

Canary

The hawk was magnificent. The rosy glow of the early morning sun softened its harsh outline and highlighted the golden fringes of its sombre feathers as it glided in a slow, sweeping, upward spiral lifted by a thermal of air created by the wakening village. Tucked under its belly were steel-hard, lethal talons. To anyone below, the hawk was merely a black dot against the pink-tinted sky. Only powerful binoculars could reveal its large, blunt wings, tipped with outstretched fingers of feathers, but the hawk could see each blade of grass in the fields below, each fingernail on a man's hand and the vulnerability of each potential victim.

It reached the apogee of its flight and looked down. A tiny glimpse of yellow far below betrayed a possible quarry so the hunter closed its wings and dived, eyes wide open – focused. Air rushed silently past as the earth zoomed closer and the yellow shape grew in size, but the intended prey passed from sight. The hawk pulled out of its stoop and began, once more, to glide upwards, patiently searching, patiently waiting.

Below lay the village of Radston. Timeless wattle and daub cottages topped with thatched roofs were scattered randomly across a grey plain. A wide, slowly flowing river passed to the north on its ceaseless journey to the nearby sea. Yellow lights flickering through the small windows indicated the beginnings of the morning's activities. Light clouds of smoke rose through the thatched roofs and drifted slowly upwards, gradually assuming the hues of the early morning. Solitary trees and rare clumps of red and yellow flowers struggled to relieve the grey monotony. An occasional bird sang a brief, intense song before moving on, ashamed of its temerity. Grey workers with brightly coloured tools thrust into their belts emerged from the dwellings and began to scurry around the village, following their timeless, ritualistic tasks.

At the northern edge of Radston was a slight, uneven ridge from which dark outlets opened onto a narrow, uneven track. Occasionally, bright blue packages of varying sizes spilled from these jagged orifices and fell onto the roadway in untidy heaps. They had been ejected from the Cavern, a large underground cave carved out of the living rock to contain the machinery which manufactured small, silver discs and packed them in the vivid-blue bags. These were the key to Radston's prosperity. The packages were gathered by the grey workers, loaded onto carts and driven along the narrow dirt tracks to the Broad Roadway and onwards to the Big House in the centre of the village.

The Big House was the heart of Radston. It was a large, imposing building which dominated, not only its surroundings, but the whole village and its life. The domed central section stood fifteen times the height of a man and contained a large, square platform surrounded by five semi-circular rostra. It was here that the grey workers gathered to receive their orders from the village elders. It was here that Holy Days were celebrated and justice was dispensed. The cartloads of blue packages flowed into the Big House through the north door. The goods were unpacked and placed in small storage areas separated from the central section by two arcades of timber pillars. The bags were then organised, and loaded onto carts which pulsed through the south door onto a diverging system of dirt tracks which led to scattered markets outside the village and southward to the harbour.

Andrew was enchanted by Canary. She was beautiful. Her translucent, yellow body was lit by an internal, golden glow which imbued her intricate feathers with a rich but delicate texture, endearing her to those who came near. Elegant wings were usually folded by her sides but when they were unfurled their supple strength became apparent and contrasted with the fragile grace they

displayed at rest. When she sang, vibrating trills hung on the air like a filigree of golden thread before gently unravelling and falling to earth like a soft shower of sparkling dew.

Canary's vulnerability was not immediately apparent. When she flew, her lithe beauty and intoxicating elegance attracted many followers but her naïve trust in the sincerity of her friends was exploited by those who envied her casual magnetism. These false disciples conspired to undermine the fragile essence of her psyche. While she soared above, her enemies lingered below and fed those nearby with morsels of poisoned insinuations until her companions ceased to emulate her innocent ascendancy and began to skulk in the shadows of her detractors, feeding from an easy diet of sniggering denigration.

Soon Canary flew alone. When she looked down she saw seething piles of interlocking malevolence. Clouds of sneering jibes rose to assault her ears. She struggled to understand the situation and wept at the fickle inconsistency of her former friends. Gradually her feathers lost their sheen; her head began to droop and she flew less frequently. Andrew was worried but he did not know how he could restore her self-esteem. He talked to her gently, encouragingly. Gradually her head lifted and she began to fly for longer periods but never again did she soar with her former carefree abandon. For a while she flew with a small group of similarly disheartened birds but she favoured their company only because she had no other. They, too, soon betrayed her.

