

The Dry Spell





THE KIDS' CANCER PROJECT

WRITE A BOOK IN A DAY

Parameters Form

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Parameters and random words

Parameters

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Random words

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quirky

The Dry Spell

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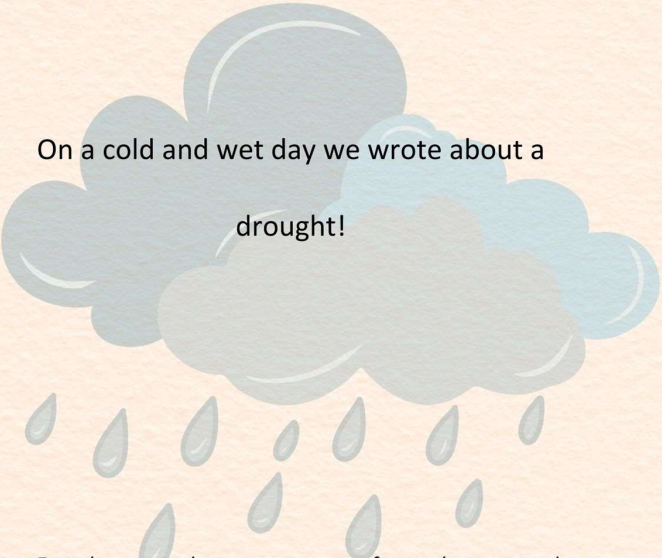
Holly Sydelle

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On a cold and wet day we wrote about a
drought!

For the second year a group of people ventured to Woodbridge, a historic home beautifully restored and maintained on the banks of the Swan River in Woodbridge (Mandoon), this year we were ensconced in the Warden's cottage - much warmer and cosier, many thanks to Leslie Thiele for allowing us to use this space.

With plenty of home-made soup and other foods to keep us happy, we put our minds together to plan and complete an illustrated book for you. All in one day!

We hope you enjoy our little book and take a magical journey through your reading, please remember to floss!
We enjoyed writing it for you.

The Woodies.


We'd like to thank the National Trust of WA for allowing us the use of the space for the day.



Chapter 1 – The Invasion


It was *Free Dress Friday*, and Tabitha was on her way to school. She walked along the track next to the dried-up riverbed that was the short cut into town.

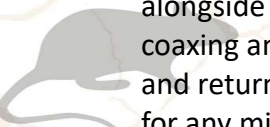
As she walked, she noticed how sad the bush around her was looking, and the trees seemed like they were crying out for water. The Corellas once clean and white, now brown and dirty, perched quietly on tree branches with their wings puffed up trying to keep cool. It was only eight o'clock and already the temperature was 25 degrees. They didn't have the energy for their usual shenanigans, like swinging by one leg upside down, and watched Tabitha with heads bent and showing little interest. She could see her friends Bonnie and Jane waiting for her outside the IGA on the corner ahead. It was one of the few buildings in town that was still open and not boarded up.



Tabitha remembered a time before the drought when the town of Wheaterup was a favourite stop for travellers on their way to the city or when following the wildflower trail. She hoped the rains would come back again this year.


As she was about to cross over the road to her friends, she heard something behind her and turned around to see Tess following her. Tess was her Kelpie and an escape artist! 'Go home, Tess!' she cried out, but Tess had already spotted something scurrying along the wall of the IGA and behind the bins out back. It was some mice, and Tess was off after them! If chasing them at home wasn't enough. Tess was also very sociable and, having given up chasing mice, joined Tabitha and



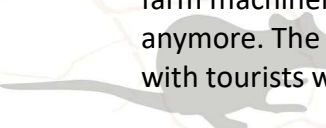


her friends. After buying a drink to quench her thirst, Tabitha and her friends continued their walk to school. Tess ran alongside them trying to 'round up' the stragglers. After some coaxing and stern words from Tabitha, she reluctantly left them and returned home where she would spend the day on alert for any mice entering the property.

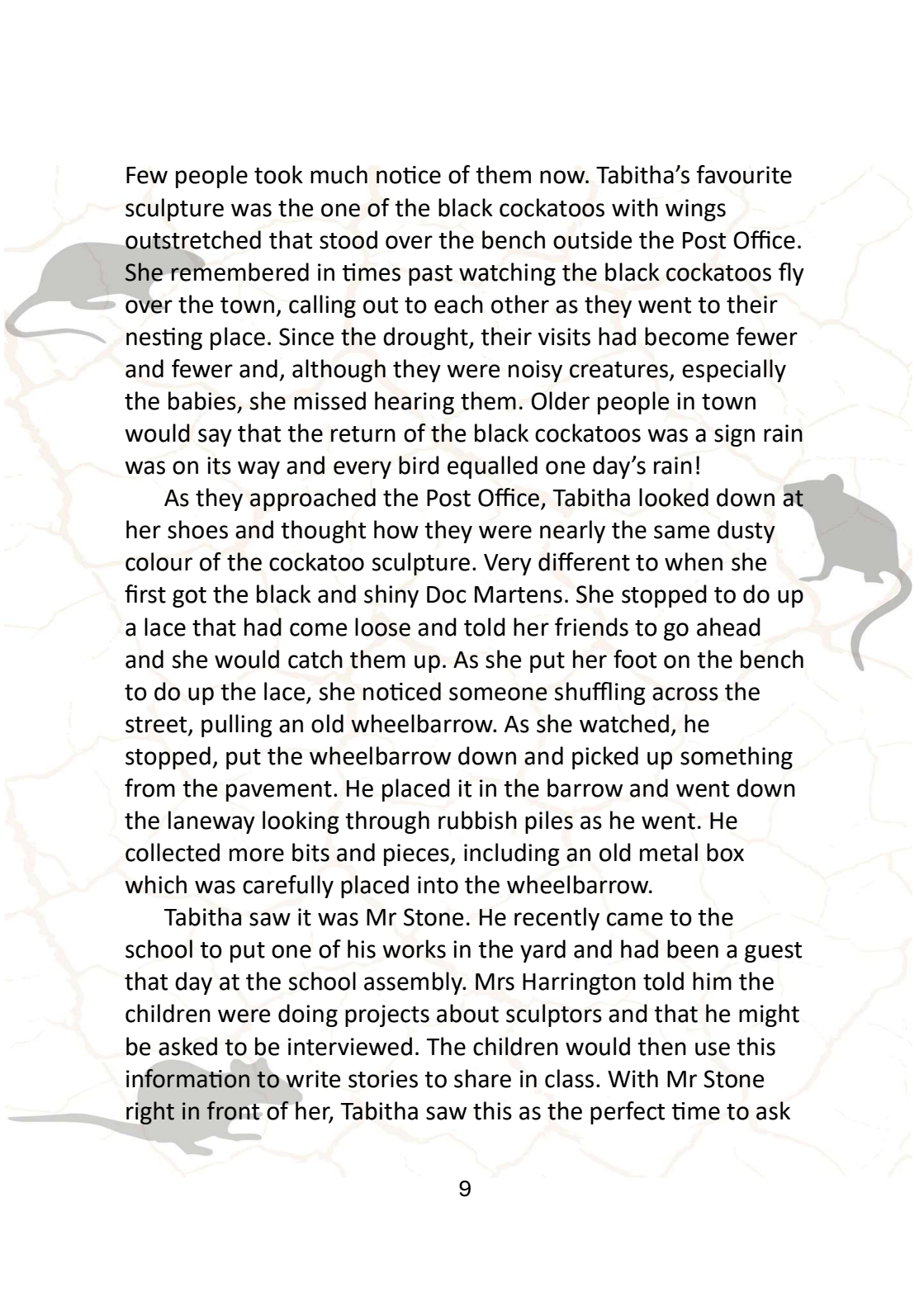
Since the drought, the town had seen an influx of mice in plague proportions. They seemed to be everywhere you looked, and the children shared stories of where they had been seen. Tabitha told them about finding one in the bath and how she had to get her Dad to help get it out. Someone else had seen them robbing food out of their dog's food bowl.



