

## Chapter 4

The young bird Stravoz plays hide-and-seek with his little sister Florentine in the vast, floating tree. This time, to make it as difficult as possible for her, he flies down the gigantic tree trunk and hides right outside it, where the roots start to disappear into the sky. Pondering on his splendid hiding place, he suddenly becomes aware that he has never been so far away from home before and looks, overwhelmed, into the cloudy, endless vastness. This gaze into a nothingness has an incredible pull because he knows that this tree is the only form of life far and wide. Completely lost in thought, he hears his sister's voice, as if it's from a distance: "Found you!"

But Stravoz is no longer thinking about the game, his reflections focus only on the newly discovered place and his resolution to explore the world that lies beyond. He sends his sister away, saying: "Florentine, you should fly home quickly, it's very dangerous down here." He spreads his wings and wants to fly away but is suddenly stopped in his tracks when he recalls what his father, Glavoz, had repeatedly drummed into him: "Stravoz, you can't ever leave the tree, ever! Our tree is shrouded in a protective atmosphere that allows us to live here, but beyond the invisible frontier, the roots and outermost branches, there's nothing! Nothing that can bear your wings, nothing that gives you enough air to breathe and nothing but icy cold temperatures. But none of that will kill you, you'll just keep on falling without any hope of being able to stop yourself. You'll long for death but death will never come."

Stravoz remembers his father's forceful words as if he'd heard them for the first time and feels compelled to abort his attempt. So he flies home. In the

meantime, Florentine is worrying about her brother and tells her father where they had played hide-and-seek and where Stravoz clearly still is. Angry with worry, Glavoz wants to fetch his son home and, when he suddenly turns up, blocks his path. "I know where you've been. I thought I'd made myself clear. It's much too dangerous down there, you should know that by now. That's enough and you're going to spend the next few days here and not move from the spot. Perhaps that's the only way you'll learn."

Sad about his punishment but accepting that his father had no other choice, Stravoz thinks about what he has just experienced. The draw of the vast expanse of nothingness out there is unbroken and, although he's not allowed to leave home for the next few days, his desire grows to flout the rules and attempt what he has only just started today.

Brief version:

A young bird called Stravoz, driven by the desire to discover a new world.

## **Chapter 5**

A new day dawns and the mightiest and most majestic being on the tree rises up into the sky. This is Hephioz, who, with his flaming plumage, makes life possible in the first place and without whom there would be nothing but eternal darkness. Each morning his gigantic wings burst into flame anew and he rises up to bring radiant light to all creatures on the tree. While enthroned above the tree in the sky all day long, his feathers slowly droop, the flames diminish, and by slowly letting the darkness return, he sinks down to the treetop. To get rid of

the light and let night fall, Hephioz needs to smother his still glowing plumage before a spark can catch the tree. Because that would start a fire whose heat even he wouldn't be able to stand.

Hephioz is the most noble of all creatures, with a pure spirit and connected to everything that occurs on the tree beneath him, even if no other bird has ever seen him. But it's this bond that suddenly bothers him because he senses that a little bird has put something into his head which deeply hurts and upsets him.

“What are you looking for?”, he calls down desperately, knowing that the bird's much too far away to be heard. “There's nothing outside, nothing but pure illusion. And anyway, isn't what you already have enough? The life that I make possible for you? I don't do all that for me, no! Just for all of you and you'd much rather embark on a quest for an adventure?”

Sad and tormented by thoughts he has never experienced before, Hephioz glides around, trying to resist the darkness that threatens to encroach upon his mind. He tries his utmost to bring the light back into his thoughts and, finally, he does gain the upper hand and conquers his doubts and sadness. Well, that's what he believes anyway.

Brief version:

The mighty Hephioz towers over the tree until an unprecedented sadness forces him to think sombre thoughts.

## **Chapter 6**

Stravoz is maddened. Imprisoned in his own home, there's nothing he'd like better than to explore the world he suspects of existing beyond the tree. He knows the stories of the vast nothingness and the strict constraints about leaving the tree. And nevertheless, since that day when he played hide and seek with Florentine, his irrepressible desire grows to see what this magical place is like. "Why are they all so naive? Why am I the only one who's curious about what's surrounding us all?"

Once he's on his own with Florentine, he tries to persuade his little sister to accompany him on his adventure. "You should come with me and find out what really is out there." She looks at him severely and replies firmly: "Stravoz, you're a selfish dreamer. And you're absolutely wrong if you believe that there's more there than everything we know we have here. And you should just be grateful for everything you have. And apart from that, it's much too dangerous because you know that there's not enough air out there, you'll fall for an eternity and never see our family again!"

Stravoz feels that neither his sister, nor anyone else in fact, understands him. Which suddenly makes his decision all the clearer: "Tomorrow, I'm going to fly out there when nobody's looking."

High up in the clouds, Hephioz has accepted the fact that the young bird Stravoz won't be dissuaded from his plan, and is suddenly drawn into a maelstrom of sadness that he can't pull back from this time.

Brief version:

Stravoz won't be put off from putting his plan into practice, without realising that it has already set a powerful force in motion.

## **Chapter 7**

Hephioz flies around in a frenzy and in deep despair. "He's just a bird. A small young bird who doesn't know what he's doing. Just one single bird. But it's too much nevertheless and I can't stand this torture. And he won't be stopped in his quest for a world that doesn't exist. I do everything for them, but he doesn't care. And I'm totally powerless to quell my sadness..."

