

CHAPTER 1

THE RAVEN-BLACK QUILL AND THE GOLDEN TELESCOPE

IN WHICH SEIZER THE FIRST AMUSES HIMSELF WITH HIS RAVEN-BLACK QUILL
AND HIS GOLDEN TELESCOPE.

Once upon a time, in a faraway kingdom called Cloudland, there reigned a detestable despot, Seizer the First. Twelve crowns he had, one for each month. He also owned a golden telescope and a raven-black quill. To begin, I shall tell you what he did with the raven's quill, and then I shall talk about his golden telescope. With his quill he wrote laws not ordinary laws, but cruel and terrifying ones. (but cruel and appalling ones)

To give you an example, he wanted his subjects to work incessantly in the mines and dig out precious stones to adorn his twelve royal crowns. That is why he passed a law to abolish carnivals, school playtimes, birthday parties and Sundays. According to this law, Sundays were re-named "Premondays" and they could never, but never, not even in the slightest, be any different from ordinary Mondays.

Again, another law declared that amusement parks and playgrounds had to close to make way for stone prisons. Seizer needed prisons to lock up whoever broke these laws and dared (light up o blow out) blow out candles on a birthday cake, dress up as a clown or a ballerina on a carnival day or play truant on a Premonday. And because prisons need padlocks and barbed wire, Seizer passed another few which specified that all flower gardens and parks had to be burned down to make way for padlock factories and barbed wire knitting machines. You may think these were the only laws! Not a hope..... . Seizer had passed so many laws that the wretched Cloudlanders could hardly breathe without breaking one law or another. Hiccuping, for example, was strictly forbidden and whoever sneezed or scratched his nose or did a handstand on his balcony had to pay a heavy fine on the spot.

Now that I have finished telling you what Seizer did with his all-black quill, I shall tell you what he did with his telescope. He would take it and go to the highest tower to look out through the twelve windows and scrutinise his dominion stretching flat as a pancake all around him. As soon as his eye fell on something he fancied, the most tempting chip in some housewife's frying pan, for example, or the liveliest trout in a fisherman's catch, he would send a message on his mobile to his sentries ' they would roar off on their motorbikes, seize the loot, throw it into a golden paper bag and deliver it promptly to their lord.

No wonder the Cloudlanders absolutely detested Seizer. Indeed, sometimes they stuck out their tongues at him or pulled faces behind his back. At other times, as if by accident, they would throw banana skins in front of the gate of the palace so that he would slip over and fall whenever he nipped out of his palace to inspect the mines.

CHAPTER 2

THE SECRET COUNCIL

IN WHICH SEIZER CALLS A SECRET COUNCIL

TO DISCOVER WHY HIS SUBJECTS DON'T LOVE HIM.

One day Seizer summoned his three most trusted courtiers to the throne-room: his confidential aide Baron Slimeball, the captain of his guard Sir Shootalot, and the royal Chief Sorcerer Saurian Slither.

"Can you explain to me," he asked them, "why my subjects don't love me? I have passed more than fifty laws which specifically demand that they love me to distraction, but there is no sign of it."

- "Whatever do you mean, Your Majesty? You must be joking. Most certainly they love you," Baron Slimeball reassured him.

Slimeball had studied Applied Flattery at the University of Suckademia and he was now practising sucking up to his lord. "They worship the ground you walk on."

- "Then why do they fling banana skins in front of the gate?" Seizer persisted. "Why do I have to fall flat on my face every time I step out of the palace? Just tell me why."

- "Perhaps... maybe--- oh yes... I've got it! They think you enjoy ice-skating (banana peel skating)," Slimeball tried his best to explain.

Seizer looked at him in disbelief.

Saurian Slither smiled a dark and devilish smile.

- "Let's face it, Your Majesty. Though they should really love you, they don't," he said, running his charm beads through his long, bony fingers, "and I'll tell you why not....."

- "Tell us then!"

- "They don't love you because at night they dream."

