

The Princess and the Poo



By Neale Morison

As told to Elizabeth and Stella

I

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess called Katerina. She lived in an enormous castle. One of its mighty walls plunged straight down into the sea, and on stormy days the waves crashed against it. Against another massive wall nestled a little village.

The castle was built from great blocks of a brilliant white stone. Deep in the stone were threads of gold and silver and turquoise that flashed in the sunlight. The tall towers of the castle were topped with domes of green copper, and studded with crystal windows that sparkled like jewels. When the sun rose the castle turned from a rich purple to a deep glowing red, and as the sun mounted in the sky the castle shone brighter and brighter until the villagers had to turn away their eyes.



Princess Katerina's father, King Roger, was powerful and wise. He had filled the castle with beauty. Princess Katerina loved the gardens and pools and fountains, the great halls, the spacious rooms filled with sunlight, the lofty ceilings painted with clouds and stars, the finely crafted furniture, the delicately carved and polished timberwork, the marble statues, the gorgeous tapestries and rugs, the library with its millions of books and the paintings of everything in the world and beyond it, but there was one place she loved most of all.

High atop a tower was Princess Katerina's very own bathroom. It had golden taps and jewelled nozzles on the shower and the bath. On the walls and the floor were mosaics showing wonderful scenes of mermaids and fairies and dragons and unicorns. The windows were glazed with crystal prisms, so that rainbows chased each other across the tiles. Fitted into the dome was a skylight with exquisite silver lacework as fine as a spider's web.

But of all things in Princess Katerina's bathroom, the most fabulous was the great golden throne. The princess was very proud of her throne and she was never happier than when she sat on it, gazing over her domain.

II

But then one day a terrible thing happened. Princess Katerina flushed. The water came in, but it didn't go away. Whatever was there just stayed there.

"Oh, no!" cried Princess Katerina. "Quick! Call the Royal Plumber!"

The servant outside the door called down the tower steps, at the top of his voice, "Call the Royal Plumber!" Below another servant took up the cry, "Call the Royal Plumber!" Soon everybody in the castle was shouting "Call the Royal Plumber!"

The castle bell-ringer, Claude, was doing a crossword puzzle at the bottom of the bell tower. As soon as he heard the call he ran to where the bell ropes hung down, and began to ring out the "Call the Royal Plumber" chimes: Bong bang bung bong bing boing.

And in the village just outside the castle, and on the slopes of the mountain, the people of the kingdom heard the chimes, "Bong bang bung bong bing boing", and they all began to shout "Call the Royal Plumber!"

Alf, the Royal Plumber, had stopped off at a little pub to have a beer. His horse, Ned, was tied up outside the pub at a water trough. It was a hot, sunny day, and Ned was enjoying a long cool drink. As soon as the plumber heard the bell going "Bong bang bung bong bing boing" and everybody calling "Call the Royal Plumber," he said "Oh." He put down his beer, ran out and jumped on Ned. Ned said "Hmph," and took his nose out of the trough, and they galloped off, Ga-dump, ga-dump, ga-dump, as fast as they could go.



Alf and Ned galloped all the way to the castle, and the people made way, and waved their hats in the air, and yelled after them "Call the Royal Plumber!"



There was a servant waiting on the steps of the castle to take Ned's reins, and another one to meet Alf.

"This way, sah, this way sah! Hurry please," said the servant, and Alf ran after him up more steps and along more corridors and up more steps until finally he came to the door of Princess Katerina's private bathroom.

III

Alf stood respectfully outside the door of the bathroom and he took off his hat. He said "Er, your majesty?"

"Yes?" said Princess Katerina.

Alf said "Er, it's the Royal Plumber."

"Ah! Don't come in!"

"Um, what seems to be the trouble?" said Alf.

"I can't tell you," said Princess Katerina.

"Fine, good. Can you come out and talk to me about it?"

"No."

"Fine. I notice that there is no water coming out underneath the door of the bathroom. There is no water dripping from anything, is that right?"

