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opening extract from

Jonathan Swift's Gulliver

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My name is Gulliver. Lemuel Gulliver. I live quietly here at Redriff, in south London. Today has been a very important day for me. I came back from the stable, where I had been having my usual daily conversation with my horses, and decided that for the first time in five years I would allow my wife to sit down to dinner with me. Of course, she had to stay at the furthest end of the table, and I kept a nosegay of scented herbs with me the whole time, to ward off any smells. But I did actually let her speak a few words to me. I now think I might even be able to bear a visit from one of our neighbours soon, but I am not yet sure.

I have also decided that it is time I told my own story, before anyone else presumes to tell it for me – I have heard rumours that this may be the case. Fortunately I have an excellent memory – and a reputation for complete honesty – so you may trust every detail of what you are about to read.

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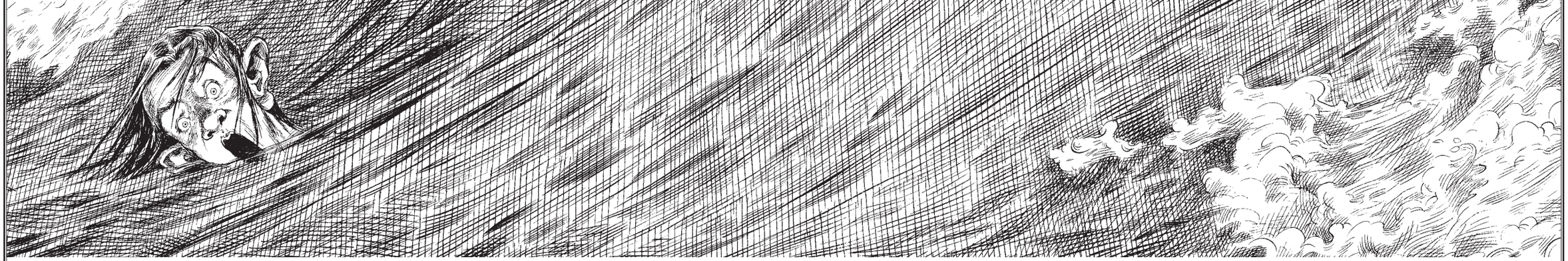

A VOYAGE TO LILLIPUT

I was born in Nottinghamshire and was sent to Cambridge University when I was fourteen years old. Three years later I began training as a surgeon, first in London and afterwards in Leyden in the Netherlands. I made several voyages as a ship's surgeon, but grew tired of the sea and decided to set up as a doctor in Wapping, where I moved with my wife and children. However, business did not go well and I again took a post as a ship's surgeon.

The ship I was employed on, the *Antelope*, sailed from Bristol on 4 May 1699, bound for the South Seas. In early November a violent storm blew the ship off course, and we ended up somewhere to the north-west of Tasmania. On 5 November the ship was driven onto a rock and wrecked. Six of us managed to escape in the lifeboat, but shortly afterwards it was overturned in a sudden gale. I swam as best I could and eventually found myself in shallow water within sight of land. I staggered ashore and, completely exhausted, fell asleep immediately.

When I awoke, it was just daylight. I was lying on my back and tried to sit up, only to find that I was stuck fast. I could not even move my head. It seemed that I was tied to the ground by hundreds of pieces of string.

Eventually, as the sun was becoming uncomfortably bright and hot, I felt some living things moving up my left leg and onto my body, closely followed by about forty more. The first creature, whatever it was, came to a halt just under my chin, and by peering downwards I found I could just make it out. To my astonishment, what did I see but a miniature human no bigger than my hand, equipped with bow and arrow! In my amazement I let out a loud roar, and all the creatures turned and fled back down my body, some of them falling off in their hurry to get away. They were soon back, however.