Seizer's frown deepened.

- "What's that got to do with anything?" he snapped.

- "Plenty, Your Majesty," exclaimed Saurian. "After cream cakes, fireworks and amusement parks sweeten their sleep, your people wake up to padlocks and barbed wire stretching all around. No wonder they blame the Crown."

" - "Dreams - no doubt- are a real nuisance," Sir Shootalot agreed happily. He was a plump, red-faced fellow with bags under his eyes and a chest bulging with medals. "Some little dreams, so tiny you hardly notice them, break out and spread like wildfire, like a tornado they move, and like a whirlwind they turn everything upside-downf"

Seizer changed colour, glanced over his shoulder and gulped. - "What's to be done then?" he asked, sucking the tip of his sceptre nervously.

- "My advice is, simple: Rob your subjects of their dreams; then and only then will you know what peace of mind means," thundered Sir Shootalot. "Just pass a law which strictly forbids dreams and I shall enforce it. I shall organise dream patrols, we shall smash down doors, force our way into houses and see to anyone who breaks the law!"

- "I propose that we install bedside dream-meters and start taxing dreams," spoke up Baron Slimeball, well known as a practical economist. "Once people find (realise) that dreams cost a lot, (are expensive) - no doubt they'll cut this bad habit out."

Seizer pondered.

- "And you, Saurian, what do you say?" he asked his third courtier,

- "I say the measures my distinguished colleagues recommend are ingenious but unworkable. The problem with dreams is that they are not easy to control. They are well hidden, deep, very deep down inside people's heads, far behind the furrows of the forehead."

- "I would suggest (I am tempted to suggest) splitting their heads open. (milder expression) But I cannot really propose it, simply because who then would pay the taxes, who would dig

up diamonds and precious stones, who indeed would knit the barbed-wire?" summed up Baron Slimeball, confirming yet again his clear-sightedness. Seizer turned even paler.

- "There's nothing to be done then?" he said despairingly.

- "Certainly something can be done," declared Saurian Slither. "Where there is an evil will there is an evil way. Give me a bit of time, and I promise I shall come up with a devilish device which will rid us of your people's dreams once and for all."

"Would one week be enough?"

- "No. Evil takes a while to hatch- Magic is no easy matter. It needs time, thought and inspiration."

- "How long do you need?"

- "Seven weeks and seven days."

- "Shall we say six?" Seizer haggled.

Saurian shook his head.

- "Absolutely not! Seven. In seven weeks and seven days I shall present you with my invention."

And with these words, he bowed and made his way towards the door..... He passed through six galleries and through six state-rooms, climbed up a cobwebby staircase and headed for his secret workshop,

CHAPTER 3

SAURIAN'S INVENTION.

IN WHICH SAURIAN SLITHER PRESENTS TO SEIZER HIS INVENTION, GREETED AT FIRST WITH INCREDULITY AND FINALLY ACCEPTED WITH WILD ENTHUSIASM.

Seven weeks and seven days Saurian Slither slaved away in his secret laboratory. He had triple-locked the door and blocked up the keyhole with sealing wax. Once or twice, when Seizer sneaked up and peered to see what Slither was up to, all he saw was pitch-black darkness and went away disappointed.

Until, one morning, Saurian appeared in the throne-room where Seizer and the other courtiers awaited him. He was wearing a black robe embroidered with green runes and in his hands he held a pillow.

"Behold, Your Majesty!" he hissed in a voice so full of malice that it froze the blood. (that the walls of the throne room cracked) "Here is my invention. Allow me to present to you the Nightmare Pillow."

Seizer took the pillow into his hands with suspicion and looked at it closely, He looked at it from above, he looked at it from below, he looked at it from all sides. (from each and every side) He prodded it with his finger and an expression of bewilderment spread across his face.

"This is just an ordinary pillow," he said at last. "Are you trying to fool me, Saurian;

"I would never dare fool a great ruler such as you, Your Majesty. Nevertheless you are mistaken. Appearances can be deceptive. This is not an ordinary pillow. It seems so, (It appears to be) but in reality, it isn't. Ordinary pillows are filled with feathers."