"That's right," said Princess Katerina.

"Good," said Alf. "I don't hear the sound of the shower or the bath, so there are no taps that you can't turn off, correct?"

Princess Katerina said "Correct."

Alf said "Good. I think there's only one thing that could really be wrong, that would stop you coming out and talking to me, so I think I know what the problem is, your highness. I think perhaps that something that should have gone away, has not gone away?"

"Yes," said Princess Katerina.

"Good. Thank you," said Alf. "And I don't suppose I can come in there to fix it?"

"No!" said Princess Katerina.

"Fine," said Alf "I'll try to deal with it as best I can. Thank you very much, your Majesty, you've been very helpful."

"You're welcome," said Princess Katerina.

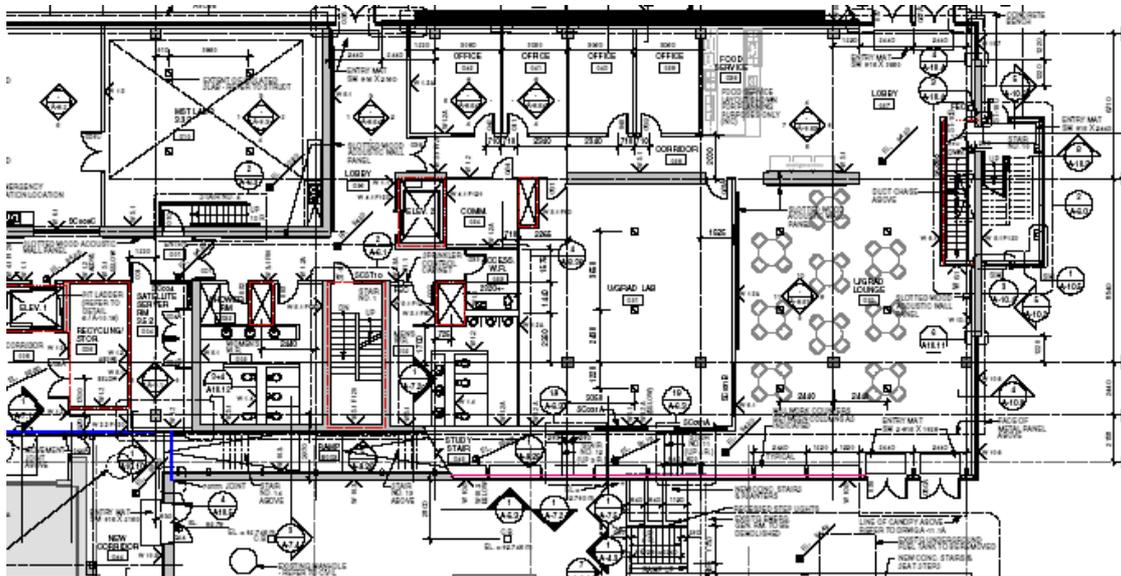


IV

Princess Katerina couldn't talk to anyone about her poos. She couldn't have everyone in the kingdom knowing that she did normal poos like everyone else, because then, they'd say "Well, what's so great about her? Why is she so royal? Why does she get to live in a castle, and we have to live down here in the village doing all the work?"

So the idea was that the whole royal family never did any poos. The rule was that if you ever, ever, ever talked about poos, you could only talk about them to someone else in the royal family, and never to anyone else. Because if you did, before you knew it, there would be no royal family, and everybody in the whole kingdom would just do whatever they liked. There would be a revolution and a republic.

So Alf went off to try and find out what the problem was. The very first thing that he did was go to the Archibald the Royal Architect and said "May I have the plans for the castle, please?"



Archibald gave him the plans. They showed the halls and walls and floors and doors and towers and stairs and windows and walkways. They showed the beams and seams and footings and fittings. Most importantly to Alf, they showed all the plumbing pipes. On the plans Alf found the pipe that came out from underneath Princess Katerina's throne. It went down through the castle wall, along inside the wall between the castle and the village, underneath a little castle garden, then through the castle wall on the sea side where it opened out into the sea.

