

Elephant Hill and The Path of Light

*Elephant Hill
and
The Path of Light*

Part Two

*by
J. C. Dickens*

With the help of the crew of:



Elephant Hill and The Path of Light

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In the London office of the Undiscovered Worlds Press, Dickens shuffled his manuscript.

“Whew,” said Dickens, “I’ve been reading for a long time. Does anyone have any criticism?”

“No,” we said, “we’d like to hear the rest of your story. We think you are a very Literary Cat. More tea?”

Dickens stretched and purred exuberantly.

“Please, and heavy on the milk, if you please. Is that a can of sardines I see over there on the table?”

“It certainly is. We had quite forgotten about it. If we can find a can opener, we’ll all have sardines on toast.”

“Ah hum” said Dickens, “I think you will find it is the kind of can that has a key on top that will open it nicely.”

“You’re right,” we said, opening the can with the key. “We were wondering about Buckingham Palace. Are you actually staying with the King and Queen?”

After everyone was served, Dickens cleared his throat meaningfully.

“Let me explain about Buckingham Palace,” he began.

“It seems that Uncle Arthur, who had been having a grand old time at the London Zoo, was having some second thoughts about his situation. For one thing, it was beginning to get rather chilly, and he wanted more room to roam. Uncle Arthur decided to go to the office and complain.

“My dear fellow, delighted to see you, and how are we settling in?” asked the Superintendent of Elephants and Wildfowl.

“Well,” said Uncle Arthur, “no complaints on the food side, and the company is stimulating.”

“Splendid!” interrupted the Superintendent, “I knew you’d just fit in like everyone else.”

Uncle Arthur was being shepherded to the door when he blurted out, “I need more roaming room.”

“Of course you do, my dear fellow,” said the Superintendent nonplused, “when it comes to that, we all need more room. But do the official regulations allow us to have more room?”



The superintendent reached across his desk and pulled out his well thumbed copy of, Rules and Regulations Appertaining to Newly Arrived Elephants from the Indian Sub-continent.

The superintendent flipped expertly through the pages, “Ah yes, you see here it is in black and white, my dear chap. Apparently, you already have the maximum space allocation for your class of elephant, so I’m afraid our hands are rather tied on this one. Now, if you have any further questions, don’t hesitate to pop in and see me,” he added.

Uncle Arthur, blinked at the microscopic print on the page and finding his voice temporarily gone, silently nodded his head.

The next minute, Uncle Arthur found himself being swiftly marched back to his pen. He was no sooner out of the door when the Superintendent reached for the telephone and rang the elephant keeper, “Look’s like we’re going to have trouble with number 6. Yes, that’s right, the batty one, who calls himself Uncle Arthur..”

Back at the pen, one of the other elephants slyly winked and said to Uncle Arthur,

“And how did we get on with Mr. Rules and Regulations?” And not waiting for an answer, he shuffled off, chuckling to himself.



That night at the zoo, everyone was sleeping except Uncle Arthur. It had finally dawned on him that he was in something of a predicament. He reasoned that it was time for him to take a walk—a long walk. Raining again, thought Uncle Arthur as he departed the London Zoo, clutching his blue umbrella.

Night workers stared curiously at a large lumbering shape, hurrying through the dark London streets. Let them stare, he thought, an elephant in a predicament just has to have a long walk.

On and on he lumbered. Finally, and Uncle Arthur could never clearly recall the following events, he only remembers hurrying through some large wrought iron gates, and under a stone archway. He crashed through an ivy covered fence and plunged blindly down a long colonnade of trees to find he was in front of a little house which seemed to him vaguely familiar. Uncle Arthur blinked. He saw that the house was in fact, an old



style lodge set in a rose garden with a pavilion nearby. It was run down and weather beaten, but looked like many he had seen on his travels. He walked round the wide verandah and found some of the windows had been boarded up, but by a large stone porch, he saw a door loosely swinging on rusting hinges.

Cautiously, Uncle Arthur pushed the door with his trunk and found himself standing on an old Persian carpet. It was all hauntingly, temptingly familiar. Down through a mahogany lined hallway he marched, until he came to a large sitting room. A portrait of Queen Victoria stared down at him from the wall. He lifted his trunk and brushed a long marble topped table. Very dusty, he thought, it looks as though this house has been abandoned and neglected.

What a waste, thought Uncle Arthur, it is a charming room though. He soon realized that everything was covered with cobwebs and a thick layer of dust. On a side table, he



noticed a little book with “Guest Book” written in gold lettering. He brushed off the dust and thumbed through the pages and saw that visitors from Europe and Asia had last signed the book in 1851. So, he was in an old guest house which had not been used for over a hundred years. And it now lay empty and abandoned. This could be for me, thought Uncle Arthur, a little house in a quiet park like setting.

