

## A SMALL CHILD

And so it turned out now that he is to be alone with the child, drowning in helpless anger at himself and at the way the world is built **but more on him and his deficient personality and for what reason**, for what reason he continued to ask himself without being able to respond, for what reason (somehow this sounded better than the simple why) did you have to pretend to be such a hero, why can't you for once be just **somebody**, why do you always have to flaunt **that little you of yours**, covered by a peel within another peel, a peel covering a peel, further and further peels of people with further and further capabilities in any field or domain to run or make money or know things or sing opera arias in Italian and in German to taste spectacularly rare and expensive wines, meet men that are tremendously **famous important** and rich, not to mention women and the business of women or Scotch Whiskey that tastes like an electrical short circuit, something he would lecture lengthily about when occasion **arises**, to read every book and be acquainted with every place on the globe and solve every riddle and again know everything that there is and there is nothing that cannot be done, why why why (he was so angry he clean forgot the fancy **for what reason**) couldn't you just be simply someone, just another one out of everyone, just like everyone, one that simply withers into a reclining chair near this pretty pool in this pretty part of the earth in this fresh clear air, what, isn't that enough, what, do you also have to excel in this, in taking care of children?

~~And so~~ they all left, Gili the grown pest and Amira his wife who talks endlessly but only when Gili is sleeping or away, Omer the smart successful son and his young wife Viatriki with Natali the new baby and also Yotam, the other son, a doctor, and his wife Alma **also a doctor** and with them Dana their eldest, the child's older sister, and all of them, everyone, stood around him and said, Shmulik are you sure? Shmulik? But he continued to sulk in the reclining chair and hide behind the Economist sucking the expensive gin with a green straw even though it is not yet ten thirty in the morning and even ~~when~~ his wife Drora, who **is not speaking to him** for several days since the business with the artichokes, after she already went down with everybody to the parking area, came back running and said Shmulik, why are you being an idiot, what would you do if he begins to.... To which he slowly turned his face towards her and gave her his frightening gaze with his blue eyes and ~~even started to~~ **compress** his eyebrows but ~~even~~ before he could complete that move ~~she took herself and~~ walked away, exasperated, and after another minute Alma ran back and said Shmulik, are you sure, because it's not a problem at all I'll take him, and Shmulik allowed himself to smile at her in noble magnanimity and actually spoke to her and said, Alma, nu, didn't I too raise children, and Alma looked at him not knowing what to think and finally turned and walked away. After a minute came the screeching sound of the electric gate and the two cars clattered on the gravel, an appropriately elegant clatter, the gate screeched back and here they are, he, and the child, alone.

That smell. Of the low hedge surrounding the pool. That singular bitter smell of that hedgeplant whose name he doesn't know in contrast with all other ~~wild and garden~~ plants whose names he knows with rare accuracy and fullness to the applause of some of his acquaintances, this plant that doesn't grow here in Israel ~~where he lives~~ but only in special far away and coveted places such as ~~for example~~ the end of Broadway in San Francisco,

above the long stone staircase descending graciously to the bay, dotted as it is with colorful sails while ~~from further to the left~~ the noble elegant Golden Gate Bridge beckons, perhaps also to him, and in the sky float the pretty clouds of San Francisco ho ho the pretty clouds of San Francisco and especially here where majestic Broadway ends and beyond it the great park with grand eucalyptus trees and ancient sequoias and huge pines also called redwoods and on both sides of the street, luxurious dwellings of people who succeeded so obviously that they may purchase for themselves a stately house on Broadway in San Francisco overlooking the bay and the bridge, and these steps leading down to the bay as well as the gardens of these successful people are boundaried by this plant that has no special form or color, if anything it just looks like a plain myrtle bush of which there are too many back home but the smell, oh the smell, that bitter fragrance of abroad, the smell of far and expensive capitals and of objects that can be found only in homes of others and of deeds that only others have the opportunity to do, this bitter smell of that plant in the low hedge that he doesn't even know its name, the one that surrounds the pool that he is sitting next to, that smell that he is now smelling.

