

ALEX MILWAY

HOTEL

FLAMINGO

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN



To the children of 2020

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HOTEL FLAMINGO

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

ALEX MILWAY



Piccadilly
PRESS



Zoozoo Theme Park

Sea Dog
Pirate Tours

Port Whisker

Whale Holiday Bay

Glow Worm
Point

Lizard Beach

Tusks Cinema

Artists' Quarter

The Glitz Hotel

Little Fish Marina

Le Chat
Shopping Mall

Dukduk Bowling

Carnival
Opera House

Bathers'
Huts

Bush Baby Bay

The Boulevard
Sports Arena

ANIMAL BOULEVARD

Hotel Flamingo

Welcome to
Animal Boulevard

Lookout
Point

Sandy Dunes

Savannah Beach

KEY:
Grazing Land
Coastal Path
Watering Hole

Fort Rhino



The Empty Hotel



Animal Boulevard was unusually quiet. Apart from the odd jogger, T. Bear hadn't seen a soul all morning and yet Lemmy had been on the phone non-stop.

'All of our guests have cancelled!' said Lemmy, dizzy with disbelief.

'WHAT!' cried Anna, marching through the lobby. 'Why?'

'Something about a virus,' said Lemmy.

‘That sounds serious,’ said Anna.

‘I’ll find out more,’ said Lemmy, racing off.

Anna checked the bookings diary, and what had been a full month was now just a page full of red lines and crossings out.

‘So we really do have no guests at all,’ she said.

‘What’s that you say?’ asked Mrs Turpington, the old tortoise who was a permanent resident at the hotel. She was always late downstairs of a morning, but always happy to see Anna. ‘Have I missed breakfast?’

‘We always keep breakfast ready for you,’ said Anna cheerfully.

She helped Mrs Turpington through into the restaurant and found Madame Le Pig sitting listless at a table.

‘Where is everyone!?’ she cried, banging her trotter on the table. The vase bounced up into the air and landed upside down, spilling water everywhere.

‘Well,’ said Anna cautiously, ‘Mrs Turpington is here now, so you’ll have something to do, at the very least.’



‘Thank you,’ said the tortoise. ‘I am very hungry. I sometimes wonder if lettuce leaves are enough to get one through the night!’

‘We’ll get you something straight away,’ said Eva Koala, whizzing over with a glass of water and cutlery.

Madame Le Pig stormed off into the kitchen.

‘Where is everyone?’ asked Eva. ‘It’s not been this quiet since I started working here.’

‘I know, it doesn’t feel good, does it?’ said Anna. ‘There’s something strange happening on Animal Boulevard.’

‘Miss Anna!’ shouted Lemmy from the lobby. ‘You’ll want to hear this! Hurry!’

Lemmy had found a little radio, and

they went to Anna’s office and called for T. Bear to join them.

‘It’s the mayor,’ said Lemmy, turning up the volume. ‘Listen!’

‘Because of the virus continuing to spread, the whole of Animal Boulevard is being

placed under lockdown,’ said the mayor, her voice crackling a little over the small speaker. ‘This means all non-essential shops and places of hospitality must close and all animals must stay in their homes. If you need to leave your house for food





shopping, please keep your distance from each other, wash your hands regularly, and wear a face mask at all times.'

'Good grief,' said Anna. 'We have to close the hotel.'

'No wonder the streets are empty,' said T. Bear.

Anna sat down in her chair and took off her hat. Not since first arriving at Hotel Flamingo had she felt so worried.

'What do you want us to do?' said Lemmy.

'I just don't know,' said Anna. 'I suppose we should call a team meeting. I need to tell everyone what's happened.'

•

With all the hotel staff assembled in the lobby, Anna explained everything.

'People are getting poorly on Animal Boulevard,' she said, 'and we've been told we have to close Hotel Flamingo to stop the spread of germs.'

'What!?' exclaimed Madame Le Pig. 'All my delicacies will go uneaten?!'

'I suppose so,' said Anna.

'IT IS A TRAVESTY!' cried Madame Le Pig.

'How will we survive with no guests, and no money?' asked Lemmy.

'It will be tough,' said Anna, 'but I'm sure we can find a way to keep afloat.'

Stella Giraffe looked overjoyed at the news.

'I can get on and do all the little jobs in the guestrooms that never get done,' she said happily.

‘Great!’ said Anna. ‘Excellent attitude.’

‘And I could clean out the pool,’ said Jojo the otter. ‘The pipes do get clogged with fur if you don’t keep on top of them.’

‘Good point!’ said Anna. ‘Cleanliness is everything, now. We will need to keep the hotel cleaner than ever.’



‘What do you mean?’ said Hilary. ‘I keep this hotel spotless.’

‘I know, I know!’ said Anna, in a calming voice. ‘But we just need to go a little further.’

Wash our hands properly, for a start.’

‘I do!’ said Hilary. Her nose ruckled up. ‘Oh no –’

Hilary let out the most enormous sneeze.

‘And we all must wear masks to keep our germs to ourselves,’ said Anna.

‘Sorry about that,’ said Hilary.

‘And try and stay two metres away from each other,’ said Anna.

Everyone took a few tentative steps backwards.

‘Where do we get these masks from?’ asked Eva.

‘I suppose we could always make some,’ said Anna.

Hilary sneezed again, and everyone turned to stare.

‘Leave it to me,’ she said, and stomped off out of the lobby. ‘I have some material upstairs!’

‘Is she ill, do you think?’ asked Eva.

‘No, no,’ said Anna. ‘That’s just Hilary.’
Squeak the mouse spoke up.

‘Will I be safe in the lift?’ he asked, seriously. ‘It’s quite hard to stay away from people in there.’

‘I think for the time being we should not use the lift,’ said Anna.

Squeak looked sad. He loved the quiet of the lift – and he loved working in there alone.

‘Perhaps if only you use it,’ said Anna, ‘then that would be safe, wouldn’t it?’