"And what's this one filled with?"

"Not feathers, that's for sure."

"What then?"

"Would you like me to tell you?"

"Yes, yes, get on with it. You're getting on our nerves."

In Saurian Slither's eyes two little green sparks glinted and flashed. Seizer, Shootalot and Slimeball waited with bated breath. The Chief Sorcerer kept them waiting for a bit longer, relishing their suspense. Finally, he spoke.

"It's stuffed," he said, "with bristles from a goblin's tail (from goblins tails) , seaweed from the Sea of Sorrow, dust from the desert of remorse and cobwebs from a burnt-out lighthouse. It's strewn with strips of shrouds, tear-drenched handkerchiefs and groans from crowds condemned to death. A traitor's shadow is tucked inside; a poison-adders sloughed-off skin; a tell-tale's tainted breath. It's spiked with nettles and pointed splinters from rusty shackles; filled up with ashes from a burnt-down dolls' house, wasp stings and whip lashes; and, crammed in last, a toreador's cape soaked in blood. As for the pillow case, it is stitched with hairs from the mane of a bolting horse."

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o, secretly and deviously, the production of nightmare pillows began in Cloudland. Night and day huge trucks and gigantic lorries carried to the palace costly (precious) and incredibly rare items from the ends of the earth. Sackfuls of seaweed from the Sea of Sorrow, crates of crows' feathers from the Bald Mountain; scorpions' stings from the Red Desert; hairs from the manes of wounded lions and all the rest that was needed. Under Saurian's supervision, the guards worked flat out on overtime and in just one week all the pillows were ready.

The king and the courtiers sat dumbstruck.

"Whoever sleeps on this pillow," Saurian went on, "will have nothing but nightmares. Frightful, hideous, ghastly nightmares. Do you understand, Your Majesty? If we compel the Cloudlanders to sleep on pillows like this, their everyday lives will seem paradise compared to the nightmares that will torment their nights. So, in this way, by this device, (thanks to my invention) they will trouble you no more".

Seizer could barely contain his enthusiasm.

"Fantastic," he shouted. "Start the mass production of nightmare pillows straight away! One for every, single Cloudlander. I'll show them. I'll teach them not to love me,. The palace guard is at your disposal. But, before you leave, please kneel here in front of me, my faithful Chief Sorcerer."

"What for?"

"So that I can decorate you."

Saurian knelt, and on the lapel of his black robe Seizer pinned the Royal High Order of Diabolical Excellence (first class).

CHAPTER 4

THE NIGHTMARE PILLOWS

IN WHICH THE CLOUDLANDERS ARE CAUGHT IN THE TRAP AND BEGIN TO SLEEP ON NIGHTMARE PILLOWS.

So, secretly and deviously, the production of nightmare pillows began in Cloudland. Night and day huge trucks and gigantic lorries carried to the palace costly (precious) and incredibly rare items from the ends of the earth. Sackfuls of seaweed from the Sea of Sorrow, crates of crows'

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Sir Shootalot then summoned the people of Cloudland to the central square. He climbed onto a stack of ammunition boxes and, in a thunderous voice, he read out the new law that Seizer had passed.

"Article one: All the pillows in Cloudland are confiscated."

A mufter of consternation ran through the crowd, but Shootalot, undeterred, took a deep breath and continued.

"Article two: New pillows will be issued to the citizens of Cloudland free of charge, gratis and for nothing. This is to prove the affection, generosity and infinite concern that Seizer lavishes on his people,"

Sighs of relief were heard from the crowd and one dear old lady was moved to tears. Sir Shootalot had reached the end of his proclamation.

"Article three: Sweet dreams to you all!"

He rolled up the parchment and handed it to his aide-de-camp.

"Off you go then," he commanded the crowd. "Run and fetch your pillows, hand them in and collect your brand new ones."

