

Lizzy liked to sit beneath tables, which was fine and dandy when she was three and her family found it sweet and endearing to listen to her talking to make believe friends, but mum began to fret when Lizzy began to shout for their heads to be taken from their shoulders and their bodies to be drawn and quartered. Dad told her not to worry, all little girls played make believe and she must have been watching one of mum's favourite historical programmes on the telly to know about drawing and quartering – even then, dad said Lizzy did not really know what the words meant, she probably just liked the sound of them.

Lizzy turned 8 when her teacher came knocking the front door. Mum wrung her hands and fussed over making cups of tea. It was her opinion that tea could help in any given situation, especially stressful ones, especially ones involving teachers and guinea pigs and Lizzy.

'Oh,' mum squeaked, reminding teacher of the guinea pig's final squeal as it disappeared down the toilet.

'Oh dear,' mum squeaked again, 'I really don't understand it at all. Lizzy loves animals.' Mum hurried from the kitchen into the parlour, she usually hurried in to the living room but the presence of a respectable, important figure such as teacher had, in mum's mind, turned it into a parlour.

Lizzy was beneath the table, she had thrown a white blanket over the top of it so she could hide herself from view for hours on end if she so chose. It had become her personal kingdom. Mum and dad had long since abandoned any hope of having tea around the table, not since Lizzy had taken to biting them on the legs if they dared to sit on the dining chairs. Tea was now taken on trays in front of the telly.

Mum bent down and hovered as close as she dared to the white drapes surrounding Lizzy's kingdom.

'Lizzy dear, would you come out a moment please. Your teacher is here, we need to talk about something that happened in school today. Lizzy, we need to talk about the guinea pig.'

'I freed it.'

Mum looked at the teacher who was staring at the voice coming from beneath the table.

'What do you mean exactly, how did you free it dear?' Mum asked.

'Dad freed my goldfish by flushing it down the toilet. You shouldn't put things in cages; all creatures in my kingdom are free. The guinea pig needed to be freed, so I copied dad, I freed him.'

'But Lizzy, guinea pigs aren't goldfish dear. Goldfish can swim, guinea pigs can't.' Mum smiled at the teacher, hoping that she would understand that Lizzy hadn't meant to hurt the guinea pig at all, Lizzy was being – what was the words for it? Bhuddist? Christian? Humanist? Whatever it was, Lizzy was innocent.

The teacher did not look convinced.

'Did Josephine need to be freed as well Lizzy?' The teacher asked.

It was at that moment dad came in from work. He harrumphed into the living room, he did not know the teacher was there and mum noticed crossly that he had not taken his work boots off at the front door.

‘What’s going on here then?’ He asked.

‘Just a misunderstanding, Lizzy freed the guinea pig at school, her teacher just thought we ought to know about it. Dear, please take your boots off, your damaging the parlour floor.’

Dad looked confused; he didn’t know they had a parlour.

‘It’s a little more complicated than that.’ Teacher stated, folding her arms across her chest. ‘Lizzy also tried to put Josephine Fossie’s head down the toilet. So Lizzy, I’ll ask you again, were you also trying to free Josephine?’

Mum was not sure she liked the teacher’s sarcastic tone and hoped that her raised eye brows indicated as much.

Dad chortled and tried to disguise it with another harrumph.

‘She’s the red queen.’ Lizzy mumbled.

‘Well, I am pretty certain that Lizzy meant no harm. May be this little girl upset her, Lizzy never does anything without good reason.’ Mum said.

It was the teacher’s turn to raise her eye brows.

Dad spotted the tension beginning to bubble between the two women and stepped forward.

‘Listen, may be its best if you leave this with us tonight. I’ll have a chat with Lizzy and I promise that she will undertake any punishment you feel is fit.’

Mum looked aghast at him and tried to interrupt, but he put his hand up to stop her.

‘No, no I really think it best we speak to Lizzy and she will do anything you ask of her, absolutely anything and I can assure you nothing like this will ever happen again.’