The mouse’s face erupted into joy.

‘Thank you!’ he said.

‘So then,’ said Anna. ‘Until we find out more, let’s all try to keep busy, and keep happy.’

‘I best lock the doors,’ said T. Bear, his eyes filling with tears.

‘We have to,’ said Anna. ‘But rest assured, we are going to open them back up as soon as we can.’

Anna returned to her office, fearful of what lay ahead for her and all of her staff. But more pressingly, she had to go and talk to Ms Fragranti and explain why they would have to cancel her show.



Flamingo Fears

The flamingos looked heartbroken. They had been rehearsing their new performance day-in, day-out for weeks. And now their plans were in tatters.

‘But darling,’ said Ms Fragranti, throwing her head back with such force it looked as though it might fly off, ‘the show must go on!’

‘It can’t,’ said Anna. ‘Everything is



absolutely, totally cancelled!’

‘Everything?’ asked the flamingo.

‘Everything,’ said Anna.

‘Then it feels as though life itself is cancelled,’ said Ms Fragranti, covering her face with her huge wing.

‘I think the whole of Animal Boulevard is feeling much the same,’ said Anna.

Ms Fragranti was heartbroken.

‘But life without art, without music or drama –’ she said.

‘There will always be drama with you around,’ said Anna.

That brought a smile back to the flamingo’s beak.

‘Quite so, darling,’ she said. ‘But this is deadly serious for all of us.’

‘I know,’ said Anna.

‘We live to perform!’ said Ms Fragranti, spinning around. ‘Our audience is everything – it is our livelihood. I have trained for years to be this wonderful and yet without *the show*, what could I do? I would make an awful accountant, darling.’

Anna scratched her head.

‘For the time being we just have to stay safe and well in the hotel,’ said Anna, thoughtfully. ‘But perhaps there will be a way soon that you *can* perform.’

Ms Fragranti sensed that Anna was having an idea.

‘Darling, this is fighting talk, and I like it!’ said Ms Fragranti. ‘The show will go on!’

‘It will,’ said Anna. ‘We will find a way.’

Hilary worked hard all day with the sewing machine, and eventually brought down a huge pile of masks for all the staff. Anna called everyone together, and they formed a very long queue.

Hilary handed out the masks, and everyone put them on. They weren't all a perfect fit.



‘Is it supposed to cover your eyes?’ asked Lemmy.

‘Is it supposed to cover your ears?’ asked Eva.

‘Is it supposed to cover your whole body?’ asked Squeak.

‘I think perhaps you made them all to fit a hippo, didn’t you?’ asked Anna.

Hilary blushed.

‘I didn’t stop to think,’ she said.

‘Not to worry,’ said T. Bear, cheerfully. ‘Mine fits!’

Hilary collected them back up, taking notes on everyone’s size.

‘I’ll sort them out straight away,’ she said.

‘Do we really need them?’ asked Stella. ‘I mean, are they actually going to do anything to stop me getting ill?’

‘It’s more that if you get poorly, they will help to stop *you* spreading it to someone else,’ said Anna.

‘I see,’ said Stella. ‘But how will I know if I’ve got the bug?’

‘Lots of people won’t show symptoms,’ said Anna, ‘so it’s not that easy to know.’

‘What a tricky little customer!’ said Stella.

‘Which is why simply wearing a mask when required seems like the most responsible thing to do,’ said Anna.

‘Right then,’ said Stella. ‘That all makes sense now.’

Mrs Turpington had been watching from afar, and when everyone had dispersed, she approached Anna.

‘Miss Anna,’ she said. ‘I’ve been watching the news, and I’ve learned that

because of my age, I must start shielding from others.’

‘Shielding?’ said Anna.

‘I think it means stay away from everyone,’ she replied. ‘But I’m a little worried about doing that. I fear life would become so terribly quiet and lonely.’

Anna realised she’d have to do something.

‘You mustn’t worry,’ said Anna, thinking on her feet. ‘Perhaps we could move you to the Royal Suite, which is much bigger than your current room. And we could bring you meals, and visit you regularly – and stay distanced of course.’

‘You’d do all that for me?’ asked Mrs Turpington.

‘I think it’s the least we can do,’ said Anna. ‘You’re part of the family here.’
Relief flooded over Mrs Turpington’s face.

‘Thank you,’ she said.

Anna could see that despite the hotel being closed, she still had a lot to worry

about and many people to care for. It was up to her to make sure all of her staff stayed safe and well, not to mention paid! It was a challenge she was more than happy to meet. But of course, keeping Madame Le Pig happy would be the biggest challenge of all.





Stores Run Dry



Madame Le Pig stormed into Anna's office.

'I have just put in an order for food,' said Madame Le Pig, shaking a wooden spoon above her head, 'but there is nothing to buy!'

'What?' said Anna.

'It's all gone!' cried Madame Le Pig. 'The shops are empty.'

Anna couldn't believe her ears.

'Do you have anything left?' asked Anna.

'Of course I have some things left. What do you take me for?' snapped Madame Le Pig. 'I run a restaurant! The greatest on Animal Boulevard! But we won't last long with things as they are.'

'OK,' said Anna. 'What do you have?'

'I have enough flour for six months, but hardly any yeast,' she said.

'Do you need yeast?' asked Anna, not knowing much about baking.

'Do you need bread?' snorted Madame Le Pig.

Anna loved bread.

'Yes,' she admitted. 'What else?'

'Pumpkins, tins of beans and dried

things, and also some fruit,' added Madame Le Pig. 'But all the fresh food will be rotten within a week – especially if there is no one to eat it! It is a horrible waste!'

'Then we need to be clever,' said Anna.

'In the kitchen, I am the cleverest!' snorted Madame Le Pig.

'Indeed,' said Anna. 'Leave it with me.'

Madame Le Pig stormed out of the office, steam rising from her head.