And so it was done. The Cloudlanders ran to their houses, brought their pillows and collected their new ones. The guards piled up the old pillows in the middle of the square, ripped them apart and cut them to pieces with their swords and spears. The feathers were scattered on the breeze, and drifted up into the sky like clouds, like hopes which vanish, never to return. Afterwards, the guards set fire to the pillow cases and whatever else remained. (was left)

And from that evening on, the Cloudlanders began sleeping on the new pillows.

At night, from the windows of the (their) houses, tormented gasps and groans were (could be) heard, troubled breathing and wild ravings; sobbing and wailing filled the air and, now and then, a stifled scream.

At daybreak Cloudlanders plodded to the mines, pale and stooping with sunken cheeks and vacant eyes. Not one word did they utter when the guards seized their belongings. No more banana skins, no more complaints, no more funny faces.

The days went by, sullen, drab and dismal icy-cold. (monotonous) Sighs and groans rose up into the sky, which grew darker and darker until it became as black as pitch. Resigned to their fate, Seizer's subjects went down into the mines, sweated at the barbed wire knifing-machines and, whenever they saw Seizer, bent their heads and bowed low-

Children awoke to icy Premondays and went to school shivering with the cold. There, all lessons were joyless and boring. In Art they learnt to paint portraits of Seizer, in Gym lessons they learnt to bend the knee, in Religious Studies they learnt hymns in praise of Seizer and, when it came to Grammar, they learnt the Passive Voice. As for tenses, they learnt the Present and the Past, but never the Future. Only Seizer and his courtiers had the right to speak of the Future.

Indeed, every so often special patrols made surprise inspections of schools to find out whether the children were learning correctly and by rote every single item laid down by the law.

CHAPTER 6

ANTONY DISCOVERS THE SECRET

IN WHICH ANTONY DISCOVERS THE HORRIFIC SECRET AND TOGETHER WITH THE
SCHOOLCHILDREN TRIES TO FIND A WAY TO STOP THE NIGHTMARES.

In this land there lived a schoolteacher called Antony. Every afternoon as he returned home from school Antony used to stop at a stone bridge, about halfway along his journey. There, under the bridge, flowered a poppy, scarlet as flame and fresh as hope. Antony would climb down to the riverbed and gaze wistfully at the poppy, telling himself (trying to persuade himself) that the good old days were bound to return.

That day, however, as he drew close to the stone bridge, he heard voices. He stopped short and pricked up his ears. It was two guards from the palace.

- "That poppy must be around here somewhere," one of them said. "Seizer saw it this morning through his telescope. He can't possibly be wrong.' A scrabbling sound was heard just then as if someone were rooting about in the undergrowth. Antony held his breath. - "Look, there it is," came the voice of the first guard.

Apparently, he had finally spotted the doomed poppy. - "Great. Give it a good squirt. Spray on loads of weed killer."

- "I'm spraying on gallons. Can't you see?" - "Has it shrivelled up yet?"

- "You bet. You can wave that one goodbye."

Antony's heart missed a beat.

- "Great," said the first guard, "That's that. Let's go down to the tavern now and have a game of darts.'

- "Darts? Don't we have any work today? No suspects to arrest? No houses to search? No banana skins to clear up? No ice-packs to prepare for Seizers bumps and bruises?"

- "You must be joking. That's history now. The nightmare pillows have seen to that. Ever since these half-wits started using them, we've had a bit of peace and quiet. Nobody grumbles when we grab their stuff. Protests are a thing of the past."

- "You're telling me! He's a great wizard that Saurian Slither!"

- "Great isn't the word for it. With a few like him we'd really get ahead."

Tip-toeing quietly away and holding his breath, Antony moved off without being noticed and continued on his way.

