



CORNELIA FUNKE INKHEART

In books hatred is often described as hot, but at Capricorn's festivities Meggie discovered it was cold — an ice-cold hand that stops the heart and presses it like a clenched fist against the ribs. Hatred made her freeze, in spite of the mild air wafting around her, telling her that the world was a good, safe place. She knew it was not — as the bloody cloth on which the smiling Capricorn had laid his ringed hand showed all too clearly.

"Well, so much for that!" he cried. "And now for the real reason we are all gathered here tonight. Not only are we about to punish the traitors but we're also going to celebrate a reunion with an old friend. Some of you may remember him, and as for the others, I promise that once you have met him you will never forget him." Cockerell twisted his thin face into a sour smile. He was obviously not looking forward to the reunion and, at Capricorn's words, alarm showed on several other faces.

"But that's enough talking. Now, let's hear something read aloud to us." Capricorn leaned back in his chair and nodded to the Magpie. Mortola clapped her hands, and Darius came hurrying across the arena with the casket Meggie had last seen in the Magpie's room. He clearly knew what it contained. His face was even more haggard than usual as he opened the casket and held it out to the Magpie, his head bowed humbly. The snakes seemed to be drowsy, and this time Mortola did not put on a glove before she lifted them out. She even draped them over her shoulders while she took the book out of its hiding place. Then she put the snakes back as carefully as if they were precious jewels, closed the lid, and handed the casket back to Darius. He stayed on the rostrum, looking awkward. Meggie caught him looking sympathetically at her as the Magpie made her sit down on the chair and placed the book on her lap. Here it was again, the unlucky thing, in its brightly colored paper jacket. What color was the binding under it? Raising the dust jacket with her finger, Meggie saw the dark red cloth, as red as the flames surrounding the ink-black heart. Everything that had happened had begun between the pages of this book, and only the words of its author could save them now. Meggie stroked its binding as she always did before opening a book. She had seen Mo doing the same. Ever since she could remember



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she had known that movement — the way he would pick up a book, stroke the binding almost tenderly, then open it as if he were opening a box full to the brim with precious things. Of course, the marvels you hoped to find might not be waiting inside the covers, so then you closed the book, sorry that its promise had not been kept. But Inkheart was not a book of that kind. Badly told stories never come to life. There are no Dustfingers in them, nor even a Basta.

"I am told to tell you something!" The Magpie's dress smelled of musty lavender, its fragrance enveloping Meggie in a suffocating threat. "Should you fail to do what Capricorn asks, should it occur to you to stumble over the words on purpose, or distort them so the guest Capricorn is expecting does not come, then ..." Mortola paused and Meggie felt the old woman's breath on her cheek. "Cockerell will cut the old man's throat. Capricorn may not give the order himself, because he believes the stupid lies the old man told him, but I don't, and Cockerell will do as I say. Understand me, my little cherub?" She pinched Meggie's cheek with her bony fingers. Meggie shook off her hand and looked at Cockerell. He moved up behind Fenoglio, smiled at her, and ran a finger across the old man's throat. Fenoglio pushed him away and looked at Meggie as if one look could convey everything he wanted to say to her and give her: encouragement, comfort, and maybe even amusement in the face of all the horrors surrounding them. Whether or not their plan worked depended on him and his words — and Meggie's reading.



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"Push your hair back from your forehead," Fenoglio had told her. "That will be the signal to me." But just as she raised her left hand the crowd on the benches became restless again. Flatnose was back, with soot marks on his face. He hurried to Capricorn's side and whispered something to him. Capricorn frowned and looked toward the houses. Now Meggie saw two plumes of smoke rising into the sky from behind beside the church tower. Capricorn rose quickly from his chair. He tried to sound composed, ironic, like a man amused at some childish prank, but his face told a different story. "I am sorry to have to spoil the fun for a few more of you, but tonight the red rooster is crowing here, too. A feeble little rooster, but its neck must be wrung all the same. Flatnose, take another ten men back with you." Flatnose obeyed and marched off with his reinforcements. The benches now looked a good deal emptier. "And don't any of you show your faces back here before you've found the fire-raiser!" Capricorn called after them.

