

STORIES FROM A ROOK

THE FIRST TEN



with Rook Ravel & Pip

Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STRANGEWOVEN PRESENTS

Stories from a Rook

The First Ten



With Rook Ravel & Pip

"I'm going to tell you a story.
Is it real or made up?
You decide."

An illustrated collection

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the little castle

Within these pages are ten stories: some drawn from real events, others entirely made up. All are told by Rook Ravel, with scenery, sound effects, and commentary supplied by his ever-questioning assistant, Pip.

Rook brings every tale to life with the confidence of a seasoned performer. Pip listens closely, raises objections, and sometimes finds himself believing despite his best efforts.

Your part is to decide. Will you believe the story, question it, or change your mind before the final bow? Which tales really happened, and which exist only in the storyteller's imagination?

Read, enjoy, and make your guesses. The answers are waiting at the back of the book.



The lanterns are lit.
The stage is ready.
Let Rook tell you a story.

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A NOTE FOR THE AUDIENCE

Before the curtain rises

Rook tells every story with the same confidence. Pip supplies the scenery, the sound effects, and a healthy amount of doubt.

Read each performance, make your guess, and keep going. The answers, the reveal poster, and the notes behind the real events wait at the back.

For the stories based on real events, the dialogue and stage performances are dramatized. The covers are artistic interpretations.

Your guesses

STORY	REAL / MADE UP
01	_____
02	_____
03	_____
04	_____
05	_____
06	_____
07	_____
08	_____
09	_____
10	_____

STORIES FROM A ROOK

The MAN WHO BOUGHT *the* SILENCE

Story One • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 01

The Man Who Bought the Silence

Pip was tightening the last curtain cord when Rook stepped onto the castle battlements.

The little mouse glanced up.

“Not yet.”

Rook held his pose.

Pip tugged the cord, straightened a lantern, and swept a stray feather beneath the stage.

“Now.”

Rook bowed.

“I’m going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide.”

Behind him, Pip slid a painted street into place.

“There was once a theater that sold a ticket every Thursday to a man who never watched the play.”

Rook folded his wings against his ribs.

“He arrived at precisely seven, wearing a brown coat with one button missing. He paid for the same seat: the last chair in the last row, beside the exit.”

Rook’s chest rose. His head tipped back. Suddenly he was a theater manager, inspecting someone over imaginary spectacles.

“‘You’ll scarcely see a thing from there, sir.’”

His posture changed. His voice became quiet.

“‘That will suit me.’”

The man sat through every performance with his eyes closed.

He never applauded.

He always left before the curtain call.

Naturally, everyone had an explanation.

Rook leaned forward, becoming a whispering usher.

“A critic. They send them secretly.”

He puffed himself up.

“A retired actor. Can’t bear to watch anyone else.”

Then he hunched, voice thin and certain.

“He’s asleep.”

Pip stopped adjusting the backdrop.

“Was he?”

“Someone dropped a scenery flat behind him one evening. He jumped nearly out of his coat.”

Pip nodded and returned to work.

“For eleven months,” Rook continued, “the man came every Thursday. Then a young actress found him waiting outside before the doors opened.”

Rook drew his wings close, taking on her brisk curiosity.

“You’ve seen our play six times.”

A small turn of his skull.

“Have I?”

“Don’t you get tired of it?”

“I don’t listen to the play.”

The actress looked at the theater doors.

“Then what do you listen to?”

For the first time, the man smiled.

“The room.”

Pip slowly lowered a tiny stage broom.

Rook let the silence settle.

“The actress had heard some strange things in her profession. She waited.”

The man explained that his wife had worked in that theater for thirty-eight years. She had mended costumes, found missing props, and persuaded frightened children to step out beneath the lights.

On Thursdays, he used to collect her after work.

He would wait in the last row.

Even after thirty-eight years, she always had one more thing to finish.

“‘From that chair,’” Rook said in the man’s voice, “‘you can hear the dressing-room stairs. The pipes knock when someone turns on the upstairs tap. And just before a scene begins, there’s usually someone running very quietly.’”

He paused.

“‘She’s been gone nearly a year. At home, I keep listening for her key in the door. Here, there’s always another sound coming.’”

The actress sat beside him until the doors opened.

Afterward, she told the manager.

And the manager, who was kinder than he was sensible, decided they should do something special.

The following Thursday, the company invited the man onto the stage. They presented him with flowers and announced that his seat would be free for life.

Everyone applauded.

Rook spread his wings, filling the little castle with the shape of a grand occasion.

Then he lowered them.

"The man thanked them very politely."

Pip looked up.

"But he didn't come back?"

"No."

For three Thursdays, the chair remained empty.

Finally, the young actress went to his house.

Rook became her again, standing awkwardly on a doorstep.

"We meant to make you feel welcome."

"You did."

"Then why have you stopped coming?"

The man looked down at his hands.

"I could manage buying a ticket,' he said. 'I didn't know how to manage everyone watching me miss her.'"

Pip set the broom down.

"The actress went back to the theater," Rook said. "She spoke to the manager. The manager spoke to the ushers."

"And?"

"The next Thursday, when the man approached the ticket window, the clerk held out her hand."

Rook adopted her businesslike voice.

"One ticket?"

"Please."

"Last row?"

"Please."

She took his money.

Nobody turned to watch him enter.

Nobody asked how he was feeling.

And halfway through the second act, a young actress came down the aisle and sat beside him.

She said nothing.

After a while, he moved his coat so she had a little more room.

Rook fell quiet.

Behind him, Pip left the painted theater standing beneath its tiny lantern.

"Did he keep coming?" the mouse asked.

"For years, according to the story."

"And the actress?"

"When she could."

Pip considered this.

"I think that one happened."

Rook tipped his skull.

"Because of the flowers?"

"No. Because they got it wrong before they got it right."

Rook gave the mouse a small bow.

Then he turned to his audience.

"Well?"

His shadow stretched across the castle towers.

"Real... or made up?"



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The NEWSPAPER THAT SOLD the MOON

Story Two • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 02

The Newspaper That Sold the Moon

Pip had hung a moon above the castle.

It was painted on a wooden circle, with a pale face on one side and the words THIS WAY UP on the other.

Rook studied it.

“A little higher.”

Pip pulled the cord.

“A little to the left.”

Pip shifted the hook.

“Perfect.”

The moon turned slowly, presenting THIS WAY UP to the audience.

Pip closed his eyes.

Rook waited until the mouse had corrected it. Then he stepped between the towers and bowed.

“I’m going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide.”

He glanced toward the moon.

“This evening’s story concerns a newspaper that found something extraordinary up there.”

“Cheese?” Pip asked.

“Much better for selling newspapers.”



“In New York, in the summer of 1835, a newspaper called The Sun began publishing reports of astonishing discoveries on the moon.”

Rook lifted one claw as if holding a delicate instrument.

"The reports described a remarkable telescope and connected the discoveries to a famous astronomer: Sir John Herschel."

Pip rolled a little brass tube onto the stage.

Rook bent to peer through it.

"That's the wrong end," Pip whispered.

"I'm portraying an important gentleman. He may require time to notice."

He turned the tube around.

"The newspaper's accounts began with landscapes and vegetation. Then came animals. Among them were creatures resembling bison - and creatures resembling unicorns."

Pip leaned out from behind a turret.

"On the moon?"

"According to the newspaper."

Rook stepped sideways. His neck shortened. His voice became the brisk cry of a street seller.

"Wonderful discoveries! Remarkable creatures! Get your paper!"

Then he became a customer, squinting suspiciously.

"Unicorns? Who saw them?"

He straightened into the seller.

"Scientists."

"Well, then. One copy."