Uncle Arthur strolled along the dusty corridor, opened a door and saw a double poster bed, complete with canopy and decorated with heraldic designs. He was delighted, he pulled the curtains fast around the bed and drifted into a deep sleep.

While these strange events were unfolding with Uncle Arthur, back at the London Zoo, pandemonium reigned. Bells were ringing, keepers rushing back and forth, workmen carrying large nets and at the center of it all was the Superintendent, issuing directives, admonishments and instructions.

“I don’t care what you say,” he bellowed, his face becoming redder and redder, “we can’t have an elephant waltzing off into the streets of London when he feels like it. Next

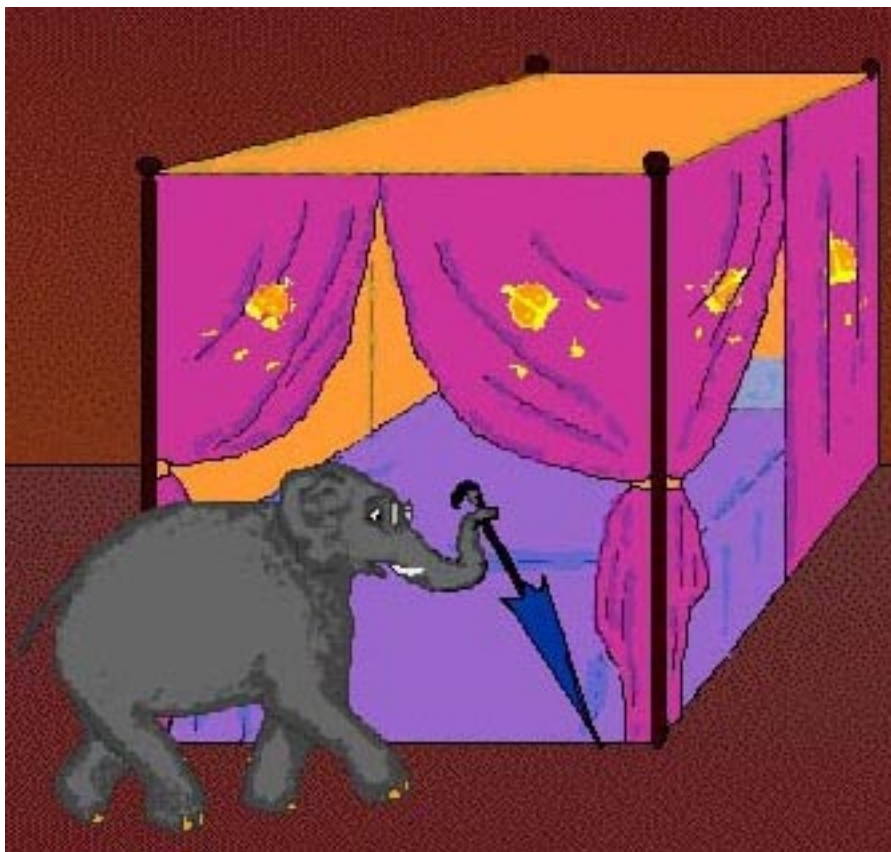


minute, all the other elephants will be wandering off, when the fancy takes them. And then, where would we all be?”

“Well, all I know” said one of the workmen, “is that he was gone, disappeared without a trace.”

“Disappeared without a trace,” spluttered the infuriated Superintendent, “how on earth can an elephant disappear in London?”

And of all this, Uncle Arthur was blissfully unaware, as he slept on in his royal bed, for he had unknowingly broached into a forgotten nook of the gardens of Buckingham



Palace. Not that Uncle Arthur's had arrival gone unnoticed, the owl in the gables had seen him come. When Uncle Arthur entered the lodge, his giant steps disturbed the dust of a hundred years. As he explored the corridors and rooms, the windows rattled, and the furniture heaved and sighed.

A family of white mice called the Bobbingtons were just sitting down to a snack behind the wainscot when the floorboards gave a shudder. Unknown to

them, Uncle Arthur had just tumbled into bed. They looked on in amazement as the plates and jugs started wobbling and the tiny iced cakes leapt into the air.

"Whoops," said Ma Bobbington, as she reached out to save the cakes from bouncing on to the floor, "who is shaking the table?"

"Not me," said a startled Alf.

"Listen," said Em, "the floorboards are groaning."

There was a sudden whooshing sound and the next minute they were covered in a shower of dust which had blown down from the ceiling.