As they walked on to school, the topic of conversation turned to the latest project their teacher, Mrs Harrington, had set them. The class was exploring the topic 'Community' and had been involved in discussions about the people who contributed to making their town special. In Art they had also been learning about famous sculptors from the past such as Michelangelo and Rodin and modern sculptors of today. Tabitha decided she would interview their very own local sculptor Mr Stone for her project. She enjoyed writing and thought he would have lots to say about his artworks and how he makes them.



Mr Stone had lived in Wheaterup for some years and was known for his interesting works that used old scrap metals to make large, **quirky** animal shapes that were placed throughout the town. To create these creatures, he repurposed rusty old farm machinery, tools and anything metal that nobody wanted anymore. The rusty sculptures in town had once been popular with tourists who liked to have their photo taken with them.



Few people took much notice of them now. Tabitha's favourite sculpture was the one of the black cockatoos with wings outstretched that stood over the bench outside the Post Office. She remembered in times past watching the black cockatoos fly over the town, calling out to each other as they went to their nesting place. Since the drought, their visits had become fewer and fewer and, although they were noisy creatures, especially the babies, she missed hearing them. Older people in town would say that the return of the black cockatoos was a sign rain was on its way and every bird equalled one day's rain!

As they approached the Post Office, Tabitha looked down at her shoes and thought how they were nearly the same dusty colour of the cockatoo sculpture. Very different to when she first got the black and shiny Doc Martens. She stopped to do up a lace that had come loose and told her friends to go ahead and she would catch them up. As she put her foot on the bench to do up the lace, she noticed someone shuffling across the street, pulling an old wheelbarrow. As she watched, he stopped, put the wheelbarrow down and picked up something from the pavement. He placed it in the barrow and went down the laneway looking through rubbish piles as he went. He collected more bits and pieces, including an old metal box which was carefully placed into the wheelbarrow.

Tabitha saw it was Mr Stone. He recently came to the school to put one of his works in the yard and had been a guest that day at the school assembly. Mrs Harrington told him the children were doing projects about sculptors and that he might be asked to be interviewed. The children would then use this information to write stories to share in class. With Mr Stone right in front of her, Tabitha saw this as the perfect time to ask

if she could interview him for her project. She walked over and as he started moving on called out, 'Hello, Mr Stone, can I interview you for my project?'. Mr Stone did not say anything, just looked at her and grunted before continuing on his way.





Chapter 2 – Pesky Peter

‘What a nasty pasty.’ Tabitha resisted the temptation to call out to Mr Stone. *Miserable old thing*, she thought, as she walked along towards the town park. She couldn’t help staring at the drought-stricken gardens. ‘Oh, no,’ she said. Two brown ducks waddled over the hard and cracked ground beside the dry pond. Not a trace of grass was to be seen, and the trees looked as if they might be dying, with curling leaves and peeling bark.

‘Poor ducks, how will they survive? This is awful. Just a few months ago the pond flooded. And people say they don’t believe in climate change.’

‘Talking to yourself, Tabitha?’

She hadn’t heard Peter approaching. ‘Uh, no, I was just, um, talking to the ducks.’ Tabitha blushed.

Peter grinned. ‘Oh yeah? My mum says, if the rain doesn’t come soon, we’ll lose a lot more trees and the gardens won’t be watered, and all the vegies will stop growing. That doesn’t worry me though, cos I hate vegies. Bring on the sausages, that’s what I say.’ He ran on.

What a bozo, Tabitha thought. She picked up her school bag and hurried after him. The siren sounded just as she arrived at the gate.

‘Come along, children, hurry now. Peter, stop pulling Jane’s plaits,’ called Mrs Harrington, the year five teacher.

A scraping of chairs on the tiled floor continued until all the children were seated in the classroom.

Mrs Harrington counted the empty chairs. 'Oh dear, it appears that we have still more absentees this morning.'

Peter raised his hand.

'Yes, Peter. What would you like to say?'

'Miss, I saw Toby at the footy on the weekend. He said he didn't have to come to school anymore, cos his dad's lost his job on Scratchley's farm, and they are moving up to Perth.'

Another hand went up.

'Yes, Alice.'

'My mum says we're only allowed to have one bath a week from now on. I've got to get in after my sister, cos she's younger than me. I don't think it's fair.'

'That's great,' said Peter. 'I wish my mum would say that.'

Chattering and giggling erupted around the classroom.

Mrs Harrington clapped her hands. 'Now, now, children. Behave nicely, please.'

Tabitha raised her hand.

'Yes, Tabitha. Please make it quick, we must get on with today's lessons.'

'Yes, miss. My dad says that even though we are short of water and must be very careful with it, we still have to look after our health. Particularly, by brushing our teeth every day.' She glared at Peter, and he responded by poking out his tongue at her.

'Yes, thank you, Tabitha. That is a particularly good point you make. Please thank you father for his excellent advice. Peter, that is very rude. Put your tongue back in your mouth and keep it there. Any more misbehaviour and you will stand in the corner.' When Mrs Harrington turned to write on the board, Peter pulled silly faces, which caused several children to

start giggling again. Without turning round, the teacher said:
'Peter Jones, is that you misbehaving?'

She finished writing on the board:

This week's project

Write about a significant member of the local community

'Now children, we spoke about this project yesterday, and you have had some time to decide who you will choose as your subject to write about. Remember to use good grammar and spelling and make the story as interesting as possible. Who would like to tell the class who they have chosen?'

Martin raised his hand.

'Yes, Martin, stand up and tell the class.'

'Yes, Miss. I am going to choose Sergeant Bolland. I spoke to him after school yesterday and he said I could interview him in the Police Station on Saturday morning.'

'Oh, very good, Martin. Who would like to be next?'

Another hand went up.

'Yes, Alice.'

'I'm going to interview Mrs Pollard. She is a nurse and I would like to be a nurse when I grow up.'

'Excellent, Alice. Next?'


Jane raised her hand.