"Whoever it is, we'll teach him not to start fires in the devil's own domain — we'll teach him a lesson, right here and now!" Someone laughed, but most of those who had stayed behind were looking uneasily in the direction of the village. Some of the maids had actually risen to their feet, but the Magpie called their names in a sharp voice, and they were quick to sit back down with the others, like schoolchildren unfairly slapped on the hand. Nonetheless, the restlessness persisted. Scarcely anyone was looking at Meggie; almost all the members of her audience had turned their backs to her and were pointing at the smoke and whispering to one another. A red glow was creeping up the church tower, and gray smoke formed a dense cloud above the rooftops. "What is all this? Why are you staring at that little wisp of smoke?" There was no missing the anger in Capricorn's voice now. "A bit of smoke, a few flames — so what? Are you going to let that spoil our festivities?"



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Fire is our best friend, have you forgotten?" Meggie saw the doubting faces turn back toward him. Then she heard a name. Dustfinger. A woman's voice had called it out. "What does that mean?" Capricorn's voice was so sharp that Darius almost dropped the casket of snakes. "There is no Dustfinger anymore. He's lying up there in the hills with his mouth full of earth and that marten of his on his breast. I never want to hear his name again. He is forgotten as if he had never been —" "That's not true." Meggie's voice rang out over the arena so loud and clear that she herself was alarmed. "He's here!" She held up the book. "Never mind what you do to him. Everyone who reads this story will see him — you can even hear his voice, and see the way he laughs and breathes fire." All went perfectly quiet. A few feet scraped uneasily on the red, rough surface of the old football field — then, suddenly, Meggie heard something behind her.



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"A very fine speech!" said Capricorn slowly. "But you're not here to make funeral orations for dead traitors. You're here to read aloud, and I am not going to tell you so again." Meggie forced herself to look at Capricorn. She mustn't look at the cars again. Suppose that really had been Farid? Suppose she hadn't imagined the ticking? The Magpie was watching her suspiciously. Perhaps she had heard it, too, that soft, harmless ticking, nothing but a tongue clicking against someone's teeth. What did it mean, unless you knew the story of Captain Hook and his fear of the crocodile with the ticking clock inside it? The Magpie wouldn't have read it, but Mo knew Meggie would understand his signal. He had woken her up often enough with that ticking sound, right beside her ear, so close that it tickled. "Breakfast time, Meggie!" he used to whisper. "The crocodile's here!" That was it. Mo knew she would recognize the ticking that helped Peter Pan to go aboard Captain Hook's ship and rescue Wendy. He couldn't have given her a better signal. Wendy, thought Meggie. What had happened next? For a moment she almost forgot where she was, but the Magpie reminded her. She slapped Meggie's face with the flat of her hand. "Start reading, will you, little witch!" she hissed. And so Meggie obeyed.

Hastily, she removed the black bookmark from the pages where it lay. She must hurry, she must read before Mo did anything silly. He didn't know what she and Fenoglio were planning to do. "I'm going to start now, and I don't want anyone disturbing me!" she cried. "Anyone! Is that understood?" Oh please, let Mo understand, she thought, please! A few of Capricorn's remaining men laughed, but Capricorn himself leaned back and folded his arms in anticipation. "Yes, just you take heed of what the girl said!" he called. "Anyone



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Capricorn gestured impatiently to the Magpie. Mortola's face looked sour, as if he had told her to eat a bar of soap, but she took two or three reluctant steps back. That would have to do. Meggie raised her hand and pushed the hair back from her forehead. The signal for Fenoglio. He instantly launched into his performance. "No, no, no! She's not to read!" he cried, moving toward Capricorn before Cockerell could stop him.