She moved to another part of the country and became less close to Andrew. On the few times he saw her she seemed well but her feathers were dull and her head hung low. She moved frequently from one place to another, flying briefly with one flock before moving on to another, never desperately unhappy but never as carefree and splendid as before.

Andrew heard that she had eventually settled in a country far away and decided to visit her. He climbed onto his cart and took the reins. The iron-bound wheels slowly began to grind over the stony earth as the willing horse took the strain and began the journey towards Andrew's beloved Canary.

The way was long and arduous. At first there were many carts travelling over the flat, grey plain. Some kept pace with him; others came bustling past and rumbled into the distance. He wondered about his fellow travellers – their hopes, their fears, their desires, the reasons for their journeys. None thought of him.

He turned off the plain onto a narrow track which twisted downwards into a pool of sunlight and revealed a panorama of patchwork fields with straggling woodlands. Cows passively grazed the rich pastures; birds sang loudly from the hedgerows and wild flowers nodded from the grassy verge. Few other travellers now disturbed his thoughts as he began to relax and accept the motivations for his journey. But then he noticed a chilling of the air and a waning of the light.

Soon the track fell more steeply and followed a fast-flowing river which plunged over a torrential waterfall, thundering into a deep pool of disturbed blackness. He chilled to the mesozoic screams of lizard-birds which glided and swooped above the turbulent water. His renewed optimism faded and he gritted his teeth anew against the anticipated hazards of the remainder of his journey.

Eventually he neared Canary's home. The track wound steeply through a twisting, upward spiral which tested the determination of horse and driver before opening onto a desolate plateau. Andrew felt he had reached the top of the world. He looked back and marvelled at the steepness of the final climb. He observed the distant stretches of the river and saw the surrounding peaks reaching into canopies of congealing, black-tinged clouds. They moved forward across the plateau

until they came to a stone-built hovel. Andrew climbed out of the cart and tethered the horse to a small, stunted bush.

Canary was there to meet him. She smiled, but he was shocked by her appearance. Her feathers were straggly, dirty and unkempt. Her eyes were dull and lifeless. Her whole demeanour silently screamed her unhappiness – and she was held tightly in the clenched fist of a giant.

Her body twisted briefly as she moved against the giant's grip in an effort to become more comfortable. Andrew's eyes travelled from the cruel fist, past the rounded belly and narrowed shoulders to the shaven head. A savage mouth with sharp, uneven teeth was twisted into an ugly smile and the large, crooked nose had widely flaring nostrils. Andrew stared into the giant's eyes; they were bland, colourless, seemingly impenetrable but he sensed the seething malignancy that lay behind them.

The dwelling was squalid. The walls were built of rough stones, piled carelessly on top of each other. Gaps in the jumbled surfaces provided windows with only ragged curtains to protect the occupants from the weather. The doorway was small and the roof was mildewed thatch, rotting with neglect.

The giant, like a huge scorpion retreating into its lair, backed towards the doorway and squirmed into the tiny opening. Eventually only his hand which was still clutching Canary remained in view. She said goodbye. Andrew reluctantly turned and began to move away.

He was worried. He wanted to free Canary but she had not asked for help. Perhaps this was the life she wanted; perhaps the giant was kind to her. But the cold, black eyes and loathsome demeanour scared him, and made him fearful for Canary's future.

He decided to return and once more approach the hovel. He knocked on the door and was allowed to enter. The inside was small and bare and the floor was thick with dust. Canary was still in the grip of the giant who lay with his limbs grotesquely twisted in the narrow space. His ugly mouth grimaced an awkward smile but his cold eyes remained impassive. Canary wriggled awkwardly, and no words were spoken. Andrew slowly became angry at her plight – the dusty floor, the squalid surroundings, the contorted giant, but most of all at her feeble struggles against the cruel grip of her captor. As his feelings grew even more intense, he interlocked his fingers and pulled hard until his knuckles turned white. His anger finally erupted and he jumped at the giant striking him furiously with lashing fists. The giant roared loudly as purple lumps swelled on his face and ruptured into streams of flowing puss. Andrew wriggled through the doorway and fled before his foe could retaliate.

The giant was powerful and had important allies. Andrew knew he had broken the law and he feared punishment.

The journey home was arduous and he arrived at Radston exhausted. Waiting for him was a party of grey workers. Their brightly coloured tools were still in their belts but in their hands they held ropes which he knew were to restrain him. The giant had persuaded the authorities to arrest Andrew and try him for his crime.