The moment he reached home, he bolted his front door and rushed into the bedroom. He drew the curtains and in the flickering light of the oil lamp he pulled his pillow out of the pillow case. He weighed it in his hands and looked at it very intently. Then he took his penknife and made a little slit at one corner. Smothering a cry of terror, he staggered back. His knees were shaking and his hands began to tremble. With the palm of his hand he wiped away the cold sweat trickling down his brow. As fast as he could he sewed up the pillow, pushed it back in its pillow case and put it down in its place.

That night, Antony didn't sleep a wink. Sitting at his table he gazed at the flickering flame of his candle and he thought and thought. Old memories welled up in his mind while outside on the paving stones echoed the heavy footsteps of the guards, patrolling the surrounding streets.

The next morning when he went to school, he sent a pupil out to keep watch at the entrance and he told the children all about his discovery.

He ran through the whole story, from start to finish, and summed up, "That's why we are tormented by nightmares all night long. That's why we are overwhelmed with misery-That's why we twist and turn in our beds. Just so that he can have a quiet life, Seizer robs us of our dreams. "

- "I can't stand it anymore. I can't bear having nightmares every night!" said Theo, the youngest in the class, and he burst into tears.

- "Be brave," Antony comforted him. "Tears won't get us anywhere- If we all put our heads together, we are bound to think of something."

- "I've got an idea," said Daphne. "I know what we must do."

She was a tiny, frail little girl with beautiful blue eyes. Her father worked in the diamond mines and her mother in a barbed wire factory.

- "What must we do?" they all asked with one voice.

- "We mustn't sleep in our beds at nights," suggested Daphne.

- "That's not a bad idea," said Theo sniffing,

- "Let's sleep in the bath," Thanos shouted enthusiastically from the second row.

- "Let's try it out," Antony agreed. "We've got nothing to lose."

They tried it out for several nights but unfortunately, without much success. They kept on having nightmares; and even worse, some of them caught colds because the bath taps dripped on their heads.

- "Why are we still having nightmares, sir,?" asked Theo, and sneezed three times.

- "Who knows? It seems we have been sleeping on nightmare pillows for such a long time that we've lost the habit of dreaming sweet dreams. Let's face it, we may have to accept that there is no hope any more." (no more hope)

- "Of course there is hope!" Daphne cried out. "Since Saurian Slither, the Chief Sorcerer, was able to make nightmare pillows from all that is revolting and repulsive in the world, why can't we try and make anti-nightmare pillows from all that is beautiful, joyful and delightful (comforting) in the world?"

The class fell silent. They all had a good think about it, and they had to agree that Daphne was right.

But how could they make such pillows, since all that was beautiful, joyful and wonderful had vanished from their land, or had been seized by Seizer and his gang (cronies) ?

- "Let's try," Antony urged. "We've nothing to lose. Do your best, search everywhere. Find anything beautiful that's left and bring it along to school tomorrow. But watch out, don't let the guards get wind of our plans or we're finished."

CHAPTER 6

THE ANTI-NIGHTMARE PILLOWS

IN WHICH ANTONY'S PUPILS COLLECT BRIGHT FRIENDSHIP BANDS, LACE FROM A WEDDING VEIL AND MANY OTHER ITEMS, BUT THEY RUN THE RISK OF LOSING EVERYTHING, WHEN THEY HAVE A SUDDEN SCHOOL INSPECTION.

And so it happened. Everybody searched here, there and everywhere, in every hidden nook and cranny, in every secret hidey-hole. In the corner of a forgotten drawer, Daphne found a little confetti and in the dusty attic the streamers from a kite. Alexis found a swan's feather caught on the barbed wire and Lucy a four-leaf clover. Vania hunted in the bottom of her granny's pocket and pulled out tinkebell a bright friendship band; and Thomas discovered, between the yellowing pages of an old book, a blue forget-me-not. Anna scrambled on to the roof and managed to find some straw from a swallow's (red robbins) nest caught in the tiles. With their hearts beating fast in case a patrol stopped and searched them, the pupils took everything to school. They laid their finds gently on Antony's table and gazed at them as if they were treasures.

