

Natalia Blok

**CITY BEHIND THE
WALLPAPER**

Translated by John Farndon

CAST

TYKHON (TYSHA, TYSHKO), mouse, 7 years old (almost 8)
LYOSHA, Tikhon's brother, 10 years old. (almost 11, but not soon)

CUCUMBER CAT

RAT

TARGAN JURASSIC, cockroach

MOTHER JURASSIC, cockroach

CROW

MOM and DAD, mice

SCENE 1

TIKHON and LYOSHA's room.

TIKHON sits on the floor and makes something out of his construction kit.

Next to him is a notebook, Every now and then he makes notes in a notebook.

LYOSHA is bored. There is a maze is painted on the floor, scattered with toys.

In the centre is a children's carousel. LYOSHA begins to walk through the maze, but steps on a toy

LYOSHA Ouch! Hell!

TIKHON Don't step on the maze! It's an experimental model teleport! Who knows where it might whizz you off to. Maybe straight down the toilet!

LYOSHA (*annoyed*). Wow, how brilliant you are making such an amazing piece of kit, but you can't even walk around the room!

TIKHON It's going to be my robot hand, for scratching my ear.

LYOSHA What a plonker.

TIKHON It can scratch your back too. And shoot. You see this rubber band, and this lever? All you have to do is pull the rubber band back then it's – BAM!!!

(TIKHON shoots a lego brick at LESHYA)

LYOSHA What are you doing! Donkey brain!

LYOSHA hurls the first toy that comes to hand at TIKHON.

TIKHON Ok, ok, ok. Just don't mess up the maze! Sorry, it was an accident! I'll make you an automatic hand, too.

LYOSHA How about getting it do our homework?

TIKHON What! Are trying to kill me?

LYOSHA It'd be cool. But what are you on about?

TIKHON If I had a robot to do everything, I'd get lazy and die. Then I won't even need to do homework!

LYOSHA Dad says robots are a great help. I think it'd be cool.

TIKHON But Mum says you need to be able to do everything yourself, that work is important.

LYOSHA But Mum disappeared.

TIKHON She's coming back! She said nothing in the world ever disappears and just leaves an empty space. I know she's gone, but nothing new has appeared in her place. So she'll come back!

LYOSHA I miss her too.

TIKHON and LYOSHA are sadly silent. DAD enters

DAD Ok, Lesha. Why so quiet? Are you up to something? Did the boy geniuses invent something again?

LYOSHA Not me. It was the Great Engineer - Tikhon Tesla!

TIKHON pushes LYOSHA

LYOSHA Ai! I'm kidding. Don't shove.

DAD Let's have breakfast then sleep. It's early. It'll soon be day. And during the day all mice should sleep!

LYOSHA pushes TIKHON.

TIKHON Ai! Lyoshka-boshka! Dad, why's he always getting at me?

DAD Kids, enough! Breakfast – now!

DAD leaves the room.

SCENE 2

The Kitchen

The mice are sitting at a table with half a loaf of old bread. It is moldy. DAD tries to saw off a slice with a tiny saw.

DAD Look! It's almost fresh. Barely moldy at all. I found it in the rubbish dump. Delicious!

LYOSHA Ugh, I don't want that.

TIKHON Nor me. It stinks.

LYOSHA Ugh, ugh!

TIKHON I want cheese.

LYOSHA And I want cheese. I can even smell it.

TIKHON That's the cheese in the mousetrap near our door. You can't ignore it. I want it too.

DAD Ok, kids, don't invent treasure. We must eat what we have. Look at this beautiful bread! We just need to share it out.

DAD takes a much bigger saw.

DAD Lesha, help me cut.

DAD and LYOSHA start sawing at the bread with a big saw. Crumbs fly.

TIKHON Dad, can I go to the rubbish dump at night when everyone's asleep. I need parts for my perpetual motion machine. And I need to finish the teleport.

DAD Well, as long as Lyosha looks after you. There are mousetraps everywhere! But first you have to help me clean our hole.

LYOSHA *(To Tikhon)* I said you need to do homework – you're just silly.

TIKHON Silly yourself.

The bread is sliced. DAD breaks it into large pieces and gives it to TIKHON and LESHA

DAD I wanted to ask Tikhon what he wants for his birthday. He will be eight soon.