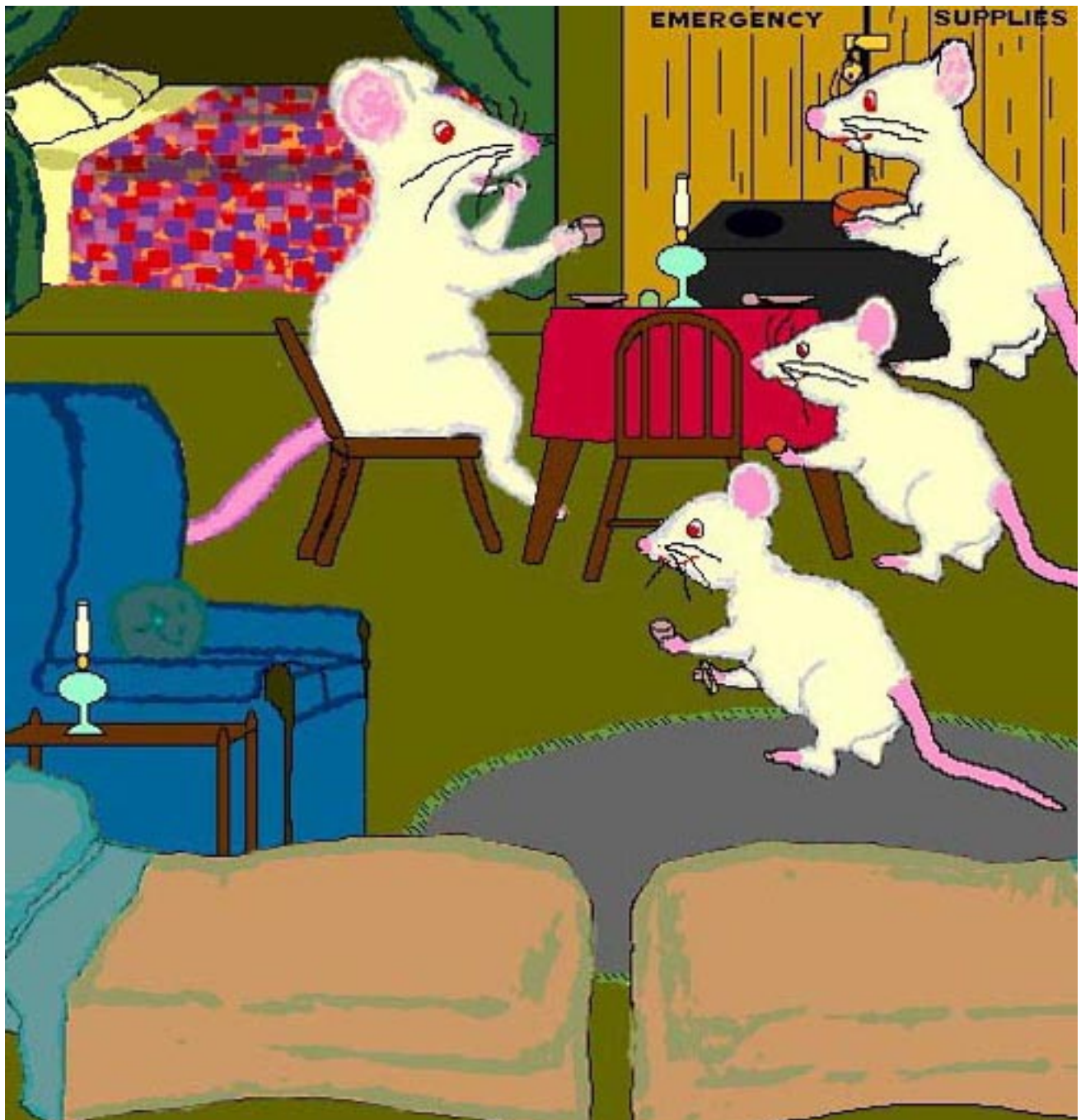
"Oh dear," Ma gasped, "it must be an earthquake."

"Come on," said Pa Bobbington, "down to the shelter!"

And the four Bobbingtons raced through the maze of corridors behind the wainscot until they arrived breathless and shaking at the shelter deep beneath the foundations of the house. In the safety of the shelter, they lit the emergency oil lamps and sat wide eyed on the little sofa. They pricked their ears, listening intently. Far above them, they could hear the timbers of the house creaking and groaning as if a winter storm was buffeting the house.

"Well," said Pa Bobbington shaking his head in disbelief, "this is a pretty kettle of fish and no mistake. Who would have thought that such things would happen again in our time?"

"You mean," said Alf, "that something like this has happened before?"



“Yes, it has,” said Pa, as he looked around the shelter affectionately, “this place has been a safe haven in dark and dangerous times.”

And Ma said, “Well, it just goes to show that you never know what's round the corner.”

“True Ma, very true,” said Pa.

“Now, I don't know about you three, but I could do with a nice cup of tea to settle my nerves,” said Ma brightly.