~~So again~~ he sticks his nose into that piece from the Economist on real estate laws in Bangladesh and in particular in the delta of the Brahmaputra river where from year to year islands appear and disappear and as the geography changes continuously so have the real-estate laws crystalized in unique and fascinating ways that are striking both ethically and aesthetically not to say financially and the reporter that interviewed Begum Lilipati Muhseini, mayor of Tesmodozin municipality is in the heart of the area under discussion but suddenly his heart fell, the child, the child, where's the child, terrified he swung his head back but the child was sitting simply in his place, immersed in a little green plastic truck loaded with three tiny gravel pebbles that he is pushing with a wooden peg, a bit to the left, a bit to the right, croaking with his tiny voice a childish depiction of truck sounds, his black curls covered with a white cap bearing a symbol perhaps of some sports club, oblivious to anything else, breathing a sigh of relief he turns back to the Economist, what would he do if the child needed anything, would he agree at all to accept anything from him, how pleasant instead to be reading the clever Economist who knows every thing, how well every piece is written in the Economist, how excellent everything is in the Economist starting from the font and moving to the paper and ending with the quality of the drawings, tables and photographs, and of course the reporting, concise but witty and impeccably edited, this is not how ignorant people write, this is not how you write for ignorant people, all this Economist was not made for ignorants nor for the poor or the lowly, contrariwise, even the advertisements are outstanding, here's a prestigious villa on the riviera and here's an invitation to a boat show and here's a proposal for extreme upgrading of your private wine cellar, Begum Lilipati Muhseini, actually a kind of cool gal, there in Bangladesh.

And its not as though he was that hungry for fame and success, no, at least not exactly, but what he did have in him was this burning ambition to do great things, or at least to participate, and of course would he have actually succeeded to attain a great achievement as he so wished and expected, clearly the world would cheer and clap hands for him, but even if not what of it, isn't it clear to everyone that the world is made up of morons, but it was in his own eyes that he was obliged to excel, and thus in a twisted trail that wasn't easy even for himself to explain ~~to himself let alone to others~~ he came to be a sewage engineer, perhaps a respected sewage engineer but a sewage engineer nevertheless, not more, perhaps an imaginative, creative sewage engineer, if one can believe in such things, a

sewage engineer for whom the gravest complications of sewage design are like simple riddles given to little children, and in spite of his engineering excellence he didn't quite achieve that luxurious financial position towards which he naturally strove although his finances were not bad, far from it, but truly he desired more, much more, and in this he did not succeed, even though the sewage industry rolls tremendous amounts of money in our country where people build and build and build all the time and wherever something is built there people will live and people, as we know, do what they do and for that sewage is required, and anyone thinking about that even for one minute understands that when the sewage system is properly planned there is a chance that all the rest will also be okay, perhaps.

~~And that he ended up dealing with sewage happened in fact through the history that he started out studying~~ in the university in Jerusalem immediately after the army, since besides the craving for large and important deeds he also had a craving for basic issues, primal matters, deep, foundational phenomena, those that give birth to the plethora of other, secondary things, this important and fundamental effort to understand the underpinnings of the known universe, and when he read history of ancient Rome with the venerated professor Yaabetz among other issues sewage was also described, a topic in which the Romans shined brightly and in many countries that inherited Rome they never managed to achieve that ancient hygienic excellence until the end of the nineteenth and often far into the twentieth century, sewage, Yaabetz once said, is the blood of society, and sewage testing is like blood testing, in fact he only remembered this many years later, and after he studied history he understood that he will never be a historian, both because of his temper and because of his fondness for success, financial as well as professional, and thus he turned to engineering since he had good technical sense, and because of some mixup and because he just returned from army reserve duty and because the deadline already passed ~~and because of other and different issues~~ he found himself in the faculty for civic instead of electrical engineering where he thought he was going, and so he sat in the Tilda and Seymour R. Quibelovitch of Cincinnati, Ohio, building, studying elements of water engineering and introduction to sewage control systems and could not believe how much interest and challenge he found in these architectural facilitators of water and sewage handling, yes, he would almost say that there's poetry in sewage, does your shit sing, Giora asked him one day, and he laughed and said, sometimes.