"I can't allow it! I am the author of this story, and I didn't write it to be misused for the purposes of violence and murder!" Cockerell tried to put his hand over Fenoglio's mouth, but Fenoglio bit his fingers and sidestepped him with more agility than Meggie would ever have expected of the old man. "I invented you!" he bellowed as Cockerell chased him around Capricorn's chair. "And I'm sorry I did, you stinking devil of a villain." Then he ran off. Cockerell didn't catch up with Fenoglio until he reached the cage containing the prisoners, and in revenge for the mockery and laughter coming from the benches he twisted the old man's arm behind his back so viciously that Fenoglio let out a cry of pain. Yet, when Cockerell dragged him back to Capricorn's side, Fenoglio was looking pleased, because he knew he had given Meggie plenty of time. They had rehearsed it often enough. Her fingers had been shaking as she took the sheet of paper out of her sleeve, but no one noticed anything when she slipped it into the pages of the book. Not even the Magpie.

"How the old man boasts!" cried Capricorn. "Do I look as if an old fellow like that invented me?" There was more laughter. The smoke above the rooftops seemed to have been forgotten. Cockerell put his hand over Fenoglio's mouth. "Once again, and I hope this will be the last time," said Capricorn to Meggie, "start reading! The prisoners have waited long enough for their executioner." Silence fell again, and once more it smelled of fear.

Meggie bent over the book on her lap. The letters seemed to dance on the pages. Come out, thought Meggie, come out and save us! Save us all: Elinor and my mother, Mo and Farid. Save Dustfinger if he's still alive, and save Basta, too, for all I care. Her tongue felt like a little animal that had found refuge in her mouth and was now butting its head against her teeth. "Capricorn had many men," she began. "And every one of them was feared in



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the surrounding towns and villages. They stank of cold smoke, they stank of sulfur and everything that reminds you of fire. Whenever one of them passed by people closed their doors and hid under the stairs with their children. They called them Firefingers and Bloodhounds—Capricorn's men had many names. They were feared by day, and by night they made their way into dreams and poisoned them. But there was one who was feared even more than Capricorn's villains." Meggie felt as if her voice was growing stronger with every word she read. It seemed to grow until it filled the arena. "Folk called him the Shadow."



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Two more lines at the bottom of the page, then turn it over. Fenoglio's words were waiting. "Look at this, Meggie!" he had whispered when he showed her the sheet of paper. "What an artist I am, eh? Is there anything in the world better than words on the page? Magic signs, the voices of the dead, building blocks to make wonderful worlds better than this one, comforters, companions in loneliness. Keepers of secrets, speakers of the truth ... all those glorious words.

"Taste every word, Meggie, whispered Mo's voice inside her, savor it on your tongue. Do you taste the colors? Do you taste the wind and the night? The fear and the joy? And the love. Taste them, Meggie, and everything will come to life. "Folk called him Capricorn's Shadow." How the sh hissed as it passed her lips, how darkly the sound of the o formed in her mouth. "He came only when Capricorn called him," she read.

"Sometimes he was red as fire, sometimes gray as the ash to which fire turns all that it devours. He darted out of the earth as fast as flames lick their way up wood. His fingers and even his breath brought death. He rose before his master's feet, soundless, faceless, scenting his way like a hound on the trail and waiting for his master to point to the victim. It was said that Capricorn had commanded one of the trolls who understand the whole art of fire and smoke to create the Shadow from the ashes of his victims. No one was sure, for it was also said that Capricorn had ordered those who called the Shadow to life to be killed. All that everyone knew was that he was immortal, invulnerable, and pitiless, like his master." Meggie's voice died away as if the wind had blown it from her lips. Something was rising from the gravel that covered the football field. It grew taller, it stretched its ashen limbs. The night air suddenly stank of sulfur. That stench burned Meggie's eyes so that the letters blurred, but she must go on reading while the eerie creature grew taller and taller. "Yet one night, a mild and starlit night, the Shadow heard not Capricorn's voice when it was called forth, but the voice of a girl, and when she called his name he remembered; he remembered all those from whose ashes he was made, all the pain and all the grief—" The Magpie reached over Meggie's shoulder.