'Miss, I would like to ask Mr Phillips, the dentist,' she said smiling at Tabitha.

'Very good. Next?'

Tabitha raised her hand.

'Yes, Tabitha.'




‘I want to interview Mr Stone, the sculptor.’ A murmur spread around the classroom. ‘I asked him this morning, if he would allow me to interview him, but he didn’t answer.’

Bonnie and Jane exchanged glances.

Tabitha continued. ‘Well, he didn’t say *no*, he just sort of grunted.’

‘Ah, Mr Stone certainly keeps himself to himself. Have you considered anyone else? Perhaps Mrs Poplar, the IGA shopkeeper, or Miss Dewhurst, the organist at All Saints Church?’

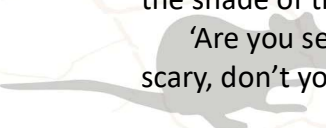
Tabitha thought for a few moments before answering. ‘No, Miss. I really would like to interview Mr Stone. I’m interested in his sculptures. I find it curious that he uses old bits and pieces of metal and turns them into figures and peculiar shapes. At the same time, he is doing something good for our community by recycling unwanted bits of scrap metal, old screws and bolts. I believe he will be an interesting subject and I’m looking forward to writing his story.’



‘Yes, I see, and you make a good point about recycling. Let’s hope he will allow you to interview him. If not, you will have to find someone else as the written report is due to be handed in by the middle of next week.’

The remaining children, in turn, spoke about the members of the community they had selected. All too soon, the first period ended and the children were excused from the classroom.

Bonnie, Jane and Tabitha, sat together in the playground, in the shade of the bicycle shed.



‘Are you seriously going to interview Mr Stone? He’s a bit scary, don’t you think?’ Bonnie asked.

‘Yeah, my dad caught him in our garage, and he told him to get out.’ Jane added.

‘Can’t you think of someone else? Mrs Poplar is very nice and you might get some lollies from her,’ said Bonnie.

‘Hahaha, old Miss Dewhurst is nice too. My sister calls her Miss Dewdrop cos she always has a little drip on the end of her nose,’ Jane said.

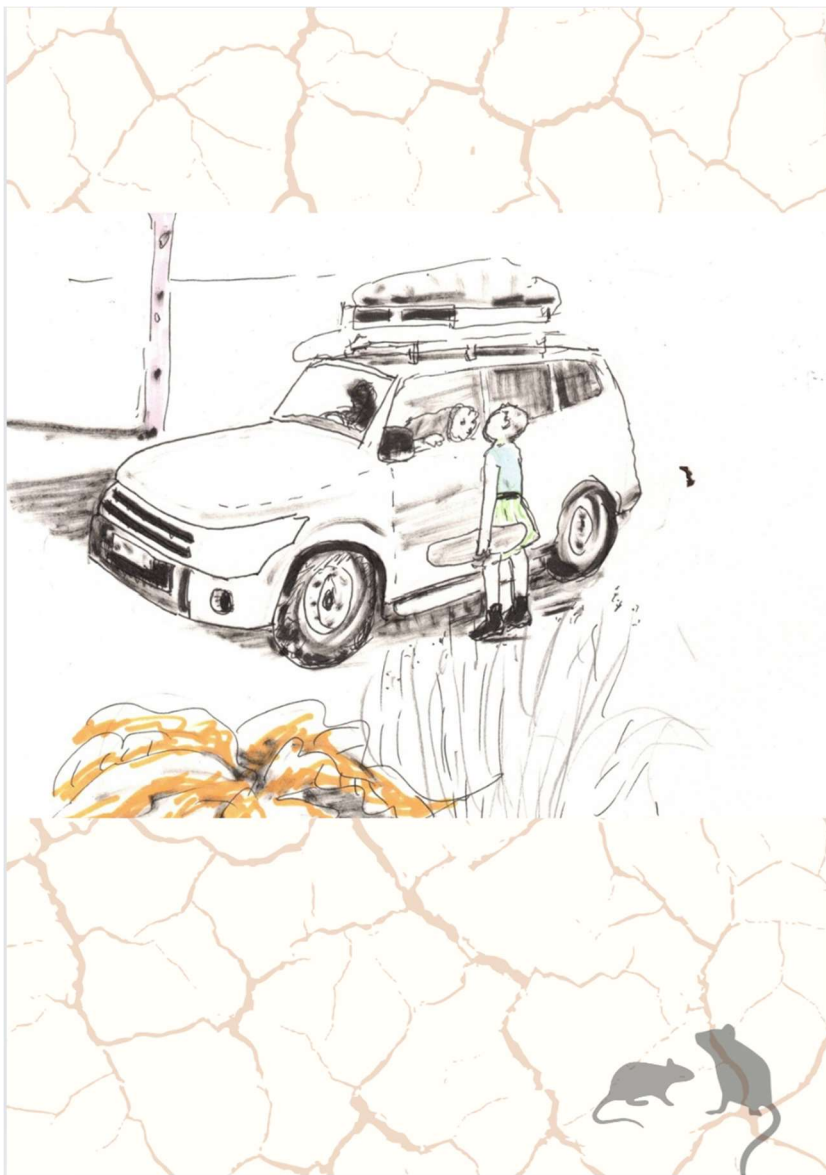
The girls laughed.

Tabitha bit into her apple and chewed for a while before answering. ‘I’m determined to interview Mr Stone. I think I’ll call round to his house after school and ask him politely.’

‘Oh, you can’t go to his house. Just imagine what it will be like. He smells a bit; I expect his house will too. Yuck.’ Jane screwed up her nose.

‘Too bad. Anyway, he can’t help it if he has BO. He could do something about his teeth though. My dad should look at him, his teeth need some work. They look so bad, perhaps he has toothache all the time. It could be why he’s such a grumpy old man.’

The siren sounded, and the girls returned to class. Tabitha began to plan her visit to the sculptor. *I hope he will let me interview him. I would love to find out how he makes such amazing sculptures. I’ll bet his studio in the old stables is fascinating. I’m not going to be nervous, I’m not, really, I’m not. What is there to be nervous about?*





Chapter 3 - Mr Stone's Stable

After school Tabitha walked through the hot, dusty town, scuffing her boots through dry, dead grass and worrying her loose tooth with her tongue. The last of her baby teeth was getting ready to leave. She rehearsed in her head how she would introduce herself to Mr S. 'Hello Mr Stone, thank you so much for agreeing to being interviewed ...'.

*Mr Stone is a bit scary, with his **wrinkled**, cranky face and his mouth full of rotten teeth, she thought to herself. But I'm sure I can charm him into giving me the best interview. I'm bound to win top marks.*

Approaching Mr Stone's house, she knocked boldly on the **faded** front door. The sound echoed through the house. Silence. She knocked again, louder this time. Eventually heavy footsteps approached the door, which opened suddenly.

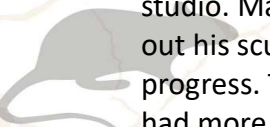
'Who are you? I'm busy, go away!'