Struggling to get loose, I finally managed to free my left arm, and, by pulling violently, loosened the threads tying my hair down, so that I could turn my head a little. I tried to grab a handful of the tiny men but they scurried off again, all yelling at once. Then one of them cried, "Tolgo phonac" and I was instantly bombarded with hundreds of minute arrows, which pricked me like so many needles and hurt terribly. I quickly decided that it might be wise to lie still and try to free myself under cover of night, when I would be able to sneak away. Soon I heard a lot of clattering and banging to my right, and saw that a tall platform was being built. Four of the little creatures climbed up to it and the tallest of them, who seemed to be rather important, made a great long speech directed at me, of which I didn't understand a single word.

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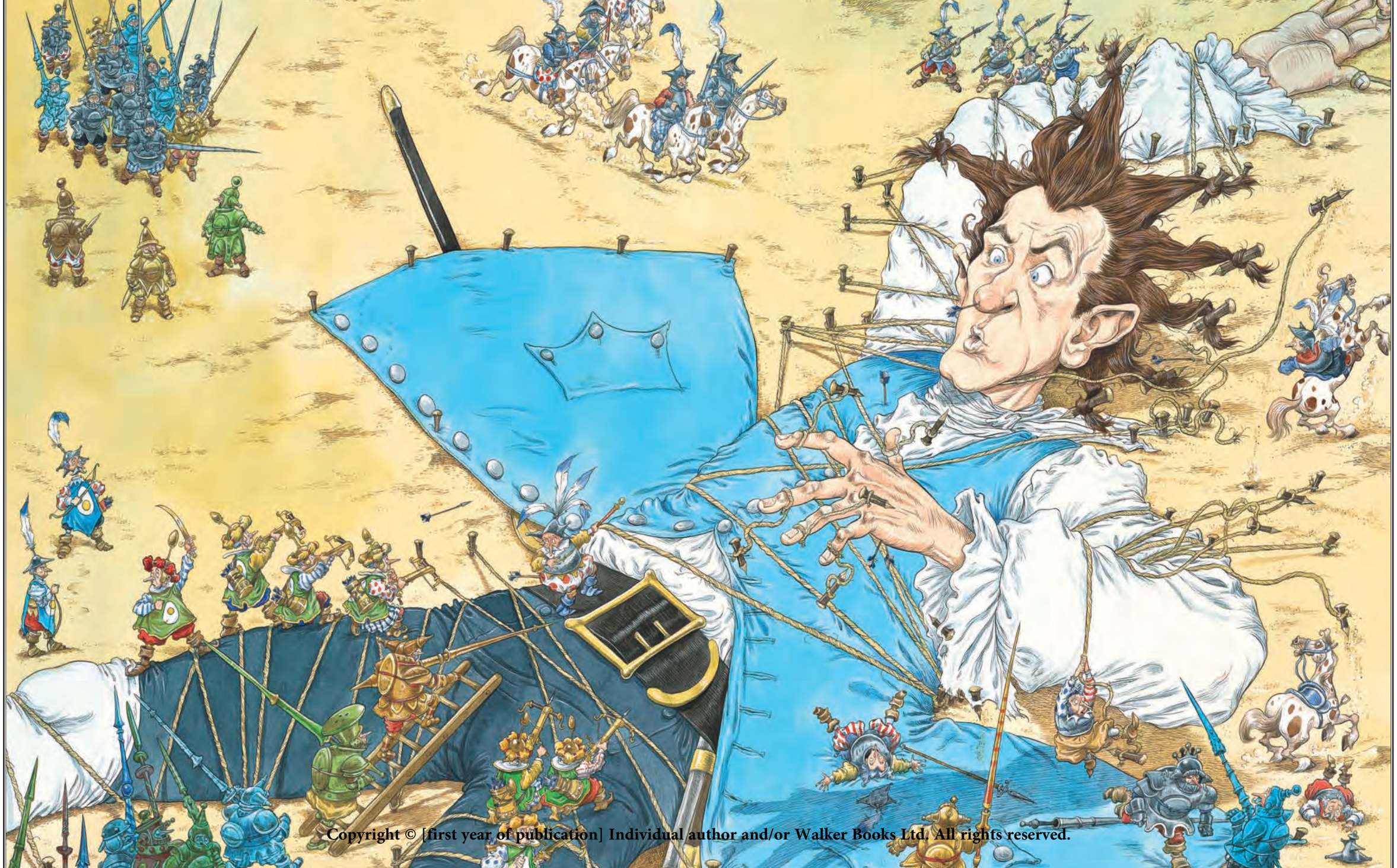

