

Ahead, Ms Tarnish had already dipped her body through an alcoved side door to reverse almost immediately, pursued by a stout figure sporting a tweed khaki suit and black boots. That must be the Major, thought George disheartened, watching the pair exchange information. Another new horrible staff member.

“About turn!” barked Posquith, executing an expert ankle swivel. Ms Tarnish stumbled to follow, the bigger of the two brandishing an ebony-tipped cane under one arm. Purposefully they marched over stopping a foot or so away from George.

“Halt!” ordered the Major. Perched on top of a parched neck stuffed into a collar, his bald head sat unnaturally small as if it should be attached to a turkey. “So, you must be the bright spark looking for The Zobeasts?”

“Oh, er, yes, I am. Um, have you got it?”

“What? Speak up when you’re spoken to. Mumbling grumbling children are the worst!” Posquith squatted low. A wrinkled pink and white face eyeballed George. Squashy lips bulged this way and that but George wasn’t listening, fascinated by the tip of a hair-sprout close to tickling his cheek.

“...and you’re not the first to ask about this Zobeasts prize. Therefore, explain to me what exactly it is that is so important about this book and why you want to borrow it?” Posquith slid open a sticky smile to reveal a hollow of stumps. “Well, come on boy. I’m waiting! Oh bunkers, not again.”

Abruptly, Posquith straightened to rev his throat, finally screwing up his peckish features to disgorge a lump of glutinous matter. The jelly belly delivery wobbled just short of Tarnish’s satin shoe.

“That’s got it. Runs in the family. But back to business seeing as that’s why you’re here. My instincts tell me there’s something fishy going on and frankly I think there’s quite a lot you’re not telling me which I suggest you do or you could get into a whole pile of trouble. So come on, let’s have it. The truth! What do you know about this Zobeasts book?”

“Nothing! This is the truth! So, so you haven’t got it back then?”

“Got it back? Haven’t you been listening to a single word?” roared Posquith. “Of course it’s not back, you stupid boy. I’ve never set eyes on it! He sneered. “Who are you working for?”

“What? No-one, I promise!”

“Really. Well, how convenient. It strikes me as extremely suspicious that you seem to know so much already about this book that’s so hard to come by.” The Major smiled nastily. “As much as I find you a likeable brat, I don’t think you realise how important this conversation is. Whatever makes that book so valuable, only matters to me now! Find it and bring it to me!”

George shuddered. “Um, I think it’s got wings,” he managed.

Posquith bent low, twisting up his face. “Don’t push me, child. Just do as you’re told and get me that book. Wherever it is. Understood?”

“But what if I can’t find it? It could take me ages!”

“It could take me ages,” mimicked Posquith back in his stride. “As the new Chief Librarian of The Grand Library of St Slegna, that book belongs to Me, here, in My Library!”