

First excerpt from the book

Anna Bojti – Night at the Zoo

One night, you awake to find your sister Dodo gone: she is not in her bed, and her favorite soft hippo toy Finnegan is missing too. And find that Dodo has discovered a portal into another world, one that leads straight through her bed. You decide to follow her.

*You can follow the **red** numbers in the full book.*

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“What a silly dream this turned out to be,” you scoff, but feel awake and alert. As you walk to your room and your own bed, you nearly trip over a dragon-patterned rucksack that Dodo was supposed to pack full of food supplies, for you to carry. You decide to lug it along. It’s really heavy! What did your sister pack in there? Then you catch a glimpse of Owlet perched on the night stand. Not exactly a flashlight, but it’ll have to do! You pick it up to light up the darkness as you make your way under the duvet. You sit under the blanket and wait, but nothing happens. You feel something small and hard press against your leg. Lighting up Owlet, you investigate what it is. A bean! Right, it must be from Finnegan’s stuffing, and his left leg has that hole in it, so every now and then a bean drops through. He’s left you a trail! You’ll just follow the beans. As you crawl onward through the duvet folds with your heavy rucksack, a strange feeling catches up with you. You should have come up against the wall of your room ages ago! But here you are, going on and on without anything in your way. So, it seems you’ve found the Single Use Passageway. But where does it lead to? The duvet folds appear to go on for ever in the Owlet’s bright blue light. It’s like sinking into a rippling blue ocean. It feels like this crawl will never end, though passageways tend to have an exit as well as an entry...

From your right, you hear a distant clacking sound. Listening carefully, you can tell there’s something ticking away out there.

Do you...

Keep going the way you started → 24

Make your way toward the sound → 25

Shine your Owlet for a look around → 26

24

All the crawling is tiring you out. And this rucksack is such a nuisance. Every so often it almost seems to move by itself. It was a mistake to lug it along! This grinding crawl under the duvet is turning you breathless, when all at once you feel something’s changed. Strangely, the weight of the duvet has lifted. Light as a feather! But why do you feel goosebumps? The air around you is freezing cold, you could almost bite it. And the duvet overhead seems wet. But this must be snow! You rise up suddenly on your knee and poke your head out from under the blanket of snow. You feel a fresh, cold breeze. As you get up on your feet, you look around and see something amazing. → 35

25

You head for the clacking sound, which grows louder. At the Owlet’s faint blue light, you see something stuck in a fold of bedsheet. It’s close enough to touch, and you lift it up. Of course it’s your long-lost kitty-clock! You see the gloomy-looking tomcat’s whiskery face telling the time. It still works! And a lucky thing you found it in this tangle of bedclothes. Stashing it in your rucksack, you venture on. → 24

26

You stop to get a better look, and lift owlet high to fill the tight blankety space with light. Looking around, you find nothing. Or wait, what’s this? A tiny ant is crawling your way, balancing a large crumb on its back. Normally an ant in your bed wouldn’t exactly thrill you, but all of this is so far from normal! At last you see something alive in the darkness. What do you do?

Try to talk to it? All things considered, meeting a talking ant wouldn’t be too far-fetched. → 27

If talking to an ant sounds slightly too far-fetched, you can just keep crawling! → 24

27

For an awkward moment, you feel uncertain about the proper way of addressing a small insect.

You could politely tell the ant “Good day” → 28

Would you rather try a formal “How do you do” and offer a handshake? Of course, ants wouldn’t really have hands to shake, but offering a foot instead might be disrespectful – perhaps it might be best to leave the handshake out of it. → 29

Or you could always try a casual “hey there” → 30

28

The ant crawls on without batting an eyelid. What a rude beast! Was it born in a barn? Now what do you do?

Keep crawling along your way under the blanket → 24

Or head toward the clacking sound? → 25

29

For a moment, the ant’s face lights up with feeling. It stops, and slices a tiny morsel off its giant crumb, then leaves it behind as it crawls on toward its anthill. The crumb is microscopically small, so you only manage to pick it up after a couple of tries with a wetted finger, before it finally sticks. Then you flick it in your rucksack, and though it will probably be stuck down there forever, you are now the proud owner of a crumb morsel.

Do you carry on pushing ahead under the blanket → 24

Or do you head toward the clacking sound → 25

30

The ant passes you by, and it must have a nose because it is now holding it in the air. Probably not a fan of humans, this ant.