'Everything all right, miss?'

asked T. Bear.

'Not really,'

said Anna.

'I feel a bit lost.'



‘So do I,’ he said. ‘But remember, everyone’s going through the same thing. At least we’ve all got each other.’

Anna agreed.

‘I’m so lucky to have all you,’ she said. ‘It must be awful to be alone at times like these.’

‘Quite, miss,’ said T. Bear.

At that very moment, the phone on the front desk rang, and they heard Lemmy’s voice as he answered.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘No, unfortunately we’re closed at the minute . . . *Can you speak with the manager?* I suppose so . . .’

Lemmy’s head peered through the office door. He shrugged and pointed to Anna’s phone.

‘Sounds important,’ he said. ‘I’ll put it through.’

Anna picked up the phone and was amazed to find that she recognised the voice on the other end of the line.

‘Is that Anna Dupont?’ said King Valentin Penguin. ‘We’re having an absolute boulder of a day over here at the palace, and could really do with some help.’

Anna covered the mouthpiece so he couldn’t hear her.





‘It’s the king!!!’ she whispered excitedly. T. Bear snapped to attention and Lemmy’s jaw dropped in shock.

‘Of course,’ said Anna, removing her hand. ‘How can we help?’

‘My darling wife Julieta is absolutely out of Squid Scones – barely a crumb left – and she’s turning half yellow with worry,’ said the king. ‘This soggy bottom of a lockdown has left us in a complete mess.’

‘But we’re closed,’ said Anna, sadly. ‘You can’t come to eat here at the minute.’

‘Oh I know that,’ said the king. ‘Such a bothersome problem it must be for you too! But no, I was actually hoping you might be able to deliver some of the little wonders to us? We could do it all

distanced, I’m sure If your chef might be able to cook us some?’

‘Your Highness,’ she said, ‘it would be a pleasure. I will see what I can do!’

‘Absolutely whizz-bang!’ exclaimed the king. ‘I will be in touch. The queen will be overjoyed!’

Anna put the phone down and a smile widened on her face.

‘I have got a brilliant idea!’ she said, and she ran off to speak with Madame Le Pig.



Problems and Solutions



Madame Le Pig's face turned the darkest shade of red.

'My restaurant is not a takeaway!' she said, waving her trotters in the air furiously. 'I am a top-class chef serving food to the most respectable clientele on Animal Boulevard!'

'And you will be out of a job soon if we don't think and act quickly,' said Anna.

Madame Le Pig was wise enough to know that she needed her job.

‘You want me to make my Squid Scones and post them to the King and Queen Penguin?’ she asked.

‘And that’s just the beginning,’ said Anna. ‘You could also make other meals using the food you do have!’

‘We could sell my delicious, prizewinning bread!’ said Le Pig. ‘Loaves, batons, nut rolls . . .’

‘But what about the yeast?’ asked Anna.

‘There is a way . . .’ said Madame Le Pig, mysteriously. ‘It is magical, and not without difficulty, but Madame Le Pig will overcome this problem!’

Anna was excited to see the results.

‘Then that’s what we’ll do,’ said Anna.

‘Leave it to me,’ said Madame Le Pig, and she rolled up her sleeves. ‘Squid Scones coming up!’

‘And I’ll need to find some delivery people,’ said Anna.

•

Lemmy had fallen asleep on the front desk. There was next to nothing for him to do without any guests, so Anna didn’t mind – everyone had their own way of dealing with change and stress, after all. But now she needed his help.



‘Lemmy?’ she asked, gently, waiting a few seconds.

‘Lemmy?’ she asked again, slightly louder, but still with no response.

Eventually, Anna chimed the desk bell.

‘GUESTS!?!’ cried Lemmy, launching into the air.

‘Sadly not,’ said Anna. ‘But I may have a job for you.’

Lemmy rubbed his eyes.

‘Ready for action,’ he said, still half asleep.

‘Do you have a bicycle?’ asked Anna.

‘I don’t,’ said Lemmy, ‘but I know someone who does. My little brother Bobby. Why do you need it?’

‘So . . .’ said Anna, explaining her story of how the hotel was going to set up a food delivery service. She talked through

everything she had planned.

‘Why don’t we ask Bobby to be our delivery boy,’ Lemmy said. ‘He wouldn’t need to come into the hotel, we just find a way of passing the food to him safely.’

‘Do you think he’d do it?’ asked Anna.

‘He loves any reason to be on his bike,’ said Lemmy.

Anna wanted to hug Lemmy, but she knew she wasn’t allowed. It made her feel sad, and she forced herself to take a step backwards to make things easier.

‘Give him a call,’ said Anna.

‘Right away!’ said Lemmy.

•

T. Bear stood outside on the terrace, watching the flamingos rehearsing. They were putting on quite a show, full of

balletic dancing and high-kicking, but it wasn't cheering him up – T. Bear hated to see the hotel without guests. He was feeling desperately sad about lockdown, more so than any other member of staff.

'Come and join in, darling!' said Ms Fragranti.

She stepped away from her troupe and swept her large wing around T. Bear's shoulders.

'Oh no,' he grumbled.

T. Bear really didn't feel like acting, dancing *or* singing. In fact, he wondered if he could ever be happy again – at least not until guests had returned to the hotel. Ms Fragranti, however, was very persuasive.

'Dancing and singing are good for the

soul,' she said, clutching T. Bear's paw.

Ms Fragranti directed her

flamingos to break into song. It was a rousing number, all about the colour pink. T. Bear looked terribly out of place.

'I'm not sure about this,' he said, gruffly.

'I bet you have a beautiful deep voice,' said Ms Fragranti, passing him a script with all the words. She pointed to a line. 'That's your part.'

With a gushing smile, Ms Fragranti sang out at the top of her range. T. Bear flushed pink with embarrassment.





‘You can do it darling!’ cried Ms Fragranti.