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As you might imagine, I was absolutely starving by now and, although it was rather rude of me, I indicated this by pointing vigorously to my mouth. The important person understood immediately, and ordered food to be brought. It was all tiny – I ate three loaves of bread in one mouthful – but delicious. They then brought me wine to drink in what must have been their largest barrels, and some ointment to soothe the pain caused by the arrow wounds. They smeared my wounds with ointment and then loosed the ties on my left side – and not a moment too soon, for all the drink they had given me had filled my bladder to bursting. The creatures on my right side quickly realized what was going to happen and ran clear, turning to gasp in amazement at the gushing torrent I produced. I then gestured as best I could that I would like to be let free, trying to indicate that I would do them no harm, but they refused.

I soon fell deeply asleep (I later discovered that they had put a sleeping potion in the wine) and woke up to find something tickling my nostril, making me sneeze terribly. I found I was being carried on a sort of platform on wheels, drawn by no fewer than fifteen hundred horses.

We stopped near a large city, and my left ankle was bound with chains to the front wall of a building that looked like some sort of temple. At least a hundred thousand people, including someone who was evidently the emperor himself, came out of the city to see me. Thousands of the sightseers clambered up ladders to swarm over my body, causing me considerable irritation, until the emperor forbade it.

When they were sure I was securely chained, my ropes were cut and I was at last able to stand up. You can imagine the commotion that caused. Feeling very down at heart, I turned round and crawled into the temple, where I found I could lie down at full stretch.

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When I finally came out again, I found the emperor coming towards me on one of their miniature horses. He ordered me to be given food and drink, and began to speak to me. To see and hear him better, I lay down on my side. He was very smartly dressed and much taller than the people around him, who included ladies in sumptuous dresses, and what appeared to be a number of priests and lawyers. The emperor, priests and lawyers spoke to me for over two hours and I replied in all the languages I could – I am very good at languages and know several – but they couldn't understand me and nor, for that matter, could I understand them.

The court then went off, leaving a large number of guards to keep the crowds away. Some ruffians were impertinent enough to shoot arrows at me as I sat on the ground outside my home. One of the arrows only narrowly missed my left eye. The man in charge of the guards seized six of the ringleaders and decided that the best way to punish them was to hand them over to me. I picked them up, put five of them in my coat pocket and then pretended to be about to eat the sixth. He was terrified, and let out an awful yell. I took out my pocket knife, which frightened them all even more, but then used it to cut the ropes binding the man and put him gently on the ground. I then freed the other five in the same way. The soldiers and the crowd were very impressed by how merciful I had been.

As news of my arrival spread, huge numbers of people came to look at me. They all stopped work and the whole country threatened to grind to a halt. The emperor ordered everyone who had already seen me to go home, saying they could only come near me again if they paid a licence fee. The treasury made a lot of money collecting these fees.

In the meantime, I later learnt, the royal court were discussing what to do with me. They were afraid that I might break free, or eat all the country's food. They thought of starving me to death or poisoning me with their arrows, but then decided that my corpse would be too difficult to get rid of, and would soon start to rot and smell horrible, perhaps even causing a plague.

While the court were arguing, some soldiers came in and told them how kindly I had treated the criminals who had attacked me. The court were so impressed that they abandoned their plans to get rid of me, and instead decided I should be properly looked after. Each day I was to be fed six cows, forty sheep and lots of bread and wine, paid for by the treasury. Six hundred people were appointed to look after me; three hundred tailors were ordered to make me a suit; and six of the best teachers were to teach me the language. I soon started my lessons. The emperor himself often came to help. Each time, I begged him for my freedom, but he replied that I must be patient. In any case I would first have to swear an oath of peace and agree to be searched for any weapons.

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