

**Zdenka Bilobrk**

# **The Forest Realm**

*The Forest Realm*

by Zdenka Bilobrk

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## Foreword

There's a nice little shadowy path, ideal for serene and contemplative strolls, not far away from my house. Almost every day I'm there, communing with nature, spirits, my inner self or who knows what forces that reside inside our souls or manifest themselves as results of intellectual, creative or psychological processes induced by reflective bouts of the mind. Anyway, one morning, on a lonely walk down the path, I was overwhelmed by a need to write about the place, wax poetic about its splendour and abundance of life, in all its glory. On one side of the path there flows the mighty Cetina River and the other side is occupied by a small forest called Bakracica. The forest is a magical place, at least according to my perceptive faculties. It is home to many species of birds and other animals. There these magnificent creatures are sheltered from even the most enthusiastic of hunters because the forest has surrounded itself with a protective ring in the form of thick and thorny bushes, thus denying access to cowardly bipeds carrying lethal extensions of their one inch wonders.

When I got home from that morning walk I started writing the first chapter of *The Forest Realm*. Some weeks later it was done and I was quite satisfied with the result: I had described what I wanted to describe and my soul rested content. I had no wish to expand the story. A few days later my kids told me that they had not seen magpies around for quite some time. They were right. Over the following few days, on my strolls down the path, I noticed the same thing. It was as if the magpies had simply vanished into thin air. That inspired me to write more chapters, develop the story and introduce a touch of bitterness to the narrative.

It should come as no surprise then that the main protagonist is a young magpie. He is a child of the forest, inextricably connected, both physically and spiritually to everything in it. He is also a rebel and adventurer at heart and emphatic to a fault. After many adventures he falls in love and this is where the source of his rebellious nature and his inability to conform is revealed: his unflinching belief in love. And this is what the poem is about. Love and all the good things the emotion has to offer to all those who truly embrace its precepts.

## Chapter I

Ruckus reigned in the forest today,  
The "Cuckoo affair" was the cause of the affray,  
The little sparrow in wonderment glared,  
As the larks their songs joyously blared.

In happiness the Sun did rise  
For the forest dwellers of every guise,  
Feathers rare and trills transcendent,  
Avian families with plumages resplendent.

Mrs Lark had an early start,  
Ode to Joy on her beak; her feathers smart,  
Parting wistfully with her beloved looking glass  
She swooped down Songbird Alley with elegance and class.

At Mrs Pecker's humble abode  
The flow of blueberry wine and gossip never slowed,  
At length Mrs Pecker walked Mrs Lark to the door,  
Where they whispered secrets for half an hour more.

She flew back home singing the melody expressive,  
But alas! On her bed of straw she saw eggs impressive,  
The words 'Drink of Joy' she could not intone,  
Her voice now lost she fainted with a groan.

Instantly many a neighbour at Mrs Lark's side did appear,  
All devotees of medical dramas, it soon became clear.  
Forthwith they presented sugar cubes galore  
And Mrs Lark rose promptly from the floor.

The news spread like wildfire,  
Reaching every forest flier.  
Rabbit the postman did not wait,  
To Old Owl he wanted the stories to relate.

He impaired Mrs Magpie's plight, right of the bat,  
'Cause about every family he could knowingly chat,  
Since Mrs Magpie's been caring for the kids alone  
Her house has been a complete battle zone.

Her husband did a runner quite some time ago;  
He's now living with his mistress in another borough.  
The baby magpies are up to mischief every day,

Each and every one of them a full-fledged tearaway.

The oldest one is a school dropout,  
With a rough crowd he's hanging about.  
The thicket is their stomping ground  
And there, it's been said, outrages abound.

Rabbit the postman, to be sure, had heard the story from Mrs Pig  
And also that her own son was a veritable bigwig;  
He won a talent show and in a movie he played a role  
And ever since he's been under the studio's control.

His girth the motion picture company forced him to lose  
And stories about him are always breaking news;  
He is at the gym, sweating, every day of the week  
And dieting often to maintain his physique.

On account of his fame he's been promised a donation  
To build a sports centre for the forest population.  
Rabbit the postman talked and talked  
But Old Owl was not a bit shocked.