And indeed, they were treasures, the most precious in the whole world. In that dark and icy-cold land, at that school, in that classroom, on that table, hopes glittered and sparkled: scented sweet peas, soap-bubbles, rose petals, sky blue ribbons, silken golden bown curly locks, iridescent sunbeams, bright friendship bands, shiny acorns, carnival streamers and crysta raindrops. sugar cubes,paper chains

At that very moment the door flew open, and in rushed Thanos, puffing and blowing.

- "Look out! The guards are coming!"

Antony hid the treasures in the drawer in the nick of time and signalled to the children, who started to sing all together, at the top of their voices

For Seizer our Lord and King

for Seizer we sing

We love him dear,

You are the brightest star of all.

At that same (very) instant the door burst open and in came Sir Shootalot with six guards.

- "What's going on here?" demanded Shootalot.

- "It's our singing lesson," Antony explained.

- "What are you singing?"

- "Seizer's Anthem. What else?"

- "Good. But now it's inspection time. I shall ask the children some questions. Question one:Why do we have hands?"

- "To play pat-a-cake," Daphne was quick to answer.

- "Wrong," snapped Shootalot.

- "To climb trees?" queried Basil.

- "Wrong again," barked Shootalot. "We have hands to applaud Seizer. Question two: Why do we have tongues?"

- "To lick lollipops," called out Theo.

- "Wrong. We have tongues to stick down official envelopes. Question three: Why do we have ears?"

- "To hear?" asked Alexis tentatively.

- "Wrong and wrong again. You're all useless half-wits . We have ears to listen and obey. What lesson did you have yesterday?"

- "Drawing."

- "What did you draw?"

- "Seizer's portrait," answered Antony.

- "Where are the drawings?"

- "In the drawer."

- "Hand them over, so that I can inspect them."

Antony hesitated. If he opened the drawer, the guards might spot (tense Eould he open...) their hidden treasure. He swallowed, not knowing what to do.

- "Come on then. What are you waiting for?" Shootalot growled. "Open the (that) drawer."

Antony gave a furtive wink to Basil. Basil caught on. He took a mouth-organ out of his pocket and began to play.

- "Guards! Confiscate that mouth-organ immediately ," bellowed Shootalot. "Musical instruments in Cloudland are strictly forbidden, apart from royal bugles. Guards! Seize his mouth-organ!"

The guards surrounded Basil and tried to snatch the mouth-organ away. While everybody's attention was fixed on Basil, Antony seized the chance to open the drawer and pull out the drawings.

- "Here they are," he said. "Here are the drawings! Seizer full face, Seizer in profile, seated on his throne, Seizer astride his horse, Seizer with his crown on (twelve crowns ontop of each other) , in his robes, with his retinue, in his pyjamas..... They are all here for you to inspect!" Shootalot grabbed the drawings and examined them closely, one by one.

- "Hmmm. In this one, his nose looks a bit crooked, in this one, a ruby is missing from his crown, and here, on his slipper there is no pom-pom. Again, in this one, his horse has three tails and five legs. This mustn't happen again. At the next inspection, I want to see Seizer with a straight nose, and his horse with all its legs, but no more than that . Let's not overdo it! (go oner the top) Continue with the lesson, now."

As soon as the guards went out of the classroom, Antony and his pupils sighed with relief.

- "Phew! That was a lucky escape," said Antony. "We almost gave ourselves away. Now, let's get on with making our pillows."

Since all they had collected was not enough to fill many anti-nightmare pillows, they decided to make only two, one for Daphne, and one for Antony. They would sleep on these at night and the next day they would relate their dreams to the others.(to the rest of the class)

CHAPTER 7 DREAMS AND HOPES

IN WHICH DAPHNE'S AND ANTONY'S DREAMS TRAVEL ALL AROUND FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH.