As his mind swam into consciousness Andrew became aware of the warm smell of fumes from the fire mingling with the sweet scent of newly-lain straw. He was afraid. It took him a few moments to realise he was on the floor of the Big House. Surprisingly the ropes binding his hands and feet did not bite into his flesh but felt soft – almost gentle. His hands were bound in front, not

behind as was the usual custom with prisoners. A meal of bread, meat and ale had been placed by his side. Why were the grey workers being so gentle and understanding? He was not one of them, and he had committed a crime.

As he was finishing his food a delegation approached him. He rose and followed as they moved to the centre of the Big House where the court was gathered. The accuser stood on a rostrum to the right of the central platform where the assembled twelve were seated. A large crowd stood to the rear of the court officials. As the charges were read by the accuser, Andrew looked into the soul of each of the assembled twelve. Grey eyes softly returned empathic messages of understanding, but the situation remained bleak. The giant's deposition was read and Andrew could not deny its damning accuracy. The charges were serious, and he was guilty.

Then, unexpectedly, a woman from the crowd stepped onto the platform and moved to the front of the assembled twelve. Andrew knew her as Yotsy. Her appearance was different from the others. She was larger and wore a light-coloured, loose-fitting, red blouse and a pleated, blue skirt which fell just below her knees. Her short, grey hair was fine and delicately cut. Her gentle, blue eyes bathed Andrew with a warm, loving aura of affection and sympathy. She began to speak directly to him in a gentle, quiet voice which carried through the Big House. She spoke of the cogent force of love and compassion, of faith and hope, of communion and fellowship, of the power of good, of natural justice. Finally she stopped. There was a moment of intense silence, then one of the twelve shouted, "Free him!". The phrase was echoed by another and another until all had voiced their agreement. Andrew's saviour walked towards the crowd and melted into them as they moved towards the doorway. The accuser approached him and loosened his bonds. Andrew was left alone in the Big House to contemplate the strange circumstances of his liberation.

However, he still feared the giant. He knew his enemy could command the forces of nature and had many powerful allies which he would use to exact dreadful revenge on him and the village of Radston.

In a place far away a young conscript shuddered with anticipation as he stood in his brief underwear. He was frightened and did not know why he was there, but there were rumours that a powerful giant in another land had requested troops to fight a just cause. The boy looked at the sergeant on the other side of the counter, puzzled by his non-oriental appearance; he had not seen a westerner before. A uniform and a fearsome rifle were passed over and he moved to a corner to inspect them. The main garment was bright blue and reminded him of the boiler suit he had worn when he had worked in the factory. He pulled it over his head, wondering at its thickness, and fastened the brass buttons, fumbling over their newness. Next he sat on the floor and put on the thick, grey, woollen socks. The boots were knee length, bright yellow and made of rubber. Lastly he placed the helmet on his head, moving it backwards and forwards and from side to side until it felt comfortable. He fastened the battery pack to a loop on the back of the tunic and attached it to the lead from the lamp on the front of the helmet. The formidable rifle frightened him. He handled it awkwardly as he moved to the door.

The bright sun assaulted his eyes as he stepped onto the parade ground. The heat sucked the sweat from his body as he joined the other conscripts and walked towards the waiting helicopter. Once again he felt very afraid.

He stood in line until it was his turn to climb the steps into the body of the helicopter and eventually took his place on a hard, metal bench which ran the length of the fuselage. A sergeant strapped him into a harness and there he sat, listening to the throbbing of the engines.

There was a gradual increase in the intensity of the vibrations and then a sickening lurch as the helicopter rose from the ground and banked steeply. The sound of the rotors steadied to a constant thrumming and the conscript studied his fellow soldiers. All were young. Some were beginning to relax within the constraints of their harnesses but others sat nervously upright, bracing themselves against the throbbing chassis of their temporary confinement.

The journey seemed interminable but eventually a lessening of the vibrations indicated that the helicopter was descending. A bone-shaking crunch ended the first part of his ordeal. He released his harness and wearily forced his cramped limbs to unfold and propel him towards the opening doors. The freezing air was unexpected and chilled his already frozen soul to absolute zero.

Flurries of snow assaulted him as he followed the others from the landing circle. A harsh voice ordered him to switch on his helmet light and drop to the ground. He fell onto his stomach and began to crawl, looping like a caterpillar, along the snow-covered track which wound an oval course around a central, conical hill.