Do you head toward the clacking sound → 25

Or keep crawling along your way under the blanket → 24

35

You’re standing in a wide open space surrounded by dark trees. The trees are all bare of leaves, and their empty branches sway in the wind. Trails start under the trees, and disappear into the haze. Your feet are very cold, and no wonder. The ground is a thick carpet of snow. Over your head, the clouds rush past like they were blown away by a giant. The face of the full moon peeps out from behind them, lighting up streaks of fresh, brittle snow. You look around. There’s no trace of Dodo. Broad paths start toward your left and right. In the middle of the clearing is a life-sized sculpture of a lemur. The lithe little creature looks at the sky, wide-eyed and curious, balancing a tuft of snow on the tip of its nose. Behind you there’s a high gray stone building with a pointed arch door. The top of it is lined with carvings of polar bears, and all of them wear cute snowcaps. What a familiar sight – this must be the Zoo!



Having made the great discovery, it feels like you deserve a break. Setting down your rucksack, you hear it make a weird yakking sound, then your cat Tubby pokes his head out the top.

“Tubby, how did you get here?” you ask. Your favorite little tomcat is a welcome surprise in such a desolate place. You scratch behind his ear. Instead of a purr, to your amazement the cat answers you out loud.

“No idea. I guess you should know, you brought me here.”

“Tubby!” you gape. “You only ever used to mewl.”

“Mewling is what babies do to get attention. I’ve always been talking to you, only people are too dumb to understand.”

Standing in the snow, you feel stranger than ever. Having your cat talk back will take some getting used to, but it’s actually not unpleasant.

“Tubby, can you tell me how you got inside the bag?”

“It looked comfortable enough, so I climbed in while you were busy in your room. Big mistake too, in hindsight,” he sighs, worriedly looking at the snow, “but at least there’s a sausage sandwich with me. In a baggie. If you want it,” he adds politely.

He’s right, in the bag you find the remains of a school snack from the day before yesterday. You put it in your pajama pocket. “Thanks, that could be useful. Now what do we do?”

“I say head for home,” the cat says, “I don’t like this cold wet carpet. I want the one at home, so I can scratch at it.”

“But Tubby, this is snow! How would you know, you’re such an indoor cat. No way am I carrying you home now. I’m not going back until I find Dodo,” you tell him, “go right ahead and walk yourself home. Just duck under the snow.”

“Forget it,” says the cat, “I’d rather stick with the rucksack.”

“Fine,” you agree. Though the bag is heavy, you’re glad to have some company on the road.

What do you do now?

Search for footprints in the snow → 36

Or go up to the polar bear building, in case there’s a warm room inside → 37

37

You make for the polar bear gate. Getting closer, under the arches you notice a door’s been left open just a crack. A friendly light filters through. The sign on the door reads, ENTRY PROHIBITED STAFF ONLY. You wonder if this applies to you, when from the line of trees you see a slinky white tomcat worming its way up to the door. Ignoring you completely, it stalks in through the door crack like it owned the place. Gathering your confidence, you decide to follow, and sneak a look in the door crack.

Read up on what you find inside.

Second excerpt from the book

Anna Bojti – Night at the Zoo

After many adventures, and encounters with the strangest creatures imaginable, you find the hidden passage to the hut where the zoo director supposedly lives.

160

You go toward the brambles., Right up at the bushes, you see there's a small gap where you could slip through. Looking both ways up the path, there's no-one around watching. Carefully, you push through the gap. On the far side, there's a narrow little walkway winding through the thickets of undergrowth. Stepping along uncertainly, you try to head north, dodging thorny brambles that grab after you. The thickets block out a lot of the moonlight, leaving you groping around in darkness. You're starting to lose your nerve. Stopping for a minute, you grab at a passing tree trunk. To calm yourself down, you hum a soothing tune as you walk. Trees branches comb your hair and scatter snow on top of your head. Soon enough, you step out of the bushes right before a hut. The hut looks exactly as if it were brought here from Africa. Its round mud walls were topped in a thatch roof. The doorway was guarded by a life-size native warrior statue. Holding a spear in one hand, he rested one foot against his knee, with a wide friendly grin. Despite the welcome grin, Tubby looks at him cagily. What do you do?