“Dear Rabbit,” Old Owl said,  
“Your story is nothing new, I'm afraid.  
An authority figure the baby magpies require,  
Without their father they've gone haywire,

I've been on this earth a long time and I've seen it all,  
Saying that Mrs Magpie is guilty; I wouldn't make that call.  
She's got sticky fingers, that is true,  
But this other thing; even for her that's taboo.”

“Words with no basis in fact, that's boloney,”  
The Owl said with acrimony,  
“There's so much you still have to learn,  
As for Mrs Pig, I'll teach her the meaning of stern,”

Declared the Owl in a manner stark.  
“I'll visit Mrs Lark before it gets too dark.  
Now I have to lie down, get some shut eye  
Because the sun is still very high,

Daylight does not agree with me  
On account of this cataract, don't you see?”  
Rabbit the postman laid its ears back and legged it fast,

And spread Owl's harsh wisdom through the forest vast.

All these years he's been carrying the mail,  
Never once to arrive on time did he fail,  
Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night  
Ever stayed Rabbit the postman from doing his job right.

In the time honoured fashion he'd relax after work  
At the sauerkraut restaurant Grove by the Fork  
Where there's always love and cabbage tastes great  
And where happiness flows from the plate!

The novelty of Mrs Lark's distress soon dissipated  
And so the guests her abode decorously vacated.  
All by her lonesome Mrs Lark had to cope,  
Staring at the eggs with nothing to do but mope.

Dark already was the night  
When Owl started preparing for her flight.  
She perched her spectacles on top of her nose,  
Put her coat on, hooted, and into the sky she rose.

Her sense of timing was right on the money,  
She knew Mrs Lark wouldn't do anything funny,  
Her predictions proved absolutely correct  
Because with the eggs did Mrs Lark emotionally connect.

Kind of heart Mrs Lark has always been;  
She protected the eggs and the life within.  
It was only the right thing to do  
And besides, she was a bit lonely too.

It's been a while since she's been in her prime  
And it'd bring her joy to sing a nursery rhyme.  
Be the eggs from Mrs Magpie or Mrs Cuckoo  
The hatchlings will be birds, through and through.

A formal dinner table Mrs Lark set  
And Old Owl a royal treatment did get;  
Choice dishes galore upon to dine  
And buckets of the best forest wine.

Assiduously they studied Adoption law  
Until on every article they could with authority draw.

Natural Law or popularly known as Forest law exists  
(older than Roman Law)

Which on the rights of every baby bird absolutely insists.  
Right to attend the forest school and knowledge gain  
And by their loving parents to be sheltered from pain.

Dotting grandmas making wool socks for them in wintertide,  
Loving grandpas showing them across the air how to glide.  
That's been the way of every civilization  
From the human to the ant nation.

There is even a new, strange and curious fad in the human domain:  
Parents won't let kids leave home until the age of forty they attain.  
And when finally children do leave the nest  
Parents from worry can never again rest.

Pursuant to Forest Law, happy was the story's denouement  
As the mother of ten hatchlings would Mrs Lark henceforth carry on  
And Rabbit the Postman was their uncle; the conclusion foregone.  
Old Owl the aunt did the woollen socks provide  
And Rabbit taught them down the slopes how to slide.

Peace was restored to the forest at the base of the mountain high;  
A happy home to all the god's creatures that can fly.  
The story of Mrs Magpie and her young I still need to disclose  
And with that in mind the following chapter I will now compose.

## Chapter II

Over the eastern horizon the sun appeared in a joyous display,  
Shining gently on many avians gathered in a vast array.  
Under the old oak tree they all chirped and one young swallow  
Spoke of her adventure and in the attention she did wallow.

From the land of Africa she returned the day before  
And brought back pictures by the score,  
Of the Sphinx, deserts vast and pyramids high  
And the oases where for water she had to fly.

The skills needed for the Africa trip  
She acquired through a long apprenticeship.  
The subject of aeronautics she repeatedly failed  
Until each and every definition she correctly nailed.

Wind velocity and various climes,  
Tides of the sea and moon times,  
An A in Geography she earned  
'Cause by heart the following she learned:

States, capital cities and land masses,  
Seas and shores and mountain passes,  
Gravity, relativity and quantum locking  
She now knows better than professor Hawking.

The birds listened to her tale in awe,  
And the little squirrel dropped her jaw.  
When the swallow finished her story  
There was no end to remarks laudatory.