"Well," thought Alf, "If I can't do anything about the pipe being blocked from the bathroom, maybe I can do something about it from the sea end."

V

Alf left the castle and climbed down the high cliff to the sea shore. On the beach was a little boat. Alf pushed the boat out into the water and jumped in. He rowed out beside the castle wall, where it went straight down into the sea. As he rowed he saw that at the foot of the wall was a mass of jagged rocks covered in barnacles. Suddenly he realized the waves were very rough. The boat was drifting toward the rocks. Alf rowed harder and harder, but the rocks came closer and closer. The next wave was going to pick the boat up and smash it to pieces. Alf closed his eyes and gave up rowing. He waited for the splintering sound of the boat breaking apart. After a while he opened his eyes. The boat was moving backwards, away from the rocks, all by itself.

"What's going on?" he said.



"Hello," said a voice. Alf looked down over the bow of the boat and saw two dolphins pushing the boat with their noses.

"Hello there. Thank you very much for saving me. My name's Alf," said the plumber.

"I'm Chi Chi and this is Iki. Glad to help. Is there anything else we can do?"

Alf said, "Oh, thank you. Possibly you can. Over on that wall there's a little pipe that comes out."

Chi Chi and Iki said, "We know."

Alf said, "Oh? Well, it comes out from Princess Katerina's very own private bathroom."

The dolphins said, "We know."

The plumber said, "You're very clever dolphins. Anyway, I'm afraid the pipe has become blocked up."

"We know," said Chi Chi and Iki.

"Well, how do you know that?" said Alf.

"We blocked it," said Chi Chi.

"You what?"

"We blocked it because we got a little bit tired of Princess Katerina's poos coming out of the pipe, into the sea where we live," said Iki.

"We didn't want to be swimming around in poos and wees," said Chi Chi, "So we thought, we know!"

"We'll block the pipe!" said Chi Chi and Iki together.

"Oh?" said Alf. "Well, that explains the whole thing. And I don't suppose you'd want to give me a hand unblocking it, would you?"

"No!" said Chi Chi. "We're very happy to have it blocked up, thank you."

"That's the way we like it," said Iki. "It's much nicer down here."

Alf said, "Well, thanks for your help."

"No problem," said Chi Chi and Iki.

VI

Alf went into the castle and had another look at Archibald's plan.

"I see here where the pipe goes underneath a little garden. Maybe I can dig into that garden, put in a cess pool, pump it out from time to time, that'll work."

So he followed the plans, through a maze of passageways and stairways, through sculleries and dungeons, until at last he came to a golden gate. On it were the words "Secret Garden".

Through the gate Alf could see what looked more like a forest than a garden. There were trees and ferns and vines and creepers, with dazzling flowers of all colours.

Alf tried to open the gate but it was locked, so he yelled out at the top of his voice, "Hello! Royal Plumber here!"

A deep, soft voice said "Royal Unicorn here."

"Goodness," said Alf. "I didn't even know there was a secret garden, let alone a Royal Unicorn. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Certainly," said the voice. "I could use a plumber."

Out of the trees stepped the most beautiful creature Alf had ever seen. A silver mare with a long golden horn on her forehead trotted up to the gate, bowed, and said "My name is Freya. I am the last of the Royal Unicorns. How may I assist?"

Alf said "Pleased to meet you. What a beautiful garden this is. So quiet and peaceful."

"Too quiet," said Freya. "What's on your mind?"

"Bit of a problem with the plumbing to be honest. What I was thinking was, seeing as how Princess Katerina's sewer pipe from her toilet comes down underneath your garden, I thought we'd dig down to it, put in a cess pool, pump it out from time to time, depending on the, you know, the princess, and problem solved."

And the Unicorn said, "Let me see if I understand you. You want to dig a big hole in my beautiful garden."

Alf said, "Yes, that's right."