'But Mr Stone it's me, Tabitha, I spoke to you this morning about interviewing you for my school project and writing about your sculptures ...'

'Why would I want to waste my time talking to a scruffy child? I've no interest in being interviewed or written about to satisfy the curiosity of nosy towns folk. Go Away!'

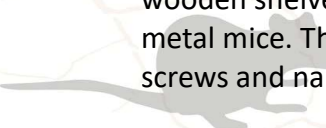

'But, but ...'

The door slammed in her face. Tabitha was left staring forlornly at the blank doorway. She had to get this interview. She had already bragged about it to her friends. And it would be excellent experience to advance her career as an author.



Tabitha raised her hand to knock again, but hesitated. She looked aside towards the old stables which housed Mr Stone's studio. Maybe she could start by having a look around to check out his sculptures and have a peep at some of his work in progress. Then she could come back and try again, when she had more to talk about. With Plan B firmly in mind she headed towards the stables.

Tabitha squeezed in through a gap in the large stable door. Inside it was gloomy, with dim light filtering in through cracks in the walls and half open doorway. On hooks along the walls were broken pieces of tack and old dried saddles. Near a long work bench there were hoppers filled with piles of old metal, large and small, as well as welding equipment and various metal work tools. The large space was full of mysterious shrouded shapes and had a strange metallic smell, along with a strong odour of mouse and the faint memory of horses. In the disused stalls were some of Mr Stone's finished sculptures. Large animals and other figures made from plough shares and springs and random bits of rusty metal. Tabitha started to explore the stables, examining each weird form. The way Mr Stone fashioned each animal, bringing together apparently random bits of metal to show different characters, was very clever, but she found it a bit creepy being surrounded by the still figures in this quiet, stuffy place.



At the back of the stables was the old tack room. The door was stiff but Tabitha managed to push it open and peered inside. Spread out across the floor and stacked on rough wooden shelves on the far wall were rows and rows of small metal mice. These mice were made of smaller bits of metal, screws and nails and small springs. They were much more

lifelike than the larger sculptures which were dotted around town and for which Mr Stone was well known.

Leaping mice, creeping mice. Mice running, scurrying, and sitting upright. Tabitha shuddered. She'd had enough of mice. Since the drought and the mouse plague began, mice were everywhere! In the shed, in the kitchen, in her bedroom, chewing on her clothes. They had even invaded her dreams, and sometimes she woke up convinced that her sheets were crawling with mice. Horrible! Drowning was supposed to be the best way to deal with plague mice, but there was no longer enough water in the town to water the garden or do the washing. None to spare to deal with pesky mice. At least the town cats were well fed. Which was just as well as few people had money to spare to feed their pets. She wondered whether dogs would eat mice. Although her dog Tess loved to chase them, she'd never seen her eat one. It was a pity that you couldn't feed them to the stock. It would only be fair since the mice had eaten all the stock feed. And there seemed to be something glistening inside each of the mouse figures. Curious, she was about to pick one up to look at it more closely when she heard footsteps approaching from outside.

With a gasp Tabitha quickly wriggled out of the tack room and hid behind some dusty old hay bales in one of the disused stalls. Mr Stone stomped into the stables and switched on an overhead light. Thick shadows of the mouse sculptures danced across the walls. They almost seemed like they were alive.

Mr Stone put on his old leather apron and pulled the dust cloth off one of the unfinished sculptures. He stood back staring at it for a while, then rummaged around in a pile of scavenged metal bits and pieces, muttering to himself under

his breath. Having found a few pieces to his liking, he lit an oxy-acetylene torch and donned his visor before starting to work.

Tabitha looked away to protect her eyes from the **dazzling** light and frowned. With the drought everything in town was so dry, and the old wooden stables were a total fire hazard. At school recently Mrs Harrington had been teaching them about the fire risks and fire bans. Dad had mentioned that there may be a total fire ban tomorrow. She was certain that using an open flame in a wooden stable was risky.

Mr Stone continued to work. He worked for hours! Tabitha stayed still as a mouse, careful not to make a sound. The metallic smell grew stronger, strangely, so did the smell of mice! Her nose itched and the dust got in her throat, making her want to cough. She dozed for a while on the scratchy hay until finally Mr Stone finished for the day. He turned off the torch, **swept** up the metal slag and fragments under his workspace and flung the dust sheet over the sculpture. He took off his leather apron and hung it on a nail, turned off the light and left. Tabitha was about to stretch and sigh in relief when the door was pushed to and she heard the bolt shoved home and the click of a padlock. She was locked in!






Chapter 4 - Trapped

Noooooo!

As soon as the crunch of Mr Stone's boots against the gravel silenced in the distance, Tabitha jumped out from behind the hay bale and ran towards the large wooden doors of the stable entrance.


'Please, please, please!' she breathed and grasped the large metallic handles, leaning all her body weight against the doors. They didn't even budge.


Damn! Tabitha kicked against the wooden panel, scuffing the toe of her boot. She took a step back and watched the crimson light bleed in through the door gap. The sun was setting. Her heart pounded as she thought about finding her way back into town in the dark. *Stop it*, she told herself, scrunching her eyes shut. *I'm not a little kid anymore. I can find a way out.*



Tabitha took a few steps back, held her breath, then ran towards the door, ramming it with her shoulder. With a loud thump, she bounced off the door and landed in a heap on the floor. Resolute, she bounced back up and dusted her knees. She searched around the stable, making use of the dwindling light.

'Aha!' the metallic glint of Mr Stone's collection box caught her eye and she rushed over to it, retrieving a long, rusty fire poker. *Perfect.* She brought the tool back over to the door and managed to squeeze it through the gap. She leaned it against the locking mechanism, then used all her arm strength to push






against it. Just as she thought her shoulder was going to pop right from its socket, a loud snap sounded, jolting her to the floor. Excited, Tabitha looked up, only to see the broken half of the fire poker jutting out through the door. Pursing her lips, she looked down at her hand where the rusted metal had broken off. Casting it away, she placed both hands against the doors, pushing against them, but again they didn't budge.


With a loud sigh, Tabitha slumped to the floor, tucking her head against her knees. *I'm never getting out!*

As the light faded from pink to mauve to the grey of twilight, Tabitha sat with her back against the doors, focussing on breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth. 'It will be okay' she whispered.




Just as she was about to give up, something scratchy brushed against her shin and she jumped up, madly swiping against her exposed leg. She scanned the ground searching for what it could have been, but there was nothing visible. 'I can't stay in here with all the creepy crawlies tonight,' she whispered to herself. 'I've got to get out of here.'

Shuffling away from the doors, Tabitha explored the side of the stable, testing a range of levers and cords, until one eventually turned on a dull ceiling light. *Phew, that solves one problem.* She breathed a sigh of relief.




In the soft orange glow of the new light, some of the metallic sculptures which had been left without dust covers looked sinister as though they were swathed in crackling embers. Gulping, Tabitha gave the menacing structures a wide berth, edging around the outer walls, then came to the back of the stable where the few hay bales were stacked together.