“Good idea,” said Pa, opening the cupboard at the end of the shelter marked emergency supplies. Ma fished out from the bottom shelves, a loaf of bread, butter, milk and

a large slab of Cheddar cheese that Mr. Heatherington had given them. Soon they were seated around the little table sipping hot mugs of tea and happily munching on cheese sandwiches.

“A feast fit for a king,” smiled Pa.

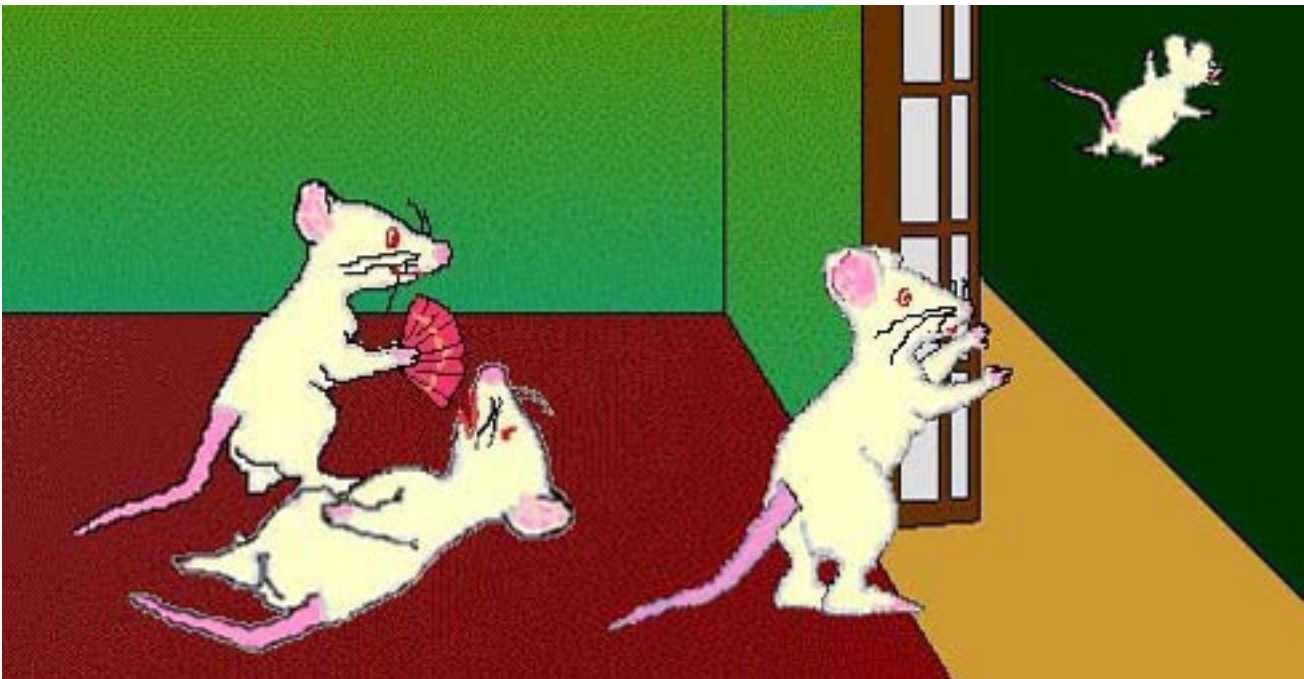
“Ah, that’s better,” said Ma.

Alf and Em were almost too excited to eat. They had known about the shelter, but apart from helping bring down supplies and furniture, they had never stayed in it overnight.

“Now come on, you two slow coaches,” said Pa, looking over at Alf and Em, “finish off your sandwiches.”

“Pa,” said Alf, “how long do you think we will be down here?”

“Hard to say, Alf,” said Pa thoughtfully, “it could be days, weeks or months. Before you were born, we spent a week here when a tremendous gale blew all over London.



Chimney pots and slates blew off rooftops and bushes and trees were uprooted. Me and Ma stayed in for days or else we could have been blown away. Well, the gale whistled around the lodge, knocking over all Mr. Heatherington’s flower pots. Ma said to your Uncle Reg, ‘Don’t go out tonight, Reg, or you will be blown away.’ But he wouldn’t listen. We saw him saunter out onto the verandah and the next moment a gust of wind sent him sailing through the air. Me and Ma were stunned and Aunt Dot fainted.

“The storm stopped the next day, but there was no sign of Uncle Reg. Apparently, he was blown over the wall and spent a few days wandering around St. James Park before he found his way back to Rose Lodge.”

“Your Aunt Dot said, “And where do you think you’ve been?”

“Flying,” beamed Uncle Reg, “high above the trees—like a bird—wonderful!”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said an exasperated Aunt Dot, “you belong down here, not up there.”