Pip fetched a stack of miniature papers.

"Did everybody believe it?"

"No. Some doubted it. Some other newspapers reprinted it. And the discoveries kept coming."

Rook spread his wings.

"People with wings like bats."

Pip looked at Rook's wings.

Then at the moon.

Then at Rook again.

"I can see how that would sell."



The little castle became a newspaper office.

Pip tapped a wooden block against the stage: clack, clack, clack.

Rook paced the battlements, transforming with every turn.

A reader clutching the latest installment.

A learned gentleman clearing his throat.

A neighbor leaning across a fence with something astonishing to share.

"Have you read it?"

"Every word."

"Do you believe it?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why are you buying tomorrow's?"

Rook stopped.

Pip stopped tapping.

"Well?" the mouse asked.

Rook leaned forward in the voice of the offended reader.

"To discover what further nonsense they expect me to believe."

Pip resumed the printing noises.

A little faster.

— ◆ —

“The reports ran to six installments,” Rook said. “And the account supplied a most convenient interruption.”

Pip dimmed a lantern.

“The telescope’s lens was said to have started a fire at the observatory.”

Pip flicked a scrap of orange cloth above a tower, then pulled it away.

“The observations came to an end.”

Rook lowered the brass tube.

“And what about the astronomer?” Pip asked.

“An excellent question.”

“Had he actually seen any of it?”

“No.”

Pip stared.

Rook waited.

“So the story was made up!”

“The discoveries were made up,” Rook said. “That is part of the story I’m telling you.”

Pip put both paws on the battlement.

“I dislike that distinction.”

“Take your time.”

The mouse looked down at his tiny newspapers.

“Let me get this straight. You’re saying an actual newspaper printed reports about creatures living on the moon, used a real astronomer’s name, and kept publishing them?”

“Yes.”

“And other papers printed them too?”

“Yes.”

Pip glanced at the audience.

"That sounds like the sort of thing someone would invent to make people feel clever for doubting it."

Rook's skull tilted.

"An interesting possibility."

"Did you invent it?"

Rook stepped back beneath the wooden moon.

Pip hurried to catch its cord before it turned around again.

"Before you decide," Rook said, "remember the question."

He laid a claw gently on the stack of papers.

"The question is whether this business with the newspaper ever happened."

He bowed.

"Real... or made up?"

Pip studied one miniature page.

From behind the castle came a small, reluctant voice.

"I would have bought tomorrow's."



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The VILLAGE That HIRED a SCARECROW

Story Three • with Rook Ravel



STORY 03

The Village That Hired a Scarecrow

Pip dragged a small wooden figure through the castle gate. It wore a floppy hat and a coat stuffed with straw. One sleeve had caught on a wheel.

Rook watched from the battlements.

“Our leading gentleman appears distressed.”

“Our leading gentleman is standing on his own coat.”

Pip freed the sleeve and propped the scarecrow beside a tiny painted field.

Rook bowed to the audience.

“I’m going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide.”

He glanced at the figure.

“This one concerns a village that hired a scarecrow.”

Pip looked up.

“To frighten birds?”

“To keep the peace.”



The village had lost its night watchman to a better-paying position.

His replacement lasted four nights.

The next applicant asked whether the work involved going outside after dark.

Rook tucked his wings behind him, becoming a council chairman of considerable importance.

“We require a reliable individual. Someone willing to remain at his post in all weather.”

Pip glanced at the scarecrow.

“Good qualifications so far.”

“Someone who will accept modest wages.”

“Excellent qualifications.”

“And someone who won’t keep interrupting meetings.”

Pip folded his paws.

Rook continued.

While the council argued, somebody stole two cheeses from the dairy.

The following night, washing disappeared from a line.

Then the chairman’s best wheelbarrow went missing.

“He called an emergency meeting,” Rook said.

“About the cheeses?”

“The wheelbarrow.”

“Of course.”



It was the dairywoman who suggested the scarecrow.

Rook planted his claws wide and spoke in a tired, practical voice.

“Put a coat on it. Give it a lantern. Stand it at the crossroads. It might discourage somebody.”

The council laughed.

The dairywoman waited.

Then she asked whether anyone had a better suggestion.

By dusk, the scarecrow stood beneath the village sign.

It wore the old watchman’s coat. A brass badge had been pinned over its straw-filled chest.

Someone put a wooden truncheon in its sleeve.

Someone else hung a lantern from its arm.

"And did it work?" Pip asked.

"The first night, nothing was stolen."

"The second?"

"Nothing."

Pip straightened the little figure's hat.

"A promising career."

"On the third morning," Rook said, "the scarecrow was standing outside the dairy."

Pip's paw remained on the hat.

"Who moved it?"

"Nobody admitted moving it."

"Perhaps the dairywoman."

"Perhaps."

A cheese lay at its feet.

One of the stolen cheeses.

The dairywoman said she recognized the cloth.



On the fifth morning, the scarecrow stood beside the washing line.

A basket of missing clothes had been placed beneath its arm.

Pip left the figure alone.

On the seventh morning, the chairman found his wheelbarrow outside his gate.

The scarecrow sat inside it.

Rook lifted his skull and gave the chairman a magnificent, trembling voice.

“A thoroughly satisfactory appointment.”

Pip took a careful step away from the prop.

“The council voted to retain the scarecrow,” Rook said.

“The decision was unanimous.”

“What were its wages?”

“One shilling a week.”

“What would a scarecrow do with a shilling?”

“That question also arose at the meeting.”

“And?”

“They decided its personal affairs were its own concern.”



Every Saturday, the clerk placed a shilling in the scarecrow's coat pocket.

By Sunday, the coin was gone.

Some people said the clerk took it back.

Others said the dairywoman had arranged the whole business.

A few suggested that the village had finally found an honest watchman and ought to stop asking questions.

Rook leaned forward.

“Then a stranger came through.”

He became a broad-shouldered traveler, chin raised, voice loud enough to reach the back row.

“You're all frightened of an old sack.”

He turned toward the scarecrow.

“Come on, then. Arrest me.”

Pip reached beneath the stage.

Clack.

Rook looked down.

"What was that?"

"The sound effect."

"Which sound effect?"

Pip consulted a scrap of paper.

"Unsettling wooden noise."

"Very good."

Rook returned to his story.

The stranger pulled off the scarecrow's hat.

Nothing happened.

He shook its wooden hand.

Nothing happened.

Then he took the shilling from its pocket and walked away.

"That seems to settle it," Pip said.

"The next morning, his boots were hanging from the village sign."

Pip glanced toward the sign above the miniature gate.

"He had left them outside his room to dry. In their place, he found a small bundle of straw."

"And the shilling?"

"Back in the scarecrow's pocket."



The stranger left before breakfast.

The scarecrow remained in service.

Its coat was mended. Its hat was replaced. In winter, somebody knitted it a scarf.

For several years, the village accounts recorded the same weekly expense:

Night watch: one shilling.

Pip considered the little figure.

"Did anyone ever stay up to watch it?"

"Several people."

"And?"

"They reported that it stood perfectly still."

"All night?"

"All night."

Pip gave a satisfied nod.

"There you are."

"Although, on one occasion, while three men were watching the scarecrow, someone returned a stolen pig to its owner."

Pip opened his mouth.

Closed it.

Then picked up his wooden sound block.

Clack.

Rook nodded approvingly.



"So," the mouse said, "somebody could have been using the scarecrow as a disguise."

"Certainly."

"Or several people could have been helping."

"Certainly."

"Or the thieves could have become frightened and returned everything themselves."

"Also possible."

Pip leaned on the castle wall.

"You make it very difficult to disagree with you."