"Which will then full up with poo."

"Correct."

"And presumably at intervals you will open up the pit, making a ghastly stench, drive a horrible smelly poo-cart into my garden, fill it up with the poo, no doubt with considerable spillage, and then drive the poo-cart, poo slopping in its wake, out through the garden."

"You're very quick," said Alf

"Too quick for you, my lad," said Freya. "You're not going to do that."

The plumber said "I'm not?"

"Negative," said Freya, walking back into the trees. "Regretfully I am unable to oblige. This conversation is over."

"Thanks for your help," said Alf.

"Don't mention it," said Freya.



VII

Alf had another look at the plans for the castle. "Hmm," he said, "I see here how the pipe comes through the castle wall, and before it gets to that garden it goes quite near the outside wall next to the village. Now I can just put a cess pool in beside the castle wall on the village side."

So Alf walked around to the village, and there beside the castle wall was a big open grassy area. Children were running and playing and rolling hoops and throwing balls and swinging on swings. He started walking around measuring things up and checking things out. After a while a villager came over and said, "Er, might one ask who you are exactly?"



Alf said, "I'm the Royal Plumber."

"Oh, yes, very good, yes, call the Royal Plumber!"

"And your name is?"

"I am Alderman Egbert Snape. What exactly are you doing?"

"Royal business," said Alf.

"Can you be more specific?" asked Alderman Egbert Snape.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss it," said Alf. "It's a matter of great delicacy concerning a member of the Royal Family."

"Oh, yes," said Alderman

Egbert Snape. "The matter being that they go to the toilet like everyone else?"

"You know about that?"

"Certainly we know," said Alderman Egbert Snape. "Most amusing. Call the Royal Plumber! We all have a good old laugh about that."

"Well," said Alf, "Aren't you going to have a revolution and a republic then?"

"Oh, I shouldn't think so," said Alderman Egbert Snape. "We have far too much fun with the Royal family. They're so colourful."

"Well, then," said Alf, "You may as well know I have to put a cess pool here."

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Alderman Egbert Snape.

"I don't?" said Alf.

"Not in the children's playground, you don't," said Alderman Egbert Snape. "Not where the children run and play. You'll have the whole community up in arms. Pits of poo! Most unhygienic. Out of the question. You'll get your revolution and your republic if you try anything like that."

Alf said "Thanks for your help."

"My pleasure," said Alderman Egbert Snape.

VIII

Alf said, "Oh well."

He went back to the castle. He looked at the plans but he didn't see anything else he could possibly do. He thought and thought and at last he had an idea.

Alf went back up to Princess Katerina's private bathroom. He took a little bucket with a cover on it. He said "Princess?"

"Yes what is it?"

"No luck, I'm afraid, unblocking the toilet. Can't be done really. Trouble is nobody wants it unblocked. They like it blocked. I think I'm going to have to pass this little bucket in and you're going to have to get the thing we were talking about and put it in the bucket."

Princess Katerina said, "I see. But what then?"

Alf said, "I have a dream, Princess Katerina. A dream of a toilet that is good for the environment. With your help we can make a new kind of toilet, a toilet that turns poos and wees into fertile soil in which new life can grow. Believe in me, Princess Katerina. Your toilet will never be blocked again."

"Hmm," said Princess Katerina. "Could this new toilet of yours have a sort of golden throne on top?"

"Absolutely, your Majesty," said Alf.

"Sounds good," said Princess Katerina. "Well, where's the bucket?"

The door of the bathroom opened a little way, and a little hand came around the door. Alf put the handle of the bucket into the hand, and it went back around the door.

"There's a little scoop in the bucket, Princess."

"Thank you," said Princess Katerina. After a little while the door opened again, and the hand passed Alf the bucket.

"Thank you, Princess," said Alf. "I'll just go and dispose of this."

"One more thing," said Princess Katerina.

"Yes?" said Alf.

"I have to marry you."