“Reg,” commanded Aunt Dot, “pack the bags. We’ll not stay another day in this place, we’re back to the country this very night.”

“Crikey,” said Alf and Em, “It’s no wonder that they don’t visit anymore.”

And Ma said, “Remember that time in the Long Winter when the boating lake iced over and the frozen pipes burst. When the thaw came, we were nearly flooded out.”

“Do I, indeed,” said Pa, “it took us months to dry out. But this is different, I feel somehow that something important has happened, but I’m not sure what. Well, never mind, we are safe down here and we have food supplies for at least six months. Let’s all get a good night’s sleep and see what the morning brings.”

And so they dimmed the lamps, and they each retired to the bunks along the walls of the shelter.

“Good night, All,” said Ma.

“Night Everyone,” said Pa.

“Good night,” said Alf and Em.

Ma and Pa Bobbington were soon asleep, but Alf and Em were still wide awake.

Em said to Alf, “Alf, I’m just too excited to sleep.”

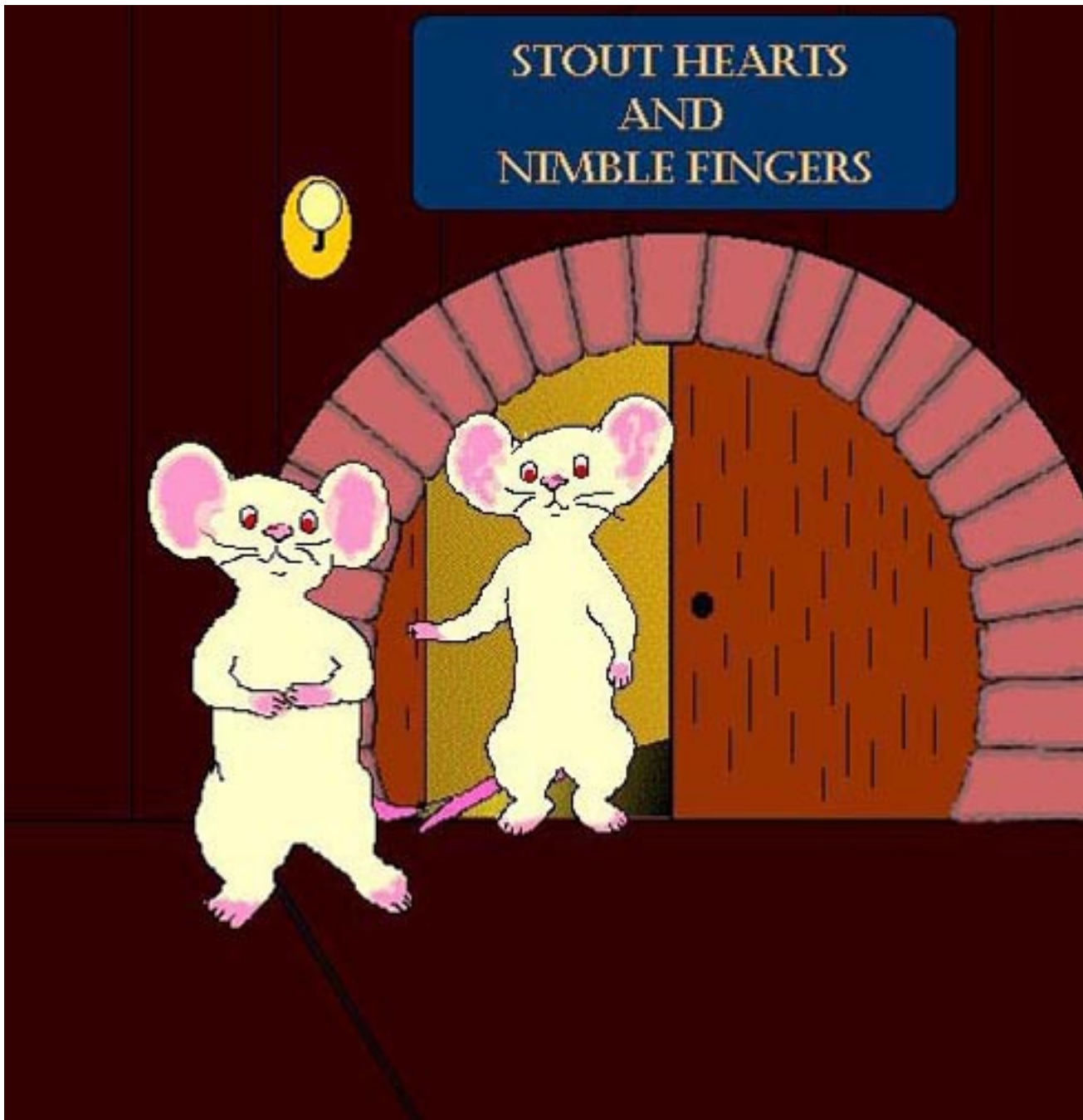
“Me too,” said Alf.

