



CHAPTER I

A MOUNTAINDREAM

“A terrible mountaindream I have had,” said the King of Gwupygrubynudnyland, “all was wobblesome, and I wobbliest of all.”

“Go on, sire”, said the Vizier.

“Dreams, Walter, what are they for? They are a nuisance.”
“Indeed they are, sire. Do go on.”

“Imagine a jelly. And imagine that jelly is the world. And imagine an infernal child wobbling that jelly. And imagine he never stops. For eternity that devilchild is wobbling the jellyworld, and laughing at nothing, at the nothingness of it. I dreamed this idiotchild was wobbling the world, wobbling and juddering it, and wouldn’t stop...”

King Walerian paused, oppressed by the memory of the dream. “Need I continue, Walter?”, he said quietly.

“No, sir, though I am intrigued by your earlier comment ‘and I was wobbliest of all’.”

“Just before I awoke, Walter...”; and once more, the King drifted off.

“Sire?”

“Just before I awoke, I was in this shaking, juddering world... I was standing in the palace, and the palace was shaking, and I wondered why, and I looked outside, and visible through the gaping windows was the infernal blond cackling child, huge like a house, his laughing lips smeared with bluish cream, and I... looked in the mirror. And awoke.”

“What did His Majesty see in the mirror?”

“Myself. But the... how shall I put it? The geometry of myself was gone. I had been shaken by the bluecream child. My features had

slid like the guts off a butcher's block. My nose here, my lips there, my ears re-sewn onto my cheek with jagged black cotton, like stitching on a scar. And my eyes. Bright with life. That is what scared me most. My eyes were very much alive, in a face rearranged by a surgeon from Bedlam. And then I awoke, parched and gasping."

For the first time, the King turned to look his Vizier directly in the eye. "And Suzanna had once again failed to place water beside my bed. Can we not do something about these wicked servants?"

The Vizier set King Walerian's crown onto his balding, gently shaking head. "A frightful dream I grant you, sire. But now you are awake and the horrors have vanished. Look, the sun is shining. Your kingdom is quiet. A gentle breeze in the orchard. All is well."

King Walerian looked with rheumy eyes through the window; the window through which, in his dream, he had seen the horrible child.

Bright light slanted into the room. The muslin curtains ghosted inwards, lifted by a breath from the orchard. His kingdom outside was quiet. Above a nearby field, a skylark was singing.

All was well with the world.



But Gwupygrubynudnyland was bored.

The dogs were bored. The flies were bored. The bird was bored in the sky, the fish was bored in the stream, the clerk was bored in the office, the farmer was bored in the field. Match-heads were bored on the sticks, handles were bored on the doors, dust was bored on the carpet, ink was bored on the page. In Gwupygrubynudnyland, the sky was bored, the earth was bored, streams flowed in defeated surrender to Gravity, which was itself bored. The day was bored, the night was bored, clocks were bored, Time itself was bored in this dreary land. Gwupygrubynudnyland was boring, and Gwupygrubynudnyland was bored.

On the High Street, the dogs slept in the doorways in the hope that maybe someone would kick them out of the way. Cats pretended to be clumsy and knocked over wine glasses with their tails, in the hope that someone would wring their necks and end their misery. Rats waited in the darker alleyways at night, hoping against hope that someone walking back from the tavern would piss on them. Anything to break the tedium. A kick, a “shoo!”, a stream of piss! Anything to vary the weft and weave of Gwupygrubynudnylandian time, any red thread to break the endless grey carpet that the Fates wove for this land, any bright and unexpected note that would disrupt the barrelorgan of predictable harmony that was the music of life in Gwupygrubynudnyland.

When most Gwupygrubynudnylandians went to bed, they would kneel and pray for another day just like the last one, and would slide soundlessly into the soft white feathers, and would fall asleep immediately, drifting like stones in the ocean, gently rolled along the deep shore, softly rolling, gently eroding themselves into rounder, smoother shapes, peacefully bumping along the bottom of the vast ocean of sleep.

But not all of them. For, of late, some Gwupygrubynudnylandians were beginning to have dreams. In the privacy of their bedrooms, in the free lands of the unconscious, they were capable of throwing off the shackles of the day and of floating into the unfettered sky. Here in the realm of dreams they were free to do as they pleased! Here, in the realm of sleep, they were no longer bored!

And so it was that in the mornings, most of Gwupygrubynudnyland would wake refreshed from the deep soothing ocean of sleep, but some would rub their pale cheeks and yellowgrained, dullscaled eyes, and curse the cockerel that had called them forth from the wonderful world of dreams to the boring, daily world of Gwupygrubynudnyland.