In another place and time, a youth looked up as the faint sound of a regular drum beat reached his ears. A longboat was nosing towards the mouth of the fiord on a profitable mission to a distant land in a future era. The youth looked at the vessel with an intense, almost insane longing, wishing he was on board, beginning a journey which would satisfy his lust for blood and bring him riches and fame. With a strong sense of familiarity he lifted a heavy steel sword and tested its weight before swinging it violently over his head. He roared a war cry and ran furiously down the slope towards the water.

The next day he stood head down, disappointed at the soft, light feel of the wooden sword he held loosely in his right hand. The replica weapon was deemed necessary as his training was about to begin. Facing him was an opponent who was older and bigger but whose frightened eyes and shaking hand exposed the essence of his cowardice.

The youth attacked suddenly, striking a sickening blow to his opponent's left temple, knocking him to the ground, where he lay still, hoping for mercy. But the attacker uttered a chilling, low pitched threat, announced his intention to kill and leapt forward hitting again and again at the head of the prone figure, stopping only when his instructor pulled him away. He uttered a shrill battle cry as he looked contemptuously at his opponent lying face down on the ground, limbs twitching and blood trickling from his ear – in his world there was no room for weaklings.

A week later the youth's right hand again gripped the satisfying weight of a heavy, metal sword. On his left arm was a brightly decorated shield, and on his head he could feel the protection of a Viking helmet. On this occasion he faced his instructor.

They faced each other, circling cautiously, each looking for an advantage. The youth attacked first, striking fiercely at the instructor's shield. The supposed mentor was taken by surprise at the strength of the blows, and his knees buckled slightly before he recovered sufficiently to deliver a series of thrusts to the legs which were successfully parried by the youngster. And so the fight continued, neither combatant in the ascendancy until the ageing instructor began to tire. Sensing this, the youth launched a final attack which forced his opponent to his knees. Blow after blow was struck on the upturned shield until desperate shouts for mercy were eventually heeded by the triumphant victor.

The youth knew he was now good enough to take his place on the next longboat. This was leaving soon to fulfil the request of a giant, in another time, in a place far away.

Andrew decided that Canary should be returned to Radston and sent word to her. She agreed and told him of a time when the giant would be away.

He again undertook the long journey; this time with a larger wagon to transport Canary's possessions. The final spiralling track was almost too much for the tiring horse but eventually they reached the plateau and were outside the dreadful hovel which Canary called "home". She greeted him sadly. Together they loaded her possessions onto the cart and began the return journey, travelling in silence. Both agreed that the rescue was necessary but neither was happy at the reasons for it, and both feared the giant's retribution. Eventually the wagon rolled into Radston, and their arrival was met with an empty silence.

Canary took up residence in a hut a short distance from where Andrew lived and they began to settle down. But they still feared the giant's retribution. They decided, therefore, to dig a hole in the floor of Canary's hut and cover it with a framework of wicker, hidden by rushes. This was to be a hiding place if the giant attacked. Life continued amicably and memories of Canary's recent horrors began to fade.

Some weeks later, on a beautiful sunny day, Andrew decided to travel the short distance to one of his favourite places – the evocative, mystical shore at Bondicar. The way took him by the shallow, slow moving burn before passing under the bridge into the Green Field. Tussocks of spiky marsh grass lined the path through the low-lying meadow. A scramble up the cinder bank brought him onto the High Track which led to the first stile. He climbed over this and leapt into the Cow Field. For the first time in many months he felt at peace and memories of the giant receded.

The narrow path through the Cow Field was pockmarked with hoof prints and undulated through a pasture distorted by folds of subsidence caused by ancient earth. As he turned into one of the blind hollows he was confronted by a herd of black and white cows straddling the path. He felt alarmed as he saw dark, unfocused eyes, staring into nothingness as though envisaging future, calamitous misfortunes.

The herd had always been in the Cow Field, and as a child Andrew had disliked using the path when they were blocking the way, fearing they might attack. Occasionally he had fled when one had lowered its head and moved towards him. When he had grown older he had become less afraid and knew that if he walked boldly towards them they would move from his way. But whenever he crossed the field he always looked to see where the cows were standing and felt uncomfortable when their heads turned to follow his progress.