"I've scarcely disagreed with anyone."

Rook turned to the audience.

“Did a village truly appoint a scarecrow as its night watchman? Or have I dressed an old sack in a convincing story?”

He bowed.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip began clearing the stage.

He collected the field, the village sign, and the little lantern.

Then he stopped.

“Rook?”

“Yes?”

“Which way was the scarecrow facing?”

Rook looked down.

Pip looked up.

Neither touched it.



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The TREE with a POSTAL ADDRESS

Story Four • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 04

The Tree with a Postal Address

Pip came through the castle gate carrying a sack of letters.

The sack caught on the drawbridge.

He pulled.

The drawbridge lifted.

Rook looked down.

“Expecting a siege?”

“Expecting you to help.”

Rook lifted the sack with his beak. Pip freed the cord, and a shower of tiny envelopes spilled across the stage.

One landed between Rook’s claws.

“To the occupant,” he read.

“That’s a prop.”

“So is the castle. I still occupy it.”

Pip pushed a painted oak tree into the center of the little theater. Its twisted branches reached almost to the battlements. A small ladder leaned against its trunk.

Rook bowed.

“I’m going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide.”

He rested a claw beside the ladder.

“In a forest in Germany, there stood a tree that received its own mail.”



Pip looked up.

"Someone hung a postbox on it?"

"No."

"Someone lived inside it?"

"No."

"An owl?"

"The letters were addressed to the tree."

Pip glanced at the scattered envelopes.

"That will complicate sorting."

Rook's neck lengthened. His chest drew forward. He became a clerk behind a counter, regarding an envelope with deep professional concern.

"Name?"

A small turn, and he was the customer.

"An oak."

"House number?"

"It hasn't got a house."

"Street?"

"A forest."

Rook turned back into the clerk.

He looked at the imaginary envelope.

Then at the imaginary customer.

Then, with great care, he set the envelope aside.

Pip nodded.

"That part I believe."



"The tree stood near a town called Eutin," Rook continued.

"There was a hollow in its trunk, high enough that a ladder helped people reach it."

Pip climbed two rungs of the miniature ladder and tucked an envelope into the wooden hollow.

"The local tale says that long ago, two young people used that hollow to exchange secret letters. Her father objected to their courtship."

Rook lowered his skull and spoke in a stern parental voice.

"I will hear no more of it."

Then he became a young man, searching for words.

He opened his beak.

Closed it.

Pip waited.

"Has he forgotten his line?"

"He's writing a love letter. This may take a while."

Rook tried again.

"Your eyes are like - "

He stopped.

"Like what?" Pip asked.

"That is the difficulty."

Pip sat on a ladder rung.

"I hope she's patient."



"The tale says the father eventually relented, and the couple married beneath the branches."

"A happy ending."

"For them. The tree's work was just beginning."

Other people began leaving letters.

People hoping to meet someone.

People who found writing easier than making the first approach.

The custom spread. Letters came from farther away.
“And in 1927,” Rook said, “the oak was given a postal address.”
Pip slowly climbed down.
“By the post office?”
“By the post office.”
“So somebody had to deliver them.”
“Yes.”
“To a hole.”
“Yes.”
“In a tree.”
“You have followed the story admirably.”



Rook stepped onto the narrow wall beside the tower.
His gait changed. He leaned beneath the weight of an imaginary mailbag, picked his way over invisible roots, and stopped before the painted oak.
Pip hurried to move the ladder.
Rook stared upward.
He looked at his imaginary delivery list.
He looked upward again.
Then he sighed with the weary dignity of someone whose workday had become unexpectedly peculiar.
Pip brought him an envelope.
“Does the tree sign for things?”
“I suspect its handwriting would be difficult.”
“Branches everywhere.”
“Quite.”

— ◆ —
“But who answered?” Pip asked.

“Visitors could read the letters left in the hollow. If they wished, they could take one and write to its sender.”

Pip turned an envelope over in his paws.

“So the tree didn’t answer.”

“It provided somewhere for the question to wait.”

The mouse looked at the hollow.

“Some letters must have waited a long time.”

“Perhaps.”

“And some might never have been answered.”

“Perhaps.”

Pip carefully put the envelope back.

Rook watched him.

“Not that one?”

“I haven’t read it.”

“Why put it back so gently?”

Pip adjusted the corner so it would not bend.

“Somebody went to the trouble of writing it.”

— ◆ —
“There is one more part,” Rook said.

Pip folded his paws.

“There usually is.”

“One of the postmen who delivered letters to the oak was a man named Karl-Heinz Martens.”

Rook settled into the steady stance of someone accustomed to a familiar route.

“He spent years bringing other people’s hopes through the forest.”

Pip reached into the hollow.

"One day, there was a note for him."

The mouse stopped.

"For the postman?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"A woman named Renate."

Rook let a little silence gather.

"They met. Later, they married."

Pip looked from the envelope to the ladder.

Then he looked at Rook.

"You've made the ending too tidy."

"Have I?"

"The postman delivering love letters gets one himself?
That's exactly what somebody telling a story would
arrange."

Rook's beak tipped toward the audience.

"An excellent objection."



Pip began collecting the scattered envelopes.

He put them into the sack one at a time.

"The tree has a name?" he asked.

"The Bridegroom's Oak."

Pip paused.

"Of course it does."

“And that is the story,” Rook said. “A forest tree with a postal address, strangers answering strangers, and a postman who found a letter of his own.”

He bowed beneath the castle lanterns.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip shouldered the sack.

This time, he checked the drawbridge first.



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The BANK That CAME in the MAIL

Story Five • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 05

The Bank That Came in the Mail

Pip was still sorting the letters from the previous performance when Rook appeared on the battlements.

"No," said the mouse.

Rook tilted his skull.

"I haven't said anything."

"You're looking at the mail sack."

"I was admiring your organization."

"You've put something else in it."

Rook waited.

Pip reached inside.

He brought out a brick.

For a moment, neither spoke.

Then Pip set it on the stage with a firm little thump.

"If this is a love letter, somebody has expressed themselves poorly."

Rook bowed to the audience.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide."

Pip looked into the sack again.

Rook continued.

"This one concerns a bank that came in the mail."



Pip slowly withdrew his head.

"A bank."

"Yes."

"With money in it?"

"Not yet."

"With a roof?"

"Eventually."

"Rook."

"The title requires a little explanation."

"I should hope so."

Rook paced the narrow wall above the castle gate. His head lifted. His wings settled neatly behind him.

He became a businessman surveying an empty plot.

"In 1916, in Vernal, Utah, a man named William Horace Coltharp was helping arrange a new building for the town's bank."

Pip slid a painted stretch of dusty street behind the towers.

"Most of the building could use local bricks," Rook said.

"But Coltharp wanted particular pressed bricks from Salt Lake City for the outside face."

Pip stood his brick upright.

"One?"

"Rather more."



Getting the bricks to Vernal was the problem.

The route was difficult. Transport cost money.

Coltharp wanted a cheaper way.

Rook lowered his head over an imaginary desk. One claw moved across an invisible column of figures.

He counted.

He frowned.

He counted again.

Pip watched.

"That's how I look when you give me the scenery budget."

Rook raised a claw.

"Then he considered the post."

"The post office?"

"The post office."

Pip looked toward the sack.

"No."

"Parcel Post could carry packages of up to fifty pounds on that route."

"No."

"And the postage cost less than the private shipping rates."

Pip put both paws on the brick.

"I am beginning to understand why you waited until the audience arrived."



The bricks were wrapped in paper.

They were packed ten to a wooden crate.

And the crates were sent through the mail.

Rook stepped sideways, becoming a postal clerk.