And sometimes he would daydream and in his mind sewage systems would show up as huge trees where one leaf is one apartment or perhaps one basin or one shower or toilet on which one man or one woman or perhaps one child sits, and in the same building several apartments perhaps four in every floor times twelve floors ~~and a building like that~~ can be considered as a branch with many leaves and in the neighborhood perhaps fifty or one hundred buildings ~~such as the first one which by now~~ make a main branch and in the entire area many neighborhoods ~~which together~~ form the trunk of the sewage tree so that the output of one man joins that of another woman and to more and more people, more and more, a huge colossal river connecting the contents of numerous people one to the other, and there must be some deep and important conclusion to be drawn from the intermixing of the content of so many people, thus he would daydream about this goal he set himself to steer himself and his life to the service of mankind through proper design and organization of treatment of human excrements, and if all those people would do the same thing in the same time, why, the sewage system would collapse, so ~~that~~ it's so lucky that there are all

these differences between human beings, he thought, sewage certainly has a social aspect to it, one that has not been appropriately recognized until today and perhaps one day he will write something about it, and there was a time when he thought that he would be thanked for the bright designs that he made and for all the benefit he provided to so many people but what can one do, there are certain professions which trap glory like an army general or an orchestra conductor, prophets writers and composers, painters and discoverers of drugs, physicists and fashion designers, but sewage engineers, whose absolute vitality is never doubted, glory is almost never theirs, with few memorable exceptions such as sir Joseph William Bazalgette who removed the great London stink in 1858 or Eugène Belgrand who built Paris' modern sewer that is used to this day or another Eugène with surname Poubelle who dealt with trashbins, so perhaps he is less relevant to our discussion.

Suddenly he heard a noise and saw him standing in front of him, ~~his face when he stands the same height as his own face when he is lying limp in the reclining chair~~, what, he said, and the child said I'm hungry, ah he said and collected himself, ah, come, let's look for something to eat.

The child skipped and hopped along the pretty path made of raw flat stones. Between the stones grew, as if naturally, a delicate green grass dotted with little white and yellow field flowers. Along the path and on the walls of the villa Hortensia bushes flowered violently in pink and pale blue. The child ran along on the path and he after him, they went inside one of the apartments and the child opened the refrigerator and took out a tray full of little cherry tomatoes, very bright red, and they sat at the natural pine kitchen table. Wait, cried Shmulik, I'll wash them for you, he took the tomato tray and emptied it to a bowl that was there and washed the tomatoes very well with water and considered to scrub them with soap but gave up on the idea and shook the bowl a little while holding the tomatoes with his big paw so they don't spill out, here take, he told him and placed the bowl on the table. The child started gobbling the tomatoes one by one with obvious pleasure. Shmulik stood over the table and the child across on a wooden chair that was too low for him but this didn't stop him in any way from his industrious munching, behind him on the wall hung an ugly faded picture, its ugliness and fade calmed him down and quieted his mind perhaps because all this exaggerated perfection already climbed on his nerves, he sat across from the child and watched him devour cherry tomatoes happily and asked, would you like some bread? The child nodded with his mouth full of tomatoes and said, with monkey, monkey? Asked Shmuel, monkey, said the child, pointing his finger to the countertop where a huge jar of peanut butter stood.

He took the bread and sliced a slice and spread it with peanut butter and placed before him on a plate and the little thing sat and ate with spirit, thought a minute and poured him a glass of water and placed before him and he drank and ate, ate and drank, and after he finished all the tomatoes and the slice with peanut butter ~~that for some reason he called monkey~~ he said happily, I need to poo, and Shmuel said, alright, do you know where to go? And the child nodded his head again and nimbly took off his clothes and ran and sat on the toilet seat, supporting his small body with his hands behind him so as not to fall inside, wearing only the white cap that failed to package the cataract of black curls bursting everywhere, such a pretty child, Shmuel told himself, glad for the positive communication growing between them and watching with interest the child emitting his refuse into the splendid toilet bowl, barely a minute passed and he jumped down and folded like a swiss army knife,

his head grazing the carpet and his young behind pointing to the stars, Shmuel understood immediately and took some toilet paper and wiped him and flushed the bowl, and after that said to him seriously, and now let's wash our hands, looked here and there and found a small stool and set the child on it and stood by him to ensure that he soaps carefully his hands from all sides and washes them with lots of running water and finally dried him with a towel and helped him put his clothes back on and said, would you like now to go back to the pool?