He approached the herd and waited for them to jerk their heads and jump sideways from the path. But they remained still – unnaturally so. Their tails hung stiffly, pointing to the ground; their jaws were unmoving. A chill spread down Andrew's spine as he slowly realised their eyes were beginning to focus on him. Badly frightened, he turned and ran, stumbling down the path in a desperate need to escape the portentous stares.

Becoming calmer he began to contemplate the strange phenomenon. For some reason he thought of the giant, but surely this could not be the work of his distant enemy. With difficulty he shrugged off his unease, climbed the second stile and entered his magical world.

He could already smell the evocative scent of the salt and seaweed. The shrill cries of oyster catchers and assertive shouts of herring gulls were underpinned by the low murmur of gently breaking waves. He scrambled over the bank and passed through the Hollow which was littered with rabbit droppings. His feet felt the sponginess of the grass as he followed the narrow path between bushes of delicate, azure-coloured cranesbill. Soon he came to the Sandpit, a naturally occurring, saucer-shaped depression in the dunes. Childishly he jumped into the soft, welcoming sand, somersaulted and lay prone. He pushed his fingers through the white, gentle upper layer and felt the cold wetness beneath. After a while he pushed himself to his feet and climbed out; the strength of his legs felt drained by the softly, shifting sand. He walked to the edge of the low cliff and felt the gentle chilling of the sea breeze. The tide was halfway; this was how he liked it. To his left he could see the waves breaking gently over the inner rocks of the Bondicars. To his right the Hadstoncars remained covered but straight ahead was open sand. Small groups of wading birds scuttled along the edge of the incoming tide. On the sea in the distance were salmon cobbles, waiting for the tide to drag the fish into their nets.

He walked farther along the path until the ground levelled and he was able to step onto the shore. The dry sand sucked at his shoes until he passed the high-tide mark onto the hard, wet compacted beach which had been rippled by the waves of the last retreating tide. He was almost overcome as every sense was assaulted by the incredible synergy of the wonderful place.

Many people had been attracted to Bondicar that day by the beautiful summer sunshine. The grey workers had discarded their work clothes, their tool belts and their bustling habits. Most were sunbathing in the dunes but some were playing games on the beach – football, cricket, rounders. Others swam in the sea. Andrew had seldom seen so many people there and he absorbed the sight with a feeling of contented well-being. Then the dreadful events began.

Andrew noticed that the air had become a little cooler. He saw a small wisp of grey smoke swirling upwards. It was joined by others, emanating from the same point. The disparate strands began to coalesce, forming a rapidly growing bank of darkening cloud. Soon the scene was tinged with ghostly green as the sun was obscured by the ominous threat. Gradually the grey workers stopped their play and stared at the phenomenon, pondering its purpose. The air became infused with an almost tangible, electrical charge which sent cold fingers of fear down Andrew's back. Then a round column of jagged lightning bolts hissed from the cloud and struck the ground with stunning, blinding force. A thunderous roar followed as the cloud exploded into a torrent of driving rain which hit Andrew like a hail of wet bullets. Panic spread through the grey workers as they ran for shelter, screaming.

Andrew realised that this was the work of the giant searching for Canary, so he ran as fast as he could through the storm towards Radston. By the time he reached home the rain had stopped, but the air remained highly charged and tinged with green. He burst into Canary's house and ushered her into the subterranean hiding place; then he waited for the giant's attack.

For a long time nothing happened. Andrew cautiously emerged and sensed the electrified air as he walked towards Canary's home. No-one was to be seen but the sense of imminent danger was acute. Then he felt, rather than heard, a slowly increasing, rumbling noise and saw a ludicrous sight which was simultaneously chilling and laughable: in the distance were the black and white cows from the Cow Field, walking upright, wearing large, black spectacles and carrying efficient-looking bows and arrows. The fearsome vision was made frighteningly real when an arrow zipped past him

and smacked into the wall of Canary's hut. Badly frightened, he scrambled inside where he waited, sitting cross-legged on the wicker frame which covered her hiding place. Soon more arrows thudded with frightening force against Canary's wall. Andrew sat impassively; he could not accept that the cows were a threat. Several arrows penetrated the walls but fell harmlessly to the floor, their force spent.

Soon the attack passed. Andrew cautiously emerged and inspected the damage. He was pleased to see it was superficial – the first attack had failed.