LYOSHA And I will soon be eleven!

TIKHON In half a year. But I'm eight in three days!

DAD What do you want, then, Tikha? Just don't say designer stuff. You already have a whole bucket of Lego!

LYOSHA He'd be happy with anything, if 'Lego' is written on the box.

TIKHON I just want a crumb of cheese. Everyone else in our family has tasted it, except me!

DAD That's because you only get cheese in a mousetrap! And that's really dangerous! And it can be poisoned! Mousetraps kill! Why do you always ask for the impossible!?

TIKHON But you've eaten it! And all I know is that smell!

LYOSHA Yes, we ate cheese, but you haven't and you won't.

TIKHON Shut up! I'll go and get it myself! Now!

TIKHON runs from, the table and rushes to the door shouting "Cheese, Cheese, I smell it, I want cheese!"

LYOSHA Plonker!

DAD Sit down, Tishko!

TIKHON squirms away from LESHHA's hands and starts running around the kitchen. Finally, TIKHON sits back at the table. DAD sits down too.

TIKHON But you ate cheese.

DAD Because it was brought by your mum. She was so skillful with her paws she could steal cheese from any mousetrap without getting caught. And she could tell from the smell it was poisonous or not.

TIKHON Then she disappeared, and I don't know what that cheese is!

DAD Don't talk about it. Just gnaw on your bread and go to bed. It's morning.

SCENE 3

Children's room. The children are in bed.

TIKHON wakes up and sees a large crumb of cheese held by his mechanical hand he made earlier. TIKHON quietly begins to carefully walk around the crumb. He sniffs it. LYOSHA also wakes up and sees all this.

TIKHON snatches the crumb.

LYOSHA Don't eat it!

TIKHON quickly eats the cheese. And suddenly starts jumping crazily; Then howls like a wolf and runs to his maze. He crawls into it, gets on the carousel, turns round and disappears. LYOSHA runs after him and also wants to run into the maze.

Suddenly TARGAN JURASSIC appears in the room.

TARGAN J Hi there. And where is everyone?

LYOSHA Who are you? What's going on?

TARGAN J Oh, I can't count. I thought it was Tikhon's birthday!

LYOSHA What? Tikhon just disappeared into the maze. We need to save him. And who are you?

TARGAN J *(pathetically)* I'm a Cockroach from the Cockroach genus! Only I always get times mixed up. I was thinking about there was a birthday here.

LYOSHA How do you know about his birthday?

TARGAN J This is the great secret of the Cockroaches. We know how to move through time. That's why cockroaches will always survive! Even in nuclear winter! Don't tell anyone!

LYOSHA Fine. If you know when Tikhon has his birthday, then maybe you know where he is?

TARGAN J He teleported to the City Behind the Wallpaper, where I live with my mother!

LYOSHA Maybe you'll jump back in time and tell him not to eat cheese?

TARGAN J I can't change the past or talk about the future! Those are the rules!

LYOSHA You're no use at all. What's your name?

TARGAN J Jurassic.

LYOSHA Oh great, Jurassic! Like a dinosaur. But we have to go and rescue my brother from your City Behind the Wallpaper. What a weird name!

TARGAN J Can't I stay here for the birthday?

LYOSHA Only if you come with me. I don't want to get lost in your City of Cockroaches.

SCENE 4

LYOSHA dressed as if he were going to war. He has a toy sword, the robot hand made by TIKHON, the slingshot, and a helmet. He has a big whistle on his chest. He gives a small sword to TARGAN J Cockroach.

LYOSHA Ok. Jurassic. Now we sit on this carousel and transport to your city. And if you were fooling me, you'll get it!

LYOSHA and TARGAN J sit on the carousel. They begin to sway. There is a moment of silence. They are waiting for teleportation but nothing happens

It's not working.

TARGAN J I'm bored already.

LYOSHA Be patient.

TARGAN J And my head is dizzy. I'll stay here

LYOSHA Be patient, Targan!

TARGAN J I can't ...

Suddenly, TIKHON falls directly on them.

LYOSHA and TARGAN J and TIKHON fall on the floor and start shouting

LYOSHA Where have you been?

TIKHON Ow! Get off me.