"What's this? What are you reading?" But Meggie jumped up and backed away before the old woman could snatch the sheet of paper from her. "He remembered," she read on in a loud, clear voice, "and he was determined to be avenged — avenged upon those who were the cause of all this misfortune, whose cruelty poisoned the whole world." "Make her stop!" Was that Capricorn's voice? Meggie almost fell off the rostrum as she tried to keep away from the Magpie. Darius stood there, staring at her in astonishment, the casket in his hands. Then suddenly but deliberately, as if he had all the time in the world, he put down the casket and wrapped his thin arms firmly around the Magpie from behind. Nor did he let go, no matter how hard she struggled and cursed. And Meggie read on as the Shadow stood, watching her. The figure had no face, that was true, but it had eyes, terrible eyes, red as the embers of a hidden fire. "Get the book away from her!" shouted Capricorn. He was standing in front of his chair, bent double as if he feared his legs would refuse to obey him if he took so much as a step toward the Shadow. "Get it away from her!" But none of his remaining men moved, none of the boys and none of the women came to his aid. They had eyes for nothing but the Shadow as he stood there listening to Meggie's voice, as if she were telling him a long-for gotten tale.

"Indeed, he wanted revenge," Meggie read on. If only her voice weren't shaking so much, but it wasn't easy to kill, even if someone else was going to do it for her. "So the Shadow went to his master and reached out to him with ashen hands. ..." How soundlessly it moved, that terrible, gigantic figure! Meggie stared at Fenoglio's next sentence. And Capricorn fell down on his face, and his black heart stopped beating — She couldn't say it. She couldn't. It had all been in vain. Then, suddenly, someone else was standing behind her. She hadn't even noticed him climbing up onto the rostrum. The boy was there, too, holding a shotgun aimed at the benches — but no one sitting there stirred. No one so much as lifted a finger to save Capricorn. And Mo took the book from Meggie's hands, ran his eyes over the lines Fenoglio had added, and in a firm voice read to the end of what the old man had written. "And Capricorn fell down on his face, and his black heart stopped beating, and all those who had gone burning and murdering with him disappeared — blown away like ashes in the wind. "



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Part 1

In books hatred is often described as hot, but at Capricorn's festivities Meggie discovered it was cold — an ice-cold hand that stops the heart and presses it like a clenched fist against the ribs. Hatred made her freeze, in spite of the mild air wafting around her, telling her that the world was a good, safe place. She knew it was not — as the bloody cloth on which the smiling Capricorn had laid his ringed hand showed all too clearly.

"Well, so much for that!" he cried. "And now for the real reason we are all gathered here tonight. Not only are we about to punish the traitors but we're also going to celebrate a reunion with an old friend. Some of you may remember him, and as for the others, I promise that once you have met him you will never forget him." Cockerell twisted his thin face into a sour smile. He was obviously not looking forward to the reunion and, at Capricorn's words, alarm showed on several other faces.

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Part 2

Meggie felt the paper in her sleeve, scratching her skin. Her hands seemed like the hands of a stranger as she leafed through the pages of the book. The place where she was to begin was no longer marked by a folded corner. A bookmark as black as charred wood lay between the pages.

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"Whoever it is, we'll teach him not to start fires in the devil's own domain — we'll teach him a lesson, right here and now!" Someone laughed, but most of those who had stayed behind were looking uneasily in the direction of the village. Some of the maids had actually risen to their feet, but the Magpie called their names in a sharp voice, and they were quick to sit back down with the others, like schoolchildren unfairly slapped on the hand. Nonetheless, the restlessness persisted. Scarcely anyone was looking at Meggie; almost all the members of her audience had turned their backs to her and were pointing at the smoke and whispering to one another. A red glow was creeping up the church tower, and gray smoke formed a dense cloud above the rooftops. "What is all this? Why are you staring at that little wisp of smoke?" There was no missing the anger in Capricorn's voice



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Part 3

It was a ticking like the sound of a clock, yet not quite the same, it sounded like a human tongue imitating a clock: tick-tick- tick-tick- tick-tick. The sound was coming from among the cars parked behind the wire fence with their dazzling headlights on. Meggie couldn't help it — she looked around, in spite of the Magpie and all the suspicious eyes turned on her. She could have kicked herself for being so stupid. Suppose they had seen it, too — the thin figure rising among the cars and quickly ducking down again. But no one seemed to have noticed her glance any more than the ticking.