T. Bear followed the lyrics, but felt his chest tighten with nerves as the flamingos sang around him.

*‘Pink is a colour that sings to me,
A wonderful treat for eyes to see,
No greys tomorrow, no blues today,
The happiest pinks are here to stay!’*

T. Bear felt a tap on the shoulder. It was his turn. He opened his mouth but his voice faltered.

‘You can do it!’ cried Ms Fragranti.

T. Bear clenched his paws. He took a deep breath and finally his voice appeared.

‘I love pink . . .’ he sang with a rich



tone, as warm as a hot chocolate on a cold winter night, ‘ . . .I love pink. When my heart does sink, I think of pink!’

‘Wonderful!’ cried Ms Fragranti. ‘I knew you could do it!’

With the flamingos belting out the tune, T. Bear quickly forgot all about his nerves. He even started to enjoy it. The song carried on for three more verses, and when they finished, they were all surprised to hear clapping from a window high up on the top floor of the hotel. Mrs Turpington was cheering them on from the Royal Suite.

T. Bear and the flamingos took a bow.

‘An audience!’ said Ms Fragranti, throwing her wings up into the air.



The Delivery Lemur



It was early the next morning when T. Bear heard a knocking at the hotel door. He peered through the glass to see a young lemur with a mask over his mouth and nose. Despite the covering, it was still possible to tell that the lemur had just woken up.

‘I’m Bobby!’ said the lemur, yawning.
‘Lemmy’s brother.’

The resemblance was striking, even

though he was only half Lemmy's size.

'Aha!' said T. Bear. 'Wait there!'

T. Bear raced away to tell Anna. He found her deep in conversation with Madame Le Pig in the kitchen.

'The scones will never reach the palace in this!' snorted Le Pig. 'They must arrive in immaculate condition!'

Anna was holding a sturdy cardboard box, lined with red tissue paper. The Squid Scones were nestled carefully inside, alongside a pot of clotted cream and tiny jar of seaweed jam.

'I think they will be very safe in here,' said Anna.

'But what if they arrive as crumbs?' snorted Madame Le Pig. 'My reputation will be in tatters!'

'Excuse me,' said T. Bear, cautiously, 'Bobby's here.'

'Then it's time to send them on their way,' said Anna.

Madame Le Pig tried to seize the box with her trotters. She pulled, but Anna kept a very strong grip.



'I've given the King Penguin my word,' said Anna through clenched teeth.

The box was tugged back and forth, until finally Madame Le Pig relented. She squealed in defeat.

‘FINE!’ said Le Pig. ‘But if they arrive with as much as a crumb out of place, I QUIT!’

‘Thank you, chef,’ said Anna, retreating quickly. She sealed the box and headed out into the lobby.

Lemmy was chatting to his brother through the door. He’d found Bobby a spare hotel jacket and hat to wear, and looked on proudly.

‘Now remember,’ said Anna, placing the box of scones in a bay within the revolving door. ‘Do not take off your mask at any time, and treat the Royal Penguins with the utmost respect. You are

an ambassador of Hotel Flamingo!’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ said Bobby. ‘So are you gonna pay me for this?’

Anna pushed the door, it turned around and the box of scones skidded over to Bobby.

‘When we hear word that the parcel has been delivered safely,’ said Lemmy.

‘Brilliant!’ said Bobby.

He threw the box into his shoulder bag and picked up his bike.

‘SAFELY!’ said Anna.

‘Yeah, yeah,’ said Bobby. ‘See ya!’

‘We can trust him, can’t we?’ said Anna, as Bobby cycled off down the deserted Animal Boulevard.

‘Of course,’ said Lemmy. ‘He’s my brother.’

•

It was a long wait before they heard news of the scones.

‘You liked them?!’ said Anna, on the phone to the queen Penguin.

‘Just marvellous,’ she replied. ‘I’d lost all hope of ever eating decent food again when this awful lockdown happened.’

‘I am very pleased,’ said Anna.

‘But I should like to order some more,’ said the queen. ‘And I have some friends who should also like to do the same. Word has got around.’

‘Good grief, that’s wonderful news,’ said Anna. ‘How many friends?’

The queen reeled off a list of names as long as Anna’s arm.

‘Some are wondering if you might be

doing other meals as well?’ she asked.

‘Well, yes,’ said Anna, ‘we had planned to. Breads, and a few choice meals . . .’

‘Marvellous!’ said the queen. ‘Send me a menu, but I’m certain we’ll take them all. Everyone will be overjoyed!’

‘You’ll take them all?’ said Anna.

‘Absolutely!’ said the queen. ‘Your delivery boy will need a bigger bag.’

‘Thank you,’ said Anna. ‘You don’t know how much this means to us.’

‘Believe me,’ said the queen, ‘it won’t be as much as what it means to me!’





A Magical Solution



Anna visited Madame Le Pig in her kitchen to tell her the good news. The chef was staring intently at a jar half full of gloopy, watery flour.

‘What are you doing?’ asked Anna.

‘Watching these bubbles,’ snapped Le Pig. Anna tried to spot the bubbles in the jar.

‘I can’t see any,’ she said. ‘What is it?’

‘It is a sourdough starter,’ said Madame



Le Pig, her eyes focused on the jar.

‘A what?’ asked Anna.

Madame Le Pig sniffed.

‘It is a mix of flour and water,’ she said.

‘Over time it collects natural yeasts from the air. It is pure magic.’

‘Wow,’ said Anna.

She looked closer.

‘It just looks like a dollop of goo to me,’ she said.

‘Shhhh!’ snorted Le Pig. ‘Go away, before you scare it! It is alive, and I wish to keep it that way. Without this I will not have bread for you.’

‘If you say so,’ said Anna. ‘Anyway, orders are in for your meals and more scones. The Royal Penguins were delighted!’

Madame Le Pig’s eyebrow raised a little.

‘Of course they were,’ she said.

Anna placed a list of all the orders on the table next to the jar of sourdough starter and slithered away.