“It seems very quiet up there now. I can’t wait to see what’s happened,” said Em. “I have a feeling that life is going to be very interesting from now on.”

“Em,” said Alf in a whisper, “let’s go up upstairs.”

Em and Alf slid down from their bunks and tiptoed to the door, so as not to wake Ma





and Pa. Em picked up one of the little oil lamps and being very quiet, they climbed the stairs and crept along the winding corridors until they came to the Bobbington apartments.

Chairs, tables and cupboards were upside down and all the pictures had fallen down from the walls and everything was covered by a blanket of ancient dust.

“Gosh,” said, Alf, “just wait until Ma and Pa see this mess.”

They made their way to the front door and Em peeped out and saw the drapes around Uncle Arthur’s bed gently billowing.



“There’s someone sleeping in the four poster bed,” gasped Em.

They tip-toed around the huge bed and were looking in wonderment at Uncle Arthur’s dangling foot, when the drapes slid open and they found themselves gazing into the eyes of Uncle Arthur.

“Good morning,” said Uncle Arthur brightly.

“Oh, sorry to disturb you sir,” said Em, “we didn’t realize anyone was here.”

“That’s all right,” said Uncle



Arthur. "I arrived unexpectedly. I was staying at the Zoo, but I doubt I'll be going back. I'm from Elephant Hill, India. Can you tell me, please, does this house belong to anyone?"

"Oh, no," replied Em, "it used to belong to Queen Victoria, but she died, and since then, I don't think it belongs to anyone. We are descendants of the mice who were the favorites of a princess, but she moved away and the rest of Queen Victoria's family forgot us. I think they just moved away, leaving Rose Lodge deserted."

"There's been no one living in Rose Lodge since Ma and Pa were born," said Alf. "No one comes to Rose Lodge any more, except for Mr. Heatherington, who looks in once and awhile. But he's the gardener and lives in a cottage on the grounds."

"Well," said Uncle Arthur, "It's a good house, what a shame that no one looks after it any more. I know! We'll get it clean and tidy. You could ask your Ma and Pa if they would like to help. In the meantime, I think I'll look around for breakfast."

Uncle Arthur strolled down the corridor into the sunlight of the garden and Alf and Em raced down to the shelter where Ma and Pa were having their breakfast.

"Where have you been?" asked Ma. "Not upstairs, I hope."

Em all excited and breathless said, "Pa, Ma, it's not an earthquake. It's, uh, it's uh, it's Uncle Arthur," she stuttered.

"And who is Uncle Arthur, when he's at home?" said Pa suspiciously.

"He's an elephant! He's from Elephant Hill in India, and he wants to know if we will help him clean up the house."

Understandably, Ma and Pa were just a trifle nervous. Because, although they had seen pictures of Elephants in books, they had never come face to face with one before.

"Does he look friendly?" asked Pa, anxiously.

"Oh, yes," said Alf, "ever so nice and friendly even if the ground does rumble a bit when he speaks."

"Ah hum," said Pa, judiciously, "I suppose that's all right. In the stories that your great-great-grandmother used to tell, things were all spit and polish and the house was filled with life and laughter."