But where one person is infected with dreams, then soon there will be another. The restless sleeper wakes the wife who lies by his side, disturbs the child who sleeps nearby. The dreamer who remembers his darkling dreams may whisper them into his lover's ear

in the bright of the day.

And so, gradually, into the light, bright, boring world of routine life sneaks the Shadow, and under the lintel of the back door, now left perilously ajar, creeps the impish demon called Change.

CHAPTER II

KASPIAN & KATRIN'S SECRET LOVE

"Have you brought them?" said Katrin, her eyes bright with excitement.

Kaspian nodded. He looked around. No-one. Then he took Katrin's hand, and led her deeper into the orchard.

It was ten-thirty in the morning. The day was bright, becoming warm. Kaspian took off his peaked student cap and let the sweat on his forehead cool. He had skipped Double Rhetoric and had run through the gleaming, empty streets; only now was his breath slowing down.

"Were you seen?" asked Katrin excitedly.

"Me? No. I'm like the fox, slinking through the dark," said Kaspian.

Katrin smiled.

"And you?" asked Kaspian.

Katrin shook her head, and shyly looked at the ground. They were together. They were alone. And no-one knew.

"Will Professor Beifuss miss you?" she asked.

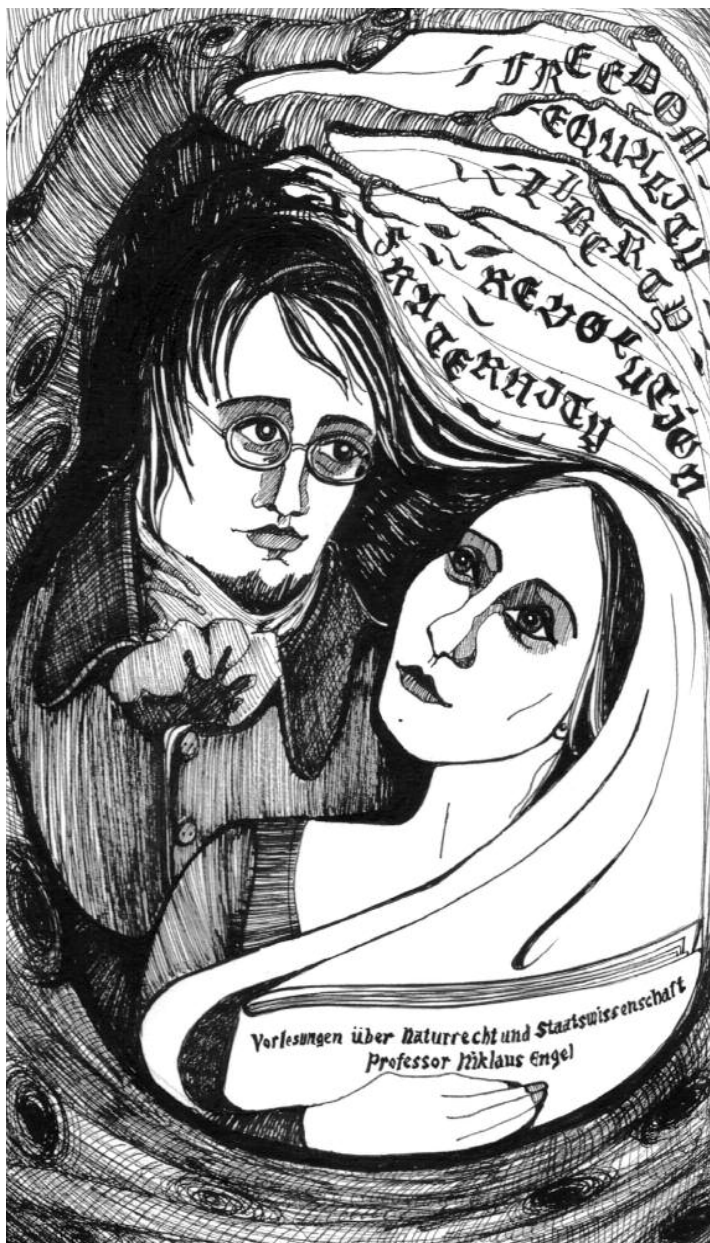
"He may notice, I suppose."

"And if he does, what will you say?"

"That I felt ill."

"Should you not then have reported that? To... what do you call her... 'matron'?"