Can I watch television? Asked the child, looking with plea at Shmulik's eyes, who somehow gathered that this is strictly forbidden and that his parents who have decided to educate the child under rigid rules don't even own such a dangerous instrument, thought about it once and twice and after a moment said, ah... sure, let's go see, they went to the living room and Shmuel found the remote control and succeeded to turn the huge screen on and to zap between countless channels, here's a bicycle race and here's another bicycle race and here's another bicycle race and here's a cartoon for little children but alas it speaks Italian, but the child didn't seem to mind one bit and he stood there transfixed and hypnotized so that Shmuel took him by his hands and sat him on the sofa where he sat on the edge of his tiny behind, his body bent forward, his mouth open and his eyes, now as big as big coins, locked on the two creatures dancing there, one broom-like and pink and the other a green flying goat, Shmulik's eyes also fixated on the screen, the two creatures danced with each other and then started flying around the house that was there and from there flew onwards to some lake while singing an incomprehensible children's song in Italian that sounded something like gali-gali-oh! Gali-gali-oh! Took took took ohh eeh ahh ohh! Suddenly he caught himself with his finger stuck deep into his left nostril and for a moment he recoiled lest Drora will be at his throat again for there was nothing loathed and abhorred by her as nose picking and in particular in the way he would do it with celestial addiction and sublime indulgence with his thick finger wagging inside his no-less thick nose and particularly when he would do this in company, then her eyes would bulge out of their sockets and once she even got up and left in the middle of an event. But now he is free. And the child, also free. The child to see a pink broom flying in the skies and he to pick his nose to his heart's content.

And once it really was unpleasant when he took the train to some facility where there were problems with the central collecting pools and the slopes and the dykes that collapsed from so much rain and across sat a girl, relatively young and agreeably plump, her broad face flat as a plate and in her ears tiny white earphone and her soft large eyes are moving from side to side, perhaps to the rhythm of her music, and even her shoulders shift slightly to the left and slightly to the right, or perhaps he only imagined it, so absorbed he was inspecting the young quiet soft girl that he didn't notice that he was burrowing and burrowing in his nose and in fact after a while a real find was picked and as he pulled it slowly out he inspected it carefully, it had one dry solid end, somewhat brownish or reddish, from which trailed a disgusting yellowish-greenish slime worm, not small in any way, and after he inspected it sufficiently he tried to launch it by snapping smartly his fingers but work of the devil as much as he snapped it left and right the repugnant slime worm again and again stuck once to this finger and then to the other so that after a few futile attempts in which he invested more and more creative thought and cunning he was sure he finally got rid of it so that he was

utterly shocked to discover the abomination stubbornly stuck behind his third finger and ~~then~~ due to his agitated state, he aggressively flicked it away and the disgusting piece drew a fine arc and landed squarely on the plump girl's smooth thigh, and she, in spite of being immersed in the **delights of music** felt the horror immediately and shuddering with creeps stood from her seat and started screaming in a huge, but not unmusical voice, you piece of scum, you piece of shit, who do you think you are, I'll show you, you'll see what I'll do to you, and already all the passengers in that car came together happily around the commotion and tried to understand what happened here, did this gentleman suddenly pull out his member or did the young lady spit in his face, are they uncle and niece or pimp and slut or whatever, and soon a big guy came ready to shake Shmuel by his shoulders and one woman almost pulled the emergency handle. Lucky that the train just stopped at Hashalom<sup>1</sup> station and **everyone got off.**

He was so lost in thought that he didn't notice the phone, ringing from his pocket. Heh Giora how're things, he said coolly, Hah Shmulik, cried Giora with great joy, how are things? How's it going? What's new? OK, he answered, what's happening, and Giora repeated, so are you all having a great time? And Shmulik said fayin, how's the family? Fayin, repeated Shmulik, impatient already, **and Drora?** How is she? Happy? Fayin, shoor, said Shmulik, and added a tiny chuckle, why shouldn't she be, listen, started Giora again, there're a couple of things, do you have a minute? **He** looked at the child fixated on the screen in front of him and said, yes, okay, and sat heavily on a massive pine chair that stood there, and Giora said, a couple of things, there's a main valve that blew up in the pressure sensor in Taybe... it's point 300/15, next to the stone trap? Shmulik asked, **yes,** exactly, said Giora, there's corrosion there, and there's already a team, and it's not going to be too simple, there are three inspection points, you remember... yes, three, first we forgot the third, it's just under the high voltage line.... I brought in Saiid with the tractors... but I want to ask you, about the pipes there, if they have dressers... no, Shmulik cut him short, what do you mean, dressers, there are no dressers there, the flanges at both ends are welded, and this is fully documented in Taybe four file, ah yes said Giora, Taybe four, sure, I'll go get it out right away and I'll talk to Saiid so he doesn't start before we figure out exactly what the situation there is like.