Check if the door's open and try entering → 171

Peer in one of the windows → 169

Walk your way around the hut → 170

163

You pick up a blowgun. It is a wooden tube over a yard long, intricately carved. Shots or darts go in one end. If you blow hard enough, the dart flies out. It reminds you of the pen blowgun you made at school to shoot wads of paper at the necks of those sitting in front, while the teacher was busy writing on the board. From your You're jarred from your daydream by a sudden sharp voice. You flinch and nearly drop the blowgun.

"You put that right down! Before you break it."

Quickly, you replace the blowgun on its shelf, and step back guiltily to examine the table company. The owl is still staring with gimlet eyes, while the bearded old man ignores you and looks away. Whose voice was it you heard? Looking at the buffalo skull gives you a pang of fear, but you soon rule out the chance of it talking.

Do you speak to the bearded man → 174

Or if you haven't already, look closer at the owl → 173

You could also leave the house → 185

169

Sneaking up carefully to avoid detection, you peep inside the window. There's a friendly looking room inside, cluttered with an assortment of stuff. Close up to the window, a bearded man and an owl are seated at a table. You duck before they see you. But they didn't look dangerous from here. In fact, sitting with them seems a good idea.

Be brave and walk in the door → 171

If you haven't already, you can walk your way around the house first → 170

Or decide to leave this place → 185

170

You walk all the way around the hut, and sadly note there are no more windows to peek into, no back door, not even an air vent, so sneaking in the back is not an option. You're about to circle back to the front of the hut, when you notice a trail of child-size footprints and small round spots. You

follow them until you reach two egg-shaped prints, one large and one small. This is where they sat in the snow! Inside the smaller print, you find a bean, and in the large one a bunch of pistachio shells. This must have been Finnegan and Dodo alright. They seem to have avoided the hut altogether, perhaps the armed guard scared them off. You however feel curious to look inside.

There's the window to peer in, if you haven't already → 169

Or walk past the guard and his spear to walk in the door → 171

You could also decide to follow on Dodo and Finnegan's trail without wasting more time on the hut → 18

171

The Zulu warrior by the door is making you jittery. Of course, he's only a piece of carved and painted wood. The body is covered in tribal tattoos, whorls and patterns, and he also wears a nose ring, and a cap of snow on top of his head. What if you had a guardian statue planted outside your room? Maybe nobody would dare enter, least of all Dodo. Or maybe everyone would come around to see your awesome tattooed spear-bearing guard figure?

Even as you daydream, you open the door and step in.



The only light inside is from the wavering flame of a candle. Shelves line the walls ceiling-high, and loaded with books, trophies and tribal artifacts. The floor is covered in soft and deep-piled carpets. Mounted over the door you just entered is an enormous buffalo skull, with “Dr. Endre Nagy” written on a label underneath. It’s a spooky-looking trophy. In the center of the room, behind a round table there’s a bearded man sitting in an armchair. He’s holding a china teacup. Sprawling on the armrest is a huge owl. On the tabletop before them is a printed metal sign that reads “Do Not Feed!” in bold capitals. The fireplace in the middle of the hut is bare, apart from the sighing of the wind. As you walk closer the owl flashes its yellow eyes at you. The old gentleman ignores you completely. He’s probably hard of hearing, you think. Tubby looks the owl up and down, but decides it’s too big for him to attack. Instead, he jumps out of your hood and sits beside the fireplace.

What do you do next?

Walk around the hut and check out the books and tribal stuff → 172

Strike up conversation with the bearded man → 174

Or take a closer look at the owl → 173

172

The bookshelf is loaded with heavy, leather-bound volumes. You open a few and take a peek: one has pictures of spooky African masks, the other describes tribal life and tradition, including the mysterious witch-doctors. A third book is an illustrated album full of animals you have never seen before. The topmost shelf is lined with trophies, antlers and stuffed birds. There are also assorted special items: ornate carved arrows, spears and blowguns, as well as a few ceramic bowls.

What do you do?

Take a blowgun from the shelf → 163

Try talking to the bearded man → 174

Investigate the owl, if you haven’t already → 173

Or inspect one of the ceramic bowls → 175

173

You take a good close look at the enormous bird. Its plumage is rusty brown, shot through with streaks of black, and its stomach has swirly brown patterns on yellow. There are two tufted ears on its head. The yellow eyes look right back at you, and you notice that above the beak, the bird is wearing a pair of black-framed eyeglasses.