The plan was a success. (more succesfull than they could ever hope for) Daphne and Antony had the most wonderful, the most superb and the sweetest dreams one could imagine, and they would recount them to the class next morning. And the children in their turn told them to their friends and their friends to their parents and their parents to their colleagues and relatives. The news of the dreams travelled by word of mouth like wild fire

In a few days the people of Cloudiand, as they were digging in the mines, building prisons or knitting at the barbed wire machines, would whisper one to the other,

"Have you heard the news?"

"What?"

"Have you heard what Daphne dreamt about last night?"

"What was it? What?"

"A birthday cake!"

"With nice little candles?"

"No, with telegraph poles! Of course it had (wih nice little) candles!"

"What colour candles?"

"Green, pink and blue."

"Have you heard the other bit of news?"

"Which one?"

"The dream Antony had last night?"

"No. Go ahead. Tell me."

"It was about a Maypole."

"Are you serious?"

- "Would I lie to you? Not only that. He also saw a harlequin balancing a marshmallow on the tip of his nose."

- "Psst ... psst ... I've some news."

- "What news?"

- "The day after tomorrow Antony is going to dream about fireworks."

- "In black and white or in colour?"

- "In colour, in technicolour."

- "Listen to this one. Listen to me. Daphne dreamt that Premondays became Sundays once again."

- "if only. Even thinking about it makes me feel I could fly off like an ostrich!"

- "Like a swallow you mean."

- "You're right. I'd forgotten all about swallows,"

- "Antony dreamt of a land without prisons. They were demolished, in ruins! Not one stone left on another."

- "Really?"

- "Just as I'm telling you."

- "Daphne dreamt that the barbed wire had rusted away and in its place jasmine and Easter lilies sprouted."

- "Daphne and Antony dreamt one and the same dream last night."

- "What dream? What dream?"

"They dreamt of a land without Seizer!"

- "This isn't possible. It can't be. It just can't happen."

- "I'm telling you, they certainly did have this dream, both Daphne and Antony."

- "A country without Seizer, did you say?"

- "That's it. A country without Seizer."

- "Without Seizer!"

- "WITHOUT SEIZER!"

- "A country with Sundays."

- "With amusement parks."

- "With Easter lilies!"

- "Without barbed wire!"

- "Without guards and prisons!"

They People would talk and talk about all this, secretly, in whispers, and hope grew little by little (in their hearts) until they began to believe that it was within their grasp to make these dreams come true, one day; so they started to form a secret plan of action.

However, so that the guards would not suspect anything, the Cloudlanders showed no sign of hope, they hid their joy, they bowed low before Seizer as they used to and they dragged their feet as they always had.

So time went by until the night came which was recorded in the Chronicles of Cloudland as "The Night of Terrible Dreadful Revenge."

CHAPTER 8

CELEBRATION AND RETRIBUTION

IN WHICH SEIZER AND THE COURTIERE EAT, DRINK AND MAKE MERRY NEVER SUSPECTING WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THEM.

That evening Seizer was celebrating the third anniversary of the Pillow Law /ordinance . He now believed that his subjects had totally resigned themselves to their fate, that there was no fear of riots, nor indeed any need for night time patrols. And to celebrate the anniversary, he invited all his guards and courtiers to a banquet.

The candelabra were blazing, the tables were overflowing with rare delicacies: roast goldfinches, canaries stuffed with pine-nuts, swans' necks (barbecued) on spits, nightingales' tongues in a sauce salted with children's tears, froglets stuffed with blackberries, outlandish iced screams and other such exotic fare. The guards hauled up from the cellar barrels of beer and choice wines, ready to start wining and dining. However, just before it all started, Seizer made a short speech.

- "My loyal courtiers and stalwart brave guards," he said. "I am perfectly happy with the state of our regime. The taxes are unbearable and nobody protests (dares to protest) . I have gained ten kilos from sheer joy and I hope I shall gain another ten today. I must confess that if I were not so unfeeling I would feel quite overcome today. Indeed, tomorrow I'll pass a new law that makes it compulsory for my subjects to sleep in the mines and factories at night, so that they do not waste time travelling to and fro. Consequently, there is no need for homes. We shall pull them down and in their place we shall pile up even more barbed wire; in due course we shall establish build up a worldwide barbed wire monopoly."