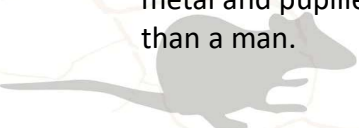


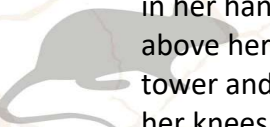
Digging her fingers under the twine, Tabitha dragged one of the bales over to the doorway, then brought the other two over, stacking them like a pyramid, where she gave herself steps to climb up. Standing on the top bale on her tippy toes, she could see that the latch to the window above the doorway was unlocked. *If I can reach that window I can climb out!*

The prickly hay left red indents on Tabitha's knees as she clambered down the pyramid. She rushed over to the collection box and tipped the contents out into a jumbled pile, bringing the box back to place it at the top of her stack. Precariously, she climbed to the top and stood on the box, leaning against the door, legs wobbling. Slowly, she reached her arm up towards the window, fingers just swiping against the splintery frame. *So close!*



Before she could fall, Tabitha quickly jumped down to the bottom of the stack and scanned around again for anything that could give her extra height. She looked at the sculptures, thinking about how they would be sturdy, but knew that she would never have the strength to drag one of those to the door. Just as she was about to give up on them, one of Mr Stone's latest commissions caught her attention. It was at the back; the one old Farmer Morris had commissioned for his son. It was a young man standing proudly with a long weed slasher and a shovel grasped in each hand. Intrigued, Tabitha walked up to closely inspect the artwork. It was certainly striking, and the sharp metallic angles of the face did resemble the young man; however, she could not quite get past how the melded metal and pupilless eyes made him look more like a monster than a man.






Staying clear of the sharp blade of the slasher, Tabitha retrieved the long shovel from the statue's grasp and tested it in her hand. The metal was heavy but she could lift it easily above her head. Steadily, she walked back to her hay bale tower and climbed the steps until she was at the top, bending her knees to try and stop her legs from shaking. Bracing with one hand against the door, she slowly took her hand away so that she could grasp the shovel's handle above her head, inching it carefully towards the window.

Taking a deep breath, Tabitha pushed the handle of the shovel against the murky glass and watched as it sliced a long scratch across its surface. Pushing harder, the weathered frame began to groan, then swooshed open with a pop.

With a gasp, Tabitha was pushed forwards as the shovel lurched up through the window then fell back downwards, the sharp tip of the blade nicking her shoulder. Her balance was knocked sideways, sending the whole pyramid down in a tumble. Tabitha landed flat on her back then watched wide-eyed as the shovel pierced the ground right between her legs. She closed her eyes, relieved, then they flew open again with the loud *thwack* of the handle making contact with her jaw.

Squealing, Tabitha jumped up, spitting a pearly white tooth onto her palm like she would the pip of a ripe mandarin. She had finally lost her wobbly tooth.

Dad is going to be soooo mad at me! she thought, her tongue swiping along the gap on her bottom jaw, some of her adult teeth felt sore after the impact. Wincing with the pain, she held onto her face. Just as she was recovering from the shock of it all, the dull ceiling light flickered and died, sending



her straight into darkness. *I guess I'm staying here tonight, then.*

Ignoring the pain, Tabitha tried to remove any evidence that she had been in there by pushing the hay bales back to the other side of the stable. She grabbed a fistful of the hay to make a pillow and tucked the old man's leather apron around herself as a blanket. Her mind drifted to her dad, who thought she would be staying at Bonnie's house as she did every Friday night, and of Bonnie, who was not expecting her over until tomorrow as she knew that Tabitha was going to try and interview Mr Stone tonight.

Nobody will be looking for me. The loneliness felt heavy on her chest, as suffocating as a woollen blanket. Clutching onto her premolar as her only possession, Tabitha's eyelids grew heavy, and she dozed off into a cautious slumber.



Chapter 5 – A Pink Mouse

Tabitha opened her eyes and found herself lying in the dirt, the whiffy straw and the other smelly stuff on the hard concrete floor. She rubbed her head and then frowned as she tasted blood – her tooth! Looking down into her hand she realised it had gone. She sat up and peered into the gloom of the stable and thought, *it's really dark outside now, I must have been asleep for-ever!* A mouse ran over her legs so she jumped up and rubbed her head again, discovering a large bump - but there were more important things that worried her. Panic set in. *Where is my tooth? I need it or the Tooth Fairy won't come! I must find it.*

Bending down she raked through the grime with her fingers getting more and more desperate. Almost in tears she sat back down and was startled by a small creature sitting watching her.

She slid backwards and murmured,

'Who are you? Where did you come from?' There was no reply. Tabitha squinted through the bad light and saw a white mouse – but could it be a mouse? Looking closely, she could see that it was actually a pink mouse and it seemed to have wings and elongated whiskers. While wiping dribbly blood off her chin Tabitha said to the mouse,

'You're a very strange creature.'

The mouse made eye contact with her and gently beat its wings releasing a cloud of silver glitter which floated to the dirty floor – the floor no one had bothered to clean up after the horses were sold.

‘I’m not strange,’ said the mouse.

Tabitha jumped with fright, and the mouse waved her tail lazily – the large white pom-pom on its tip fanned the air.

‘Oh! You can talk,’ whispered Tabatha, still afraid.

‘Of course I can, but only a few can hear me,’ replied the mouse stroking her whiskers with red varnished claws.

‘My name is Millie. Is this what you are looking for?’ She held up a small, still slightly bloody tooth.

‘Oh yes, thank you, and my name is Tabitha. It’s mine and I need it for the tooth fairy!’

‘Don’t panic,’ soothed the mouse. ‘You have found her! I’m Millie the Tooth Fairy.’

‘I had no idea the Tooth Fairy was a mouse!’ exclaimed Tabitha.

‘Well. How do you think I can get into houses to leave money for the children!? Anyway, I need your tooth very much because...,’ a scurrying from behind startled them both. Several small brown field mice rushed around Millie, one leapt up boldly and snatched the tooth from her grasp, disappearing through a hole in one of the stall doors.

Millie let out a loud squeak and then sobbed, big tears rolled on to the floor. Tabatha, even more surprised, gently asked,

‘What’s the matter, Millie?’

Between sobs Millie told her that so many teeth were being stolen that she was losing her magic powers and could not visit all the children who had lost their teeth.

‘I know it makes them very sad if I don’t visit in the night and leave them some pocket money,’ she sniffed.

Tabitha stroked the top of Millie's head and was quiet for a while before asking,

'Do you know who is stealing the teeth? And where they are taken?' Millie shook her head. They sat a while longer before Millie suggested they move into the tack room at the back of the stable. It was getting cold and the tall sculptures cast eerie shadows.

Opening the creaking door, Tabatha felt for a switch, pressed it down and gasped as the light revealed the enormous collection of small metal sculptures. On close inspection, they were all mice and some of them were real; smaller and scurrying around, seemingly with no purpose.

