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An instant classic"

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THE BOOK OF STOLEN DREAMS

Let the hunt begin...



DAVID FARR

THE BOOK OF STOLEN DREAMS

"Listen to me carefully... Take the Book to the corner of Heine and Hopkins Streets. A man called Solomon will be there reading a newspaper and wearing a white flower in his lapel. Give the Book ONLY to him. Until then, keep the Book safe. Tell no one you have taken it. Promise me!"

Rachel promised. Robert just looked horrified.

Felix lowered his voice to a quiet murmur, his eyes burning: "This Book contains more secrets than you know. Now go!"



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THE
BOOK
OF
STOLEN
DREAMS

DAVID FARR

Illustrated by Kristina Kister



USBORNE

Let the true dreamer wake...

BOOK ONE



Introduction

If you are reading this book, or if someone is reading it to you, you will know we are living in strange times.

A shadow has passed over the land of Krasnia. And people are afraid.

The shadow has a name. It is President Charles Malstain.

He came from nowhere and now he is in control of everything.

You cannot fight him. Not if you value your life.

You cannot persuade him. Not if you value your tongue.

You can only stay and suffer – or flee.

Look up!

High in the night sky there is a great silver airship. The airship is heading west over the ocean. It is called the *Pegasus*. It is taking desperate fugitives away from Krasnia, from the cruel control of Charles Malstain to the welcoming arms of a foreign city – Port Clement.

Look closer, through the windows into the airship's first-class compartments. Those sad, lonely faces. They are leaving loved ones behind. Will they ever see them again?

Now move your gaze lower. Down through the shadows, past steel girders and ladders, to the second-class deck. It is open to the winds and bitterly cold. A single lantern at each corner barely produces a glow to ease the darkness. Thin grey blankets drape over thinner shoulders, hats are thrust down over ears.

Look closer still. Can you see a figure standing alone on the far corner, looking out into the night?

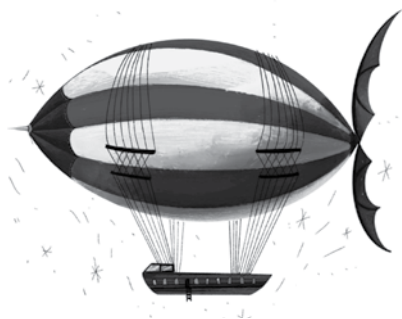
A girl!

She is twelve years old. She is skinny, she has dark hair and a freckled nose. She has fingerless gloves, carries a strangely elegant small travelling bag and she wears a worn woollen coat, under which is a red checked shirt, a grey jumper, and trousers that seem more likely to belong to a boy. Her black leather shoes are a size too big and could do with a clean.

And now look. There is another figure approaching her across the deck. Oh no! Is she in danger?

The man is slight, dressed in a shabby suit that no longer fits him. In his left hand he carries a battered violin case wrapped in a blanket.

And unless Rachel Klein is very much mistaken, he seems to have a penguin on his head.



1

On the Lower Deck of the Pegasus

“**E**xcuse me. I couldn’t help noticing you are alone. Please, my dear girl, you have no reason to fear.”

Rachel said nothing. The scruffy man stood in the frozen darkness and smiled. His suit jacket was missing several buttons. His eyes twinkled but were sad at the same time. He looked the way a kind uncle would – if Rachel had a kind uncle. What age was he? Rachel wasn’t sure.

He spoke again, words tumbling from his mouth like laughter.

“You will want to know my name. Quite right! Who am I? Why am I talking to you? Why am I here on this huge airship travelling across the night-sky to Port Clement? How did I get my ticket away from that miserable city of

Brava? Why is my ticket for this trip pink and yours blue? Is my moustache real? Why am I wearing a hat in the shape of a penguin?"

He stopped for breath. Rachel stayed silent and looked down at her shoes. They were so obviously too big. Would he notice? Would he see the little bulge in her sock? She must be careful. He might have followed her from Brava. From Meyer's House of Illustration. These days you could trust no one.

"And you, my dear? How old are you?"

"Twelve." Rachel could tell him that. That was safe.

"Good Lord! You don't look a year older than eleven! Your name?"

Rachel Klein thought fast. Remembered her false name.

"Isabella von Gurning."