"I'd like to go to Africa, fly far and wide,  
Because nowhere but in this forest did I ever reside!"  
From the tree top roared Young Magpie,  
With self-confidence and a glint in his eye.

"I'm not afraid of flying, I'm not afraid of heights,  
And I fly so fast no flyer can keep me in his sights.  
I want to behold mirages wondrous and oases plush  
And into Egypt's hydro plants I want to see the water rush.

There are so many beautiful cities in the world, big and small,  
And I want to fly over and gaze at them all,  
I don't even need money for this journey long."



Concluded Young Magpie in a voice determined and strong.

The words roused Mr Hedgehog from his coil  
And his temper slowly started to boil:  
“Young Magpie, you fool, what you speak of is madness,  
This folly of yours will only bring you sadness!

You will never reach the continent dark,  
My words all of you should mark.  
Young fool, you’ll not even fly as far as the mountain top;  
If you do manage that all of my spikes I’ll crop.

And I’ll give you another piece of my mind:  
I am completely fed up with you and your kind.  
Your devilry keeps half the forest awake,  
All the time nothing but mischief you make.”

“Mr Hedgehog, seems to me you’ve been eating again  
Those mushrooms that psychedelic compounds contain.  
That’s why you cannot fall asleep and don’t know up from down,  
The mountain is to the north you silly old clown!

Now you’ve got nothing to say  
And I’m telling you it’s as plain as day:  
With a skin job for hair do,  
You’ll look mightily cool.

So, off to the barber old fool, ‘cause I’m leaving now.  
As soon as I reach Egypt I’ll send word, I vow.”  
Young Magpie waved everyone goodbye and vanished into the blue  
And sombrely south, towards the sea, he flew...

Mr Pecker started work around midday  
And all the birds scattered their own way,  
It was time for lunch and every creature agreed:  
“At least once a day a hefty meal you need.”

Young Magpie painstakingly his course did chart,  
Only to realise that there was an ache in his heart;  
He never thought he’d miss the forest, his cherished birthplace,  
But now, haunting images of his brothers his eyes with tears did grace.

Still he flew on, stalked by shadows of the past,  
He saw the face of his teacher in the skies overcast  
And remembered longingly how in the days olden,  
She hated his plumage rich and earring golden.

He recalled Old Owl and her demeanour dour,  
And how the atmosphere in her classroom was always sour.  
But no one could ever fault her logic cold  
And all the wisdom she kept, centuries old.

The weather matched Young Magpie's frame of mind;  
He couldn't see a thing in low cloud, flying blind.  
Then the clouds vanished and a multitude of islands appeared below;  
The glorious sight erased his tears and he landed on an isle to send a postcard from the archipelago.

In bold letters he wrote: THE FOREST VAST AND SPACIOUS  
HOME TO ALL BIRDS OF DISPOSITION KIND AND GRACIOUS  
This is not exactly Egypt, but it's just as pleasing to the eye,  
Kind regards from your loving Young Magpie.

Sender: YOUNG MAGPIE  
FROM THE ISLAND OF MLJET, CROATIA

Young Magpie stayed on the island for quite a while  
And there he was put through many a trial,  
Battles fierce he waged and the island's liberator he became  
And in the next chapter I'll tell you all about his fame...

### Chapter III

The sun set deep into the boundless expanse of teal,  
Aiming its rays at the rugged mountain top in a display surreal,  
The island slowly cooled from the sweltering heat of the day  
And sweet enchanting odours drifting in the air the presence of olive trees did betray.

Young Magpie sat on a tree with a dominating view over the city  
Hoping to see, gliding through the air, a hen looking pretty.  
His eyes caught nothing but the blue sea;  
A few fishing boats and a ferry approaching the quay.

Every human was engaged in his favourite frivolity;  
Some were barbequing sardines of the highest quality,  
Some were lazily returning from the beach,  
And others rested their bodies in cafes, practicing their speech.

Young Magpie continued to watch the human world go by,  
The sights made him contentedly sigh.  
He stretched his lithe body and powerful wings  
And momentarily started snoring as if playing an instrument of strings.

At the break of dawn he opened his eyes  
And went flyabout as the sun ever higher did rise.  
Not a soul in sight from the wood to the rock face;  
It seemed no flying creature lived in the entire place.