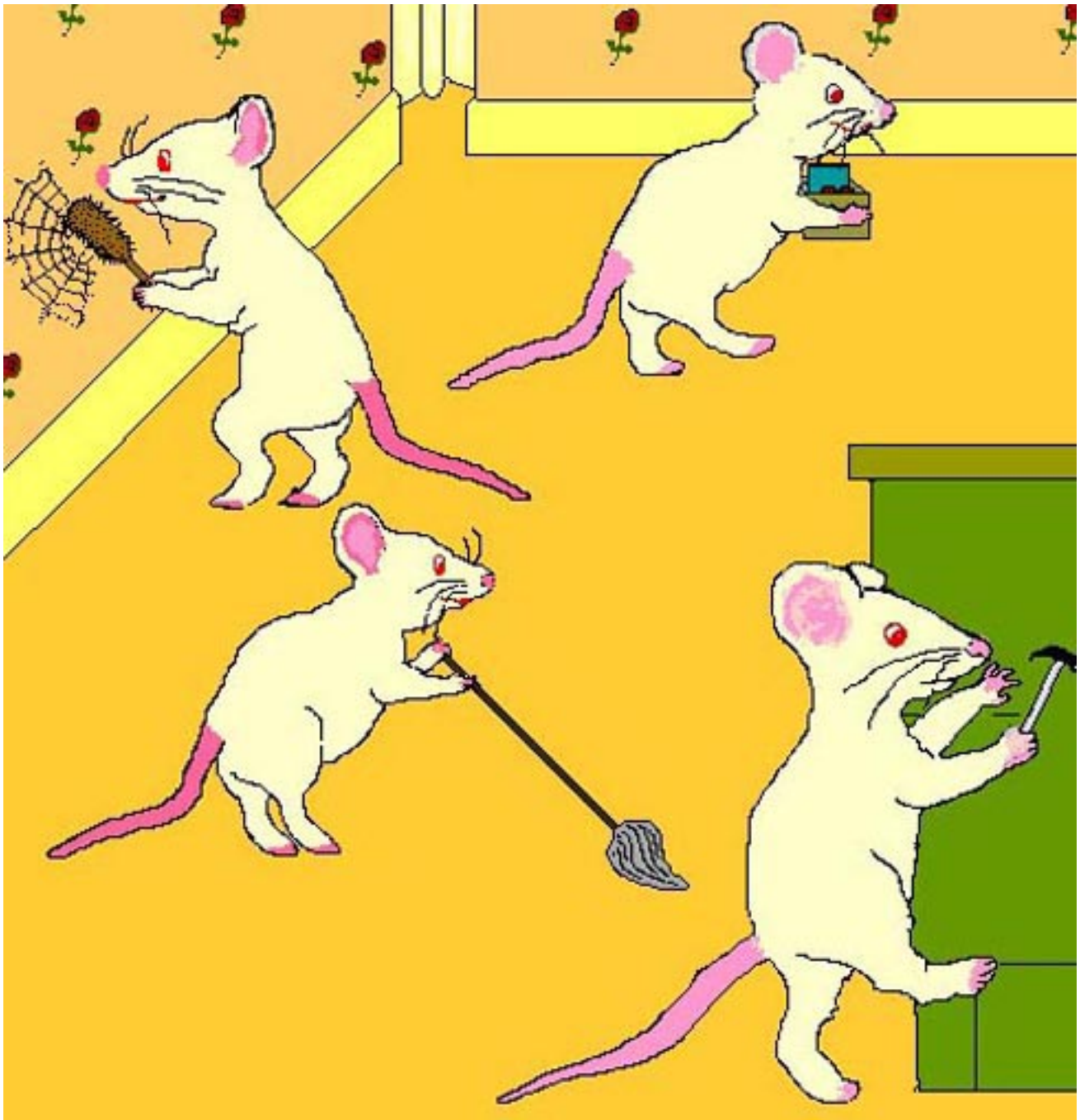
"There you are," said Ma triumphantly, "I always said that one day the Spirit of the House would return and our fortunes would change."

"You did, Ma," said Pa, "you certainly did."

"Come on," said Ma enthusiastically, "its time to roll up our sleeves and get weaving."

And with these encouraging words, the four Bobbingtons raced upstairs to get out brooms, dustpans, mops and buckets to help Uncle Arthur in the Great Clean Up, as they later referred to it.

In his search for breakfast, Uncle Arthur stepped out the back door and saw a motley collection of old buildings—a greenhouse with broken panes, various sheds with rusting rakes and shovels, and everywhere, columns of leaning red flowerpots. The sheds were



overrun with tall grass and trailing ivy.

As Uncle Arthur started to explore, he heard a strange wheezing sound like badly tuned bagpipes. A gray haired old man with baggy trousers tottered around the corner. It was Mr. Heatherington, the Palace gardener and handyman.

“Where on earth did I put that new trowel of mine,” he wheezed, as he rummaged through the tools leaning against the potting shed. Uncle Arthur froze on the spot, wondering if this odd apparition was going to give him a friendly reception.

Mr. Heatherington walked away from the shed in a fit of wheezing, but triumphantly clutching his new trowel, when he clapped eyes on the stationary Uncle Arthur.

“Begging your pardon, Sir, but I didn’t know anyone was staying this week.”



Relieved, Uncle Arthur said “I was just thinking about breakfast.”

“And what would Sir like on this fine morning?”

