracted the old turtle's attention, "Would you happen to be Grampa, of Zumer Beach?"
The old fellow thought about this for some time and eventually nodded slowly.
"Well, Mr. Grampa, we have a package to deliver to you."
"We are sorry if it is a teaspoonful late," called out Sniffle in her loudest voice, which was not especially loud.
"We got very lost," Fiz explained cheerfully, "It was very interesting, tho',"
"Splendid! Is splendid" Grampa called out, "You come up, all of you come up now."

Obediently, Wingo and his pals trotted up the long staircase to the house on stilts.
It occurred to Wingo that through all their troubles, he hadn't really given much thought to what the parcel might actually hold. Perhaps it was something exciting, and the delivery business needn't be as dull as he thought? Why, it might be a case of pirate treasure, or a map of the whole wide world, or maybe even a set of shining silver armour!
It took Grampa quite a while to work through the brown wrapping paper, but eventually he managed to uncover a box. He opened it up and smiled.
"Is not late, no, is just in time! Yes, just in time!"
Wingo leaned over. His face sank with disappointment. Inside was nothing but a bunch of silly old candles. They didn't even look magical or special or explodey. All that effort just for a box of candles? The young horse sighed.
"Is for very special day," said Grampa and waved one of the candles about, "Here, smell! Smell!"
The trio obliged with a good sniff. Wingo had to admit they smelled very nice.
"Why, they smell of a vanilla!" said Sniffle, who had quite the expert nose when it came to food matters.
Grampa Turtle nodded eagerly.
"Yes, yes, is my wife's favourite smell. And now we can have cake. You can not have cake without the candles!"



"Splendid! Is splendid" Grampa called out.

The trio was not all together clear about what he meant by this.
"You see, you see, today is her birthday, my lovely old wife - long time we have been married, long, long time. For her birthday, all the family comes to Zumer beach, all the children, and now you have brought the candles, we can have cake and the proper birthday."
The old turtle beamed once again and Wingo realised that even if they were just silly nice smelling candles, they were important to Grampa and his family, and he supposed that counted for something. Actually, it counted for quite a lot of something.
"Come on, come on, let's go make candles and cake," Grampa said, merrily waving them on, "Everyone celebrates birthday! You came long way, eat some cake. Come on, don't be shy!"
"I am keen to see what sort of cake it is," whispered Sniffle.
"And I need some good ol' sunbeams before we fly back to Georgiana Fields," added Fiz, hopping up and down.
Wingo smiled. He supposed it would be awfully rude to refuse a piece of birthday cake, and since he was a well brought up horse, he led the others on to the birthday party.

It turned out to be a splendid party, and Gramma was delighted at her special candles having arrived just in the nick of time. The cake was delicious, and Sniffle spent a good while questioning Grampa's son, who had baked it, about all sorts of things to do with mixing different kinds of spices. Fiz, meanwhile, lay on the beach in her goggles long enough to charge up her brain, and then came up with what she though were some very interesting new sandcastle designs, following which, she leapt up and ran over to try and convince the three grandchildren to build a monumental sand pyramid.
Wingo went for a very slow stroll with Grampa along the sea's edge, where the water was just the right temperature to cool you off, while Grampa told the young horse stories of his life in the old country before he had moved to Zumer Beach.
As it began to get late, they all returned to the house built on stilts for a nice cold glass of lemonade.
Wingo, Fiz, and Sniffle sat there slurping their drinks, enjoying a well-earned rest.
"Well, we finally got the parcel delivered, and, Hail and Hurricanes, what a time we had of it!" Wingo said, "Thanks for your help, you two. Doing all this grown-up delivery business stuff is tougher than I thought."
"I'm sure that your Mum and Dad will be proud of you," said Sniffle.

"Yez," added Fiz, "It's just a shame that you can't have no more dreams of havin' adventures like them no more, since you gave that dream away to the Neverloper."
The thought of not being able to have adventures like Wingo's Mum and Dad made them all quite gloomy, and naturally, Wingo felt most gloomy of all.
"Wait a minute!" declared Fiz, her eyes lighting up, "Just 'coz ol' Wingo can't have adventures like his Mum 'n Dad, doesn't mean that-"
"It doesn't mean that he can't have his own adventures!" Sniffle finished, clapping with excitement.
Wingo had a good think about it and decided that his friends were quite right. He may no longer have the dream of being a Lightning Rider like his Mum used to be or an explorer like his Dad once was, but by Gust and Gales, that didn't mean that he, Sniffle and Fiz couldn't go on their very own adventures, just like the ones they had on the way to this rickety shack on Zumer Beach.
Wingo smiled at Sniffle and Fiz. He knew that whatever adventure they ended up finding next, it was sure to be a jolly grand one!



THE END