Having checked out the owl, you could now turn to the old man and ask why the bird is wearing glasses → 176

Or if you haven’t already done so, walk around the room and get a better look at the books and African memorabilia → 172

174

You approach the bearded old gentleman.

“Hello,” you greet him. He looks at you with a twisted smile, and stares back at the tabletop. You follow his gaze and observe a saucer with some apple slices, just within his reach. He looks up at you again with a pleading expression, then back at the apples. Could he be asking you for a slice of apple? What do you do?

Put a slice of apple in his mouth → 177

Try striking up a conversation instead → 178

175

You go to a cluttered shelf and pick up a clay pot, then open it. It is full to the brim with a reddish-colored powder.

“You put that right down!” a strange voice hollers across the room.

You nearly drop the clay pot, before you replace it on the shelf and step back guiltily to examine the table company. The owl is still staring with gimlet eyes, while the bearded old man ignores you and looks away. Whose voice was it you heard? Looking at the buffalo skull gives you a pang of fear, but you soon rule out the chance of it talking.

Do you...

Strike up a conversation with the old man → 174

Investigate the owl, if you haven't already → 173

Or leave the house → 185

176

You turn to the bearded old man and ask why his owl is wearing eyeglasses. He looks at you with a twisted smile, and stares back at the tabletop. You follow his gaze and observe a saucer with some apple slices, just within his reach. He looks up at you again with a pleading expression, then back at the apples. Could he be asking you for a slice of apple? What do you do?

Put a slice of apple in his mouth → 177

Try striking up a conversation instead → 178

177

You pick up a slice of apple and offer it to the old man. As you get it near his face, he suddenly gapes his mouth wide open and tries biting your hand – you only just manage to pull away in time! Looking a little disappointed, he looks down at his feet like a kid caught at a prank.

“Do Not Feed, can't you read the sign?” quips the owl, sounding bored. “Anyway he's harmless, you're perfectly safe to pet him,” it adds in a more encouraging tone.

Awkwardly, you reach over and pet the old man on the head. His lion's mane of hair is smooth and silver-gray. The old gentleman smiles, then tries to stuff his beard into an empty jar on the table before him.

“There you go, he won't bite,” says the owl. “Now tell me, what brings you here?”

Turn to page → 181

178

“Hello. Nice hut you have here! Are you an explorer, or a famous scientist? Can you tell me about your books? What kind of bird do you have stuffed over there? Where is this awesome carpet from? This is a long-eared owl, isn't it?”

But whatever you ask him, the old man only smiles his twisted smile and fiddles with his beard.

“Stop trying, it's a waste of breath,” quips the owl, sounding bored.

The old gentleman smiles, then tries to stuff his beard into an empty jar on the table before him.

The owl seems the better conversation of the two, so you turn toward it. → 181

181

What do you say to the owl? You can ask several questions.

Ask who the old gentleman is → 182

Ask why the buffalo trophy is labeled “Dr. Endre Nagy” → 183

Tell the owl you’re here to see the Director (if you have heard of the Director) → 184

Or say you need to get going to find your lost sister → 187

182

“That’s Otto, my faithful bloodhound. The last time we visited Africa, he got into a witch doctor’s hut and ate up some magic powders. That’s how he turned into a bearded old man. But I love him all the same, and we’re still inseparable. He does tend to bite, and often can’t cope with being human. Can you, Otto?” The bearded gentleman smiles, then wheezes and snaps at a passing mayfly.

If you have more questions for the owl → 181

If you decide it’s time to get back to finding your lost sister → 187

183

“Dr. Endre Nagy was a dear friend of mine, a famous explorer and scholar of Africa,” the owl replies.

“That’s interesting, how did you make friends with a buffalo?” asks Tubby.

“No no, he was an explorer, a human, but long dead now. He hunted that great buffalo over there, and gave me the skull as a gift. It’s an heirloom now.”

“That’s really a nasty way to go. For the buffalo I mean. Being hunted,” you say, and no longer feel spooked by the skull. Dr. Endre Nagy smiles above the door, and looks pleased by your words.

You could ask the owl who he is, and how he got friendly with such a famous scholar → 186

Tell the owl you’re here to see the Director (if you have heard of the Director) → 184

Or say you need to get going to find your lost sister → 187

184

“Oh, you’ve come to the right place!” says the owl, and sounds pleased. “I am the Director.”