The ferry again lazily inched its way to the shore,  
Leaving ripples of foam in its wake, just like the evening before.  
The sun shone in a translucent glow,  
Bathing in warmth everything below.

Young Magpie immediately learned the ropes,  
As if he was born on the coast and not on the mountain slopes,  
He helped fishermen on the pier, mending nets until the afternoon knell  
And then he rested on the gentle bobbing waves, moving with the swell.

The gulls watched in wonder this newcomer in their midst;  
To dub him a strange creature they could not resist,  
Be it for the earring golden or the plumage rich,  
The gulls decided that Young Magpie in his brain had a glitch.

Young Magpie befriended the locals all along the coastline;  
He hung out with kids, tourists and creatures feline,  
Only the grannies did not like his company much,

Saying he's a sorry spectacle of a bird as such.

The grannies took pity on the poor soul,  
And gave him dinner every day in a bowl,  
It was just a matter of days, they suspected  
Until Young Magpie by carnivores got dissected.

Young Magpie's story did the new world's shores encompass;  
There the strange pictures caused quite a rumpus,  
Showing kids, Young Magpie and a donkey  
Posing together by boats in a manner swanky.

Summer slowly came to an end  
The island into tranquillity did blend.  
The last tourist away on the ferry did sail;  
On the pier there was only Young Magpie and a forgotten rail.

Somewhat low in spirits, despondent and tired,  
Remembering how by the photographers he'd been admired,  
Young Magpie returned to his branch to rest his weary head  
When a fiend appeared in front of him, filling his heart with dread.

A strange little brute of constitution vile  
With sharp claws and eyes hostile,  
They faced one another; the standoff the passage of time did belie  
And then the demon charged with a shriek and a cry.

Young Magpie parried and fainted with skill,  
Many times he'd been through that drill  
When he'd defended birds of stature small,  
From predators fast, strong and tall.

He rushed forth and hammered the fiend with his beak  
And into a screech of pain turned the beast's shriek,  
The monster fell to the ground and did not stir  
And a realisation terrible did to Young Magpie occur.

"So that's why there's no flyers in the island's territory  
Neither songbirds, nor those of persuasion migratory."  
Young Magpie flew out to sea  
Where gulls were resting on the waves, carefree.

"You're somewhat gloomy today, aren't you Young Magpie,  
Why don't you Mr Donkey with your company gratify?  
It must be that your acquaintance has a mongoose met?!  
My oh my, so that's it, I'm so smart and I deserve the epithet!"

Thus the leader of the group exclaimed,  
The biggest gull in the flock, called the Famed.  
His witticism made all the gulls with laughter howl and crow,  
So hard that even tears into the sea started to flow.

The leader of the flock his name acquired by one glorious deed,  
When on legions of sardines in the bay he did feed.  
The feat quickly became nothing short of legendary;  
It was said no other gull's stomach so much food could carry.

So exasperated with the nonsense did Young Magpie become  
And to righteous indignation he had no recourse but to succumb.  
He vociferated resolutely his disdain  
In a language damning and plain:

“You seagulls! You're so big and yet so pathetic,  
Only towards gluttony your attitude is not apathetic!  
Just like humans...one cannot tell whose avarice is more voracious;  
All those bipeds can think of is money and how to become more predacious!

To their character there is no strength; and moral fibre they don't possess.  
The fact that they're descendants of the fierce Neretva pirates they choose to repress!  
Queen Teuta's patrimony with mongooses they polluted  
Only to have this proud island by these fiends thoroughly looted.

If only I had your size and strength for about half an hour,  
Clean of the demons the land I'd scour.  
I'd chase them all into the sea to drown,  
And their hegemony of this island thus bring down.”

The seagulls listened to Young Magpie with due attention;  
The Famed replied: “I applaud your idealism but I have to mention  
We don't care for ideals and we don't do things for free,  
If you want my help then that gold thing in your nose is my fee!”

In front of the mongoos stronghold, at break of day, a vast host of seagull warriors its appearance made,  
Commanded by the splendid figure of the Famed the army promptly siege to the bastion laid.  
Wearing the earring golden the Famed to the leader of the mongooses shouted:  
“Parley and hear my terms or have your evil horde mercilessly routed!”