Everyone applauded, Baron Slimeball most of all. Then they all fell upon the food like vultures. They gorged themselves to bursting point, they downed twelve bottles each and it was long past midnight when some staggered drunkenly to their beds, while others fell asleep with their heads slumped in the custard left on their plates. The snoring and belching reverberated to the very borders of Cloudland.

Then ... just then, like sleepwalkers, like flitting shadows, the people of Cloudland, men, women and children emerged from the darkness. Some were wearing pyjamas, others nightshirts. Some were carrying stools, others grappling hooks and rope-ladders and each and every one was clasping under his arm his nightmare pillow- Tip-toeing, they headed for the palace- When they arrived they saw the guards snoring sprawled out on the alabaster stairs and golden balconies.

The Cloudlanders surrounded the palace. One or two stars were flickering in the sky and the moon was half-hidden behind the clouds when they set up the step-ladders and the rope-ladders and started to throw the pillows noiselessly through the windows into the palace.

When all the state rooms, the halls and every single space were jam-packed, they began to stack up pillows around the palace. The guards were covered up, the grand staircases were covered up and so were the ramparts. The whole palace was buried under a colossal pile of pillows.

Then, holding their breath, silently, just as they had come, the Cloudlanders slipped back home, locked and bolted their doors, and the boldest peeped out through the half-closed shutters to see what would happen next.

In the quiet, still night, the palace, all buried under pillows, looked like an eerie white hill. An owl that was flying overhead, startled at the sight, hovered and let out a raucous screech. And that screech resounded like a prophecy, like the voice of doom. Seizer woke up feeling an unbearable weight pressing down on his chest. He could not breathe- He was suffocating. He desperately tried to open his eyes and he soon realised that he was buried under how many? - hundreds and hundreds and thousands and thousands of pillows, He was scared out of his wits.

- "Help," he cried out, struggling for breath. "Treason! Help! Beat the drums. Sound the alarms."

The guards woke up as well. Dizzy, drunk and drowsy, without really having a clue what was going on, they drew their swords and like madmen began slashing at the pillows, which were stifling and smothering them.

What happened next cannot be put into words. Out of the pillows came forth the nightmare horrors which, sewn up for so many years, had fed and thrived and multiplied. Oh, yes, bursting and tumbling out of the pillows came bats and lizards, goblins and Minotaurs. Slimy black snakes, ghouls, baldheaded crows and murky shadows, scorpions and nasty hairy things, repulsive bloodless phantoms with sunken eyes, hyenas, werewolves and scary sprites, winged ants, monsters and cruel demons, one-eyed giants and crawling dragons, all hell-bent on hunting down Seizer and his crew. Seizer fled, Shootalot and Slither fled, the guards with their hearts in their mouths fled, stupefied. They all ran like blazes, they ran for dear life.

And hard on their heels, raging and wailing, growling and cursing, with rattling chains and clattering scales, with gnashing teeth and forked tails, hooked talons and blazing nostrils spewing forth fire and venom, the nightmare creatures pursued Seizer and his guards. gave chase

Nobody knows what happened next. Nobody knows what became of Seizer and his crew. Some say the nightmares caught up with them somewhere beyond the forested ridges of the mountain, in the grey granite ravines. Others say that the nightmares grabbed hold of them and dragged the wretches away with them to the depths of the quagmire where the mute toads are. (live) Yet others say that they managed to escape but went mad with terror and, with unhinged minds, they wandered for ever after from place to place, from town to town, begging, while dogs barked behind them and children taunted and hurled stones at them. Some others say But what difference does it make? One thing is certain. Never again did they set foot in Cloudland. From that day to this nobody has ever seen them. And the Cloulanders tore down the barbed wire, pulled down the phsons, threw away the padlocks, and they lived happily ever after..... If only all the people on this earth could live as happily as they did.