"An utterly charming name. Do you live in Brava? Which side of the city are you from?"

Rachel took a deep breath and lied again.

"From the west? A charming area. Full of the best-dressed women." He studied her. "And yet I sense in you a different spirit."

Oh no. He had seen through her! How could he tell?

The man scrutinised her carefully. His breath was visible in the dim glow of the deck's lighting.

"No. I suspect you come from the poorer north of the city, from a family of artists. Your eyes are musical,

and your nose gives me the strongest impression that you have a piano in your living room.”

How did he know? How could he possibly know...?

“You do? Ha! I knew it!” He jumped in delight. “Where are your wonderful parents? Are they getting you a hot chocolate from the cafe? I’m afraid to say it isn’t very good.”

Why was she nearly crying? Was it lack of sleep? Was it the mention of the hot chocolate? Memories of muffins in the old family apartment?

“But, my dear – why do you look so sad? Is it the poor quality of the hot chocolate? No, I see now. Your parents aren’t here with you. You are alone. Where are they?”

Rachel looked into his understanding eyes, and told him the truth: “My mother is dead.”

The man’s face fell.

“Oh, my poor girl. How tactless I am. I could beat myself with a stick! I should have thought that there might be a darker reason for you being on this journey. Oh, you’re shaking! Please take my blanket. It smells slightly of salad cream due to an unfortunate accident with a baguette earlier today. You will find out in time why it is flea-bitten and why the design is of watermelons.”

Rachel shivered and took the rather grubby piece of old rug that he had unwrapped from around the violin case.

“And your father? Where is he?”

“He’s in prison. Soldiers took him.”

“Oh, my dear Isabella! But it’s an all-too-common story these days. Did he put up a fight? No? It was probably wise of him. You don’t mess with Charles Malstain’s state police. In the days of the Emperor, if soldiers came to arrest you, they offered a polite smile, a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolate hearts. But these days the police have neither reason nor manners. And there are no chocolate hearts.”

Rachel looked up at him. His ragged suit. His funny facial hair. He spoke again.

“Why are you going to Port Clement, may I ask?”

“My brother is there. I have to find him.”

“Is he doing well there?”

“I don’t know.”

“You haven’t heard from him? Do you know where he lives? You don’t even have a telephone number? Then how will you find him? Now don’t cry, I was only asking a question. Of course you will find him, even though Port Clement is a city of seventeen million people and he has no idea you’re coming. Why are you crying again? Here I am trying to cheer you up and I only make things worse! My problem, Isabella, is I speak before I think. My mother – a marvellous woman – was very critical of this flaw of mine. Forgive me.”

Rachel wiped her eyes and said she would. She looked out across the darkness. It was endless and unknowable.

As if sensing what she was thinking, the little man stood beside her at the rail and spoke quietly.

“My dear, listen to me very carefully. Your brother will find you – or you will find him. I promise you.”

“How do you know?”

“Because he will hear your heart beating.”

For a moment their eyes met. Rachel felt a little spring of hope deep inside her.

And with that the little man slapped her on the back.

“Now how about a cup of dreadful cocoa?”



2

Josef Centurion

They walked together to the sad little kiosk at the opposite corner of the *Pegasus*'s deck. A woman with long earrings dispensed thin dark liquid into plastic cups. The little man paid for two. He handed Rachel hers.

"I'm afraid it tastes of dead moths," he whispered. He was right. But it was warm, and that was something.

Together they sat in the bowels of the airship's huge lower deck. The little man wound the watermelon blanket tightly around her. It did indeed smell of salad cream – with a hint of gherkin. Rachel's hands clasped the warm cup like a friend.

It was a long flight over the ocean to Port Clement. She didn't want to be alone. Yes, the man was odd, he dressed like a shabby clown, he smelled of something

unpleasant – was it vinegar or soil? – but he had such a kind smile. And she did want to know about the weird hat.

So long as she didn't tell him her real name, nor the secret she was keeping – the REAL reason why she was travelling to Port Clement to find her brother Robert. Meyer's House of Illustration. The piece of paper that was hidden in her left sock. That was a secret she would not tell to any stranger, no matter how kind. That was a matter of life and death.

“What is your name?” she asked.