Pip pushed a little box toward him.

Rook examined it, weighed it with an imaginary scale, and nodded.

Pip brought another.

Rook nodded again.

Pip brought a third.

Rook looked past him.

The mouse had lined up a row of boxes leading behind the castle.

Rook's voice changed.

"How many more?"

Pip shrugged.

Rook stared down the line.

"That is not a number."

Pip brought another box.



"About fifteen thousand bricks," Rook said.

Pip stopped.

"How many crates?"

"About fifteen hundred."

The mouse sat on the nearest one.

"Someone must have noticed."

"People noticed."

"Someone must have complained."

"There were discussions about unusually large shipments."

Pip folded his paws.

"I would have contributed."

"The bricks together weighed more than thirty-seven tons."

The mouse stood up again.

He inspected the stage beneath his feet.

Then he looked up at Rook.

"How many have you brought?"

"Those are wooden props."

Pip lifted a box.

It came up easily.

He closed his eyes for a moment.

“Useful information to provide sooner.”



Rook stretched one wing toward the painted street.

“Imagine handling the ordinary mail while all those crates were arriving.”

He became a customer at a counter.

““Anything for me?””

Then the clerk, bending beneath an invisible load.

““Bricks?””

““No.””

““Then I shall need a moment.””

Pip passed him a tiny envelope.

Rook held it aloft with enormous relief.

““Correspondence!””

The mouse applauded once.

“A moving scene.”



“By November, the building’s brickwork was complete,” Rook said. “The bank moved in the following February.”

Pip began stacking the prop boxes into a wall.

“And the post office?”

“That November, postal officials made the rule clearer. More than two hundred pounds of nonperishable merchandise from one sender to one recipient in a day required advance approval.”

Pip added another box.

“So somebody read the rules and found a cheaper way to obtain thousands of bricks?”

"Yes."

"And somebody else had to carry them?"

"Yes."

Pip considered that for some time.

"I find that part extremely convincing."



Rook watched the mouse finish his little wall.

"Have you decided, then?"

"Not entirely."

"What troubles you?"

"You said a bank came in the mail. Now it's the facing bricks for a bank."

"A fair distinction."

"And you gave me a very precise number of crates."

"Does that help?"

"It might. Or perhaps you've learned that people believe a story more readily when the person telling it has counted something."

Rook looked toward the audience.

Pip brushed imaginary dust from his waistcoat.

"A thousand five hundred crates sounds much more respectable than 'an unreasonable number of boxes.'"

Rook bowed to him.

"An excellent point."

Then he addressed the room.

"Did thousands of bricks travel through the post to help build a bank in Utah? Or have I simply found a heavy way to keep my assistant occupied?"

He spread his wings.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip placed the final box on the wall.

Then he pinned a small notice to the castle gate.

Rook leaned down to read it.

DELIVERIES REQUIRE PIP’S APPROVAL.

“Is that necessary?”

Pip picked up the mail sack.

“Advance approval.”



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The LIGHTHOUSE *That Had Never Seen* *the* SEA

Story Six • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 06

The Lighthouse That Had Never Seen the Sea

Pip extinguished three lanterns.

Then a fourth.

Rook watched the little theater grow dark.

"Are we saving money?"

"Atmosphere."

"Ah."

Pip pulled a painted forest across the back of the stage.
Between its black branches stood a narrow white tower.

At the top, a tiny light began to turn.

Rook leaned toward it.

Pip cleared his throat.

"Please don't touch the mechanism."

"I was admiring it."

"That's what you said about the drawbridge."

Rook withdrew his beak and bowed.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide."

The light swept across his bones.

"There was once a lighthouse that had never seen the sea."



It stood on a wooded ridge, miles inland.

No harbor lay beneath it.

No ships passed its windows.

From its little gallery, a person could see hills, the tops of trees, and a narrow road winding toward a quarry.

"The man who built it had spent much of his life aboard ships," Rook said. "When he retired, he bought a cottage beside that road."

Pip slid a small roof into place.

Rook settled his wings against his ribs. His movements became slow and deliberate.

He was an older man measuring a patch of ground.

"A little tower," he said.

Pip glanced at the painted lighthouse.

"How little?"

"By the time he finished, the neighbors had opinions."

Rook became a neighbor, leaning over an invisible fence.

"You're a long way from the coast."

A turn of his skull, and he was the sailor.

"So are you."



The tower rose above the clearing.

The sailor fitted a lamp at the top.

Every evening, he climbed the stairs and lit it.

The neighbors called it his folly.

They gave directions by it, though.

Past the foolish lighthouse.

Turn where the old man built that tower.

If you can see the light, you've gone too far.

Pip stopped turning his tiny lamp.

"So it was useful."

“People can find something useful and still enjoy laughing at it.”

Pip considered the castle’s crooked left turret.

Rook looked away.



Then came a winter storm.

A quarry cart broke an axle on the ridge road.

Two men stayed with the horse. A third went for help.

Snow covered the track. Wind filled his footprints.

He lost the road.

Rook’s posture narrowed. His steps became uncertain. He turned one way, then another.

Pip brushed a handful of white paper flakes across the forest.

The traveler raised an arm against the weather.

For a moment, he could see nothing.

Then a light passed above the trees.

He waited.

It came around again.

“He knew which ridge it stood on,” Rook said. “He could work his way toward the clearing.”

Pip turned the lamp slowly.

The light crossed Rook’s skull.

“The sailor heard him knocking.”

Rook changed at once into the older man, opening a door.

He listened.

Reached for his coat.

“Come inside. Tell me where the cart is.”

— ◆ —

The men and the horse were brought off the road.
Afterward, people still called the tower a folly.
They said it rather differently.
The sailor kept its lamp burning.
Years passed.
Then he grew too stiff to climb the stairs each evening.
One autumn, he moved away to live with his daughter.
The cottage stood empty.
The lighthouse went dark.
Pip stopped the turning light.
In the little theater, the forest seemed to draw closer.

— ◆ —

“One evening,” Rook said, “the lamp came on again.”
Pip looked up.
“The sailor had returned?”
“No.”
“His daughter?”
“No.”
“A new owner?”
“The cottage was still empty.”
The light burned the following night.
And the next.
There was no ghost floating in the gallery.
There was a person.
A dark figure climbing the stairs near dusk, carrying
something beneath one arm.
“If people could see somebody,” Pip asked, “why didn’t
they go and ask?”

"One did."

Rook became a curious neighbor approaching the tower door.

He knocked.

Waited.

Then called upward.

"Who's keeping the light?"

From above, in a voice flattened by wind, came the answer:

"Someone who knows the road."

Pip folded his paws.

"That is deliberately unhelpful."

"It satisfied the neighbor."

"It wouldn't satisfy me."



The neighbor came back the next evening with a loaf of bread.

A woman was climbing the stairs.

The night before, he had been quite certain he had heard a man.

He held up the loaf.

"For the keeper."

She looked down.

"Leave it by the door, please."

Two evenings later, a younger fellow was there.

The neighbor stopped him.

"How many keepers has this lighthouse got?"

Rook let the younger man's voice carry a small, embarrassed laugh.

"Depends on who can get away."

— ◆ —
Pip leaned over the battlements.

“They were taking turns.”

“So the story goes.”

“Who?”

“The two quarrymen. The traveler who had gone for help.
Their families. Other people who used the ridge road.”

“Did they have a list?”

“Eventually.”

Pip nodded.

“That makes sense.”

“The first version had three people arriving on Tuesday
and nobody assigned to Thursday.”

“That also makes sense.”

Someone supplied oil.

Someone repaired a window.

Someone who could no longer manage the stairs cleaned
the lamp glass downstairs.