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Two more lines at the bottom of the page, then turn it over. Fenoglio's words were waiting. "Look at this, Meggie!" he had whispered when he showed her the sheet of paper. "What an artist I am, eh? Is there anything in the world better than words on the page? Magic signs, the voices of the dead, building blocks to make wonderful worlds better than this one, comforters, companions in loneliness. Keepers of secrets, speakers of the truth ... all those glorious words.

"Taste every word, Meggie, whispered Mo's voice inside her, savor it on your tongue. Do you taste the colors? Do you taste the wind and the night? The fear and the joy? And the love. Taste them, Meggie, and everything will come to life. "Folk called him Capricorn's Shadow." How the sh hissed as it passed her lips, how darkly the sound of the o formed in her mouth. "He came only when Capricorn called him," she read.

"Sometimes he was red as fire, sometimes gray as the ash to which fire turns all that it devours. He darted out of the earth as fast as flames lick their way up wood. His fingers and even his breath brought death. He rose before his master's feet, soundless, faceless, scenting his way like a hound on the trail and waiting for his master to point to the victim. It was said that Capricorn had commanded one of the trolls who understand the whole art of fire and smoke to create the Shadow from the ashes of his victims. No one was sure, for it was also said that Capricorn had ordered those who called the Shadow to life to be killed. All that everyone knew was that he was immortal, invulnerable, and pitiless, like his master." Meggie's voice died away as if the wind had blown it from her lips. Something was rising from the gravel that covered the football field. It grew taller, it stretched its ashen limbs. The night air suddenly stank of sulfur. That stench burned Meggie's eyes so that the letters blurred, but she must go on reading while the eerie creature grew taller and taller. "Yet one night, a mild and starlit night, the Shadow heard not Capricorn's voice when it was called forth, but the voice of a girl, and when she called his name he



remembered; he remembered all those from whose ashes he was made, all the pain and all the grief—" The Magpie reached over Meggie's shoulder.

"What's this? What are you reading?" But Meggie jumped up and backed away before the old woman could snatch the sheet of paper from her. "He remembered," she read on in a loud, clear voice, "and he was determined to be avenged — avenged upon those who were the cause of all this misfortune, whose cruelty poisoned the whole world." "Make her stop!" Was that Capricorn's voice? Meggie almost fell off the rostrum as she tried to keep away from the Magpie. Darius stood there, staring at her in astonishment, the casket in his hands. Then suddenly but deliberately, as if he had all the time in the world, he put down the casket and wrapped his thin arms firmly around the Magpie from behind. Nor did he let go, no matter how hard she struggled and cursed. And Meggie read on as the Shadow stood, watching her. The figure had no face, that was true, but it had eyes, terrible eyes, red as the embers of a hidden fire. "Get the book away from her!" shouted Capricorn. He was standing in front of his chair, bent double as if he feared his legs would refuse to obey him if he took so much as a step toward the Shadow. "Get it away from her!" But none of his remaining men moved, none of the boys and none of the women came to his aid. They had eyes for nothing but the Shadow as he stood there listening to Meggie's voice, as if she were telling him a long-for gotten tale.

"Indeed, he wanted revenge," Meggie read on. If only her voice weren't shaking so much, but it wasn't easy to kill, even if someone else was going to do it for her. "So the Shadow went to his master and reached out to him with ashen hands. ..." How soundlessly it moved, that terrible, gigantic figure! Meggie stared at Fenoglio's next sentence. And Capricorn fell down on his face, and his black heart stopped beating — She couldn't say it. She couldn't. It had all been in vain. Then, suddenly, someone else was standing behind her. She hadn't even noticed him climbing up onto the rostrum. The boy was there, too, holding a shotgun aimed at the benches — but no one sitting there stirred. No one so much as lifted a finger to save Capricorn. And Mo took the book from Meggie's hands, ran his eyes over the lines Fenoglio had added, and in a firm voice read to the end of what the old man had written. "And Capricorn fell down on his face, and his black heart stopped beating, and all those



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who had gone burning and murdering with him disappeared — blown away like ashes in the wind. "



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