The man smiled. “Ah, well done! There I was squeezing information from you like a lemon and told you nothing of myself! My name is Josef Centurion. You pronounce the Josef with a ‘y’, like yoghurt. You pronounce the Centurion quietly, in case someone overhears you – a tax collector or a shampoo salesman. One should never tell a shampoo salesman anything!”

Rachel laughed. It felt like her first laugh in years.

He went on: “I was brought up in the East of the country. Ah, my childhood. Wonderful! All potato fields and folk music. Let me straightaway tell you about my sister Lotte, an angel whom I loved with all my heart. You remind me of her in so many ways, even though you are completely different.”

So Josef Centurion chattered on about his childhood, his wonderful sister Lotte with her bright blue eyes and little mole on her left cheek, his kindly mother and funny father.

“My first memory in life was of a country doctor with ginger hair crying as he looked at me. This was apparently a reaction to my extremely ugly face.”

And as he talked and laughed and twinkled, Rachel started to feel safe. Maybe she could let herself catch a little sleep. She'd been awake for so long and she would need all her energy for Port Clement and the search for Robert.

She felt her hand loosen on the cup of chocolate, then saw, through half-closed eyelids, Josef rescue it from going all over her and place it carefully on the deck beside them.

“My father was a terrible farmer but rather a good small-time thief...”

Rachel's eyes dimmed. She could hear the deep hum of the airship's engines. She felt the fires from the ship's cylinders blow gusts of warmth across her face. And the heat of the fires and Josef's lilting words warmed Rachel's frozen bones and slowly sent her into a kind of dream.

“Josef?” She spoke his name perfectly, saying Josef with a “y” like in yak's milk.

“Yes, my dear.”

“Will you wake me when we get close to Port Clement?”

“Of course. You sleep now.”

And so Josef started on a story about a brown cow that he and his sister Lotte had chased until it fell into a river.

And as the cow entered the river, with Josef running after it and Lotte in tears of laughter, Rachel Klein's eyes closed. And she slept for the first time in days.



Josef Centurion heard the gentle breathing of the sleeping child, felt her head resting against his shoulder. Her little mouth was nibbling something invisible as she dreamed, like a hamster checking a nut. Josef stopped talking and smiled to himself. His chatter had done its job. The little girl, so lonely on the deck, was now sleeping warm and safe beside him.

Which was exactly what he wanted.

For when, earlier that day, a tall, elegant woman had approached Josef Centurion at Brava airfield while he was playing his violin, she had tasked him with a simple mission.

To board the airship *Pegasus*. To get to know a young girl who was travelling under the name Isabella von Gurning, but whose real name was Rachel Klein. To appear kind and harmless. To ensure Rachel reached Port Clement safe and sound. To offer to pay for her to stay in a hotel for her first night in the strange new city. To take her to the legendary Hotel Excelsior. To leave her there alone in Room 341.

Where she would easily be found.

And then to return home to Brava using his pink return ticket. To earn himself two hundred groschen.

To ask no questions why.

And then to forget he had ever met Rachel Klein.



3

All About Rachel Klein

My dear friend and reader, as you quietly read this book, hidden beneath the covers of your bed, do be careful. This book is banned by President Charles Malstain's censorship committee, and to read it is in itself an act of great bravery. Perhaps place a false cover on the book, just in case. If you are in public, in a park or a pizza parlour, wear an unusual hat and answer to a false name such as Maurizio. (Unless your name is Maurizio. Then use Deborah.)

Or are you not reading the story but listening to it? On a secret radio station? Oh, cherished but secret listener, there is truly nothing better than hearing a story told well out loud! But be careful what other curious ears are listening in. Maybe wear headphones. And if someone

asks what you are doing, pretend you are learning a language such as Finnish. (No one knows Finnish. Not even the Finns.)

There are enemies and informers everywhere.

And now, my dear, brave friend, it is time to find out all about our intrepid young traveller – our heroine, if we can call her that – Rachel Klein. And the secret of her socks. Or more importantly – what she is hiding in them.

In her left sock is a piece of paper. And on that piece of paper it says:

CG gone. TG dead.

KRF broken.

Only RK.

He has hidden the BSD.

IDLAMIRC 342. 3rd.

Let me tell you why.

Rachel Klein was born twelve years, two weeks and one day ago in a quiet northern suburb of the great city of Brava, capital of our fair country of Krasnia.