"Yes. But I hope he will indulge me, as he very much liked my essay on "Cicero on agriculture" last week."



“And what did Cicero say about agriculture?”

“That it inspired him.”

“What fascinating subjects you must study.”

Kaspian looked up at Katrin, smiling at her sarcasm. She smiled back. How he loved her. There was not another girl in Gwupygrubynudnyland like her. Which other girl would dare meet him alone? In the orchard? On a school day?

Katrin sat down on the swinging chair that hung between two trees. Around them, the white, perfumed world of the cherry orchard. She began gently to swing as Kaspian leant up against a trunk, and watched her, his eyes gleaming.

“And what have you brought?” she asked, excited.

Kaspian had been waiting for this moment. He looked at her slyly, wondering how long he could keep her in suspense.

“Well?”

But he could wait no longer. He unbuttoned his jacket. Slid his hand inside. Looked around, lest they were being watched. And pulled out a monograph, bound in thick blue card.

“From Berlin,” he whispered. “A monograph.”

Katrin flew forward and sprang down from the swing in her excitement. As she did so, Kaspian caught a glimpse of her slim, ivory ankles.

“By whom?” she gasped.

“Professor Niklaus Engel.”

He said the three magic words quietly, reverently, like a magic spell. Katrin was entranced, excited, ecstatic. Overcome with enthusiasm, and without thinking of the consequences, she jumped forward and threw her arms around Kaspian. “And the title?” she cried.

Kaspian was overwhelmed, his heart racing. “*Vorlesungen über Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft*,” he said quietly, trembling with emotion. For, in that moment her soft, graceful arms were laid on his shoulders, her hand clasped around his neck, her smiling, upturned face just below him, her cherrycoloured lips but inches away from his...

And then she was gone. Katrin stepped back. Stood. Looked down.

Their momentary embrace still hung, sung between them, like a bell that rings far away, half-heard, half-dreamt. Had they really been so close? Had her lips so nearly touched his?

The shy silence deepened. Simultaneously they glanced up at each other, and immediately looked back down, studying their hands.

Someone had to speak, and break the spell.

“Have you read it? Already? Before me?” asked Katrin, quietly.

“I...skimmed it...”

“And...?” she said, regaining some composure and confidence. “And...?”

Kaspian’s mind, which since her embrace had been floating amongst the stars and suns of other worlds, gradually returned to him. “It, it, it is quite brilliant,” he said. “We will not be disappointed.” He steadied the swinging chair, as if by stilling its rocking, he could settle his heart. “Shall we...?” he asked. Katrin nodded and came to sit down beside him, the curve of her hip a mere inch away from his. Her heart fluttered in her breast. Had she really flung her arms around his neck? Why did she not feel ashamed? Why, instead, this lighthearted joy?

“And how did you come by a copy?”

“The Jew was true to his word. I thought I would never see those three shillings again. But sure enough, when he passed back from Berlin, he brought with him... the book. Hidden in his bales of salt, tea and tobacco. Smell.” And he held the monograph aloft for her to sniff. She bent over and brushed her nose across its blue binding, and he caught a glimpse of the down on the nape of her neck.

“Black tea,” she giggled.

“He slipped it under my cup at the coffee shop. And I gave him more money, for the next time.”

Katrin looked up at him, adoring. And then looked cautiously around.

A gentle breeze breathed through the orchard, stirring the

blossoms, scattering the riper petals like fragrant, slow-falling snowflakes. All was quiet; only the perfumed breath of the wind. Not a soul moved hereabouts. They were alone.

She turned to Kaspian. "Let us read," she said.

Kaspian nodded, and opened the monograph to the first page. There was a pause, and then Kaspian's quiet voice whispered through the dense German words, teasing out their meaning; their defiance, their truth, their world-changing bravery. And soon his voice was joined by Katrin's, also whispering, alternating sentences with him as they gently peeled off layer and layer, gently unveiling the naked truth that lay beneath the layers of words, their lips and tongues gently playing with the sound and the significance, playing with the magic, with the spell and inspiration of philosophy.

And the wind came, gently easing through the branches, and carried their words. Their words rose through the eaves, gently breaking through the canopy of blossom, gently scattering a perfumed rain over the orchard... and upwards the wind carried the words and the speech and the whispering, and carried it over the wall that divides the king from his people, and blew the words, like scattering, broken blossoms, over the reclining, sleeping, white-haired King.

King Walerian opened his eyes. A voice had woken him.

"Can one not even sleep in peace in the blasted orchard?" he asked, angrily.