"Oh," said Alf. "That's a shock. A surprise, I mean, your Majesty. Why, if it's not a rude question?"

"We can't have someone outside the family knowing about the you know what."

Alf didn't want to tell Princess Katerina that all the animals, every fish in the sea, and everyone in the village already knew about the you know what. He didn't want to embarrass her any further.

"Thank you very much, Princess Katerina, I'm deeply honoured and I accept your proposal with the greatest pleasure. When would you like to be married?"

"How are you fixed around ten tomorrow morning?" asked the Princess.

"I think I'm free," said Alf.

"Ten it is then," said Princess Katerina. "Wait, there's a problem. The Royal carriage horses are on vacation this week. So who can we get to pull the carriage?"

"I think I know," said Alf. "See you tomorrow."

IX

Alf went around to the stables and told Ned the whole story. Ned said he would be delighted to pull the carriage, but he didn't think he could do it alone.

"Back in a minute," said Alf.

Soon he was outside the gate to the secret garden.

"Hello," said Alf. "Royal Plumber here."

"Royal Unicorn here," said Freya and came out to the gate. "We don't want any."

"No, I've given up on that idea," said Alf. "I came to ask you a favour."

"A favour," said Freya. "Shoot."

"Would you help to pull the Royal Carriage when I marry Princess Katerina tomorrow morning?"

"Congratulations! How lovely. I'd be glad to. Who's my co-pilot?"

"My horse Ned," said Alf. "I'm sure you'll get along. He's a good strong horse."

"I'll look forward to it. Now, that for you, what for me?"

"You have but to ask, Freya," said Alf.

"I have a little plumbing job you might be able to help me with," said Freya.

"I'll be over to look at it straight after the honeymoon," said Alf. "See you tomorrow."



The next day there was a fabulous wedding. All the Royal family and the nobles were there. The servants were dressed in their finest uniforms. There were trumpet players with trumpets so long they needed a boy or a girl to hold up the other end. King Roger walked up the aisle with Princess Katerina on his arm, and when Alf and Princess Katerina kissed there was a tear in every eye.

As they stepped out on to the steps of the castle, all the villagers shouted "Call the Royal Plumber! Hurrah!"

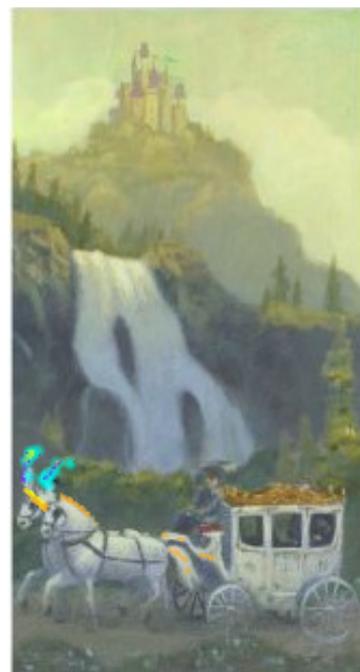
"Bong bang bung bong bing boing" rang the bells, as Claude the bell ringer hauled at the ropes.

Ned and Freya were harnessed to the carriage. Their tails and manes were threaded with gold and silver ribbon, and they wore matching plumes of peacock feathers.

Alf and Katerina hopped into the carriage. They moved away very slowly, because there were a lot of people in the way, waving and shouting "Call the Royal Plumber!" and because they had to wave goodbye to everybody, and because Ned and Freya were kissing each other and they kept getting their plumes mixed up.

"You know, darling," said Princess Katerina, "we should do something nice for all the villagers, and all the animals. They've all been so helpful."

"Let's think about it," said Alf. "I'm sure we can come up with something."



XI

After the honeymoon, Alf called at the Secret Garden.

"Hello," said Alf. "Royal Plumber Prince Consort here."

"Mrs Ned Royal Unicorn here," said Freya. She opened the gate, and took Alf through the garden. The further he went in to the garden, the lovelier it looked, until at last they came to the centre of the secret garden.