But listen, there's another thing.... There's the Ayala tender... Giora's voice changed register and Shmuel too, something visceral twitched inside him. Yes, what about it... Giora cleared his throat ~~like someone gearing himself to say something he prepared ahead and continued,~~ Shmuel, you know, I know that you... that this is something that you spent a lot of... effort... and time on... a lot of thought, and design, and all that research... but these people from Ayala... Korotzky, and Makhoreh, with this character, Batat, George, you know.... These... they are not the kind of people that you can **hold** with such ideas... these valves with the air stops... and the wireless system with cloud backup... you understand what I'm telling **you** Shmulik? So what, what do you suggest, asked Shmuel **too slowly and too quietly,** what are you suggesting here? I'm saying, mumbled Giora hesitantly, ~~but gradually some~~ authority crept into his voice, ~~which grew increasingly louder,~~ I think we will give this to Meirovitch to do, everything, from scratch, as plain and ordinary as possible, this, this is what I propose to do, do you understand me Shmulik? He raised his voice ~~and was now shouting almost,~~ **you,** he continued, you have to find other places to shine in, to make your mark, do you

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<sup>1</sup> Peace station

understand what I'm telling you? This tender here we have to take it, and all your *hochmes*<sup>2</sup> will have to wait, and this maybe not in our country even, maybe one day we'll work in Switzerland or Sweden and then we can think about such things, did you understand me Shmulik? A silence dotted with throat clearings ~~now~~ filled the other side.

You are so right, Giora, Shmuel started whispering after the some time ~~it took him to come to~~, you are absolutely right, this is exactly what you need to do, exactly, what everyone else would have done, every one, he tried to stop himself but now his internal combustion was on its way and could not be stopped, every one, he continued, every one, do you understand me, every one except me, do you hear me Giora? Every one except me, do you understand? Each and every one of the seven billion fucking people on this fucking planet, each and every one of them, but not me, do you hear? Not me! I will not allow this to happen! A silence spread again. Giora didn't say anything and Shmulik too swallowed some spittle and vainly tried to control himself. The vein in his forehead was throbbing and his lower lip started to tremble. ~~He tried to start again~~ quietly and said, Giora I don't need to tell you all this again, when we started this company, it wasn't for the Ayala tender in this neighborhood of ~~Or Yehuda~~, you know? We had other ideas, and other directions, we agreed on that between us, right Giora? Giora didn't answer and so he continued, ~~answer me, answer me~~, isn't that what we agreed? Right? And if you now go to do the tender with Meirovitch, you hear me Giora, if this is what you are going to do, then you – ~~now he was screaming uncontrollably~~ – you are a miserable worm, a miserable intestinal worm, do you hear me Giora? This is what you are, a piece of stinking filthy intestinal worm! A disgusting putrid intestinal roundworm, Giora, did you understand this, Giora the stinking intestinal roundworm, this is what you are Giora! He slammed the phone on the couch and sat a minute to collect himself.

After another minute he looked around, on the television screen the pink broom and green goat gave way to two children looking at an aquarium where some painted fish were swimming, ~~he moved his gaze to the couch, to the child, but~~ the child certainly was not looking at the screen but directly at Shmulik, and in his face was a special look, frozen and amazed, he must have got scared, thought Shmuel, and after another second his little face broke and he burst in howls of horror and pain, he is scared, thought Shmuel with regret, I scared him, his face contracted like an old potato and rivers of tears ran from his eyes while he was rubbing them with his tiny fists, his screams became louder and louder, ~~only after a while he understood that he was screaming~~ mama, mama, I want mama, where's mama, now his nose was running with green liquid snot, wait, wait, Shmulik told him and went to fetch some tissue paper, let me wipe your nose but the child screamed even more if that was at all possible, wait, Shmuel said, mama will soon come, but that didn't help at all, he looked around to see what he could do, in the tiny freezer of the fridge he found something and brought it to the child and asked him, would you like a lollypop? But the child continued to scream as loud as he could, ~~now he was also~~ stomping his legs, and then lied on the couch and hit it with his hands and feet and his screams drilled through the villa walls, so what do you want, asked him Shmuel, first in a friendly tone and then impatiently and finally in anger, what do you want, Shmulik screamed at him and the child screamed back with his last energy, mama, I want mama, where's mama, his little body twitched on the couch, his face was wet and red and his hysteria just grew and grew, Shmulik stood and looked at him,