Ah, what a city it was back then! A riot of sunny avenues, palm trees and outdoor restaurants, all gently kissed by the blue ocean that surrounded the city on three sides. And populated by the happiest, cheekiest, most

devil-may-care people on earth. You know the saying: God created the world. And when he got really good at it, he created Brava.

Rachel's birthdate (April 8th, to be precise) was sadly not remembered for her arrival alone. For on the very same day that Rachel Anne-Marie Klein slipped, mewling and tight-eyed, into this world, the rebel army of Charles Malstain entered the city of Brava from the east.

Two arrivals: one a newborn child that brought untold joy to a family of pianists and writers; the other an army that introduced untold misery to an entire city.

Such is life, my friend. There is no joy without accompanying sorrow. There is no despair so dark that a sliver of light cannot abate it. Our sliver of light weighed seven pounds two ounces, and for a whole day after her difficult birth Rachel was cuddled and held tight in her mother Judith's arms.

Never one for dramatic shows of emotion, Judith Klein sang a quiet little song she had learned as a child, and kissed Rachel's pink, shiny cheeks.

Rachel's brother Robert, nearly two years old and already full of freckles, couldn't wait to rush in to see his new sister, to tickle her and gently throttle her in the way that affectionate brothers do.

And her father? Her father Felix stood by the top of the bed and, for the first time in his life, said absolutely nothing.

Felix Klein was a librarian. In his spare time he was a writer of articles, funny jokes, plays, gardening tips, recipes, one good novel, thirteen bad novels, hundreds of letters to his family, even more letters to the government, love songs to his wife, and a small Latin dictionary.

Felix loved words. He wrote words about words. He sang about words. He was pretty much a walking word himself.

He worked in a temple of words. Its official name was the North Brava Public Lending Library. But to Felix it was much more than that. It was another family, a family of thousands of precious leather-bound children, each to be cared for and loved and nurtured through its strange and difficult life.

As well as reading and writing words, Felix also loved to say them. He was quite simply the best talker on earth. And since his job at the library required almost complete silence, he saved up most of his talking for home. Judith was used to it and had long ago given up on ever having a quiet night in.

And yet as Felix Klein stared down at his baby daughter, his words caught in his throat and a little gulp of joy came out. But nothing else. He was, miraculous to say, speechless.

For days Felix wandered around their sunny apartment, holding baby Rachel and saying nothing. Tears filled his eyes, dripped on to his typewriter, splashed on to kitchen

surfaces as he made tea for Judith, or a hot crumpet for himself which he then forgot to eat.

Such was Judith and Felix's joy that it was five days before either left the apartment, five days before Felix went to get milk and a newspaper, five days before he lit his pipe and read in the *Bravan Daily News* that the east of the city was convulsed by fighting between the Emperor's defence guard and the invading rebel army of Charles Malstain.

Felix's eyes lowered to hide his feelings. He knew all about Charles Malstain, the military colonel who had gained popularity in the East of the country with his boasts of creating a greater, newer, shinier Krasnia. Malstain was a small man, with a love of brass bands and a loathing for children.

Felix rolled up his newspaper and said nothing to Judith about the fighting. It would only cloud his wife's happiness. That evening he quietly used the *Bravan Daily News* to kindle a fire.

For a month the family did not buy another newspaper nor listen to the radio. They therefore did not know that the soldiers of Charles Malstain had reached the old centre of Brava, laying waste to its sandy beaches, flower stalls, museums and gardens. One criticism of Brava's centre – that perhaps it had one too many statues of military horsemen – was swiftly corrected as Malstain's men toppled each and every one.

As Rachel celebrated her twentieth day on earth, the family drank tea, entirely ignorant of the fact that Malstain's soldiers had entered the royal palace, arrested the Emperor in his bed, executed his royal guard, imprisoned his wife and children, and set fire to the royal galleries.

But as Rachel approached thirty days old, the truth could be avoided no longer. For Charles Malstain's men had reached the north of the city. And the very streets where the Klein family lived.

One morning little Robert Klein peered out of his window from the third-floor apartment, to see black helmets below. When Felix anxiously went to the shop to buy bread, he was asked to show identity papers, and to hurry home once he had bought his "essential provisions". He asked why he was not free to go to the park and feed bread to the ducks, as was his habit (he would often return with less than half a loaf left, much to Judith's annoyance). But he was simply slapped on the cheek and told to stop asking irrelevant questions.