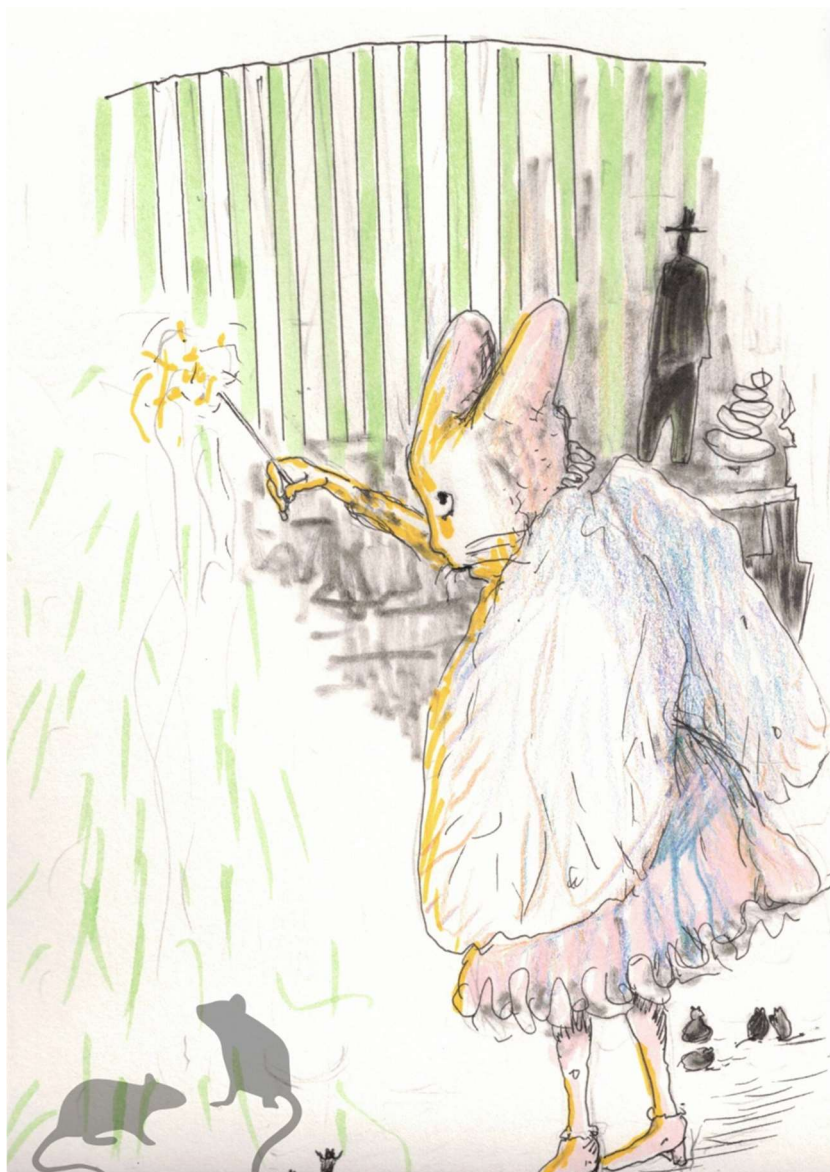
'Look at this Millie,' she giggled. 'You never told me you had so many brothers and sisters.'


'That's not funny Tabatha,' frowned Millie. 'They are obviously nasty brown field mice. They make me shudder. Greedy little creatures that think your house is theirs and that they can help themselves to your food. In winter they come in for warmth and right now because of the drought. They have no manners and respect for one's privacy. Nasty little vermin, that's what they are.'

They wandered between the sculptures amazed at the various shapes and sizes, and the quantity.

'I wonder why he has so many and why he doesn't sell them along with all the bigger ones out there,' said Tabitha.


'It is odd,' agreed Millie. 'Okay, I've seen enough now, let's go and sit over in that corner, I'm tired.' As they walked between the steel mice Tabitha felt a cold draft and the light flickered.





‘Geez, I hope we’re not going to be left in the dark,’ she called to Millie as she headed to join her. They sat gazing at this strange scene of metal and live mice and, as they watched, it transformed. Gradually the metal structures shrank and grew fur and tails and claws and dashed around aimlessly.

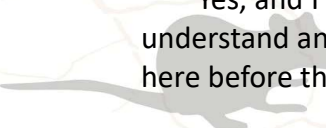
Tabitha and Millie drew back into the corner, terror written on their faces. Unable to speak they hugged each other and gazed in amazement at the chaos. This went on until all the mental sculptures were alive and running around and around the room squeaking and scratching. Tabitha and Millie put their hands over their ears. Suddenly the door flew open and the melee of mice disappeared in a river of murky fur. The tack room was left empty and silent.




The two friends could hardly speak, exhausted by the strange experience that they thought they might have imagined. Curling up on a bale of smelly hay they fell asleep.

Dawn was breaking as Tabitha stretched, awake, she slowly remembered what had happened. Looking around she saw Millie folded under her shimmering wings, still asleep. She peered around the bale into the tack room and breathed a sigh of relief that it was empty. They hadn’t been dreaming.

‘Millie. Millie,’ she whispered, ‘wake up, wake up.’ Millie stirred and used her red claws to fluff her whiskers. She shook her wings and tucked them in neatly to the side of her body. Blinking, she looked at Tabitha and said: ‘Did all that really happen last night?’



‘Yes, and I wish it had not,’ replied Tabitha. ‘I don’t understand any of it. Do you? And I’m hungry, let’s get out of here before they come back or scary old Mr Stone finds us.’




With that all hell broke loose. The door flew open and the mice surged forward, each dropping something into one of the two big steel bowls on either side of the door. Whatever they were, they made a tinkling sound.


Tabitha and Millie stayed out of sight as the mice then ran into the room, stopped and morphed back into cold, still steel.

Mr Stone followed them, shambling and grunting as he inspected the bowls and then the room. All was in order. *A good haul of teeth to transform all his sculptures not just his mice.* As he walked between his artworks, Tabitha and Millie snuck towards the door and glanced in the bowls before racing out and towards the road.

‘There are the teeth! Now I know why I am losing my powers,’ said Millie, just as Mr Stone yelled: ‘Oi, come back here Tabitha, now!’ Tabitha turned reluctantly and followed him back into the stable as Millie fled.







Chapter 6 – The Fire

Tabitha saw that Mr Stone was hunting through a pile of old tractor parts. She wondered if any of the items in the pile were from the wheelbarrow collection she had seen the day before. His yellow rotted teeth were clearly visible across the stable when he spoke. She looked toward the door to the small tack room where the little mice sculptures sat, or perhaps lived. She was glad it was shut and could not see them.

‘Why are you here?’ growled Mr Stone.

‘I came to see your sculptures and interview you for my school project, and accidentally got shut in here last night; for the whole night ... by mistake,’ Tabitha replied.

‘Well then. You might as well come in and I will show you round.’