The call to arms the Famed had sent the previous night;  
All seagulls were to prepare for a furious fight,  
And gather at the appointed place armed to the teeth  
So that they could all deserve a laurel wreath.

The Famed made perfectly clear he'd brook no demur  
And proclaimed there'd be penalties harsh for every poseur,  
As well as for those who their weight refuse to pull  
And all those whose bellies beyond capacity were full.

He warned that slackers would be swiftly prosecuted  
And thieves and crooks out of the tribe booted.  
Every flyer in the elite squadron of Fleet Air Arm of the Famed's force was a flying ace,  
Always tightly keeping his position in the finger four formation with consummate skill and grace!

There too was a dive bomber squadron in the order of battle;  
Their brief to precision bomb and thus every enemy to rattle.  
With a huge trebuchet the ground gull force was equipped  
And a lot of marine offal was prepared from the war machine to be flipped.

Before marching his troops to war the Famed gave an inspired battle speech:  
"Seagulls! Now it has come the time when bravery and commitment I need to preach.  
The three Norns of fate our destiny into the tree have carved,  
So let's finish the mongooses quickly before we get too starved!"

The leader of the grizzly creatures had no choice but surrender of the kind unconditional sign,  
And so after centuries long an end had come to the Mongoose dominion malign.  
The subjects of the evil empire with Vaiśravaṇa their connection had divorced;  
The penalty for the sin was that into exile by the Famed they were now forced.

The end of the rule of the Herpestidae dynasty was completely anticlimactic  
Due to, according to history books, the Famed's brilliant negotiating tactic.  
But the real hero, it is today known in the forest vast and world at large,  
Is Young Magpie and no academic need his deeds enlarge.

His role in the liberation of the Island of Mljet is globally appreciated  
And into many languages the story of his exploits has been translated.  
In Hong Kong, humans built him a statue right next to that of Bruce Lee;  
Throngs of people visit the waterfront every day the two heroes to see.

Young Magpie has become the symbol of bravery,  
The embodiment of defiance, hope and resistance to slavery.  
His ideals live in the hearts of the living and aware  
And his deeds are a call to greatness to those who dare.

## Chapter IV

In the forest it was a time of great sorrow and heartache;  
Swallows were readying to fly south at daybreak,  
Their good friends, beloved nests and cherished thickets and groves they needed to forsake,  
That morning away they flew, leaving the spectre of cold and dreary winter in their wake.

Many a flock of swallows descended to a low altitude when the island of Mljet came into view,  
And each and every one of the long winged creatures a kiss in greeting to Young Magpie blew,  
One little streamlined shape performed a loop and separated from the flock;  
It was that same swallow from the forest and she landed on a rock.

For six long and arduous hours she had been journeying straight,  
And now to Young Magpie she wanted some of her time to dedicate,  
Well wishes from his family she did convey,  
And then glided southwards across the bay.

Loquacious and convivial by his very nature Young Magpie always was;  
Five days and five nights with the gulls he'd celebrated hard without pause.  
He was the hero of the hour, nobody that could deny,  
But seeing what the victory boiled down to made him want to cry.

It was all about eating and nibbling, grub and food,  
Followed by chewing and gobbling, chow and turpitude.  
What I am doing here? Young Magpie solemnly contemplated  
And resolved to leave and have the decision remain unstated.

Adult humans he did not much care for; their true nature he knew only too well.  
Nobody had any inkling he was about to abscond but that was his wish anyhow in a nutshell.  
Leaving his human children friends, that was another matter completely;  
They are all pure of heart, so unlike their elders, putting it concretely.

The kids felt the heaviness of Young Magpie's heart,  
They somehow sensed he was about to depart.  
Solemn faces, crying eyes and waving hands; that was the scene on the pier:  
"There departs the best bird that ever was," one kid uttered in a tone heartbreaking and sincere.

Young Magpie could not wait to reach the forest vast  
Where he never could feel as an outcast.  
Of joy and happiness in the forest glared the sound,  
Because Young Magpie had been lost but was now found.

Over and over and over again, by all creatures of the forest he was called  
To recount the story of the liberation; always leaving the audience enthralled.  
But then one day when he finished his story he beheld a hen with a pair of eyes radiant and cute;

She was indeed remarkably beautiful and Young Magpie immediately developed a condition acute.