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<sup>2</sup> Clever ideas

helpless, he tried to reach him and pat him on his back but the little one just hit him on his face and on his hands, screeching and suffocating, ahhhh! Mama! Ahhhh! Mama! Ahhhh!

He had no idea what to do now so he sat again on the chair, drowning in the child's screams as well as in his own anguish, first on Giora, then on Makhoreh and George Batat, on himself, on the screaming child, on his wife and all the others that left him like that, didn't he know that he doesn't get along with children, children don't trust him, are scared of him, apart of course from his own children who somehow got used to him and his strange ways, and angry again at himself that caused all this and for agreeing in the first place to start this company with Giora, how did he get tempted like that to that worthless character to make him a partner to his dreams, and went back to thinking about that wonderful system he dreamed up for the Ayala project, a system that because of the accurate control by the computerized backend would be able to handle pipes 2/3 the diameter of a normal system and utilize small combining pools made of plastic, which would make the entire project much cheaper and ease its maintenance and of course raise the value of their company and increase their profits and bring them more and more projects, except that instead of sweaty tractorists you would need to deal with one or two smart computer guys, young and clever, clearly this is the future of sewage, he thought to himself, and the George Batats of the world are but a stumbling block in the way of human progress, progress which I am championing, I myself, and while he is indulging in such pleasant thoughts he realized that the screams of the child subsided and when he looked to his direction he saw that the little one fell asleep from so much screaming, a fondness grew in him to this little guy that got so frightened from his rage on Giora the moron, his hair was glued to his forehead, so much he sweated, he went to him timidly and carried him on his arms to his little bed and lay him there comfortably and covered him with a light blanket and sat on the bed, holding his head in his hands. What would he do now, he wanted so much to be in the office now, clutch Giora the useless zero in his strong hands and shake him like a chicken, what did I need this senseless vacation for, they are not due to return till Friday and today's what? Monday, or Tuesday only, what kind of an idea was that, to go to a vacation, and with the entire family clan, and that child, yes, the child.

Even though they only came two days ago the room already appeared as though it was a children's room forever. It had two beds, one of the child and the other of his older sister Dana, around were spread bedsheets and blankets and towels and clothes and toys in a big mess, on the carpet were spread a lot of Lego bricks and on the side a big cardboard box holding an enormous amount of additional Lego pieces. Around were a few things that the kids started making – half a plane, a quarter of a house, three people sitting one behind the other. He sat distraught and gloomy and didn't know what to do. He didn't want to leave the child unwatched, even his gin and Economist by the pool have lost their appeal. Just for something to do he extended his hand and took from the box a few pieces and started joining them together without knowing what he was doing. Before he knew it he had a neat little house standing on the carpet. Now the devil got into him, his engine was primed, he had a project and the rest of the world got erased, rejected. With vigor he cleared the carpet of all the stuff lying on it and placed the house he just built in the middle of the carpet that was now completely empty and started energetically to build another house, and another, and another, now he's building a four story building, and now a row of shops, suddenly he realized that the child is there, by him, sitting quietly, building something himself too, ha, good morning, he said, but the child didn't answer, would you like to build with me, he asked



and the child looked at him under his heavy black eyelashes and made a tiny nod with his head, hardly noticeable but full of intent nevertheless, fantastic, he said, come, let's build together, here, do you want to put this car together? They sat together and worked, the child clumsily and dreamingly and he with purpose and deliberation but both with the same concentration and seriousness, house after house, step after step, Shmuel guiding the child and helping him to choose the right pieces and stick them together properly, house after house an entire neighborhood started taking shape, villas and apartment buildings and skyscrapers, shops and roads and cars, parking lots, schools, sport centers and even a few people walking or standing or sitting here and there.

~~And when everyone came back they found them, both of them, crouching on the carpet, and around them a new city is rising, a city that is large and beautiful and very very good.~~