‘Like I said, we’ve got lots of orders,’ said Anna. ‘Best get cooking.’

Le Pig shooed her away.

‘YES, yes,’ she snorted.

•

Anna delivered a bowl of lettuce soup to Mrs Turpington up in the Royal Suite, and found the old tortoise very happy in her new surroundings.

‘It’s perfect up here, dear,’ she said.

‘I can see the sea, and all of Animal Boulevard . . . And what wonderful entertainment!’



‘What do you mean?’ asked Anna.

‘The flamingos out on the terrace,’ said the tortoise. ‘I can hear them perfectly – and I thought my hearing was bad.’

Anna looked out of the window and saw the flamingos rehearsing.

‘You can hear them all the way up here?’ she said.

‘Oh yes,’ said Mrs Turpington. ‘They’re very loud. The sound really does travel.’

Anna gazed from the terrace down to the sea. She knew how much Ms Fragranti was desperate to perform, but while still in lockdown it would be impossible to put on a performance.

‘I really must find a way to get them an audience,’ said Anna.

‘I can’t imagine what it’s like not being able to do the thing you love,’ said Mrs Turpington.

‘Me neither,’ said Anna. ‘It must be awful.’

•

When Bobby turned up for work the following day, he looked at the steaming tower of meals awaiting him in the

revolving door of the hotel.

‘There’s no way these will fit in my bag,’ he said.

Bobby’s bike didn’t have a basket.

‘Perhaps,’ said Anna, ‘Stella can sort something out for you?’

Bobby shrugged.

‘You’d better hurry up,’ said Bobby. ‘It’s all going cold.’

‘Right!’ said Anna.

Anna found Stella out in her workshed, and when posed with Bobby’s dilemma, the giraffe jumped at the chance to help.

‘Let me see this bike, then,’ she said, sucking through her teeth. Stella grabbed her tools, screws and a few planks of wood, and walked through the hotel to the lobby.

‘There it is,’ said T. Bear. ‘It’s only a small bike.’

Stella passed T. Bear her measuring tape.

‘Get him to measure the handlebars for me,’ said Stella.

Bobby did as he was told, and relayed the size. Stella got quickly to work, sawing and hammering on the immaculately clean lobby floor.

‘Don’t tell Hilary,’ said Anna.

‘Don’t you worry,’ said T. Bear. ‘I won’t.’

After about twenty minutes of hard work, Stella had something to show for her efforts. It was a large open crate, with metal clasps attached to the bottom.

‘Hang on!’ said Stella, skipping away.

She returned with a can of spray paint and a stencil. With one strong squirt of the bright pink paint, Stella had emblazoned a flamingo onto its front.

‘Now it’s ready,’ she said.



T. Bear lifted up the crate and passed it through a window to Bobby. It fitted perfectly to Bobby’s handlebars, and he loaded it up with meals.

‘Not bad,’ he said, leaping onto the saddle. With a swerve, he pedalled off down the road.

‘Great work, Stella!’ said Anna.

Stella nodded in approval.

‘Not bad, even if I do say so myself,’ she replied.



Help for the Hungry



Over the following week, the Hotel Flamingo delivery service grew from strength to strength. Being the only staff member to be completely unfazed by Madame Le Pig, Eva became the new kitchen assistant, helping out with simple dishes and packing of meals.

With the help of the Royal Penguins and their vast palace kitchen garden,

Anna finally managed to source more ingredients. It soon became clear however, that there were many more mouths on Animal Boulevard to feed than just the Royals.

‘Excuse me,’ said a little dishevelled goat, knocking on the hotel door.

‘We’re closed!’ said

T. Bear. ‘It’s this lockdown, sorry!’

‘I see that lemur carrying food around all day long,’ said the

goat. ‘Have you got any spare?’

‘Don’t you have any?’ asked T. Bear.



‘I live on the street,’ said the goat. ‘No one gives me any help now that there’s no one in town. There’s lots of us like it.’

T. Bear hated the thought of people going hungry.

‘Wait there!’ he said.

T. Bear found Anna in her office and explained about the visitor.

‘She hasn’t any food,’ said T. Bear. ‘I don’t think she has anywhere to sleep – and she’s not the only one, either.’

‘Good grief,’ said Anna. ‘Find her some food, but don’t let her leave. We have to do something.’

‘Do something, miss?’ he asked.

Anna grew excited. ‘Leave this to me!’

Flicking through her address book, Anna found the phone number for the



mayor of Sunset Isle. The mayor was a very powerful owl who had dined once or twice in the restaurant. Anna hoped she would remember her. She dialled the number, and kept her fingers firmly crossed.

‘Ah, Ms Macaron,’ said Anna. ‘I’m calling from Hotel Flamingo, I have a very important question to ask!’

‘Hoot hoot!’ said Ms Macaron. ‘I am very busy, Ms Dupont. I have shops struggling, I have worried old folk with no one to talk to –’

‘Then I shall come straight to the point,’ interrupted Anna. ‘I want your permission to open Hotel Flamingo to let in the homeless animals of Animal Boulevard.’

‘You want to re-open the hotel?’ said the mayor, letting out a little screech.

‘Why not?’ said Anna. ‘We have all these empty rooms, and out on the streets there are hungry creatures with nowhere to live.’

‘But it would be breaking all the rules,’ said Ms Macaron. ‘The virus would spread!’

‘Not if we were clever,’ said Anna. ‘I would make sure we followed all the distancing and cleaning rules. We do have the best cleaner in town, after all. We could feed them as well. It has to be better than leaving them to go hungry?’

It took the mayor a long time to decide, but eventually she realised it was the best thing for everyone.

‘As long as you abide by the rules,’ said the mayor, ‘I don’t see why not.’

Anna cheered, and then quickly remembered she was talking on the phone.

‘You won’t regret it!’ said Anna.

‘I’d better not,’ said the mayor.