TARGAN J Oh, it hurts. I feel sick!

They all get up

- LYOSHA** Well, good to have you back. You don't need to be saved! Your teleport didn't work for us.
- TIKHON** Losho! I saw mum! In the City Behind the Wallpaper!
- LYOSHA** Mum? Our mum? Why didn't you bring her back?
- TIKHON** The teleport isn't powerful enough. You need extra batteries to get the motor running. I'm light, so I can get through without it.
- LYOSHA** So that's why Jurassic and I couldn't teleport.
- TIKHON** Is this Cockroach's name Jurassic? What's he doing here?
- LYOSHA** Helping to save you.
- TIKHON** Very funny.
- LYOSHA** How did mum get to the City Behind the Wallpaper?
- TIKHON** I don't know. But we need working batteries, because by tonight the carousel will disappear in that place! We need to go to the rubbish dump, and look for some.
- LYOSHA** How will it disappear?
- TIKHON** The teleport takes you where you want to go, but not for long. In three hours we will be teleported to the toilet... I didn't finish it! We need to hurry!
- LYOSHA** Gosh, you never finish anything! But ok let's go. Lucky I'm already in armour!
- TARGAN J** Take me with you! I promise I'll be useful. I can move through time.
- TIKHON** Move through time? How do you do that?
- TARGAN J** It's in my blood!
- TIKHON** I should take some cockroach blood for research.
- TARGAN J** How would you do that?

TIKHON I just need to take some with a needle and analyze.

TARGAN J With a needle?

LYOSHA A needle!

TARGAN J Oh no you don't!

TIKHON Ha, I was joking...

TARGAN J I just can't tell with you.

LYOSHA If you don't moan about being bored, you can come.

TIKHON *(quietly to Losha)* I wasn't joking.

SCENE 5

LHYOSHA TARGAN J and TIKHON at the rubbish dump. There are mousetraps everywhere. Mountains of garbage. Many boxes of old equipment. It's dark. Only a few lights are on.

TARGAN J It's really scary here.

TIKHON We've got to be quick. Otherwise the teleport won't work, and we won't find mum!

LYOSHA I'm not scared at all. We need to find working batteries. I'll dash in and look.

Suddenly a giant rat runs towards them. He looks like a trader in all sorts of junk. He is dragging a bag of his treasure behind him.

Everyone is scared.

TARGAN J Uhoh!*(hides)*.

LYOSHA blows on his whistle.

RAT Oy! What are you up to! Stop it!

TIKHON shoots the RAT with the catapult.

What have I done to you! Stupid children! Stop it! My poor ears!

LYOSHA We will fight for our lives! (*points at the Rat with the toy sword*)

RAT Goodness, why are doing this to me!

He quickly hurls down his bag and snatches the whistle and sword from LYOSHA

LYOSHA Let's run.

The rat leaps to block their escape.

TIKHON (*politely*). Uncle Rat, don't eat us, let us go, please.

TARGAN J comes back

TARGAN J Uncle Rat, how is your corn?

RAT Who are you? How do you know about corn?

TARGAN J Oh, I messed up again. I'm not allowed to say what I know. These are the rules of the Cockroaches of the genus Cockroaches!

RAT How interesting. And what small and beautiful children you are – and a weird cockroach. What are you doing here?

TIKHON We are looking for working batteries!

RAT Yes, yes... you need batteries .. Hmm, that's interesting. Very necessary?

LYOSHA Very very! And give me my sword, please.

RAT No hurry. I'll tell you where to get the batteries. But I have one little request.

TIKHON What?

RAT Bring me canned corn!

LYOSHA And where will we get it?

RAT From Cucumber the cat.

LYOSHA A cat? A cat? Mice and a Cat? That'd be suicide!

RAT Well, your choice. But I have four brand new batteries. Not even unpacked. Brand new.

TIKHON Cylinder type?

RAT Yes.

TIKHON How do we know you're not lying to us? Where are the batteries?

RAT Me lie? I never lie! How dare you! In here. I wanted to keep them, but I see - you need them more. So don't I deserve a small can of canned corn?

TIKHON We want to see them.

The rat shows that he does have batteries.

LYOSHA We need to talk.

They move away from the Rat.