Felix Klein's life was based on asking irrelevant questions. He loved to ask "Why is the sky blue when you look at it but black when you're in it?" or "Why does a violin sound terrible until the moment it sounds wonderful?" or "What is the opposite of an opposite?" or "If there is nothing better than this, then what is better than nothing?" and all sorts of other utterly meaningless questions that would take up hours of his and his family's

life. These were the questions that would, under the regime of Charles Malstain, become signs of a dangerous mind and a rebellious spirit. Felix would have to learn to keep his chatty mouth shut if he was to last long in the New World Order.

Two weeks later, on a fine spring morning as the cherry blossom hung heavy on the trees, the deposed Emperor of Krasnia was marched out into the square where so often he addressed his mostly adoring citizens. And in that square, as the sparrows hunted for crumbs and the blackbirds chirruped their morning song, his crimes were read out, and he was shot.

Rachel Klein grew up in strange times. She never knew a world where neighbours came out of their doors and chatted to each other about the weather, the price of bread and the terrible smell of the city sewer. No one dared gossip about anything, for fear of who might be listening.

Worse than that, Rachel never heard laughter of children in the street, never played hoopla or football with her brother in the city parks. For within months of taking over, Charles Malstain had banned children from playing in public. *Keep them in!* was the cry on information posters. *A seen child is a bad child!* Forests and parks were designated “adults only” and the beaches had wooden signs with a child’s face crossed out in red.

For years Rachel and her brother Robert left the house only to go to the state school, for their learning and exercise. Rachel studied the same book as all the other children (all the textbooks had been reissued after Charles Malstain's instatement as President of the New World Order). She played the piano for seven minutes, did physical exercise for twelve minutes. She had lunch for fourteen minutes, always the same sandwich of cheese without butter, and a pale fizzy drink called Happy Hour that made no one happy at all.

Then she came home.

Robert, two years older and of a scientific bent, was determined not to get disheartened. Unable to explore parks or forests, Robert focused his energy on the natural kingdom within the apartment. God help any creature that came into his bedroom. Dead flies were dissected and studied, beetles had their wings examined. Judith Klein's gorgeous array of pot plants on the balcony were experimented on in groundbreaking ways. Gravy was applied to a rose bush. Hanging begonias reacted very well to a daily dose of cough medicine. Robert observed that when his mother played the piano, the wasps gathered. They seemed to love Schubert in particular.

So Robert got by, busying himself with his experiments. But Rachel Klein was different. She was a dreamer. And how can one dream if one is allowed to see so little of life? Felix's heart broke to see such a beautiful, joyous daughter

take so little pleasure in her education. And so, to make up for the grey dull sameness of every school day, he determined that evenings at home would be different. Life at home would be an adventure!

One evening, on Rachel's return from school, Felix was dressed as a pirate and informed her, quite calmly, that she should quickly put on her sea-clothes for they were going on an ocean voyage to do some pillaging.

And that's what they did, without once leaving their living room. The old leather couch that had been in the family for years became the good ship *Sofa So-good*, the ceiling above them became the infinite sky, Rachel's mother became Good Seawoman McDuff, Robert (who had got bored of his wasp studies) became second mate Kurtz, and Rachel was allowed to mount the crow's nest (the bookcase in the corner helpfully had a little ladder attached), and to cry out "Land ahoy!" just before supper.

Together they did some very good pillaging and drank strong rum (water with a sugar cube in it). And when Good Seawoman McDuff tried to mutiny and became Bad Seawoman McDuff, they made her walk the plank off the *Sofa So-good* into the shark-infested ocean (which looked a bit like the family rug). And when she went to bed that night, Rachel was sure she could hear the gentle crash of the waves and taste the sea salt on her tongue.

On another day they were all polar explorers and spent an hour with their feet in a bucket of ice cubes

(which really hurt and should not be attempted). On another they were the Bravan fire brigade, putting out fires caused by foolish firework manufacturers. They were butterfly collectors in Java (Robert's favourite) and gold-hunters in Peru. They even went to England, a land where no one smiles, and told jokes to cheer the people up.

And then one day something different happened.