“Wow,” you manage to say, though you’ve always suspected that there’s more to owls than meets the eye.

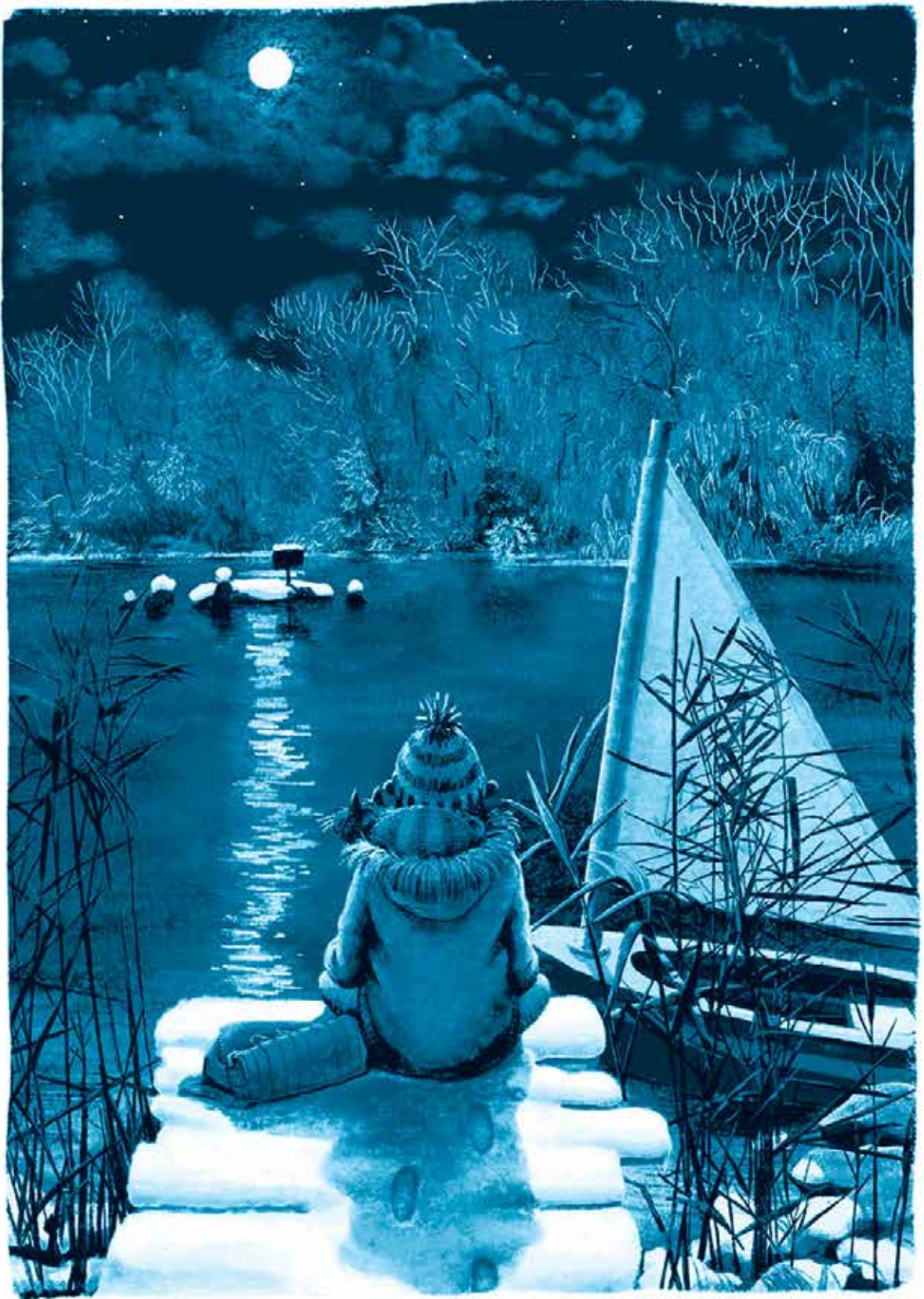
You can read all about it in the book.