The teacher studied the ground for a few moments, weighing up her options. Finally, she nodded.

‘Okay, fine. I would appreciate it if you would have a word with your daughter, preferably when she comes out from under the table.’ The teacher eyed the table again.

‘Lizzy, I shall see you in my office at 9am tomorrow morning sharp.’

Mum closed the front door behind her. Lizzy stayed under the table.

Lizzy never went to school the following day, the following week, the following month or the following years.

Lizzy turned 15, dad had a “heart incident” which meant his heart stopped beating and they put him under the ground.

Black drapes covered the table as fausty aunts and uncles plundered the wafer thin sandwiches and cups of tea in delicate bone china tea cups that had been placed upon it. Lizzy sat silently beneath.

Hushed, whispered voices floated around her, sombre tones that did not belong in her kingdom. She hoped they would leave soon.

‘You really must get her looked at you know. It’s not natural for her to spend all of her time under there.’ The voice glided down to her, she recognised it as mum’s sister.

‘Oh, she’s fine, really she’s fine.’ Mum’s voice sounded nasal as if she had a bad cold, Lizzy hoped the drapes would keep the germs away.

‘But you’re not are you?’ Persisted aunt, Lizzy willed her to come closer so she could attempt a bite on her leg; that would make her leave. ‘You can’t stay in this house alone with her, really you can’t. It’ll be too much for you. It was too much for him in the end, wasn’t it?’

Mum made a funny little sob sound and Lizzy realised that her nasal whine was because she was crying. What was she crying for? Everyone has a place and purpose in Lizzy’s kingdom, without place, without purpose - well what else would you expect to happen? Dad had simply completed his duties.

‘I know a very good therapist. He’s private but he owes me a few favours. I’ll give him a call, get him to pop round. What harm could it do?’ Aunt said.

Lizzy wrapped her ermine cape around her shoulders and ordered the guards to stand sentry at all portals into her domain. Therapist would not be able to penetrate her defences.

The therapist had called. She had watched him as he had scribbled in his notepad, how he had so many words to write down was a wonder to her, as quite simply no words had been exchanged between them.

He mumbled to mum, who nodded and cried – would that woman never stop crying? She had shed so many tears it was a shock that she hadn’t filled up all the moats in Lizzy’s kingdom.

The therapist left, he had tried to break down the drawbridges and cross the barricades but Lizzy’s defences had held.

Mum closed the front door behind him and tore up the piece of paper he had handed to her. Lizzy stayed beneath the table.

Lizzy turned 30 when mum went down to the shops in her slippers and never came back.

Lizzy rallied her troupes around her, gathered her most senior advisors. She knew she did not have long, the omens were against her. Night after night, the fluorescent light had failed to appear. Her people were becoming restless. Rumours of the return of the red queen began to surface. Traitors and rebels alike were put to the stake, hanging, drawing and quartering became once more the order of the day – she would do what she had to in defence of her realm.

With a turn of a key, the woman entered the house wrapped up against the cold in her red coat. She had brought her own guards with her. Her chariot waited at the road side, its blue lantern cutting through the curtains that had been drawn years before, shutting out the intrusion of the outside world.

She pulled the blanket off the table, dust fairies scattered to all corners of the room.

‘Hello, Lizzy. I’m going to look after you. I’m going to take you somewhere safe, where it’s warm. You can’t stay here, not now, not on your own.’

Lizzy slunk further under the table, head down. Guttural noises escaped from deep in her throat.

‘Come on Lizzy, take my hand. You’ll be safe with me, I promise.’

Lizzy’s eyes looked out from beneath her fringe. The woman nodded to her guards.

The woman locked the front door and turned to the paramedic.

‘Funny old world isn’t it?’ She said, ‘you know, I knew that woman when I was a little girl in school. She tried to flush my head down the toilet. I never knew why.’

They shut the door of the ambulance. Lizzy lay on the stretcher, restraining straps keeping her still.

The queen had fallen, long live the queen.