Dressed in black shiny feathers, her face alluring and fair,  
Of her gaze Young Magpie was all too aware;  
She kept her stare for a moment long,  
Then turned and was suddenly lost in the throng.

Young Magpie was smitten, and for that there was no cure;  
He knew it was pointless trying to resist her allure.  
Nothing would ever be the same again;  
Thoughts of her completely possessed his brain.

On the bank, by the gentle flowing river pensively did Young Magpie for hours sit,  
Struggling to compose a poem of aspect so illustrious that her sublime beauty it would befit.  
One sliver of recall his cerebral toil at long last did provide,  
Concerning a school lesson about Romeo and Juliet, love and suicide.

Appeal to me the story does not, he gloomily mused  
The concept, therefore, Young Magpie completely refused,  
Ruminating further he proclaimed: "I could never embark upon that cowardly course,  
Romeo is an idiot; why would I my beloved one into self-immolation force?"

Thereupon inspiration his soul did endow,  
A love letter he penned, furrowing his brow:  
"Do not fret my beloved; these are not the Bard's words for among us he no longer walks  
To you, through these written words of love and affection only your Young Magpie talks.

Since I laid my eyes on you I can neither eat nor sleep,  
In torturous frustration I can only weep.  
Please my darling send a line or two in reply,  
'Cause I sincerely love you to the sky.

And when spring bursts and the world is abloom once more,  
Every day I'll pick you flowers to show that only you I adore.  
With this missive a scrapbook I'm enclosing,  
Courtesy of my grandmother, its content is disclosing.

The story of my grandpa and grandma in detail it does tell  
Of their love the power no force could ever hope to quell.  
Rumour has it I take after my grandpa, I gladly mention  
And nobody yet has seen it fit to make that a point of contention."

The letter sent, the torture of anticipation bred despair,  
Food and sleep held no meaning for one day plus a pair,  
And then appeared the postman, bearing a letter in his hand;  
Young Magpie's spirits soared for he was in fairyland.



The envelope was scented with love, the season of spring and hope;  
Young Magpie opened it quickly, his heart dancing on a tightrope.  
“Dear Young Magpie,” it said! So far so good, he did surmise,  
Then the ink below made him feel like the master of the skies...

“Thank you for the scrapbook, such a wonderful present;  
It is clear that your grandparents to each other everything meant.  
I dare say overrated is the Bard and in your own right a poet you are,  
So let’s get together tonight and watch the evening star.”

It was late at night, moonlight played with her shadow  
She talked about everything, words did freely flow.  
“Listen,” she said, “and you’ll hear the river gently run; listen and hear the wind  
Softly moving over the ground; hear it whisper: happiness we all can find.

Feel the changes of the moon to life mythical creatures summon,  
Know that the animals, the birds and the phantoms all come from the will of numen.”  
He knew all these thoughts she’d spoken he’d always treasure,  
For him of all things in all of creation she was now the measure.

“It is getting late,” he observed and next thing he knew  
He tasted her kiss, fresh as the morning dew.  
For days afterwards he cherished that moment sweet  
While the forest was battered by snow and sleet.

Winter, bitter cold, icy winds and rigid frost on the forest vast descended,  
The paths, the trees, the ground; everything into a carpet of whiteness blended.  
His beloved maiden for another date Young Magpie could not invite,  
Father Frost was on a stakeout; with cold burn aiming the unwary to bite.

One icy morning Young Magpie a letter did compose:  
“My darling, it’s been a while since that night before the world froze,  
My love for you is strong and true and it shall never wane,  
We’ll hold on to what we have together and that will keep us sane.

Have patience my love and believe in my fortitude; wait for the spring.  
And when you see the river thaw and when cold does no longer sting,  
I shall appear at your doorstep, many violets and primroses I’ll bring.  
Of the flowers for your beautiful face I’ll make a dazzling string.”

Rabbit the postman took the letter and started down the snowbound hill,  
Young Magpie watched him go, in his heart some strange, ominous chill,  
Unease kept his stare riveted on the hill, long after the postman out of sight passed,  
Then suddenly there was a bang! The forest shook! An earth-shaking blast!

A feeling of dread possessed him; did the premonition come true?  
Rabbit the postman came running back and a deep breath he drew:  
“There was a hunter, he used his firearm  
And shot Maiden Magpie, doing her great harm!

