



THE BOOK OF STOLEN DREAMS

THE FINAL BATTLE

First published in the UK in 2025 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. usborne.com

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20, 93049 Regensburg, Deutschland, VK Nr. 17560

Text copyright © David Farr, 2025

Illustrations by Kristina Kister © Usborne Publishing, 2025

Title type by Sarah J Coleman / inkymole.com © Usborne Publishing, 2021

Author photo © Susannah Baker-Smith

The right of David Farr to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

The name Usborne and the Balloon logo are Trade Marks of Usborne Publishing Limited.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems (including for text or data mining), stored in retrieval systems or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9781836042372 JFMAMJJ SOND/25 10092/1

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.



THE BOOK OF STOLEN DREAMS

THE FINAL BATTLE

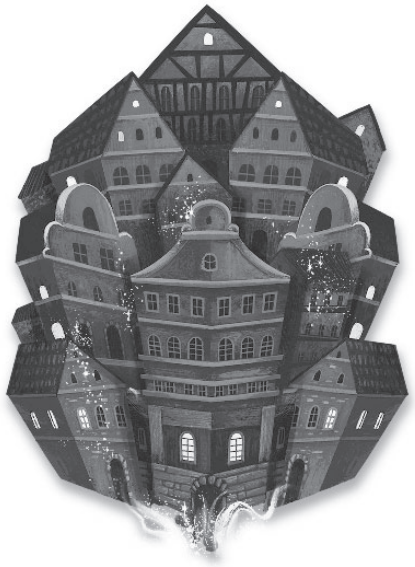
DAVID FARR

Illustrated by Kristina Kister

USBORNE

The *Stolen Dreams* books are dedicated to the memory of my ancestors, Josef, Aennie, Annemarie, Ruth and Robert Elkan.
A brave family indeed.

This third book is dedicated to the memory of Benny Friday,
who inspired the creation of Bobby.
But who was a lot cleverer.



1

Saturday Morning, North Brava

The last few months had been the happiest of Rachel Klein's life.

Rachel sat at the small kitchen table in her family's North Bravan apartment and tucked into her morning toast. She smiled at the reassuring medley of noises around her – an animal snoring, her brother Robert's electrical circuit threatening to catch fire, and the distant sound of her father joyfully gurgling mouthwash. Yes, this was as good as life got.

Rachel sipped her tea. Robert was at the bay window, playing with his new science kit, trying to make a frog jump through a hoop. From the opposite corner came a gently satisfied snoozing sound, with occasional farts. It was Bobby, the bravest beagle on earth.

Bobby LOVED Brava. Since his arrival from the Hinterland, his tail had barely stopped wagging. It wagged in the apartment. It wagged as he scampered through the city's parks, Rachel gossiping with him like an old friend. In the Hinterland, Rachel had been able to hear Bobby talk back to her. Now he just barked when he wanted a walk and whined when his lunch was late. She missed his funny chatter, but when she looked into his adoring eyes, she knew what he was saying: "I am with my wonderful owner, my bed is near the radiator, lunch will be soon, and all is well with the world!"

If Rachel had a tail, it would be wagging too. She loved her school. Laetitia, her fearless accomplice in the escape from St Cecilia's Home for Forgotten Children, was now in her class, and together they could laugh at almost anything. She loved her home, with its piano, its saggy old sofa, its memories of mother. Robert was sweet and kind. Bobby was Bobby. Even the toast seemed content.

Her father had finished gurgling in the bathroom. Now he was singing as he shaved, an old love song, sweet and cheerful. Something about lime trees. Rachel felt a little grateful tear come to her eye.

Her crazy, brilliant father. How he had changed! These days Felix leaped from his bed every morning, to catch the tram to the North Brava Public Lending Library where he worked. He was reading again, novels,

and poetry. He was even writing some verses himself – long and rapturous poems about his family with lots of stuff about how amazing his daughter was.

"Rachel Klein. Divine, divine.

Is she your daughter? No! She's mine!"

Rachel would usually have found all this acutely embarrassing, but somehow she didn't mind. Her father was back. Now that he knew his beloved wife Judith was comfortable in the Hinterland, waiting for him to join her whenever he was ready, Felix Klein could enjoy life again. He was living life for Judith. Reading for her. Loving his children for her. And he was safe in the knowledge that at the end of it all, he would join her for eternity.

Eternity. Rachel shivered for a moment as she recalled the terrible fate that had threatened her in the Hinterland. To think that she had been condemned to live in Charles Malstain's body inside Tyrants' Tower for ever. How close she had come to disaster! Well, now she was free. Now all of Krasnia was free from the terrible grip of the cruel old dictator. Charles Malstain had been defeated once and for all. And all thanks to Anil and Robert, and Bobby and Titus the mouse!

