

# Little People

by Marcus Speh

1. At the emergency room, history was written. Children who were destined for greatness sat next to children who'd devote themselves to mediocrity and would go on to die largely unnoticed. They were looking at each other listlessly through pain-tinted eyes, uttering muffled screams, oblivious of their own position in the fabric of the universe. Only one kid, a boy, small for his age, regarded the occasion not as an opprobrium but as an opportunity and cried: "This is a wonderful place to learn more about the human condition without wasting time or money." — "What's wrong with him", a woman asked the boy's father. "He bites", said the father, "and he talks rubbish like this all day long, won't watch the telly and reads too much." The woman sighed and sympathetically took the hand of the boy, who promptly bit her head off.

2. For years I tried to get this school out of my mind: the turgid turrets, the pathways, secrets to nowhere, the chalk dust that sat on the bannisters like white ash after an air raid, and the headmaster, a fat, bald, turbaned man with a clownish face and a monkey, who perched on his shoulder like a jester at the court of an anointed king. When I was in trouble, the regent turned his head to the muggins and conversed with him in a language that was rich in hushed tones and hisses, little screams and tongue-clicking, making you feel as if you were in deeper difficulties than you had thought, though their unnatural dialogue was mostly the worst that happened: the headmaster would smile a bazaar owner's smile and wave me and the poisonous cloud around my head away and out of this world, while the monkey laughed, his whole body shaking with uncanny clamor. Perhaps this primate had once been a performer who retired to our school only to torture us on behalf of our suspicious parents. When I dreamt of him he always said "je m'appelle, je m'appelle" with pursed lips but never told me his true name.

3. Would Guy be able to see his future in the pus oozing from his boil? This thought was on his mind all the way to the doctor. But when the medical man had expertly cut the cheesy abscess, a bulbous affair which had assumed the personality of a homeless person with a yellowish grin, a little man, not taller than a fingernail, who carried a periscope over his shoulder, walked out of the skin aperture in Guy's leg. Guy looked at the doctor who did not seem to have noticed the man and who talked about disinfecting the wider area around the wound. "Nobody can see me but you", said the little man. "Who are you?", asked Guy but he knew that this was his creative spirit and that he'd better protect him from harm if he wanted to make anything beautiful ever again.

4. After they had removed the snow, they saw ten fish sitting motionless below the ice on the pond. The little girl said: they're all dead, daddy, aren't they. The father looked around for help to cope with this existential moment, paralysed by the smallness of death in large numbers. Just then, a flock of white geese crossed over the garden. Look up there, he said to his daughter, feigning enthusiasm, these made it through the winter. The girl said: But my fish didn't, did they now. — Well, he replied, buying time while trying to carve a life-affirming argument out of dead wood, we need to check if their eyes are open. If they're milky, they might have moved on. There was a silence. Then the girl said: Moved on where to, daddy?

5. Today someone flashed me at the park. It made all flowers seem irrelevant. It was a woman — she was neither pretty nor ugly just naked: she turned up in front of me and stood there unsmiling, her arms, hands and fingers spread, her legs wide apart, like a frill-necked lizard ghost. She was not shaved, and I could see her bush which was sunlight yellow. It was like a truly free gift for father's day. Before she folded herself up and disappeared in the underbrush, she threw a paper glider at me. I caught and opened it. I read: "Did you ever wonder why this park is so well kept though

you never see a gardener? The reason is that it's tended to by little people. They're all around you and they disappear when they see a human. But they still deserve our respect and admiration for their outstanding work. If you agree, bow now." I did.

6. Anything ever written about little people by the big people is a fat knot of lies. All the recent movies about little people are visual lies, too, designed to make big people feel better about being big and dope little people into feeling less bad about being little. As if! But the truth must be told, if necessary by little people writing in small print on tiny scrolls or manually making miniature movies distributed across the world to venues that represent this truth by being little rather than big. Of course: if you read this and you believe yourself to be neither little nor big, you may still choose, but before you do, remember that anything large, colossal, macroscopic, ample, sizable, blown-up, bulky, mighty was once small, lesser, minute, tiny, dinky, gnomish, weeny or lilliputian — and feel your responsibility towards little people reverberate throughout the ages.