Anna called a meeting, and talked to all her staff about her plans.

‘I have to get everyone’s approval,’ she said. ‘If everyone agrees, then we can take in all of the homeless creatures on Animal Boulevard.’

‘We’d be open again, miss?’ said T. Bear, grinning happily.

‘Exactly that,’ said Anna. ‘While still closed, in a sense.’

‘But what about the virus?’ said Lemmy.

‘The guests would have to wear masks, and quarantine in their rooms if anyone fell ill, like the rest of us,’ said Anna. ‘As long as we’re sensible, we will stay safe.’

‘Sure, sounds wonderful,’ said Eva.

‘It would be nice to help out,’ said Jojo.

Eventually, everyone agreed.

‘And do you know what the best thing about this will be?’ said Anna. ‘Ms Fragranti will finally have an audience for her performance!’

‘Is this for real, darling?’ exclaimed Ms Fragranti, spinning around on one leg.

‘We’ll need to keep them occupied somehow,’ said Anna.

•

As the hotel filled up with guests, many of whom had never set foot in a hotel before, T. Bear started to feel like himself again.

‘Somehow, you always manage to keep things going, miss,’ said T. Bear.

‘It’s not always easy, though, is it?’ said Anna. ‘This lockdown has tested all of us.’

‘I’ll say,’ said T. Bear. ‘Our new guests

are the lucky ones. I bet there are many old folk out there living alone, and without anyone like you to help them.’

Anna looked thoughtful. She knew her hotel could be a force for good, and she was determined to help out in any way she could.

‘It’s time, Mr Bear, darling!’ called Ms Fragranti from across the lobby.

Anna looked puzzled.

‘What’s this?’ she asked.

T. Bear flushed red.

‘I may . . .’ he stuttered. ‘I may be taking part in their show ...’

Anna jumped for joy.

‘Now?’ she said.

Ms Fragranti wrapped a huge feather boa around T. Bear’s neck, and they

walked downstairs to the ballroom. The seats were laid out with lots of space in between each, and as the flamingos and



T. Bear walked on stage there was an enormous cheer.

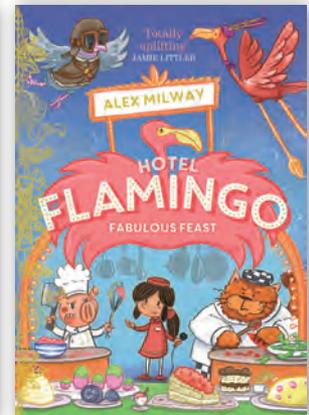
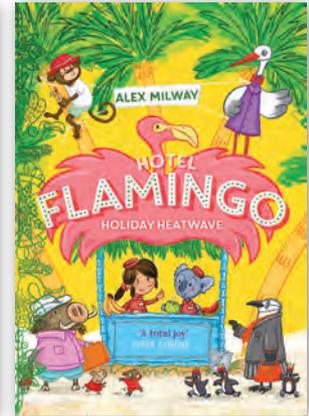
‘One, two, three, four . . .’ said Ms Fragranti.

As the singing lifted the ceiling, everyone felt just a little bit more alive, and a little bit more like normal, than they had for a long time.

Anna cheered and sang along. No matter how difficult life was on Animal Boulevard, she wasn’t going to let anything wipe the enormous smile off her face.

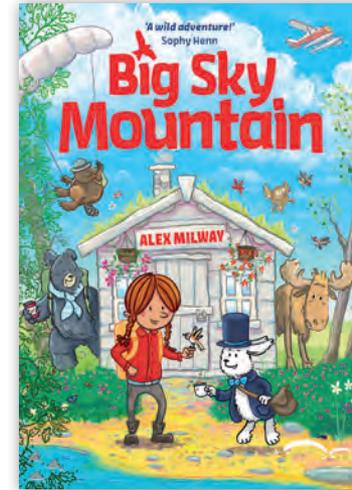
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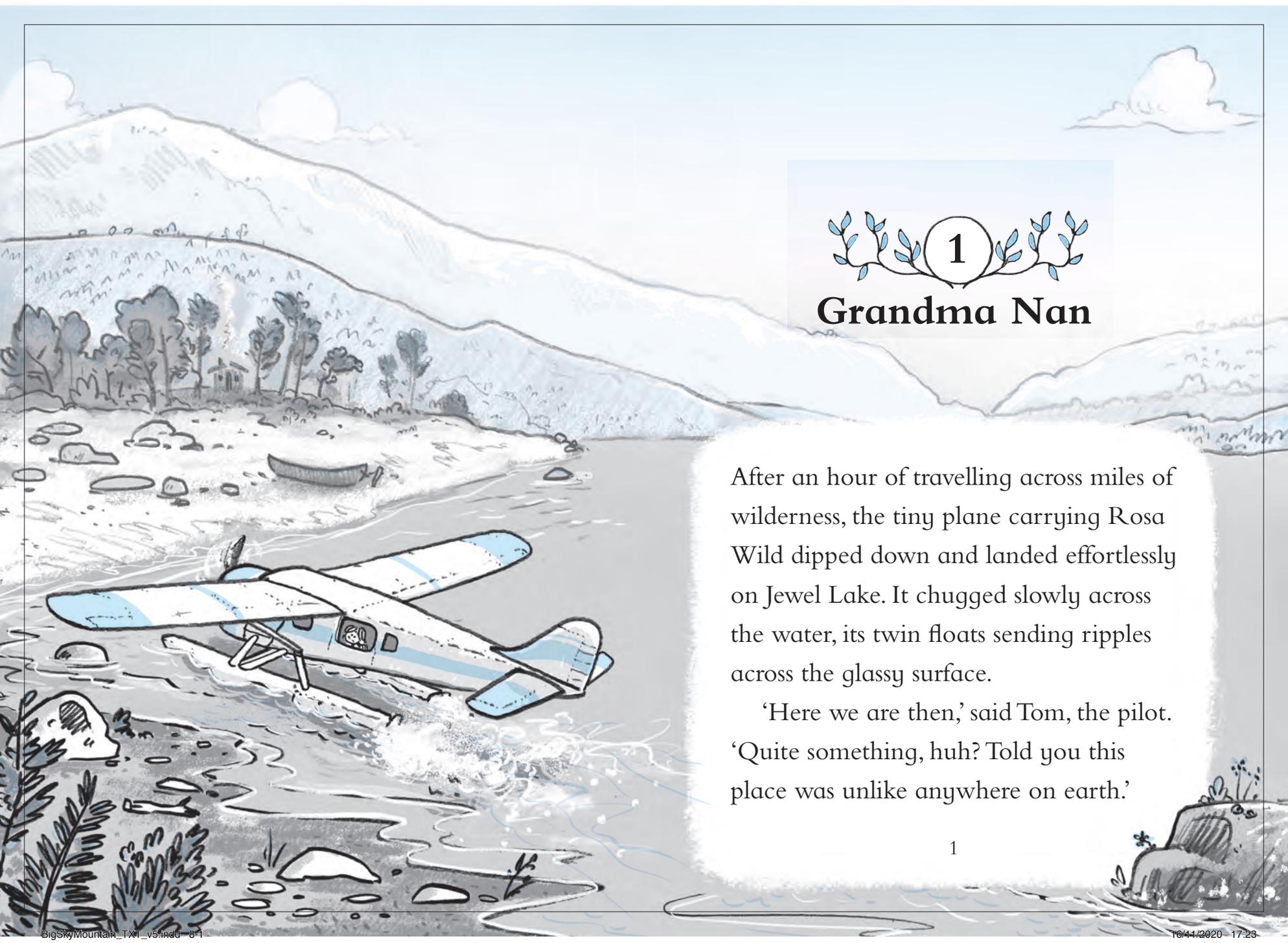