She walked slowly towards him, casting a quick look at where the mice had deposited their collections of teeth, and keeping a clear path to the way out in case she needed to make a fast escape. She wished Mille was still there to keep her company and bolster her confidence. However, she felt better at the thought that Mille was waiting outside in case of need.

‘What are you working on?’ Tabitha asked.

Mr Stone did not reply with the grunt he had used before; he seemed to be more human among his huge multi-component statues of farm animals and birds.

‘This great old bull. He is being made specially for the Shire. They want to place him on the new roundabout at the entrance to town. I’ve been working on him for weeks. I need

to find something to make into an ear; a tine off a harrow perhaps.'

'He's lovely, Mr Stone. He's almost as big as the horses that used to be here. He almost looks alive.'

'He's got a name too. Archduke Ferdinand. His namesake started the first world war. That was before you were born.'

'I know all about the first world war. I learnt about it at school. I can include Archduke Ferdinand in my school writing project, how you made him out of all those pieces farmers throw away.'

Mr Stone extended a hand holding a triangular piece of metal. It was scratched and rusty, just the right colour for a shorthorn bull that had lived through plenty of fights.


'This will do. I'll show you how I fix it on. First, I must get the site ready and then glue it in place with an oxytorch.'

He picked up an angle grinder and pressed the start button. A shower of sparks streamed out in a golden waterfall down to the floor as he smoothed an oblong patch on the great bull's head.

'Should you be doing that, Mr Stone?' asked Tabitha. 'I thought it was a total fire ban?'

Too late! As she spoke, a scrap of hay, where the sparks had landed, erupted in flames. Before either Tabitha or Mr Stone could move, the flames spread and ignited a bale of hay. For a moment Tabitha was rooted to the floor in fear, and then Mr Stone grabbed her by her arm, and they both ran for their lives out through the door.

'Damn!' said Mr Stone. 'Keep back. I'll get a hose and call the fire brigade.'




With his mobile phone pressed to his ear ringing 000, he ran to his house across the garden. Not attending to where he was going, he tripped on a steel axle he had collected for one of his sculptures and fell face forward onto his wheelbarrow full of collected nuts and bolts.

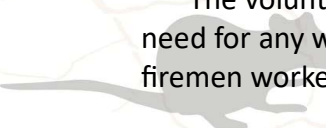
‘Help!’ shouted Tabitha, seeing Mr Stone’s mobile flying off into the long dry grass that was once a lawn. ‘Millie, where are you? Millie, Millie!’

‘Run, Tabitha,’ replied Millie from under a drought-dried bush.

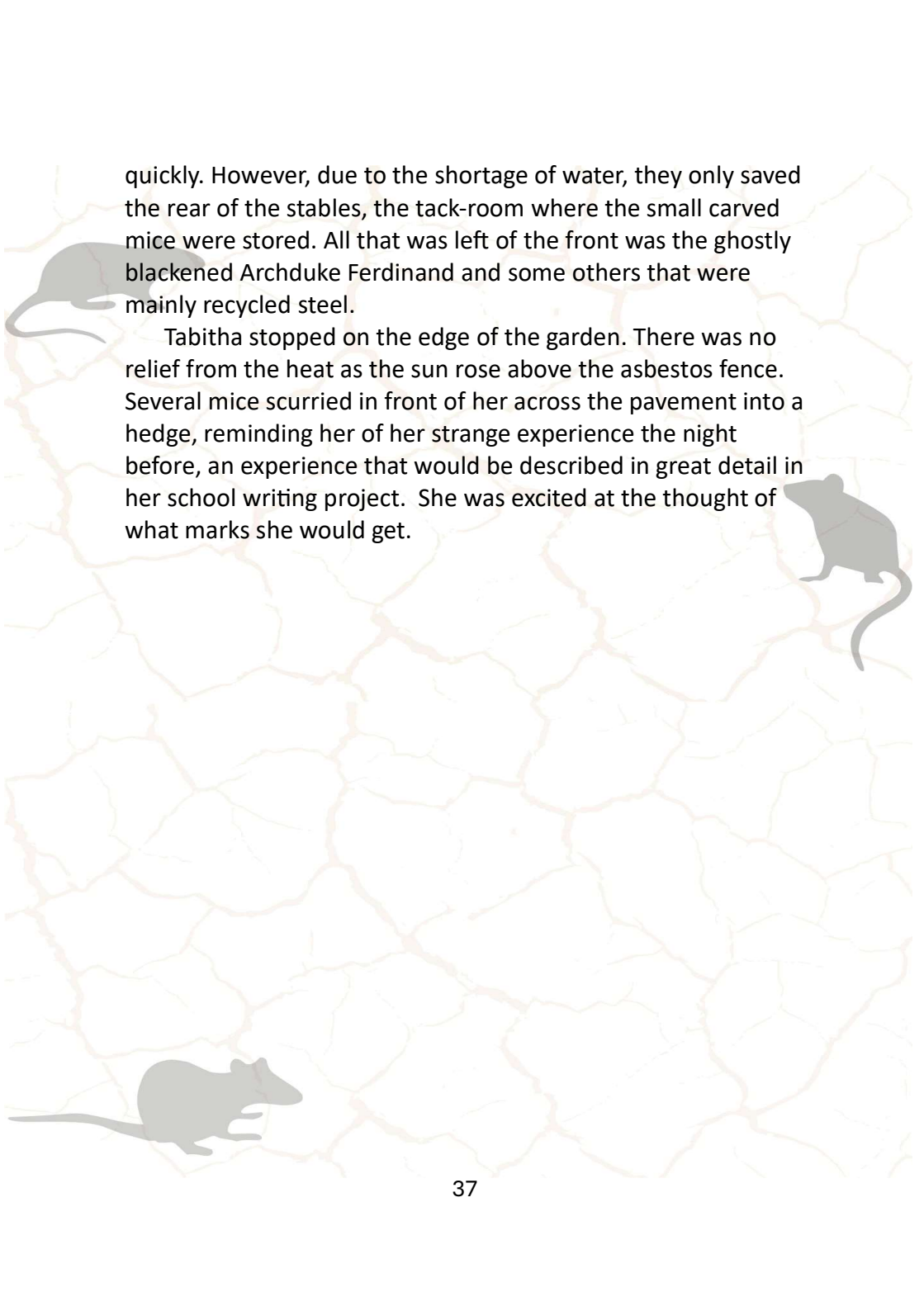
Tabitha turned and backed away from the heat of the burning stables, the flames already climbing up the wooden walls to the roof, the noise a roar of destruction, red and yellow, and a twisting column of smoke rising into the cloudless blue sky.



Mr Stone lay for a moment and slowly struggled up, first to a kneeling position, and then to his feet. Blood streamed down his face and the front of his T-shirt. The pain in his face and jaw was excruciating. He tried to grit his teeth but found his upper and lower gums touched agonisingly when he did this. Every one of his teeth had gone. He glanced around as he staggered slowly towards his house. He caught a momentary sight through the flames of the Archduke Ferdinand being engulfed before the roof came down in a storm of sparks. He reached the edge of his house, too weak to move further than the step of his veranda. He slumped on the edge filled with despair at the loss of so much of his work and collapsed.