Just as I gave her the letter the hunter his weapon raised,  
I only saw him for a second, his eyes were crazed.  
He'd been lying in wait; I think he was trying to kill me  
But instead he hit her and she fell from the tree.”

Not a second did Young Magpie waste;  
He rushed to the scene in great haste  
There she was, lying motionless in the blood stained snow,  
By her side the scrapbook and the letter; was she alive or dead he did not know.

## Chapter V

Dead silence; the forest was gripped by wintery calm;  
Only the cracking ice chanted its eerie psalm.  
A bloodcurdling scream of sorrow the deathly stillness broke  
And then silence again hid the forest under its ghostly cloak.

Two feathery bodies lay side by side on the wet, snowy ground;  
One strong, heaving with inner pain, the other petite, motionless, making not a sound.  
Young Magpie the love of his life ever so gently embraced  
And his head right next to hers he tenderly placed.

Her face was warm, life still clung to the soul!  
Young Magpie of his senses immediately regained control.  
“Of course she cannot be dead  
As long as I live to die in her stead!

She is mine to love and to cherish  
I will not let her perish!”  
He carefully picked up Maiden Magpie  
And his powerful wings took them both to the sky.

He carried her to his home and put her wounded form on the bed;  
She opened her eyes, gave out a sharp cry and quietly said:  
“My darling, I’m shaking with fever, I feel so cold,  
Please make me warm, hug me tight, never let go of the hold.”

Old Owl into the house hurriedly burst;  
In the art of healing she was well versed:  
“Out of the way Young Magpie, move, give her some air!  
Fetch clean water and bandages, she urgently needs medical care!”

Second by endless second the hours of waiting dreadfully dragged;  
Old Owl slept by Maiden Magpie’s feet, exhausted and fagged.  
By the headboard Young Magpie fervently prayed  
To all the deities, whatever their masquerade.

At sunrise Old Owl woke up. “Don’t you worry now, she’ll be fine,  
I know the evildoer...he killed your grandpa with a carbine.  
Do not give in to hatred and anger, for retribution the time is not yet ripe  
He has a gun and can only be defeated with a weapon of the same type.

Listen and learn. I have to go home and you should get some rest.  
It’s good you’re the way you are, defiant, combative and full of zest;  
If you’ve got nothing to fight for

More often than not life's a bore."

He was only a toddler when his grandpa was killed, gunned down by that thief,  
There were scenes in his memory...his old grandma stricken with grief;  
Now he understood her pain and sorrow  
And the words "remember tomorrow"...

Choke back tears he no longer could, down in torrents they began to fall,  
Then he looked at her. She loved him. They were together in this for the long haul.  
He'd fight, live and die for her love, beg steal and borrow, any price he'd willingly pay:  
"I'd forever keep her safe and sound; until she got well by her bedside I would stay."

Days passed slowly, many visitors did Young Magpie receive;  
Friends, acquaintances, family, so many one wouldn't believe.  
When calamity strikes everyone's there support to show;  
Everyday Old Owl was there, many a sock she did sew.

True to Old Owl's positive prediction, Maiden Magpie a complete recovery made.  
While Young Magpie went out in search for food patiently waiting for him at home she stayed.  
For each other head over heels they were, hopelessly in love,  
Enjoying that divine gift of affection from the lord above.

No to her he just could not say  
Every word she said he readily did obey;  
House, every day, he helped her clean  
To make her dinner he was always keen.

The long cold winter didn't bother him at all for he was in heaven,  
When he saw the little egg he was right there on cloud seven.  
"Of our love, my darling Young Magpie, this is the fruit,  
We'll be parents, a family of three, that's what I compute!"

## Chapter VI

Suddenly the river Cetina its rage unleashed on the plain,  
The waters rose and flooded meadows, orchards and fields of grain.  
The force in its course spared no human nor bird;  
The wrath of Achelous in equal measure they all incurred.

The natural disaster bothered Young Magpie not a bit  
For his kind making homes high up in the trees was holy writ.  
He just sat down on the deck to wind down  
When a sudden noise made him in annoyance frown.

“My love, it’s bound to be our kid creating mayhem again,  
Go check on him before the neighbours start to complain.”  
“My dear husband, our daughter is perched on my head, after our kid, right now, I cannot chase;  
I’ll have you know, our home, any minute now, to another hatchling will be the birthplace!