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1

Grandma Nan

After an hour of travelling across miles of wilderness, the tiny plane carrying Rosa Wild dipped down and landed effortlessly on Jewel Lake. It chugged slowly across the water, its twin floats sending ripples across the glassy surface.

‘Here we are then,’ said Tom, the pilot. ‘Quite something, huh? Told you this place was unlike anywhere on earth.’

Rosa sat up in the back seat and gazed in wonder – and no small amount of panic – at the boulder-strewn slopes



and spire-like trees that rose up around her.

The emptiness of Big Sky Mountain and the never-ending horizon was terrifying to someone who'd only ever known the city.

‘It’s so . . . big!’ said Rosa.

Tom’s moustache twitched as he cut power to the engines and sailed the plane towards the gravelly beach.

‘It definitely is that,’ said Tom.

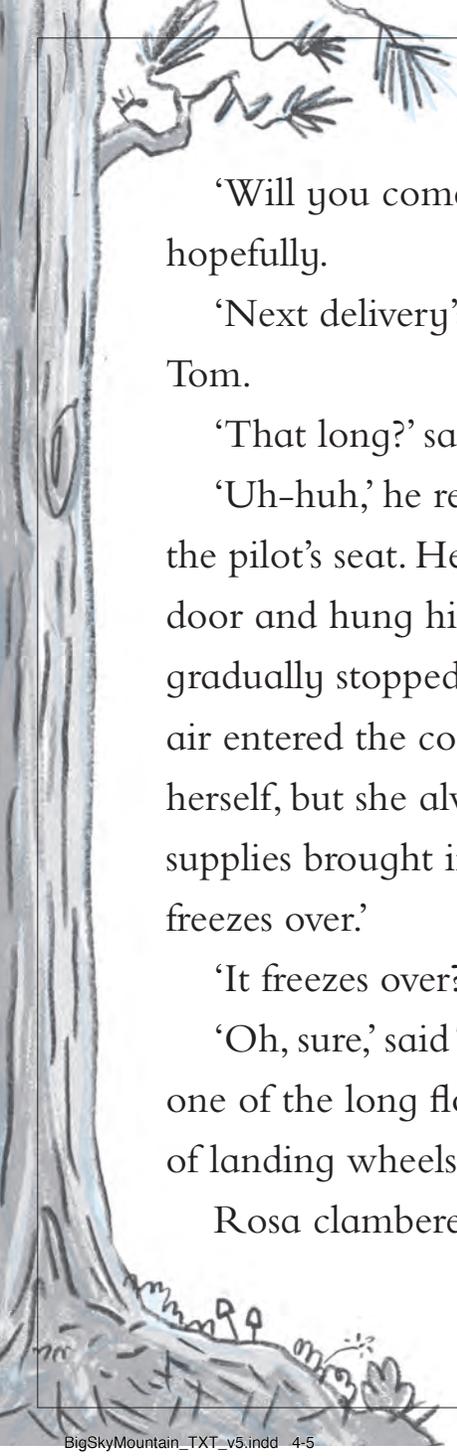
‘And where are all the houses and shops?’ asked Rosa.

Tom laughed. ‘About two hundred

miles away,’ he said. He pointed through the window. ‘There’s your grandma now. She always hears me coming in to land.’

Rosa pulled her heavy cloth bag tight to her chest. She had never met Grandma Nan before, and seeing the wild-haired old lady striding out of the trees towards them, Rosa feared the worst. She didn’t look like the sort who appreciated visitors.





‘Will you come back?’ asked Rosa hopefully.

‘Next delivery’s in a few months,’ said Tom.