He looks at his plumage, which is no longer aglow as much as it was at the start of the day, and is suddenly back in the present. A thought occurs to him that could not be more dissimilar to Hephioz's nature, and yet for a moment every doubt and all melancholy has disappeared. "If I'm no longer here then neither is my sadness either. Would I perhaps even die to escape from this suffering? No, no! Never. But it would only mean that a spark would have to alight on the tree, not put out the flames on my glowing plumage just once and the tree would catch fire and get so hot that even I... no, stop! All the birds would die and they are not to blame, just one of them, no longer, that's nothing, that's... But everything would be gone in one fail swoop... No, that's not me! I can't even think such thoughts, that's just not me."

But the more the light on his plumage fades and Hephioz approaches the treetop, the more he realises that this thought has already taken root and that he is approaching a decision without meaning to. He will have to put the flames in

his plumage out every day anew but it would only take a moment of carelessness and all living beings on the tree would succumb to their fate, which nobody currently suspects.

Brief version:

Hephioz, totally desperate, has an unexpected change of perspective.

## **Chapter 8**

It grows dark. Hephioz descends onto the treetop. The time when he just has to extinguish the flames in his glowing plumage is approaching. Just as he has done so many times in the past without wasting a moment's thought on or even questioning it. He tries to resist the dismal temptation, but this temptation is growing. "It would be so easy. All my suffering would be gone straight away. My tears would disappear in a blanket of flames." He tries to resist: "No, I can't trust this thought, I'd kill all the other creatures too." "But it would be so easy, quite good in fact..." "But that's not something I can do. They all trust me and I couldn't bear the shame."

And without realising it, the time has come and his thoughts have long since led to a decision. "I'm going to die. And take all the other creatures with me. I don't want to do that. But it's my only choice." "And once I'm dead, I won't have to live with this shame. It will die with me." When the first sparks jump onto the tree, Hephioz starts to cry out. Not because he regrets what he's doing, but to

underscore his decision, which has long since irreversibly triggered the death of a whole world.

Brief version:

Torn between redemption and responsibility, Hephioz makes a momentous decision.

## **Chapter 9**

Night has fallen. Almost all the light has disappeared. And Stravoz is alone for a while. He flies away unnoticed, with only his destination in mind. He wants to go to the place he had only got to know days before and whose fascination has not let him go ever since. But this time, he wants to go further.

Stravoz has arrived at the place where the gigantic roots weave their way into the clouds and he looks with anticipation at the nothingness in front of him. He waits for the same overwhelming feeling to manifest itself that he had on his first visit here.

But this time, something's different. It's not until now that he notices that it's not as dark as it should be at this time. He turns around and looks up the mighty tree. He encounters a sight he has never seen before and its menacing nature appals him all the more. The treetop, which, from a distance, can only be guessed at, has caught fire and the flames are proceeding inexorably down the tree. Paralysed with fear, he thinks automatically of his family and finds the courage to fly back to them. With tears in his eyes, he hears tortured screams

further up, panic spreads, burning branches fall and the roaring fire is coming threateningly nearer and nearer.

And Stravoz catches sight of his father who is looking for him, but the flames have already arrived. Surrounded by overwhelming heat, he sees his father burn to death. He screams. Like an echo, he hears death cries from everywhere, there is no time to mourn, he sees other birds burning, and suffocating, and being slain by huge branches, there is no way back to his family, no one will survive, Stravoz turns around, tries to escape the flames, his wings catch fire, but he's swift and doesn't want to die, he knows that even now he's not allowed to fly away, but he wants to know, wants to see what is really beyond the tree, summoning up his last ounce of strength he saves himself past the roots into the nothingness – the burning, dying tree behind him, the last screams suffocated by the crackling fire – and he's done it, he has defied everything told in all the stories, he... falls, the sudden icy cold makes him tremble, paralyses his wings, he struggles for air, with incredible speed he falls into nothingness, and with the last spark of clarity in his thoughts he painfully realises that his father had told the truth. "All dead, the whole of my family. I wish I had died with them." And while he's falling, Stravoz doesn't guess that without his curiosity nobody would have met their death.

Brief version:

Stravoz wants to put an end to his plan but is surprised by the fire that is gradually destroying his world.

## **Chapter 10**



At the same time as his father, Glavoz, is looking for his son while facing the imminent danger, Florentine and her mother are waiting for the two to return. They hear the fire coming. They know what is about to happen to them. And that they can do nothing about it. The cries grow louder and danger comes nearer – but there’s no sign of Stravoz and his father. Florentine is still so young and nevertheless knows that death is certain. Her mother spreads her wings around her daughter protectively while the heat gets more and more unbearable. Florentine looks at her mother full of fear: “Please sing me a lullaby. Please... sing to me!” The noise is getting louder, the fire has arrived, the swirling flames, the cries of the dying birds, the groaning of the majestic tree that’s slowly losing this unfair battle. Full of desperation, Florentine begs for a moment of peace with her mother. “Sing to me! Sing to me!!” Her mother struggles with her tears to sing a song for her daughter that she’s often sung. And suddenly both of them are in their own world. Far away from the cries, the fear and the flames that are now upon them. “Sleep now, close your eyes my child”, she sings while they start burning. “It’s peaceful when you listen.” The fire has now almost devoured both of them, but it’s still a moment full of tranquillity and harmony nevertheless. While in a warm embrace Mother and daughter burn to death.

Brief version:

Florentine begs her mother to sing a lullaby while the world around her is obliterated by flames.