The tower kept its light.

— ◆ —
“Did the old sailor find out?” Pip asked.

“A letter reached him.”

Pip glanced toward the mail sack beneath the stage.

Rook continued before he could object.

“When spring came, his daughter brought him back for a
visit.”

The old man stood in the clearing.

The paint had been touched up.

The step by the door no longer wobbled.

Inside hung a slate covered with names and days of the week.

Rook became the sailor again.

For a long moment, he said nothing.

Then he looked toward the top of his tower.

“Who’s on tonight?”



Pip let the little light make another turn.

“I can believe people would do that.”

“Yes.”

“But it’s a very convenient storm.”

“Yes.”

“And a lighthouse in a forest sounds like something you would enjoy inventing.”

Rook glanced around his miniature Gothic castle.

“A reasonable suspicion.”

He faced the audience.

“Was there really an inland lighthouse whose neighbors took over the lamp? Or have I set a light among imaginary trees?”

He bowed.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip began taking down the forest.

He collected the paper snow.

He removed the cottage.

But the little lighthouse kept turning.

Rook looked down.

“Have you forgotten something?”

Pip secured its cord beside the gate.

“The steps down from your tower are rather dark.”



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The NIGHT *the* CURTAIN NEVER ROSE

Story Seven • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 07

The Night the Curtain Never Rose

Pip pulled the curtain cord.

Nothing happened.

He pulled harder.

Rook leaned over the battlements.

"Is that part of tonight's performance?"

"It is becoming part of tonight's performance."

Pip disappeared behind a tower. There was a scrape, a mutter, and one small wooden clunk.

The curtains parted.

Pip emerged, carrying a bent hook.

"Ready."

Rook studied the hook.

"How appropriate."

The mouse narrowed his eyes.

Rook bowed to the audience.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide."

He glanced at the velvet below his claws.

"This concerns an opening night when the curtain never rose."



The theater had spent nearly everything it could afford.

Its new play had a shipwreck, a missing heir, a captain with a secret, and a splendid painted harbor.

The manager had advertised all four.

Especially the harbor.

Rook became a manager standing beneath a great imaginary poster.

“A spectacle of astonishing realism!”

He turned his head and became the carpenter beside him.

“Mind the pier. The paint’s wet.”

Pip inspected their miniature castle.

“An important distinction.”

On opening night, the company was traveling back from a performance in another town.

Heavy rain flooded the road.

The actors could not get through.

At the theater, the lamps were lit.

The seats were filling.

Behind the curtain waited the manager, the carpenter, the wardrobe woman, and a young fellow employed to make sound effects.

Pip slowly reached for his wooden sound block.

Rook nodded.

“A responsible profession.”



The manager went out before the curtain.

Rook’s wings drew close. He stood very straight, looking over an audience he was afraid to disappoint.

“Ladies and gentlemen, there has been a difficulty.”

He paused.

“We ask your patience.”

The audience waited.

The manager went backstage.
The audience waited longer.
Then somebody stamped a foot.
Somebody else joined in.
Pip tapped the boards.
Tap.
Tap, tap.
Rook glanced down.
“Very convincing.”
“I’ve waited for things.”



The young sound man had been at every rehearsal.
He knew when the ship was supposed to break apart.
He knew when the harbor bell should ring.
He also knew most of the captain’s speeches.
He had heard them through the curtain so often that he sometimes said them under his breath.
The wardrobe woman caught him doing it.
“You know the first scene,” she said.
“Everyone knows the first scene.”
“Then start.”
Rook became the young man, suddenly uncertain.
“In front of them?”
The stamping grew louder.
The manager looked toward the seats.
Then toward the script.
“Keep the curtain closed,” he said.

— ◆ —

The lights in the auditorium dimmed.
From behind the curtain came the harbor bell.
Pip struck a tiny piece of brass.
A clear note rang through the little theater.
Then came the wind.
Pip turned a crank.
Rook lowered his body against an imaginary deck.
“Reef that sail!”
He lurched sideways, becoming a frightened sailor.
“She won’t answer the helm!”
A deep roll of thunder followed.
Pip shook a thin metal sheet behind a turret.
Rook stopped.
The mouse peered around the stonework.
“Too much?”
“An excellent storm.”

— ◆ —

The carpenter dragged a box across rough boards.
A ship groaned.
The wardrobe woman shook dried peas over a wooden tray.
Rain battered the deck.
The manager read the missing heir’s lines from the script.
The young sound man became the captain.
Then the sailor.
Then a lookout shouting from high above them.
Rook’s head turned sharply. His posture changed with each voice.

“‘Rocks ahead!’”

He planted his claws.

“‘Hold her steady!’”

A crack split the darkness.

Pip snapped two little boards together.

The ship broke.

The audience stopped moving.



Nobody saw the wreck.

They heard boots running across a deck.

They heard timber give way.

They heard a man calling for someone who did not answer.

Then came a long silence.

Pip held perfectly still.

Rook waited.

At last, very softly, the harbor bell sounded again.

A chair creaked in the audience.

Someone took a breath.

Behind the curtain, the wardrobe woman pointed to the next page.



They performed the entire play.

A door became a box lid.

Footsteps through gravel came from a tray.

The wardrobe woman played the innkeeper, then the missing heir's mother, turning her head away from the audience whenever she needed to change her voice.

The carpenter nearly missed a cue because he was listening.

Once, the manager turned two pages together.

The captain had to ask a question twice.

“Where is the letter?”

A frantic rustle.

“I said, where is the letter?”

Pip glanced at Rook.

“Professional.”

“Necessary.”



At the end, the captain confessed.

The heir came home.

The harbor bell rang one last time.

And the audience applauded.

Behind the curtain, four people looked at one another.

The manager wiped his face.

The carpenter put down a bucket.

The young sound man stared at the velvet.

Then someone in the seats called:

“Bring them out!”

Pip leaned forward.

“What did they do?”

“They opened the curtain.”

“Finally.”



There stood the painted harbor.

There stood the magnificent pier.

And in front of them stood four people surrounded by boxes, trays, a metal sheet, and a script with a torn corner.

The manager bowed.

The wardrobe woman bowed.

The carpenter remembered to remove his apron.

The young sound man tried to hide behind the captain's empty chair.

The audience applauded again.

Louder.



"Did they perform it that way again?" Pip asked.

"According to the story, they arranged another evening."

"With the actors?"

"With the four people who had performed it the first time."

"What did the poster say?"

Rook lifted his skull, becoming the manager once more.

"The shipwreck you must hear to believe."

Pip nodded slowly.

"That sounds like a theater manager."



Rook folded his wings.

"An opening night without its company. Four people behind a curtain. An audience that stayed."

Pip looked at the metal sheet.

"Possible."

"Certainly."

"And you would know how the sound effects worked."

"I spent a great deal of my life in the wings."

Pip considered him.

"So you could tell it very convincingly either way."

Rook bowed.

“Precisely.”

He turned toward the audience.

“Did that performance happen? Or have I filled an empty stage with a story?”

The castle lanterns flickered.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip reached for the curtain cord.

Then stopped.

From behind the tower came one small, perfectly timed roll of thunder.

Rook looked down.

Pip bowed.



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The LIBRARY That CROSSED A RIVER

Story Eight • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 08

The Library That Crossed a River

Pip laid a narrow bridge across a strip of dark blue cloth.
Rook peered over the battlements.

"A river?"

"Yes."

"It looks rather cold."

"It's January."

Pip added a dusting of paper snow.

Then he placed a tiny building at each end of the bridge
and brought out a stack of miniature books.

Rook looked from one building to the other.

"Which one is the library?"