We can't go near a cat! Cats eat mice. In a trice! Not very nice! Diced mice. Mum said: when you see a cat - run like hell!

TIKHON Dad said the same.

TARGAN J Cats are very scary! We need to find the batteries ourselves.

TIKHON The problem is we'll probably only find dead batteries on a rubbish dump. And here are the right ones, and working!

LYOSHA But a cat! How can we steal a can of corn from a cat!? He'll eat us alive!

TIKHON We may not have time to find any other working batteries before dawn. I think we should go for the corn.

TIKHON runs up to the Rat.

Uncle Rat, why do you need canned corn?

RAT Because it's the most delicious food in the world! I used to take it from the warehouse, but now Cucumber guards it. But I'm patient. I will wait for you,

and if you bring me just one can, all four beautiful brand new batteries will be yours.

TIKHON Well, we agree.

LYOSHA Give me the sword and whistle!

RAT Well ok. You have a few hours. So yes - you have to run here under the wall, and there's a hole. This takes you into the warehouse. And the stock of corn. And Cucumber. Well, maybe one of you could sacrifice yourself and distract the cat, but that's not my business. Here's a plan of the warehouse.

The rat gives them the plan and lies down to wait.

SCENE 6

The mice and Targan J are in the warehouse amongst the stock

TIKHON Well, I can't see the cat.

LYOSHA I can't see any corn either.

TARGAN J Where is the plan Rat gave us?

LYOSHA (*unfolding the plan*). Ok, we have to run past the box to turn right, and we should see the larder.

They start to move, following the plan, but suddenly we hear hissing and meowing! The cat appears.

TARGAN J It's the cat! Run for it!

They start running. The cat runs after them hissing and meowing. Suddenly TIKHON trips, clings to a box and pulls it down so they all fall in a heap. A very large, fat cat appears on top of the boxes. He is terrifying.

CAT Meow! Now I'm going to eat you! How dare you come to my warehouse? Didn't you ever hear how scary and horrible I am? Didn't your father and mother teach you cats are deadly? Don't you know that cats are kill their prey, chew them and swallow them in a flash, tale and all? What did your parents say if you saw a cat?

Lyosha and Tikhon are terrified, unable to move. The cockroach grabs them.

LYOSHA *(in a low voice)* They said to run away!

CAT So why aren't you running?

TIKHON And why do you talk so much and not eat us?

LYOSHA Idiot, don't provoke him!

CAT Go on, run away!

TARGAN J I'm a Cockroach from the Cockroach genus, we just don't run away! Give us the corn!

CAT What? Are you crazy? I will eat you now! Grrr. Meow!

TARGAN J I'm not edible. And I can magically disappear. Oh, I told you!!

He suddenly disappears and reappears.

TARGAN J And it's ok. That's in the rules. I didn't say too much.

The cat blinks.

CAT Did I imagine it or did this little mite vanish for a second?

TIKHON Just give us a can of canned corn, Uncle Cat!

LYOSHA Sshhh! He will devour us. We have to run.

TIKHON *(quietly to him)* I would like to eat too.

CAT Go on! Run away!

TIKHON If you give us some corn, we'll go!

CAT Ok, ok, what's going on? What's this? Some new wrong generation of kids who aren't afraid of cats? This is bad news. What am I going to do? I don't want to eat you. Away. Go Away!

He hisses again, but Tikhon and Lyosha go after him.

LYOSHA *(swinging his sword)*. Give us the corn!

CAT *(in despair)*. Why?

TARGAN J We give it to the Rat and he'll give us batteries! And we will save their mother.

CAT Very confusing.

LYOSHA We've no time to explain. We have to save mum!.

CAT What about your mum? I used to have a mother too. She was so warm and she purred. But she didn't know how to catch mice and people got rid of her somewhere.

The cat sits down on the floor and begins to grieve.

LYOSHA Corn! Corn!

TARGAN J Corn!

Tikhon approaches the Cat and starts stroking him.

CAT Did your mother sing songs to you?

TIKHON Yes

CAT Then sing to me.

LYOSHA No Time. The teleport won't wait.

TIKHON Lyosho, let's sing a song about mice.

“Little mouse is sleeping sound,

Dreaming smells of cheese around

Close by, mama nods her head

Yes, she's ready now for bed.