Some nights Rachel still dreamed of Malstain's spirit dangling like a foul and toxic cloud over the waters of the Hinterland. Deprived of his body, his military uniform, and all his power, he was reduced to a miasma of pure

venomous rage. The High Council would make sure his spirit stayed there for all time. Malstain would never agree to joining the Flow. He would rather suffer an eternity of misery than submit to being part of the whole.

Well, that was his choice.

And now six months had passed, and Rachel was home, it was the summer holiday, the air was warm and sweet, the *Sofa So-good* was a great place to sit and read a book on a sunny Saturday morning. Oh, how simple and beautiful life could be.

"Rach, look at the clock! We told Anil we'd be there at eleven!"

My goodness, she'd forgotten! The Keepers of the Key Meeting! Robert was already putting on his coat. Rachel downed her last bit of toast and grabbed Bobby's travel blanket. The dog, sensing an imminent departure, leaped up with massive enthusiasm.

"Yes, we're going out," said Rachel.

"Brilliant!" Bobby's eyes seemed to cry out.

"Come on." She dashed into the bathroom where her father had half a chin's worth of shaving foam still on. "Robert and I are off to meet Anil! We're having coffee."

"Since when did you drink coffee?!" he smiled.

"Since now!" she laughed. "I'll see you at the cinema."

"Two o'clock! Don't forget!" her father replied. "Emil Bonfleur awaits!"

She kissed her father, he grabbed her and whirled her around, she got covered in shaving foam and burst into hysterics. He grabbed his purse, took out some coins. “Have a cake on me!” And with that they were gone.



2
Politics and Cream

Bobby LOVED the tram. He seemed utterly dazzled by how he could move without moving. He thought it was hilarious.

They took the number 23 into the old city centre. It was Saturday, and the streets were thronged with people out shopping or meeting for a weekend coffee and a pastry.

Rachel looked at their smiling faces. How strange that none of them knew how close the dictator Charles Malstain had come to returning to Krasnia. The new President Constanza Glimpf had decided it was better not to tell them what had happened. She didn't want to frighten the population any more than was necessary. Ex-President Malstain was a threat no more. What was there to fear?

Anil was sitting in the back booth at Belle's. He waved as Rachel and Robert walked in. Seeing him waiting, Rachel remembered the day she had met him – on the bench in the city's rose garden when, dressed in his mysterious mackintosh, he had first given her the blood-red key. Now he was a genuinely close friend. She admired him more than anyone.

Bobby scampered across and licked Anil's calf affectionately. He LOVED being at Belle's. The restaurant had made special dispensation for him to sit in the corner near the kitchen. His tail wagged in appreciation as a plate covered in cream was brought by an elegant waiter, who bowed. Bobby savoured each mouthful, looking up sagely as the Keepers of the Key discussed the matters of the day.

"I understand why President Glimpf does not want to scare people," Anil was saying, "but I think that Krasnians should know the truth. The fact is, Rachel, if it wasn't for your bravery, Charles Malstain would have been back here by now. He would have been in your body, and Mary Trueblood in Elsa's. They would have slipped back into Bravan society without anyone noticing. And who knows what might have happened?"

"He would never have got away with it," said Robert, his face full of cake. "He never convinced me that he was my sister."

"He very nearly did," said Rachel.

"No way. You're much more argumentative." Robert winked at Rachel, who wrinkled her nose at him. "You've got jam on it," he said and when she felt the tip of her nose she discovered he was right.

"Be honest, Robert," Anil continued earnestly. "You were *this* close to being deceived. So what chance would anyone else have stood? Malstain could have had the trust of the entire country. In my experience, we must never underestimate the determination of evil."

The phrase struck a chord with Rachel. The determination of evil. "What do you mean by that?" she said.

"Only that we all naturally want to live our lives in a state of innocence, with as little danger as possible. We want to believe in people. And this can mean we choose not to notice when the powerful and the corrupt mean us harm. We turn our gaze away until it is too late."

"So you think that by not telling people about what happened to Clara and Elsa, we increase the danger?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

"I don't agree," Robert said. "Malstain is currently nothing but a patch of oil on the sky of the Hinterland. He has no body, no form, no way to escape. The High Council will see to that. To tell everyone about a danger already passed would only expose Clara and Elsa to publicity neither of them wants, and scare everyone in

this cafe to bits. They've just got used to everything being normal and relaxed."