A week later Andrew woke with a shiver in a place he did not recognise, and was surprised to find he was standing upright. A cold wind gnawed through his thin clothing and he could see nothing. Despite the freezing air his feet were sinking into the glutinous, clinging, muddy ground and he struggled to keep upright. Suddenly his vision cleared revealing a bizarre scene. Through flurries of snow he saw a strange, cone-shaped hill around which stretched a muddy track which looked as though it had been scoured by giant caterpillars. Ominous shafts of light were cutting through the semi darkness. They were emanating from brightly coloured, yellow helmets worn by soldiers who were crawling swiftly away from him. Their vivid blue uniforms were spattered with mud but their high powered rifles remained lethally free from obstruction. He quickly realised that once they rounded the hill and began their return they would see him. Fear gripped his soul and he fled rapidly. As soon as he reached firm ground the scene swirled dizzily around him and he was back in Radston.

He realised that the soldiers were a threat to Canary and once more hid her below the floor of her hut.

A few days later Andrew was awoken by fearful cries of terror. He quickly ran outside and saw ominous shafts of light slicing through the night sky and realised that Radston was being attacked by the yellow-helmeted soldiers. He rushed to Canary's hut and, once more, sat cross-legged on the wicker cover and waited calmly, hoping the soldiers would somehow overlook the hiding place.

The tramp of booted feet grew louder and the door suddenly burst open. A light sliced through the dark, bouncing off the walls and illuminating the interior. Andrew looked into the eyes of a frightened, oriental youth. The conscript stood still for a moment, breathing heavily. Then, with wildly trembling hands, he raised the rifle and took aim. Andrew stared into the opening of the shaking barrel without fear. The soldier did not pull the trigger but lowered the weapon, turned and ran out of the hut into the darkness. The cries and the thuds of heavy boots began to fade and soon all was still.

Andrew sat for a long time, not daring to believe that the attack was over and Canary had once more been spared.

Several weeks passed peaceably by, but one morning, just as the sun was rising, Andrew sensed a growing wave of unease rapidly spreading through the village. He flung open his door and hurried outside. The grey workers were standing in anxious groups, looking towards the river. The dreadful tension was tangible but the cause of the disquiet was not apparent. Yotsy, the grey worker who defended Andrew at his trial, detached herself from her companions and began to walk

purposefully towards the river. Andrew followed, but the rest of the workers stayed clustered together, afraid of leaving the comforting proximity of their friends.

The sky, as it had on the day of the dreadful cow attack, assumed a portentous, ghostly-green colour. The pair saw frightened grey workers from other villages running towards them with fearful, widely-staring eyes. When they passed, Andrew and Yotsy saw that some had piles of brushwood on their backs while others had two planks of wood in the shape of a diagonal cross. They briefly pondered this strange phenomenon before topping the rise from where they could see the wideness of the river as it flowed majestically into the sea. Their hearts froze as they saw what they dreaded most; the estuary was filled with Viking longboats.

Neither Yotsy nor Andrew panicked. They turned and walked at a steady pace back towards Radston, each absorbed in their own thoughts; each knowing that the village could not withstand a Viking attack. They believed that this was the end of their community, their homes and possibly their lives – the giant was about to exact a dreadful revenge. Andrew arrived at Canary's hut and quietly hid her in the pit below the floor. He then sat on the rush covering and awaited the final attack.

He remained within his calm cocoon, listening to the sounds of panic outside as the villagers fled from the deadly threat of their latest attackers. Soon the village fell quiet. Andrew assumed that Radston was now deserted and the Viking arrival was imminent. As he waited, he thought of his love for Canary and the events which had led to the present, fateful situation. He thought, with disgust, of her life with the giant; he thought of his journey to rescue her and of his enemy's fearsome determination to exact revenge.

Eventually he woke from his trance and discovered that a great deal of time had elapsed without the realisation of their perceived fate. He opened the door and stepped outside into a deserted, silent village. It was a long time before he concluded that the Vikings had aborted their attack. There was no rational explanation for this as the village had been at their mercy. Thankfully, he released Canary from her hiding place.

Slowly memories of the troubles faded into an indistinct past. Canary shook off her fears of the giant's possible retribution and once more became a free spirit who flew high without restraint. The grey workers resumed their busy rituals and Radston again became a timeless haven of peaceful endeavour.

The hawk felt the air swirling through its magnificent feathers as it soared upwards, wings outstretched, cold eyes searching below. With supreme acuity it perceived, far below, a tiny, vulnerable spot of yellow. It folded its wings and dropped like a stone towards the earth. It unsheathed its talons and struck Canary with stunning efficiency.