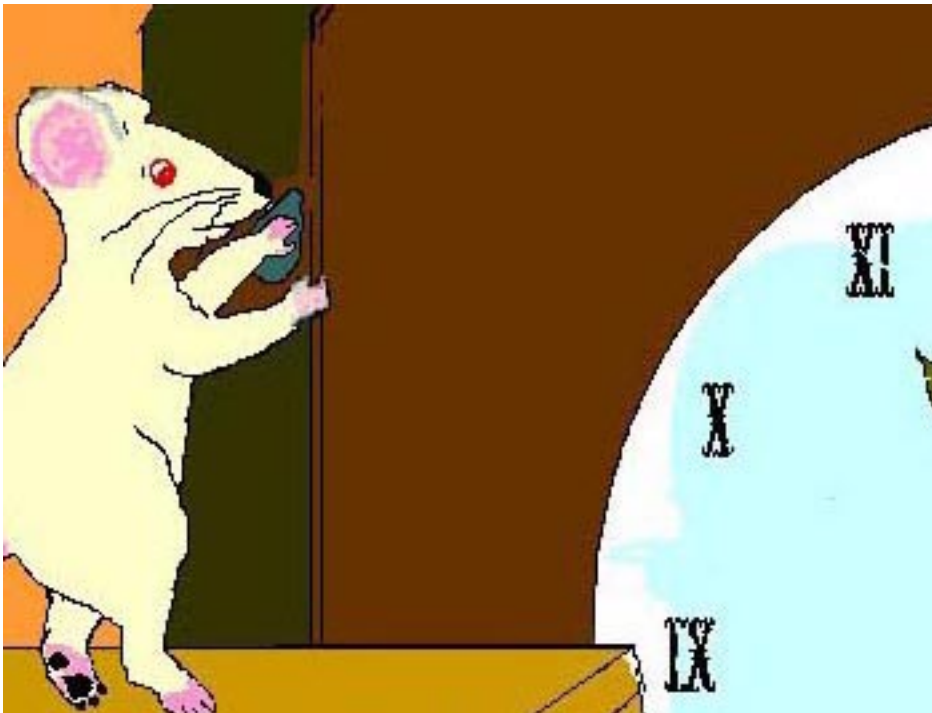
Uncle Arthur said, “Some hay and a little sugar cane, perhaps?”

“What was that you said?” said Mr. Heatherington. “My hearing is not so good these days.”

“I said sugar cane would be fine,” boomed Uncle Arthur.

“Oh certainly, sir, no trouble, no trouble at all,” and Mr. Heatherington ambled up the path to see the cook.

Mr. Heatherington was feeling a little apprehensive because he knew that cook would likely to blow her top.



She would say, "Sugar cane for breakfast indeed, never heard of anything so daft in my life. It's all very well, you giving your orders, Mr. Heatherington. But where am I supposed to lay my hands on sugar cane at this hour in the morning, tell me that, if you please."

As he shambled a l o n g , M r .

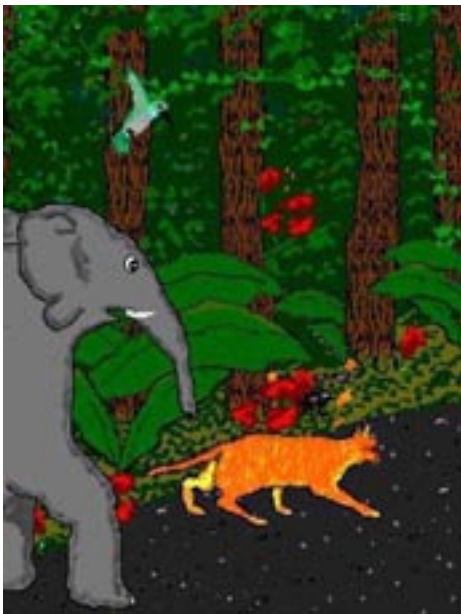
Heatherington muttered, “That’s just like them. They tell you nothing about who is staying at the lodge. Then, out of the blue, an elephant rolls up expecting breakfast.”

Then a thought struck him. Elephants eat hay! And probably apples, carrots and parsnips! No need to bother the cook at all. He turned around and headed for the stables. No one would be likely to miss a bale or two of hay, and he could send one of the stable hands out for some sugar cane.

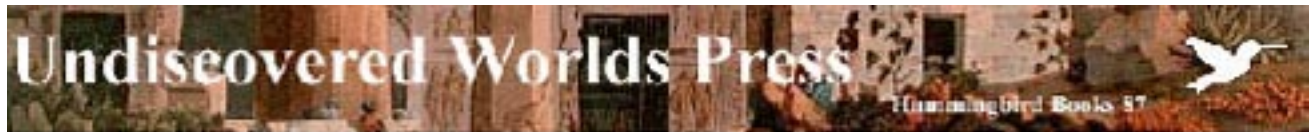
And so it was that Uncle Arthur came to be well situated in the grounds of Buckingham Palace. All through the summer, Uncle Arthur, Mr. Heatherington and the Bobbingtons were happy companions repairing and cleaning the lodge. Now, when winter was approaching they sat on the verandah watching the sunset.

“I never realized Rose Lodge was so beautiful,” said Mr. Heatherington thoughtfully.

“Yes,” said Uncle Arthur, “it’s like a long forgotten treasure finally revealing its original beauty.”



*Welcome to Part Two of
Elephant Hill and The Path of Light.
Uncle Arthur’s problems being
taken care of for the moment,
we will finally find out what
lies at the end of road for Amber,
Dickens, and Chitterbox
in Part Three of our story.*



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