

## DEAR UNFORTUNATE READERS – A WARNING

This is not your average tale. This is not a jolly page-turner before bedtime. Oh no – it's definitely not that. This is a story that swims through a world of weirdness without armbands, and not everyone has the stomach, eyes and teeth for such a thing. If you don't have the stomach, eyes and teeth for such a thing, then leave now.

**Are you still here?**

**All right, let's try again...**

DEAR UNFORTUNATE READERS  
WHO HAVE THE STOMACH,  
EYES AND TEETH FOR  
SUCH A THING...

This tale contains no fewer than **FOUR** trips to sea, a barrage of ***SLIMY*** insults and some seriously **TORMENTED** characters. If you get seasick, or if you're nice, or if you'd rather not discover the dark side of human nature, I advise you to leave now.

***Are you still here?***

Then you're mad. Mad as a kipper's slippers. And you'll probably enjoy this horrible story. Read on, but let's start at the real Chapter I.



## THE REAL CHAPTER ONE

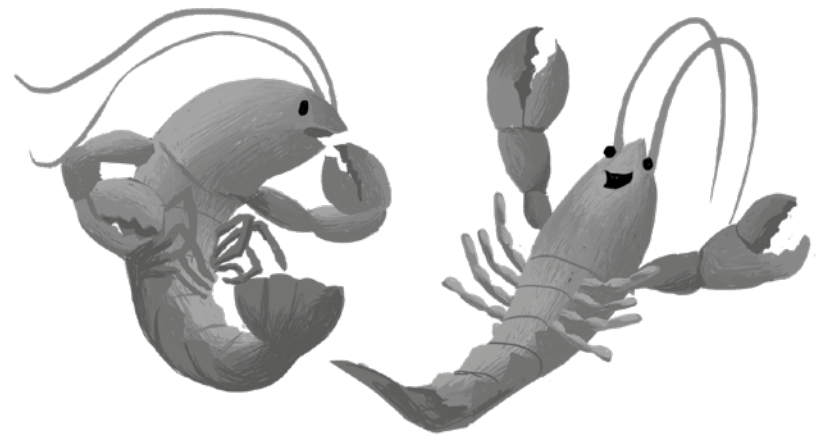
# THERE WERE SIGNS

*“What’s beautiful?”*

*“A sunken treasure ship.”*

*“Why is a sunken treasure ship beautiful?”*

*“Oh, I thought you said booty-full.”*



There were signs. Signs were there. Were there signs...?

(This chapter is called **THERE WERE SIGNS**, so what do you think?)

In fact, there were **LOADS** of signs. They were on every wall, pillar and roof. On every raven that stood still long enough for someone to stick a piece of paper to it (and there were quite a few). Brutalia was covered in the things and they all said:

**Citizens of Beautiful Brutalia,  
Gather in the square tonight for some news.  
Your Divine Queen**

Well! The citizens of Beautiful Brutalia fell backwards in shock for two reasons:

**I.** The signs were scented – they wafted sweet smells as they flapped in the wind (or on ravens) and people had never sniffed ‘sweet’ before. The island reeked of rot. And the only perfume available was **Eau de Errr**, sold by perfumer Olfa Smelch in

buckets (although he called them boutiques) called *Olfa Smelch Smells* (and he really did).

**2.** The Queen’s orders were normally belched door to door by one of the Queen’s guards, not written down. But weirder than that was the word **BEAUTIFUL**. People rolled the strange word round in their mouths until it got all spitty, and they were as baffled as bath plugs on the moon.

You see, it’s hard to explain beautiful to those who have only ever known grime, grunge and grot, and lots of other horrid things beginning with ‘g’. Because life on Brutalia could never be beautiful. Have you been there? If you have, I’m surprised you’re not missing three toes and an earlobe. If you haven’t been there before, then hold on to your churning guts because

**~~WELCOME TO BAD LUCK,~~  
YOU’RE IN BRUTALIA.**

Brutalia was a spiky island in the Salty Sea that attracted precisely no one. Its reputation was cruel, its jagged coastline skewered sailors quicker than a kebab and there was a **rotten stink** that clung to it like mist on a bog. The rotten stink was actually

a **cloud of despair** (a key ingredient of **Eau de Errr**). And despair was always there – in the air, in your hair, under there, *everywhere*. No sailor with a brain or a nose would stop for the night. Not unless they wanted a visit to hell.