"Both."

"Ambitious."

Pip handed him a book.

"Please don't lose your place."

Rook bowed.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You
decide."

He held the little book beneath one claw.

"This concerns a library that crossed a river without
getting its pages wet."



The city was Riga, in Latvia.

The month was January.

The year was 2014.

On one side of the river stood the old home of the national library.

On the other stood its new building.

"There were books to welcome into their new home," Rook said. "And someone proposed that people should pass them along by hand."

Pip glanced at the bridge.

"From one building to the other?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"About two kilometers."

The mouse slowly put down his clipboard.

"I've moved your books across this stage. That was quite enough."



Rook tucked his wings close and became a practical citizen, considering the plan.

"We could use a van."

Then he turned, brightening into someone eager to explain.

"We could. But this is a celebration."

"In January?"

"Yes."

"Outside?"

Rook paused.

Pip waited.

"Wear gloves."

The mouse nodded.

"An essential detail."

Thousands of people took part.

They formed a line through the city and across the bridge over the Daugava River.

People in heavy coats.

People in knitted hats.

People who loved books enough to stand in the cold and wait for one to reach them.

Pip began placing little wooden figures beside the bridge.

Rook watched the line grow.

He shifted into a person trying to find the right place.

“Is this the queue for the library?”

A turn of his head.

“In a manner of speaking.”

“Which end?”

Rook looked left.

Then right.

Pip pointed firmly toward the new building.

The books began their journey.

One person received a volume.

Turned.

Placed it into the next pair of hands.

That person turned.

The next person turned.

Rook moved along the battlements, becoming each in succession.

A tall man bending.

An older woman adjusting her grip.

Someone opening gloved hands, ready to receive the next book.

Pip passed him a miniature volume.

Rook took it carefully in his beak and set it beside the tower.

Pip brought another.

And another.

Then Rook looked down.

"Am I the entire city?"

"We have a small company."

"A familiar theatrical difficulty."



"It was bitterly cold," Rook continued.

Pip shook the paper snow.

"Must we have quite so much atmosphere?"

"You specified January."

"Fair enough."

Along the line, people sang and cheered.

Books moved through the city.

Over the bridge.

Toward the new library.

"Were they passing every book the library owned?" Pip asked.

"No. This was a symbolic welcome. A special collection of donated books, about two thousand of them."

The mouse looked relieved.

"Still a considerable number."

"Indeed."

"What made them special?"

"They had belonged to people who wanted to give them to the library. The donors had written messages inside - something about why those particular books mattered to them."

Pip stopped reaching for the next prop.

He looked at the little volume in his paws.



Rook lowered his voice.

"Imagine receiving one without knowing its story."

He became a person standing in the line.

The book rested in his claws.

For a moment, he studied it.

Pip leaned closer.

"What does it say?"

"We don't know."

"Then what are you looking at?"

"The cover."

Rook turned toward an imaginary neighbor.

He offered the book.

The next person took it.

"That's the part I like," he said. "You wouldn't need to know why someone treasured it to be careful with it."

Pip looked down at his own paws.

Then he passed the little volume up to Rook.



The event lasted hours.

At one end, books left the old building.

At the other, they entered the new one.

Between them stood a chain of people long enough to reach across a river.

"The new library had a name," Rook said.

Pip waited.

"The Castle of Light."

The mouse looked around their miniature Gothic stage.

Then at the books.

Then at Rook.

"You are making this very convenient for yourself."

"A castle?"

"A castle full of stories."

"An appealing arrangement."

"And a river of people carrying books to it."

Rook tipped his skull.

"Does that make it harder to believe?"

"It makes it sound as though you've been choosing your details."

"A storyteller should."

Pip folded his paws.

"That was not a reassuring answer."



"Picture the last part of a book's journey," Rook said.

The little theater grew quiet.

He set a volume at one end of the bridge.

"It has come through streets."

He moved it a little farther.

"Across the river."

Farther.

“Through hands that belonged to people its donor might never meet.”

Pip waited at the other end.

Rook passed him the book.

The mouse carried it inside the tiny library.

No bell rang.

No thunder rolled.

Pip simply placed it on a shelf.



“Did the whole thing happen?” the mouse asked.

“That is tonight’s question.”

“Thousands of people standing in the cold to pass books across a river?”

“Yes.”

Pip considered the bridge.

“People do turn out for unusual celebrations.”

“They do.”

“And it would be difficult to invent all those people.”

Rook leaned forward.

“Would it?”

The mouse looked toward the audience.

“Oh.”

Rook spread his wings.

“A winter day. A city. Two libraries. A chain of waiting hands.”

He bowed.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip began collecting the wooden figures.

He left the bridge in place.

Then he took a book from the little shelf and held it up.

Rook accepted it.

“What’s this?”

“Your turn to put things away.”



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The GUEST *Who* SENT *The* BILL

Story Nine • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 09

The Guest Who Sent the Bill

Pip placed a tiny brass bell beside the castle gate.

Rook tapped it.

Ding.

Pip looked up.

“Does it work?”

“Yes.”

Rook tapped it again.

Ding.

“Still?”

Pip moved the bell out of reach.

Rook bowed to the audience.

“I’m going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide.”

The mouse opened a miniature ledger.

“This concerns a hotel that received a bill from a man who had never rented a room.”



The hotel stood opposite a railway station.

It had a narrow entrance, a wide staircase, and a lobby clock that was easier to hear than to ignore.

One morning, the manager opened a letter.

Inside was an invoice.

Rook stiffened into a gentleman whose entire working life had prepared him to object to an invoice.

“‘For services rendered between midnight and six in the morning.’”

Pip leaned forward.

“What services?”

“Let us go back to midnight.”



Rain was running down the station windows when a young man arrived at the hotel.

His connecting train would not leave until morning.

He carried a battered case and wore a coat that had ceased to be waterproof some years earlier.

Rook shook an imaginary sleeve.

Pip rustled a sheet of paper behind the tower.

Rain pattered across the little theater.

The young man approached the desk.

“A room, please.”

Rook turned into the night porter, shoulders drooping.

“Full, I’m afraid.”

“Somewhere else nearby?”

“There’s another hotel up the hill.”

The young man looked back at the weather.

“How far up?”

The porter considered.

“Far enough.”



The porter allowed him to wait in a chair beside the lobby fire.

He also explained that his wife had been unwell.

He had spent the day looking after her.

Now he was struggling to stay awake.

“If anyone rings,” he said, “give me a shake.”

He sat behind the desk.
Within minutes, he was asleep.
Pip glanced at the brass bell.
“I expect someone rang.”
Rook nodded.
Ding.

A woman appeared at the foot of the staircase.
Rook became her: upright, brisk, unwilling to be inconvenienced.
“My window won’t close.”
The young man turned toward the porter.
The porter slept.
“It’s blowing directly onto the bed.”
The young man hesitated.
Then he put down his case.
“I’ll have a look.”
Pip fetched a tiny window frame.
Rook inspected it.
Lifted it slightly.
Pressed.
The frame clicked shut.
Pip looked pleased.
“A useful guest.”
“He wasn’t a guest.”
“A useful person in the wrong building.”

When the young man returned to the lobby, someone else was waiting.

“Have you seen a brown umbrella?”

Rook searched an imaginary stand.

He produced one.

Then came a request for a wake-up call.

Then a request for an extra blanket.

The young man found the blankets.

He wrote down the wake-up time.

Once, he went behind the desk to find a pencil.

That was enough.

Everyone who came downstairs afterward assumed he worked there.

Pip opened the ledger.

“Did he explain?”

“Once.”

“And?”

“The gentleman said he was sorry to hear that, but could he please have his boots?”