And there, among all the beautiful flowers and trees, was a great pile of rocks with a ditch around it.

"What's this?" said Alf.

"My mother told me it used to be a wonderful waterfall," said Freya. "Water came out near the top, then tumbled down the rocks on all sides, and in the pool around it there were tropical fish, like flitting jewels."

"Tropical fish?" said Alf. "It was a salt water fountain?"

"That's what Mum reckoned," said Freya. "Then one day it just stopped."

"Hmmm," said Alf. "Let me take a look at it."

XII

Alf and Princess Katerina looked long and hard at the plans of the castle. "Excuse me, Archibald," said Alf. "Are there any other plans? I'm looking for something deep down underneath the castle."

"Like what?" said the Royal Architect.

"Like tunnels, between the secret garden and the sea," said Alf.

"Ah," said the Royal Architect. "I found some plans like that once. Looked like an old dungeon, full of strange machines. Let's take a look at them."

Together Archibald, Alf and the Princess looked at the old plans. "What do you think that machine is, Alf?" said Princess Katerina.

"No idea," said Alf. "It's huge. Whatever it is, I wouldn't like to get caught in it."

Alf and Princess Katerina went down into the darkest dungeons of the castle, carrying flaming torches to light their way. At last they came to the deepest place, a tunnel that led down into the murky blackness, but it ended suddenly in a stone wall.

"Let's go back," said Alf. "This is spooky."

"All this way and we haven't found anything," said Princess Katerina. "How annoying." She kicked the wall. There was a grinding noise, and the stone she had kicked moved inwards. Then the wall swung open.

Inside were steps, leading down into a huge cavern. Alf and Princess Katerina went cautiously down the steps, holding their torches aloft. In the flickering light they could see what appeared to be an enormous wheel. Below it was a dark pool of still water. They walked around the edge of the pool and looked at the wheel.

"This is a water wheel," said Alf.

"So it is," said Princess Katerina. "It's very big, though. You'd need a lot of water to move it."

"Maybe," said Alf. "Maybe it moves the water. This is a tunnel, Katerina. It goes all the way to the sea. The wheel used to lift the water up to the top of the fountain. The secret garden must be right above us."

They looked up, and far above they could see a small circle of light.

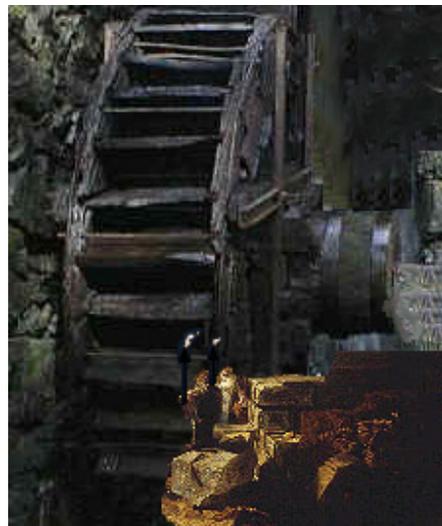
"What turned the wheel?" said Alf.

"Look," said Princess Katerina. She was pointing to a great beam that fitted into a notch at the top of the wheel. All around the wheel were notches just like it. The beam was hinged to the rock wall.

"What is it?" said Alf.

"The water pushes the wheel when a wave comes down the tunnel," said Princess Katerina, "but when the wave goes back out, the beam stops the wheel turning back. So every wave pushes the wheel around further. Some water is caught in these buckets hung around the wheel. At the top the bucket tips over and spills the water."

"So all we need to make this work is waves," said Alf. "But where are they? There are plenty of waves outside. They almost broke my boat."



XIII

Alf and Princess Katerina climbed up the steps, out of the dungeons and back into the sunlight. Together they went down to the beach and rowed the little boat out to look at the wall. This time Alf stayed well clear of the rocks.

"Hello, Alf" said a voice. Chi Chi and Iki were standing on their tails in front of the boat.