A few illustrations from the book

Anna Bojti – Night at the Zoo

You can find all illustrations here:

[https://www.behance.net/gallery/80845719/EJSZAKA-AZ-ALLATKERTBEN CHILDREN-BOOK-ILLUSTRATION-2019](https://www.behance.net/gallery/80845719/EJSZAKA-AZ-ALLATKERTBEN-CHILDREN-BOOK-ILLUSTRATION-2019)



The pier at the zoo lake



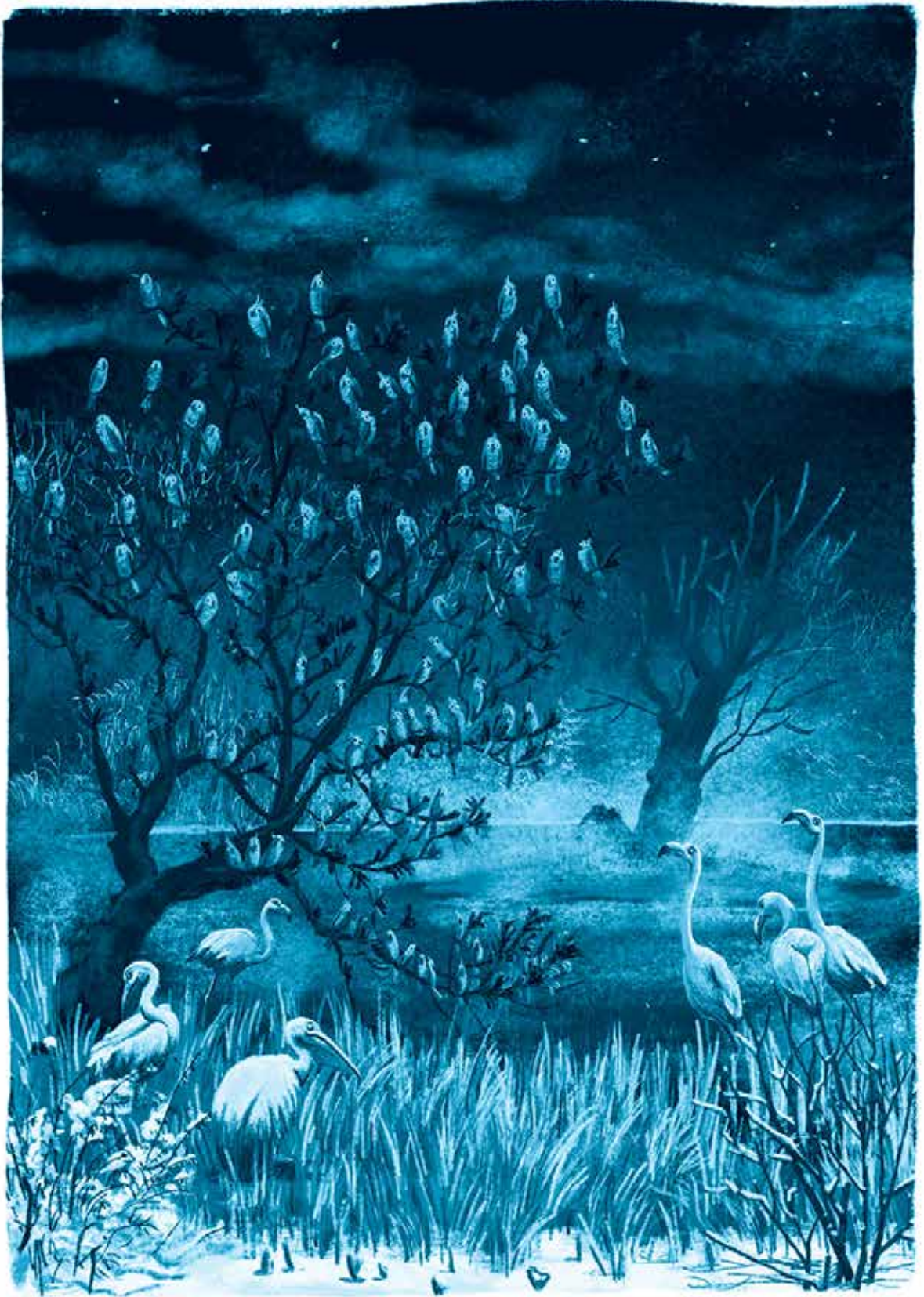
A mysterious room with a fireplace



In the clutches of a Rukh-bird



Zoo restaurant at night



The Secret Lake



Owl Castle with the dangerous Basilisk