The night went on.

The young man found the boots.

He carried a trunk downstairs.

He directed a confused traveler back to the station.

He discovered that the lobby clock lost five minutes whenever its pendulum caught against the case.

Rook crouched beside an imaginary clock.

Pip supplied a small wedge.

The clock began to tick evenly.

The porter slept.

“Why didn’t he wake him?” Pip asked.

"According to the story, he kept deciding to let him have another few minutes."

Pip looked at the ledger.

"That can become a whole night."

"It did."



Just before dawn, a man came down the stairs carrying two cases.

"My train leaves at six."

The young man looked at the clock.

Then at his own case by the fire.

"So does mine."

"You're leaving?"

"I sincerely hope so."

He woke the porter.

He explained the window, the blanket, the umbrella, and the gentleman who needed waking.

He also pointed out the wedge in the clock case.

The porter stared.

Then he looked at the young man's damp coat.

"You haven't slept."

"No."

"Have you had breakfast?"

The station whistle sounded.

"No."

The young man picked up his case.

And went to catch his train.



Pip closed the ledger.

"Then he sent the bill."

"Yes."

"What did he charge?"

"The ordinary pay for a night's work at the desk."

"Nothing for the window?"

"No."

"The clock?"

"No."

"The trunk?"

"He included that."

Pip nodded approvingly.

"Trunks should count."



The manager questioned the porter.

He checked with the guests.

The window stayed closed.

The umbrella had been recovered.

The gentleman had caught his train.

And for the first time in months, the lobby clock agreed with the station clock opposite.

Rook became the manager again, reading the invoice.

"This is highly irregular."

Pip waited.

"Where is the petty cash?"



The manager paid.

With the money, he sent a note.

Should the young man ever need employment, there would be a place for him.

A reply arrived a week later.

Rook's voice became lighter.

"Thank you. I am an actor, and have lately obtained an engagement."

Pip looked up.

"An actor?"

"An actor."

"What part?"

Rook let the silence stretch.

"A hotel clerk."

Pip sat down.

"No."

Rook remained perfectly still.

"No," Pip repeated. "You've added that."

"Have I?"

"It is exactly the ending you would choose."

"An actor might travel by train."

"He might."

"And need somewhere to wait."

"He might."

"And remember how it felt to be standing behind that desk."

Pip studied him.

"Did you know this actor?"

"I knew performers who could find a rehearsal almost anywhere."

"That isn't an answer."

Rook tipped his skull.

"No."



He faced the audience.

“A stranded traveler. A sleeping porter. A night’s work that nobody had hired him to do.”

Pip set the brass bell beside the ledger.

“Did the hotel really pay that invoice? Or have I checked an imaginary actor into a convincing story?”

Rook bowed.

“Real... or made up?”

He reached down and tapped the bell.

Ding.

Pip tore a tiny sheet from the ledger.

“What’s that?” Rook asked.

“My invoice.”



STORIES FROM A ROOK

The STATIONMASTER Who Never Sold a TICKET

Story Ten • with Rook Ravel



Real... or made up?

STRANGEWOVEN

STORY 10

The Stationmaster Who Never Sold a Ticket

Pip pushed a little railway carriage through the castle gate.
It rolled across the stage.

Past the tower.

Past the lantern.

And stopped against Rook's foot.

Rook looked down.

"Have we arrived?"

"Once you move."

Rook lifted his claw.

Pip guided the carriage into a tiny station, then placed a black cap on the desk.

Rook inspected it.

"An excellent hat."

"It belongs to tonight's stationmaster."

"May I?"

"You'll stretch it."

Rook withdrew his beak and bowed.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Is it real or made up? You decide."

He glanced at the cap.

"This concerns a stationmaster who never sold a ticket, never checked a timetable, and was promoted anyway."



The station was called Kishi.

It stood on a small railway line in Japan, in Wakayama Prefecture.

The railway had faced difficult times.

It needed passengers.

And the stationmaster was a cat.

Pip stopped beside the carriage.

He looked at Rook.

Then at the hat.

"A cat."

"A female calico cat named Tama."

Pip picked up the cap again.

"Then it may be too large."



Rook lowered himself along the battlements.

His wings rested close to his ribs.

His skull tilted.

Suddenly, without having changed a single bone, he seemed remarkably like a cat considering whether something deserved her attention.

Pip waited.

Rook slowly turned his head toward him.

Then away.

Pip folded his paws.

"That is convincing."

Rook remained still.

"Are you going to continue?"

"Momentarily."



Tama had lived near the station.

In January 2007, she was officially appointed stationmaster.

She wore a little railway cap.

Her work was to greet the people who came to see her.

Pip considered the tiny desk.

“Did they explain the duties?”

“I expect there was some understanding.”

“On both sides?”

Rook settled a little more comfortably.

Pip sighed.

“Yes. That is a cat.”



News spread.

People heard that a railway station had appointed a cat.

They wanted to see whether it was really so.

They bought tickets.

They took the train.

They arrived at Kishi.

And there was Tama.

Rook rose into the posture of a passenger approaching an information desk.

“Excuse me. I’m looking for the stationmaster.”

He turned, becoming someone pointing.

Then he looked down.

And down a little farther.

“That stationmaster?”

Rook settled onto the wall again.

He gave one slow blink.

Pip nodded.

"A clear answer."

— ◆ —

More visitors came.
Some brought cameras.
Some came from overseas.
Some were interested in trains.
Others were interested in a cat wearing a hat.
Pip straightened their little station sign.
"It would make a good photograph."
"Indeed."
"Provided she looked at the camera."
Rook turned his head away.
Pip waited.
Rook glanced back.
Pip lifted an imaginary camera.
Rook turned away again.
The mouse lowered his paws.
"I see."

— ◆ —

The railway still needed people to do the railway work.
Drivers drove.
Staff maintained the trains.
People handled the practical arrangements.
"Tama didn't operate signals?" Pip asked.
"No."
"Good."
"She gave people a reason to come."
Rook became a traveler holding a ticket.

He studied the destination.

Then he smiled toward someone beside him.

“We could go and meet her.”

He changed into a companion who had apparently heard this suggestion before.

“It is rather a journey for a cat.”

The traveler considered.

“We’ve made longer journeys for less interesting company.”

Pip looked up.

“Was that actually said?”

“That is how I would play the conversation.”

“Ah.”



Tama’s fame grew.

A year after her appointment, she was promoted to super stationmaster.

Pip slowly took off his spectacles.

He did not normally wear spectacles.

He had put them on for the occasion.

“Super.”

“Yes.”

“Stationmaster.”

“Yes.”

“What additional duties?”

Rook looked out at the audience.

He held the pose.

Pip put his spectacles back on.

“Greater responsibility for being a cat, presumably.”

— ◆ —

In time, there was a train decorated in Tama's honor.
There was also a new station building with a roof designed
to suggest a cat's face.

Pip looked toward their miniature station.

He disappeared beneath the stage.

Rook waited.

Pip returned with two little wooden ears.

He fitted them to the roof.

Rook studied the result.

"Very good."

"Efficient scenery."

"Do we have a train decorated with my face?"

"No."

"A carriage?"

"No."

"A modest luggage trolley?"

Pip pointed toward the banners hanging from the castle
towers.

Rook looked at the bird emblems.

"Fair enough."

— ◆ —

"People talk about a cat helping revive a railway," Rook
said.

Pip watched the little carriage.

"Did she understand that?"

"We cannot ask her."

"Did she understand that people were traveling to see
her?"

"Perhaps she understood that people kept arriving."

The mouse thought about that.

"Some performers would consider that sufficient."

Rook inclined his skull.