But looking around him, he established he was alone.

He could not remember the last time he had been alone. There was no servant to be seen, no Vizier, no Minister... not even a gardener, a page-boy, a scullery maid. No-one, just him, him on his own. Even at night when he slept there was a guardsman at watch at his door. But now, for the first time in years, he was alone. And suddenly, it frightened him.

For, then, whose was the voice that had summoned him from his sleep?

"Walter! Suzanna!" he cried. But the words caught in his throat like jagged bones. His white hand clawed at the air as he tried to rise

from his couch, but grasped only nothingness. His eyes fluttered, at first beset by a blinding light and then a milky gloom, as if a smoked and glassy cloud had just swallowed the sun. And what was that falling from above, huge as a house? And what was that sound, as if of a thousand voices, and what was that quaking, that shaking, that jellylike quavering of the earth, of his kingdom itself ?

“What is happening to me?” he cried, the fit now fully upon him, his limbs aquiver, his sight occluded, his heart pounding like a pigmy’s drum.

“God, save me!” said the King.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A BREATH OF WIND GIVES US A GEOGRAPHY LESSON

Here it is, a breath of wind, passing over Gwupygrubynudnyland. A breath of wind like so many you have known. In your childhood, the wind glides down from summery hills to ruffle your hair, in adolescence it is an autumnal storm to lift away your pains and carry your tears as rain, and in old age it comes like a winter chill, running its icy hands beneath your blankets and breathing into your brittle bones.

The wind blows where it listeth, the Good Book says, *and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth*. The winds move over our earth, and carry with them voices and words and ideas, the winds bear seeds from one land to another, knowing no borders nor boundaries, the dust of one’s man brow is carried to rest in the palace of another man’s country, and the exhalation of a king can come to expire in the drafts that eddy through the poor man’s house.

And so, this wind had made a long journey before it carried Kaspian and Katrin’s words and scattered them on the sleeping

King's troubled head. It had been born, like so many winds, in the cold of the Arctic. Crawling from the white bed of its birth, it had gathered freshness from the snows and moisture of the Siberian lakes. As it passed over St. Petersburg and its thousand samovars, it had suckled the savour of black, boiling tea. Slowing and mildening to take in the great Tsarist city, the wind had cooled itself through the beards of the debaters in the taverns, whence it had taken on a note of tobacco, vodka, and anarchy. Speeding up once more, the wind had taken salt from the Baltic, from Kashubia it had gathered poppyseed and the scent of herring, and, crossing the border into Prussia, it raged in the dust of the parade grounds amongst hooves and heels, and took on a steely, military keenness. And with new iron in its airy soul, it then raced towards Berlin, where it took the words out of Professor Engel's mouth as he hobbled along the Charlottenstraße, his scarf wrapped tightly against the draft.

O, how keen and biting was the wind now! It headed South with a roaring intensity, and howled down the chimneys of the German lands, filling the *Leberknödel*-soup pots with dust and ashes, and causing the stout *hausfrauen* to raise their fists and curse the cheeky and penetrating zephyr. But the wind slowed down as it entered the Bohemian forests and skirted Bavaria. For how could a wind not stop and savour the gently steaming sauerkraut, the sizzling bratwurst, the happily roaring fire? How could it howl through forests gently shrouded in poets and Romantic mists? And how could it disturb the centuries-long, somnolent peace of the princes and their peoples?

And so it limped through the mitteleuropäisch hills, passing through the hidden caves where the Niebelungen hammered their gold and where Kaiser Rotbart and his armies awaited the call that would rouse them from their slumber. In the nearby villages the wind listened in on conversations in Germanic, Magyar and Slavic languages, and finally, amongst this confusion of tongues, arrived in the orchards of Gwupygrubynudnyland, bringing with it the aftertaste of its Russian bite, its Prussian steel... and tore up the petals, and stole the words from Kaspian and Katrin's lips, and bored

keenly into the King's cushioned sleep...

And blew him awake. And the King saw he was alone, alone but for the Wind. The Wind now rose into the air and looked down at the reclining King. And saw how he looked about him in growing panic. How he tried to stand, shuddered and fell to the ground. And how now there came running his servants and staff, calling out in alarm.

The King saw visions and heard voices. He pointed at things that were not there. In the faces of his domestics, he saw demons and devils.

The Wind sighed, sorry to have disturbed the old man's snooze. As the Royal Doctor gently restrained the monarch, the Wind sloped off, limping guiltily South, eventually to die in the breathless, oven-like air of the Anatolian hills.