Little mouse, dreams bye and bye

He walks in the field under a starry sky

Sleep, little one, from the early morn

And I will bring you some sweet corn.

Tikhon sings with Lesha. Cucumber Cat lies on the floor and purrs. The song ends.

CAT Okay, I'll give you the corn. But you have to promise me that you won't anyone.

LYOSHA And that you don't eat mice?

TIKHON Why not?

CAT It's a secret!

LYOSHA Why?

CAT I'm a vegetarian. They call me Cucumber, because I love cucumbers above all. And milk, and strawberries. And I don't eat mice, that's disgusting. My mother didn't bring me up to eat prey. Ugh.

TARGAN J I love milk and strawberries too!

LYOSHA Well, we won't tell anyone. Let's tell Rat we stole the corn.

CAT Do you promise?

Lyosha, Tikhon and Targan J together: "We promise!"

CAT Do you want to drink milk with me? Please. There is a lot of milk.

TIKHON Sorry, there is no time. Thank you, but we must hurry.

CAT Oh dear! I have so few guests. Everyone is afraid of me. I'm stuck with the image. Do you understand?

TARGAN J Better than you can imagine!

CAT Well, ok.

Pulls out a large can of canned corn.

Here. Only tell no one!

TIKHON We promise!

Lyosha and Tikhon take the can and roll it past the CAT. Cockroach runs with them

CAT What sweet little mice. What a nice picture. I'd love to feed them milk... Oh well, I'll have a jar of cucumbers. Meow!

SCENE 7

The rat is sitting in a doll's cradle. He's laid out his treasure in front of him on a box of boots. He's writing price labels

RAT Right. I can swap this apple for breadcrumbs, and this piece of lard for cheese, and I keep these batteries.

The CROW flutters down beside him.

CROW Hello, Rat. Well, how's your sale? Look what I've got!

The CROW throws a banana on the box.

RAT Oh, oh! A banana! What do you want for it?

CROW Your batteries. I need them for the walkie-talkie. So I can talk to my friend.

RAT No, I promised the batteries to the mice. I exchanged them for corn!

CROW What? The mice? But the Cucumber cat ate them and spat out the bones. I saw it with my own eyes!

RAT Really?

CROW I swear it.

He takes the batteries in his claws and takes off. At this point, the mice roll out a large jar of corn.

LYOSHA Here's the corn. Now give us the batteries fast, we're in a hurry!

RAT You're alive! But the Crow said...

CROW Too late. Bye, bye.

TARGAN J What? Did she steal the batteries?

CROW Fair exchange for a banana!

TARGAN J disappears then reappears on top of the CROW. He grabs her beak.

TARGAN J Give back the batteries.

TARGAN J bites CROW on the leg. The CROW falls to the ground. Everyone rushes at her - Rat, Tikhon and Lyosha.

RAT Give back the batteries., liar!

CROW Ow! You killed me. You bit off my paw. (*starts pretending to be injured*)

RAT Don't pretend. You tried to fool me! I am an honest trader. Take the banana - and go away! It's already rotten. Here.

The CROW picks up a banana and flies away screaming.

CROW Deceived! Fooled! Robbed! Cheated!

RAT Here are your batteries. And thank you for the corn! Just one question? How did you get around Cucumber?

TIKHON He wasn't there today. Apparently, he went to the vet.

TARGAN J Yes! Went to the vet to treat his fleas!

RAT Well, that was a stroke of luck. He is so monstrous.

LYOSHA Yes, we were lucky.

They take the batteries and leave.

SCENE 8

Tikhon and Lesha's room. Tikhon inserts the batteries into the carousel.

TIKHON We finally did it. Hope it works. Ol sit down.

Tikhon, Lyosha and Targan J sit on the carousel, it hums and turns. It spins so fast that we no longer see the heroes. Everything flickers.

SCENE 9

Everyone is in the City Behind the Wallpaper. Here everything is flat, two-dimensional, including the carousel - teleport. Lyosha and Tikhon see their mother. She is ready waiting for them.

LYOSHA Mum!

MUM Lesho, Tyshka, you came! How I missed you!

Lyosha tries to hug her, but it doesn't work, because they are also flat.