The volunteer fire brigade reacted to the fire without the need for any warning from a mobile phone; most of the firemen worked close by in the town and could be mobilised



quickly. However, due to the shortage of water, they only saved the rear of the stables, the tack-room where the small carved mice were stored. All that was left of the front was the ghostly blackened Archduke Ferdinand and some others that were mainly recycled steel.

Tabitha stopped on the edge of the garden. There was no relief from the heat as the sun rose above the asbestos fence. Several mice scurried in front of her across the pavement into a hedge, reminding her of her strange experience the night before, an experience that would be described in great detail in her school writing project. She was excited at the thought of what marks she would get.



Chapter 07 – The Drought Breaks

Tabitha rushed over to Mr Stone, ‘Millie, he’s knocked all his teeth out, grab them quickly while I check he’s ok.’

Millie scampered over, picked up the teeth with the very tips of her paws and said to Tabitha ‘Ooh, these are the worst teeth I’ve ever collected. I don’t think Mr Stone ever went to the dentist or even ever flossed his teeth. But I can feel they have a lot of magic in them. I’ll add them to the ones we collected from the mice in the shed.’

Tabitha came over to Millie and looked at the bag of teeth, and she agreed ‘Yuck!’

She looked at the teeth again and noticed a bit of a glow about them, ‘Millie, do you think these have a more powerful magic than the mouse teeth?’


Millie picked up one of the teeth between both paws, gave it a sniff and peered at it closely. ‘I think they do Tabitha, do you have something in mind?’

‘Well, I remember from one of the fairy stories I read as a kid, teeth got buried and they grew beautiful trees, what would happen if you threw them in the sky – would they make rain?’

‘Yes, you are right about the trees, and I have heard of using them to make rain and even snow. You know you can seed trees and seed clouds. But I’ve never done it. I’m happy to give a go though.’

‘Great, let’s go over to the water tower, I think it’s the highest point we can get to. Let me call Dad first though, to come and check on Mr Stone.’


Tabitha made the call. ‘Dad, I’m at Mr Stone’s stable, there’s been a fire and he’s knocked himself out trying to put it



out!’ ‘Yes, I’m ok, and yes the fire is out, it was only a little one, but could you please come and check on Mr Stone?’ ‘I’ve just got to go and check on something else, I’ll be back soon.’ ‘No, it’s all good, I’ll see you soon.’

Millie only heard one side of the conversation; it seemed Tabitha’s father wasn’t very happy with Tabitha going off after being involved in a fire. But Millie knew they had limited time and if Tabitha had sweet talked him into letting her go then Millie was happy with that.

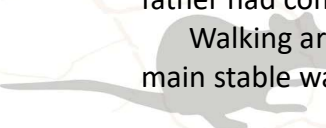
Millie jumped onto Tabitha’s shoulder, and they climbed up the ladder of the water tower. When they got to the top of the ladder, Tabitha walked out to the small ledge. The view from the tower was usually amazing, Tabitha had climbed here before with her friends. But with the drought all she saw were dried up dams with the mud cracked and **wrinkled**, the trees looked dry and thirsty, and the air looked all hazy. Usually, she could see the town from here, but there was a yellow tinge over the whole view and the town just looked blurry.



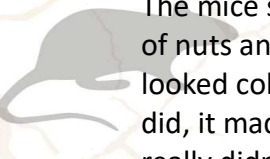
Millie jumped into the air casting the teeth as she flew into the distance. Tabitha lost sight of her as she flew away.

Suddenly Tabitha felt wetness on her face. At first she thought it must be sweat from the climb, then as the wetness increased, she realised it was rain. Millie’s plan was working! The teeth were magic, bringing rain and breaking the drought!

Tabitha climbed slowly down the ladder, which was now slippery from the rain, and returned to the burned out stable. Mr Stone wasn’t there anymore, and Tabitha hoped that her father had come and helped him.



Walking around the ruins Tabitha noticed that although the main stable was all black, the tack room was still standing. She



knew that was where the mice sculptures were kept but she decided to wait until Millie came back before opening the door. The mice sculptures freaked her out; Mr Stone made them out of nuts and bolts and springs and other bits of metal, and they looked cold and evil to her. When Millie explained what they did, it made sense to Tabitha that they looked that way. She really didn't want to face them alone.

It seemed like hours before Millie came back. The mouse looked so bedraggled and tired, but absolutely **dazzling** with excitement at what she'd done.

'Wow, I can't believe you've broken the drought!' Tabitha gazed at Millie with awe.

Millie looked stronger and seemed to glow with pride. 'That's what magic can do Tabitha. Now I need to go and work some magic on the mouse sculptures.'

'Well rather you than me, those things give me the heebie geebies.' Tabitha grimaced as she said this.

Millie laughed 'Tabitha they aren't evil, they have just been made that way, With a bit of good magic, they will change before your eyes.' Tabitha opened the door just a crack to as Millie went into the room.

Tabitha heard quite a commotion of squeaking and squawking going on and was a bit worried for Millie but after a few minutes the noise **faded** away, and after a few more minutes the door opened. Millie came out looking even more glowing, and behind her all the mouse sculptures suddenly seemed nicer and kinder.

'Right,' Millie spoke excitedly, 'they are all going to be my helpers now. They will go out and collect all the teeth that

children leave under their pillows and bring it to me so I can keep up my magic, it will be such a help.'

Tabitha felt so pleased that Millie was alright, and that she had managed to get the rogue mice statues under control. Looking over the top of Millie's head, she saw that the mice were looking at the tooth fairy with awe. *Maybe it was just about being nice and having the right magic*, she thought to herself. Maybe Mr Stone just needed someone to be nice to him. Suddenly Tabitha wondered what the time was and checked on her phone, yikes she'd better get home and get her project written.

All week the class had been presenting their story-writing project. They were excited that the rain had come and broken the drought so the atmosphere at school was buzzing. Today was Tabitha's turn to present her report and she was quite nervous. She had invited a few guests, and she didn't know whether any of them would come.

'All right class, settle down. I know the rain has got you excited and has finally seen the end of the mouse plague too. But it's time to hear from the last of our authors today and we owe them the same manners as they showed you. Tabitha could you please start your presentation?' Mrs Harrington looked over to her.

Tabitha went to the front of the class. She looked at the guest area and smiled to herself. There was her dad, and next to him Mr Stone, grinning with a new set of teeth her dad had fitted him. And there just in the distance was Millie.

'Well, have I got an awesome story for you,' Tabitha starts.





What every mouse dreads but such a good read it can't be put down Rat and
Mouse weekly



Someone to control the weather! Wouldn't we all want that. Star Storm, Weather
announcer

a gripping tale set in the wheatbelt; with mice aplenty and
magic amiss the wheaterup times

The Pied Piper would be challenged in this story The Grimm Brothers