You take care of it, but don’t you yell and howl,  
Poor little thing, as you know, is sensitive to language foul.  
You’ve seen how he responds to annoyance and urgency in your tone,  
My little darling then to tears and sadness gets all too prone.”

In a few moments Young Magpie was back on the deck:  
“It’s all right, but our window is a complete wreck.  
I’ll fix the thing on the morrow, no problem there  
But in the future our kid better take care!”

In measuring, sawing and hammering did Young Magpie the next few days spend;  
The window was not the only chore, the house he urgently needed to extend.  
Everyone in the forest vast of Young Magpie’s diligence with approval did speak;  
A proud father of two more hatchlings he became that same week.

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Primroses, snowdrops, saffrons to the splendour of life again came,  
Each and every Willow and Poplar tree opulently enriched its frame.  
Vernal grace the forest vast assumed; everything with beauty was ablaze,  
After the long, cold winter for every forest dweller in store were better days.

Sunday; a day as clear and sunny as clear and sunny may be,  
“Let’s spend it outdoors with the kids,” the young parents did agree.  
The two youngest happily with Young Magpie and Maiden Magpie went,  
While the older ones decided with their friends time was better spent.

Around the forest and along the riverbank they leisurely strolled,

Then decided to pay a visit to Young Magpie's aunt, a lady really old;  
Many, many seasons ago, when he was very small  
She'd been known as an old maid, Young Magpie did recall.

Her boundless energy belied her age,  
It was really impossible her years to gauge,  
She made too much loving fuss of the visiting party,  
Offering them a spirit of a taste strong and hearty.

She'd gathered ingredients for the moonshine before the snow covered the ground;  
Blackberries, raspberries, apples and many other things that in the forest vast can be found,  
Seeing such goodies go to waste she was always eager to prevent,  
She picked everything in sight and let the ingredients slowly ferment.

She had a friend, an old Magpie granny  
And her ability to make good hooch was uncanny.  
To be sure, Aunt Magpie only for medicinal purposes the spirit used  
And consequently the swine and bird flu inoculations refused.

She had a supply of other various alcoholic beverages and to her guests she offered them readily  
Her cheeks became red and to her surprise on her feet she could no longer stand steadily.  
But, it bothered her more that suddenly she developed a case of vision double,  
She could no longer count the glasses; then remembered that the condition was a recurring trouble.

One such past instance appeared in her mind's eye...it'd been a very long time ago...  
"Hot, very hot that day was, with my friend to buy fruit at the market I did go,  
The heat into alcoholic vapours the raspberries, blackberries and blueberries did turn,  
And, my children, I got completely drunk, I later to my surprise did learn.

My head was spinning, my legs wobbled and straight I could not see,  
I could not even remember the way home for the life of me!  
It was an accident, my dear children you have to understand  
Somehow I laid eggs in Mrs Lark's nest, oh what a development unplanned!

Judge me not too harshly, my children, for everything turned out okay,  
Mrs Lark took good care of the hatchlings, and, by the way  
There were all kinds of eggs there, of all shapes and hues!  
And I'm telling you, nobody could know which were whose!

I am old now and my eyes are not as good as they used to be,  
Sometimes even things in front of me I can't properly see,  
But when I was young everyone admired my beauty and charm  
With my good looks everybody I was able to disarm."

Here Aunt Magpie for breath did pause for a moment brief;  
Young Magpie jumped at the chance to his family's great relief.

He quickly said, "We'd like to stay but we really, really have to leave!"  
Contentedly home they walked, unaware of what Providence had up its sleeve.

There was howling and screeching and screaming...sparrows at swallows yelling,  
Arguments fierce over a piece of real estate on the cliff; a year before a swallow had designed the dwelling.

More howling and shouting; every creature seemed to be on some kind of a mission,  
Life was in evidence in every nook and cranny, in all its glory and without inhibition.

And at home: blessed silence, unusual and yet for some reason endearing and sweet and superb,  
And a sight so charming that even the ever prying neighbour Mrs Lark dared not disturb.  
A vision it was not but blissful reality; Young Magpie's long lost father in the flesh; but no longer a young lad  
A story to the older baby Magpies he was telling; transfixed by his words they were and called him granddad!