

“Schtum!” (excerpt)

by Frederick Covins © 2001

“Schtum!” hissed the sparrow urgently.

“Schtum?” echoed the Bavarian Wolf, “Vas ist dish schtum?”

“Means shut your norf an’ south,” put in Rhesus monkey, who had spent a long time in Regents Park zoo.

“Nord und...” began the Bavarian Wolf.

“Mouth, old boy,” put in Golden Eagle superiorly, “Mouth. Means be quiet, there’s a good chap.”

Heavy footsteps drew closer to the Himalayan Mountain Goat’s enclosure, passed by without hesitating and slowly receded into the night.

“Phew!” breathed coyote, “That was close.”

“Chicken-livered...” began Rhesus monkey, but was stopped in his tracks by Lion, on loan from Haifa zoo, who growled deep in his throat, “Enough already. Trouble we got without the monkey business.”

“It’s okay,” chirped sparrow, “That was the night keeper, he doesn’t come around again ‘till he’s had his kip in the office.”

“Kip?” queried Bavarian Wolf.

“Oh, gawd!” groaned Rhesus Monkey, “Do we ‘ave to take this bloomin’ kraut wiv us?”

“Look, old boy,” said Golden Eagle, with more than a little menace, “You chose to come so the least you can do is stop complaining or Lion and I will stop you permanently. Do you understand?”

Rhesus monkey swallowed nervously, “Okay, okay, no need to get yer fevers in an uproar.”

Sparrow craned his neck upwards to look at Golden Eagle who towered far above him and wondered, not for the first time, just what the heck he thought he was doing leading a bunch of creatures, any of which could tear him limb from limb, in a zoo breakout.

“Thanks, Eagle,” was all he said.

Lion put a stop to further recriminations, “Sparrow’s no schlemiel. Moxey he’s got. Apart from which he’s the only one ever been outside already. He knows the way. Without Sparrow we’re in the merde. Believe me, joking I’m not.”

“Okay,” said Sparrow, “everybody, listen up. We’re going to collect a couple of other friends, nothing too big, you understand; I think Lion is as big as it gets. Then we’re going to make our way out to the delivery entrance, where they deliver your food, and that door is never locked. Should be a piece of cake for Rhesus monkey to open it and then our troubles really begin, but we must stay together, otherwise the alarm is going to go out and you’ll all be in the pen again... if not shot dead,” he added ominously.

“You’re not exactly full of good tidings, are you *little* one,” uttered Golden Eagle softly. The emphasis and menace were not lost on Sparrow who swallowed uneasily.

“ere” , put in Rhesus monkey, “oo we gonna get to come wiv us then?”

“We need,” explained Sparrow, “somebody who's not going to attract too much attention and who...”

“Like Lion, I suppose,” interrupted Coyote sarcastically.

“Schtum!”

Lion groaned aloud, “And for this I left a warm bed? Oy veh!”

Golden Eagle ruffled his feathers menacingly, “Lion is with us because poor dumb creatures like you need protecting. Now be a good little doggie and shut up!”

Coyote looked as if he might respond to the jibe, but obviously re-considered his position and thought better of it.

“...won't be a nuisance,” finished Sparrow.

“Und who vould zat be?” enquired Bavarian Wolf.

“Himalayan Goat and Chimpanzee,” answered Sparrow promptly.

“Chimpanzee!” cried Rhesus Monkey, “Oh, my gawd!”

“We need his hands,” explained Sparrow patiently. “Apart from yours all we've got are beaks, claws and paws. We need him, just as we need Goat's horns to pry things open, okay? Now let's stop this bickering and get on with it.”

“Let's go already,” said Lion, “younger I'm not getting.”

Together the animals made their way first to the Himalayan Goat enclosure, where by the simple expedient of smashing the padlock off the gate, Lion doing the honours, they released Himalayan Goat, born and raised in Dublin Zoo.

“And isn't this a fine t'ing you're all doing,” he said as he trotted out.

Chimpanzee was even easier now that Goat had joined the gang, he simply used his horns to prize open the cage door and Chimpanzee was free. Hurrying out on all fours, Chimpanzee greeted his rescuers by clapping

“Schtum!”

his hands gleefully and executing a little dance, "Man!" he cried, "Now this feels gooooood!"

"I suppose you wouldn't care to let out a couple of screams and wake up the whole damn zoo, would you?" enquired Golden Eagle dryly.

"Sorry," said an instantly contrite Chimpanzee, "but you don't dig how great it feels to be out. One more tea party and I'd have been a basket case."

"You're not?" enquired Coyote slyly.

Chimpanzee swung round and bared his teeth at Coyote, "Who's the jerk with the attitude?" he asked generally.

"Ignore him," said Sparrow, "We've got other more important problems."

"Loike getting' outa here perhaps," added Goat.

"Got it in one," murmured Golden Eagle.

"Can we go now," pleaded Rhesus Monkey, "me nerves is all shot to pieces standin' around 'ere argyfing."

Chimpanzee eyed the little Rhesus Monkey, "Man, are you on a diet? You don't look like one of us."

"Nah," snapped Rhesus Monkey, "I ain't one of you, not no-how mate. Rhesus is me name an' monkey is me game. You're a bloomin' anthropoid, that's wot you are."

"Enough already," growled Lion, "A bunch of nudniks you're becoming. We go already, yes?"

"Ja," put in Bavarian Wolf, "Ve go, ve go."

"Schtum!"