Rachel looked around. Belle's was a sea of smiling, chatting people, with their children, their dogs and friends. How wonderful to be in a world where the main problem to be resolved was over which cake to choose and who to eat it with. Not whether an evil dictator was trying to steal your body and use it to recapture the world.

"I'm just glad it's over," she said. "I'm glad we won."

"Maybe I'm just anxious," Anil muttered, "but with people like Malstain, I always prefer to keep my eyes open."

Rachel looked at him. She knew why.

Not long after they had returned from the Hinterland, the Kleins had invited Anil to their apartment for the first Keepers of the Key meeting. Anil had told them his story. "I lost my family when an invading army came into our homeland, bombed us in our buildings, and forced us from our homes. No one helped us, no one lifted a finger." Anil's family had been killed. Anil would have been killed too, but for a magician in a flea market who had saved his life and handed him a mysterious blood-red key. Anil used the key to enter the Hinterland so he could see his family one last time before they made their journey into the Flow.

Now Anil played with his cake half-heartedly. "I just

want us to stay vigilant," he said. "We are the Keepers of the Key. Let's not forget that."

"And not the keepers of the tea," Rachel said quietly and Anil looked at her.

"Exactly so," he said.

Two hours later, Rachel was walking alone with Bobby towards the cinema to meet her father. Robert and Anil had opted not to see the film, instead heading towards the harbour to look at the sea and discuss politics some more.

Rachel was secretly pleased. She adored her brother and she was rather keen on Anil, but the cinema was something she preferred to share with her father. It was their treat. They loved the soft seats and the popcorn and the music before the film. Plus, the film itself, of course. A world to disappear into for a whole two hours. And for Felix Klein there was no greater treat than a new film starring Emil Bonfleur – the undisputed (and staggeringly handsome) star of Krasnian cinema!

Since the fall of Charles Malstain, cinema had become hugely popular in Brava. Whereas Malstain had only allowed films about himself, there were now hundreds of movies to choose from. Comedies and action films, science fictions and romance. And Emil Bonfleur was in all of them! He had become Krasnia's

most popular and highly paid actor. He was funny, charming, athletic, he always won the day. And Rachel's dad loved him.

A classic Bonfleur movie tended to involve him saving a group of innocent nuns or schoolchildren from some terrible evil (normally a vile wizard or a foreign spy with a big moustache) and there would be a girl who would, naturally, fall in love with him. Rachel always enjoyed watching her father's eyes grow large as saucers as the hero jumped from ship to ship, or flew an aircraft into war with only one hand.

The latest film was called *The Mystery of the Marble Woman*. In it, Emil Bonfleur played a heroic detective trying to unearth the secrets of a mysterious Egyptian tomb. It sounded deeply silly and brilliant. Rachel increased her pace. Bobby scampered along eagerly. He LOVED the cinema but in his case it was because he could curl up at Rachel's feet and have a good dream about biscuits.

Then Bobby stopped dead.

"What is it?"

"Something wrong," Bobby's tail seemed to say.

Bobby's nose hit the ground and pointed forward. Rachel looked ahead. There was a small group of people in front of the cinema, sitting, flowers were out, candles. The cinema itself had a sign saying:

Film Cancelled.

"What's going on?"

Rachel walked quickly towards the glass front doors of the movie house. Her father was standing there, his face pale.

"What is it, Dad?" she said.

"Haven't you heard? It's just been on the radio," he said. "Emil Bonfleur's gone missing!"

THE BRAVAN DAILY NEWS REPORTS!

MOVIE STAR LOST IN DESERT!
PET MONKEY WITH HIM!
BOTH UNACCOUNTED FOR!



The whole of Krasnia holds its breath this morning as we desperately await news of the fate of Krasnia's most beloved film star – Emil Bonfleur.

Mr Bonfleur, thirty-six years old, whose latest film, *The Mystery*

of the Marble Woman, has broken all box-office records – was taking a short break in the shooting of his new movie – *Hey Ho Pirate!* – to motorcycle across the Sahara Desert, accompanied only by his intrepid pet monkey Randall.

The two explorers set off four days ago and were last seen yesterday as they left a small oasis in Western Egypt. When they failed to arrive in Alexandria, search parties were immediately sent out.

At nineteen hundred hours, the motorcycle and sidecar were found abandoned deep in the desert, on the edge of a rocky ravine. But there was no sign of either the handsome Bonfleur, nor his adorable monkey.

Crowds are gathering already in Brava's Jackdaw square to place flowers in honour of the matinee idol and to pray for his and Randall's safe return!