"Some would."

For a moment, the tiny station stood quiet beneath its lantern.

Pip placed the cap behind the desk.

"You haven't said she performed a trick."

"No."

"Or rescued a passenger."

"No."

"Or somehow knew when a train was late."

"No."

"Just that she was there, and people wanted to meet her."

"And that their visits mattered."

Pip looked toward the painted railway.

"That is less grand than a miracle."

"Does it need to be grand?"

The mouse gave the little carriage a careful push.

It rolled into the station.

"No," he said.



Then Pip looked back.

"But a promotion to super stationmaster is a very grand detail."

"It is."

"And a train."

"Yes."

“And a building with ears.”

Rook looked at the little roof.

“An unusual employment history.”

Pip set his clipboard down.

“I can believe a railway company would enjoy the publicity. I can also believe you’d invent the entire thing because you wanted to play a cat.”

Rook lowered himself onto the battlements once more.

He tucked his wings in.

His skull settled comfortably.

Pip waited.

“Rook.”

One eye socket turned toward him.

“The question.”

Rook rose, unhurried, and faced the audience.

“Was Tama truly appointed stationmaster, given a cap, and celebrated by a railway? Or have I put an impressive title on an ordinary cat?”

He bowed.

“Real... or made up?”

Pip picked up the little cap.

Then he looked at the list of tasks still waiting beside the stage.

“Could we hire someone who likes carrying scenery?”



ANSWERS & NOTES

The truth revealed

Have you made your guesses?

The performances are over.
Now Rook opens the ledger.



The following pages reveal all ten answers.

“Some things happen because the world is strange.
Some happen because a storyteller is.”

STORIES FROM A ROOK

THE FIRST TEN • THE TRUTH REVEALED

With Rook Ravel & Pip



1

The Man Who Bought the Silence

MADE UP

2

The Newspaper That Sold the Moon

★ REAL

3

The Village That Hired a Scarecrow

MADE UP

4

The Tree with a Postal Address

★ REAL

5

The Bank That Came in the Mail

★ REAL

6

The Lighthouse That Had Never Seen the Sea

MADE UP

7

The Night the Curtain Never Rose

MADE UP

8

The Library That Crossed a River

★ REAL

9

The Guest Who Sent the Bill

MADE UP

10

The Stationmaster Who Never Sold a Ticket

★ REAL

REAL = based on documented events; dialogue is dramatized.

No. 2: The newspaper hoax really happened. Its moon creatures were invented.

5 REAL • 5 MADE UP

STRANGEWOVEN



THE ANSWER LEDGER

Behind the stories

REAL identifies a story built around documented events. MADE UP identifies an original fictional story. Rook and Pip's performances and dialogue are fictional throughout.

01 The Man Who Bought the Silence

Made up. The theater, widower, actress, and events in this story are fictional.

02 The Newspaper That Sold the Moon

Real, as a dramatized historical retelling. The New York Sun published the six-part Great Moon Hoax in August 1835, falsely linking fantastical lunar discoveries to John Herschel. The lunar life was invented; the newspaper episode happened. Rook, Pip, their stage business, and the illustrative street dialogue are fictional. Claims about exactly how many readers believed the reports should be treated cautiously.

Library of Congress, "Belief, Legend, and the Great Moon Hoax"

William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, "Life on the Moon in Two Acts"

03 The Village That Hired a Scarecrow

Made up. This is an original fictional tale written for Stories from a Rook. The village, scarecrow appointment, incidents, and council accounts are invented. Rook's final question concerns whether the village episode happened; the identity of whoever moved the scarecrow remains an additional mystery within the fiction.

04 The Tree with a Postal Address

Real, as a dramatized retelling. The Bridegroom's Oak near Eutin, Germany, has an established tradition of receiving letters in a hollow in its trunk and was given a postal address in 1927. Visitors can read and answer letters. USPS also reports that former carrier Karl-Heinz Martens met his future wife Renate through a note addressed to him at the tree. The earlier secret-courtship origin is presented here as a local tale, rather than independently established history.

Rook, Pip, the stage action, and all performed dialogue are fictional. No performed dialogue is a historical quotation.

USPS Employee News, "Beloved botanical"

Eutin municipal English visitor information, "Bride-groom oak-tree"

05 The Bank That Came in the Mail

Real, as a dramatized historical retelling. In 1916, approximately 15,000 pressed bricks for the Bank of Vernal's facade were shipped by Parcel Post in roughly 1,500 crates weighing about 37½ tons. Most of the building used local bricks: an entire finished bank was not mailed. USPS dates completion of the brickwork to November 1916 and the bank's move to February 1917.

The November 1916 policy required prior approval for more than 200 pounds of nonperishable merchandise from one sender to one addressee in one day. It clarified an existing requirement concerning unusually large shipments; it was not a simple permanent ban on mailing bricks.

Rook, Pip, their props, and all performed dialogue are fictional. No dialogue is a historical quotation. Popular accounts differ on quantities and transport details; this retelling follows the USPS historian's account and the Smithsonian's collection record.

USPS Historian, “The Bank of Vernal: The ‘Parcel Post Bank’”

Smithsonian National Postal Museum, “The Bank of Vernal brick”

06 The Lighthouse That Had Never Seen the Sea

Made up. This is an original fictional story for Stories from a Rook. The sailor, lighthouse, quarry-road rescue, and volunteer keepers are invented.

07 The Night the Curtain Never Rose

Made up. This is an original fictional story for Stories from a Rook. The theater, stranded company, emergency performance, and subsequent advertisement are invented. The performed dialogue is original, not a historical quotation.

08 The Library That Crossed a River

Real, as a dramatized historical retelling. On January 18, 2014, a human chain in Riga passed roughly 2,000 donated books along an approximately two-kilometer route from the National Library of Latvia’s old building to its new home, across the Daugava River. The library’s contemporary account reports more than 14,000 participants over about five hours. This was a symbolic celebration, not the transport of the entire collection or an emergency replacement for ordinary moving services. The books carried donors’ personal messages.

Rook, Pip, their stage action, the illustrative figures Rook portrays, and all dialogue are fictional. The passage beginning “Imagine receiving one” is an imagined illustration, not a claim about an identified participant.

National Library of Latvia’s January 20, 2014, statement of thanks, published on Biblioteka.lv

Latvian Ministry of Culture, January 11, 2024, tenth-anniversary notice

09 The Guest Who Sent the Bill

Made up. This is an original fictional story for Stories from a Rook. The hotel, actor, porter, invoice, correspondence, and subsequent acting engagement are invented. Rook’s dialogue does not establish that this actor was his former owner. All performed dialogue is original, not a historical quotation.

10 The Stationmaster Who Never Sold a Ticket

Real, as a dramatized historical retelling. Tama was appointed stationmaster of Kishi Station on January 5, 2007. Wakayama Electric Railway records her promotion to super stationmaster on January 5, 2008. She attracted visitors, received further honorary promotions, and inspired themed trains and a station redesign. Her role was as a celebrated animal ambassador, not as an operator of trains or railway safety equipment. The railway’s revival involved people, investment, and other measures as well as Tama’s popularity.

Rook, Pip, their stage action, and all performed passenger dialogue are fictional. The imagined camera behavior is theatrical characterization, not a report of a particular observed episode. This story concerns Tama’s historical tenure, not the railway’s current feline staff or visiting arrangements.

Wakayama Electric Railway, “Cat Stationmaster,” including Tama’s historical timeline

Japan National Tourism Organization, “The Cat Stationmaster of Kishi Station”

Until the next story...



Rook bows.
Pip puts away the scenery.
The castle folds into its trunk.

STRANGEWOVEN