"Hello, Chi Chi, hello Iki," said Alf. "I'd like you to meet my wife, Princess Katerina. Katerina, this is Chi Chi and Iki."

"Charmed," said Chi Chi and Iki.

"Enchanted," said Princess Katerina.

"You don't happen to know anything about a big tunnel around here, do you?" said Alf. "You didn't block it up by any chance?"

"A big tunnel? You know, our Granddad used to talk about an adventure playground for dolphins," said Chi Chi.

"He said there was a big tunnel, and a ferris wheel, and a water slide, and a high dive," said Iki. "But one day he came to look for it and the entrance was gone. There was nothing but these rocks."

"What happened I wonder?" said Alf.

"Let's ask Dad," said Princess Katerina. "He might know."



"Your grandfather built this castle before I was born, on the foundations of the old castle," said King Roger. "It was destroyed in the earthquake."

"The earthquake?" said Princess Katerina.

"It was a terrible thing," said King Roger. "The village wall stayed upright, thank heavens, and most of the village was unharmed, but the castle did not fare so well. The top of the sea wall collapsed, and many of the towers fell. My father demolished the rest and built this beautiful castle to take its place. It was an ugly thing, the old castle, built of rough grey rock, but there were clever engineers in those days, makers of strong buildings and wonderful inventions. My father missed one of them terribly, some kind of fountain in a beautiful garden. I would have loved to see it. Sadly, all their works are gone forever."

"Not all," said Alf. "I think we can restore one of the great wonders of the old castle, with the help of a couple of dolphins I know."



The next day Alf, Princess Katerina and King Roger went to the top of the sea wall with a crane. They set up the crane and hung the hook right down among the rocks at the foot of the wall. They passed the end of the rope down on the other side of the wall, to Ned and Freya.

"Chi Chi, Iki!" called Alf. "Can you fasten the hook to a rock?"

"Sure," said Chi Chi and Iki. In a minute they called out, "Ready down here!"

"Pull!" Alf called, and Freya and Ned hauled on the rope. The winch turned and the rock rose slowly out of the sea. All that week, Alf, Princess Katerina, King Roger, Chi Chi and Iki, and Ned and Freya, hauled the rocks until at last they were all gone. There, at the foot of the wall, was the opening of a tunnel.

XIV

"Quick, everyone, down to the secret garden," called Alf.

They all hurried to the secret garden. They stood beside the pile of rocks in the centre of the garden, waiting. There were strange, deep groaning sounds coming from below. Then there was a gurgle and a splash. Then a trickle. Suddenly water was cascading down the fountain on every side, filling up the pool.



"Yippee!" said a voice. Chi Chi and Iki shot out of the top of the fountain and slid down the waterfall into the pool. "Yeehah!" said Iki.

They raced around the fountain in opposite directions, touched noses, turned around and raced the other way. Then they stood on their tails and said "Hello everyone!"

Then they dived through a hole at the base of the fountain, and in a moment there were two loud splashes.

"Do you think they're all right?" said Princess Katerina.

"It's a long way down," said Alf.

"Should we go and have a look?" asked King Roger.

"Woo hoo!" said a voice, and Iki and Chi Chi shot out of the top of the fountain again.

"It's going to be noisy around here," sighed Freya happily.

With Freya's permission, Alf had a gateway built into the village wall, so that the villagers could come and wander in the secret garden. The village children loved the waterfall and the dolphins, but best of all they loved the baby unicorns, who had tiny wings on their shoulders. Alf and Katerina's children loved the secret garden too, and King Roger spent most of his time there, playing with his grandchildren and sitting beside his father's favourite fountain.

King Roger and Alderman Egbert Snape met in the garden. They got along very well. Together they decided that the castle should become a public library and museum, so that everyone in the kingdom could share the beauty and wisdom that the Royal family enjoyed. Only Princess Katerina's bathroom remained private.

Alf invented a new kind of toilet, and soon everyone was using it. Princess Katerina never had a blocked toilet again.