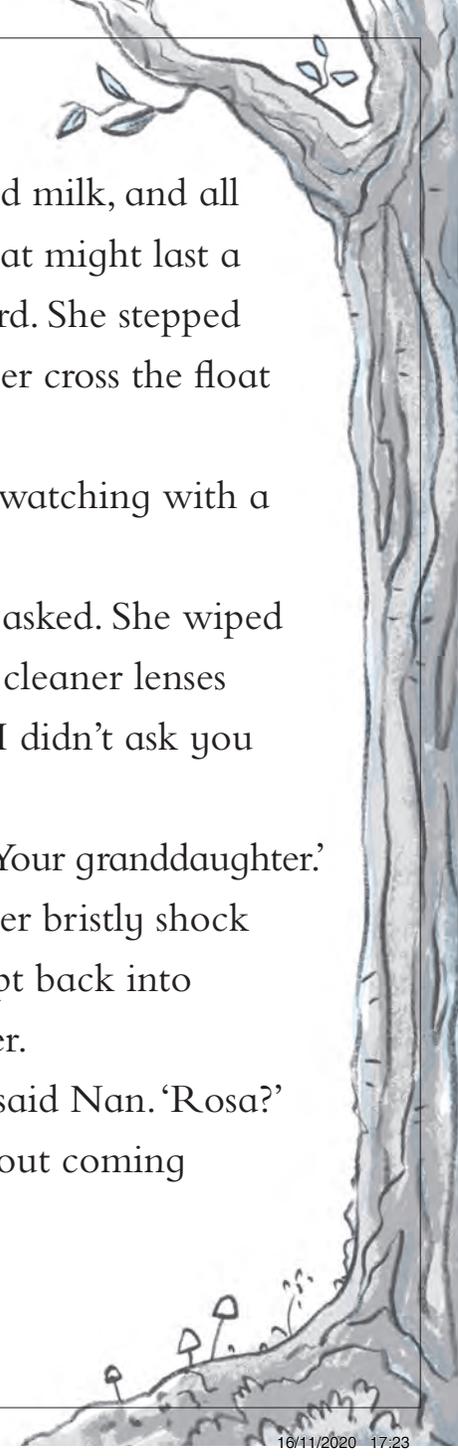
‘That long?’ said Rosa.

‘Uh-huh,’ he replied, getting out of the pilot’s seat. He pushed open the door and hung his legs out as the plane gradually stopped moving. A burst of fresh air entered the cockpit. ‘Nan looks after herself, but she always likes her winter supplies brought in early before the lake freezes over.’

‘It freezes over?’ said Rosa.

‘Oh, sure,’ said Tom, dropping out on to one of the long floats that took the place of landing wheels. ‘Come on.’

Rosa clambered over boxes filled with



tins of fruit and powdered milk, and all the sorts of dried food that might last a year or two in a cupboard. She stepped down, and Tom helped her cross the float on to dry land.

Grandma Nan stood watching with a puzzled air.

‘Who’s this then?’ she asked. She wiped her thick glasses, hoping cleaner lenses might change her view. ‘I didn’t ask you to bring me a girl, Tom.’

‘It’s Rosa,’ said Rosa. ‘Your granddaughter.’

Nan smeared down her bristly shock of hair – it promptly leapt back into place – and walked closer.

‘Granddaughter, eh?’ said Nan. ‘Rosa?’

‘I sent you a letter about coming to stay,’ said Rosa.

‘She did,’ said Tom. ‘I delivered it myself.’

Nan scrunched up her nose in thought.

‘I don’t remember reading a letter,’ she said. ‘But I do have a granddaughter –’

‘While you discuss this,’ said Tom with

a smile, ‘I best get all your supplies out and move on. There’s a storm rolling in from the north.’

‘I heard the crows warning of it this morning,’ said Grandma Nan.

‘Course you did, Nan,’ said Tom.





Nan peered down at Rosa. 'Are you sure you're my granddaughter?' she said, her eyes peeking over the top of her glasses. 'She's just a baby.'

Rosa caught sight of a naughty twinkle in her eyes. Was she playing a game?

'We have the same name,' said Rosa. 'You're a Wild. I'm a Wild.'

'You don't look very wild.'

Grandma Nan squeezed Rosa's arm in search of muscles. Her grip was as strong as a vice.

'And you don't *feel* too wild either,' said Nan. 'You're all skin and bone.'

Rosa pulled her arm free. 'Look. I am a Wild,' said Rosa, 'and —'

'And what?' said Nan.

Rosa was edging close to tears. 'And I don't have anywhere else to go,' she said.

Grandma Nan huffed. 'It's true. A girl's got to be in a real pickle to end up out here,' said Nan.

Tom placed the last box of supplies on the gravel.

'Right, that's it then!' he said. 'You'll be OK, Rosa?'

Rosa wasn't sure. 'What happens if we need help?' she asked.

'We won't need help,' said Nan with a shake of the head. 'I've lived out here for twenty-three years so far, and look at me! Still alive.'

'Told you,' said Tom. 'Nan looks after herself better than anyone. She'll see you right.'

And with a smile and a salute Tom was back in the plane. The engine kicked into life and within seconds he was motoring along the water, building up speed for take-off.

The plane rose into the air and disappeared over the mountain.



The world was silent once more.

‘Well, this is something,’ said Nan, thrusting her hands on to her hips.

Rosa slung her bag over her shoulder.

‘I *am* your granddaughter,’ said Rosa.

‘I know you are,’ said Nan. ‘You have my eyebrows.’

She picked up a crate of tins and marched off into the trees. ‘This way! And bring a box!’

Rosa grabbed a box of dried beans and hurried on. Birds were chattering in the trees, butterflies were whispering, and even the midges buzzing about her head seemed to have things to say. If Rosa hadn’t known better, she’d have thought they were all discussing her arrival. Little did she know there was a big surprise in store for her.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Writing a story about an animal hotel is a dream come true for me. I love learning about animals (my favourites are lemurs!) and I love drawing them, but I particularly love customer service.

So, as much as I'd like to stay at Hotel Flamingo and eat Madame Le Pig's amazing food, I would actually really like to work there. Yes, you heard right. Tidying the place up, planning and cooking meals, booking shows, making people happy oh, that would be better than anything!





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