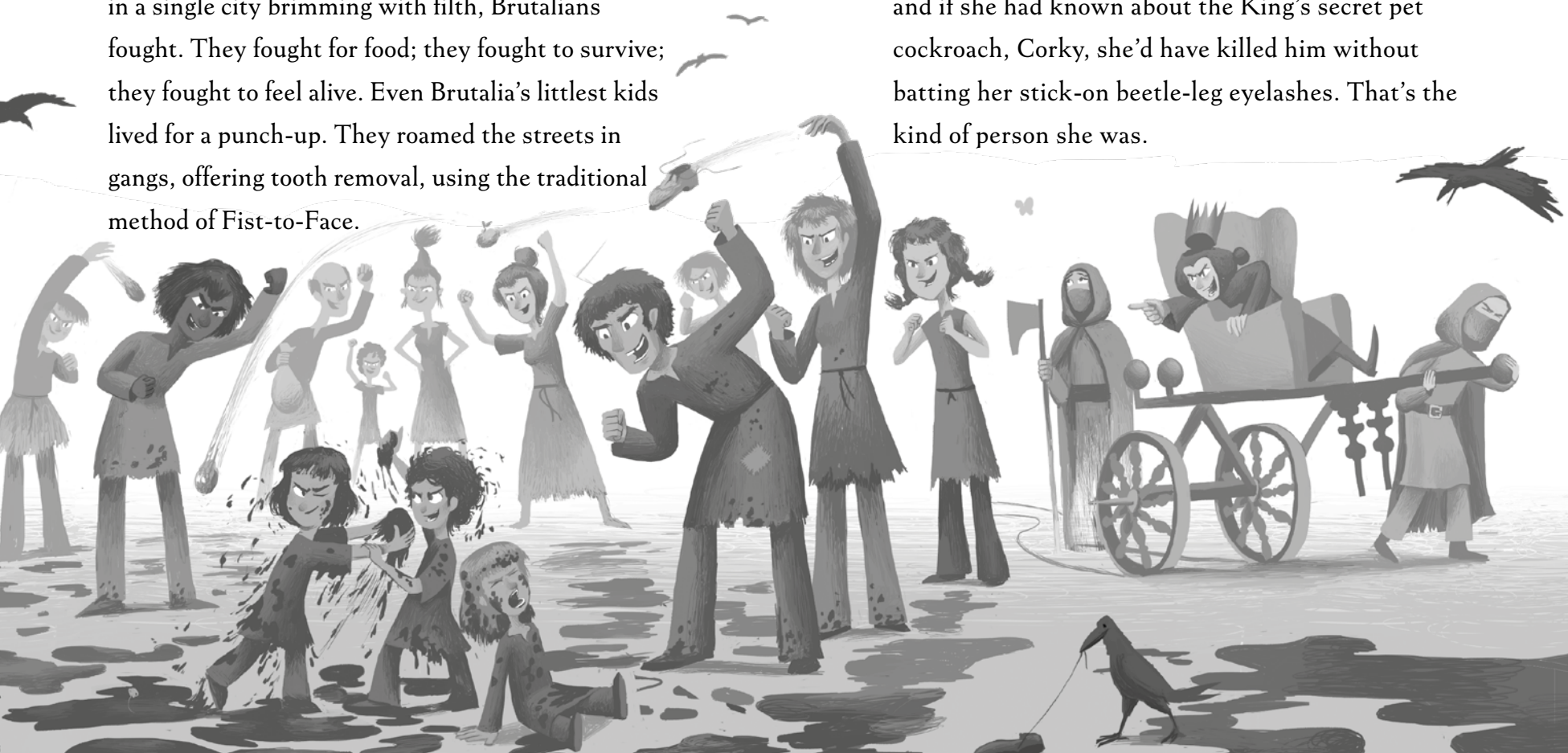
Because that's what Brutalia was: **hellish**.

Beneath the island's raven-infested watchtowers, in a single city brimming with filth, Brutalians fought. They fought for food; they fought to survive; they fought to feel alive. Even Brutalia's littlest kids lived for a punch-up. They roamed the streets in gangs, offering tooth removal, using the traditional method of Fist-to-Face.

*Who could possibly let them live like this! I hear you cry.*

I'll tell you who – the Queen and King of Brutalia. And they were royally revolting.

The King was a bit smelly, but it was the Queen who was the real stinker. She had the compassion of a brick. She loved no one and cared for nothing – and if she had known about the King's secret pet cockroach, Corky, she'd have killed him without batting her stick-on beetle-leg eyelashes. That's the kind of person she was.



So you see, explaining the word *beautiful* to a Brutalian was like trying to describe a new colour or a new taste. But there it was, on all those signs: **Beautiful.**

Sweet smells, pretty signs, strange words... Something fishy was going on in Brutalia. Was it good fishy or bad fishy? The people would have to go to the square to find out. And they would also have to go to the square because that's what the Queen had ordered. If they didn't, they'd end up getting the **Punishment of the Day.**

But we're getting sidetracked now, and you don't want to get sidetracked in Brutalia or you might end up down a dark alley getting your teeth knocked out by a bunch of rascals.

(Told you there was nothing nice about this place.)

## CHAPTER TWO

# GOD, REALLY?

*"Do you believe in God, Larry?"*

*"Of course I do. I saw him.  
Quite big, rubbery lips, fins..."*

*"Are you sure you're not thinking of Cod?"*

