



A Tik and Tok  
Adventure

# Smoke.



P E T E R   S U A R T



Snap! Snap! Whirrrrrr... snap! Click-clack, tap tap tap!

Tik opened his eyes and stared sleepily at the spot where his window used to be. A crowd of people with flashing cameras, videos, notepads and microphones was shoving and pulling and biting to get a good view of Tik in bed. Tok squeezed through the mob into the room and bounded into Tik's arms.

'The rabbit! The rabbit!' the crowd crowed.

'I'm not a rabbit,' cried Tok indignantly. 'I'm a dog. And I'm not a real one of those.'

'It's not a real dog...' the crowd shouted. 'Therefore... therefore it must be... a... a rabbit! Rabbit! Rabbit! Come on, cute little bunny, give us a big smile. This way, bunny, this way!'

At this point Tik lost his temper. 'What on earth are you doing here?' he demanded. 'What do you want?'

'*Daily Slur*, Sir,' piped a little man. 'Tell us what it's like to be a star, Sir.'

'How do I know?' Tik cried. 'Go away!'



The pilot's gaze went from his notebook to Tik's face and back again. Slowly the lines and squiggles he made formed a picture of a boy in a garden in the golden light of sundown.

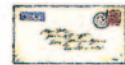
'You're our last hope,' said Tik. 'They're all hopeless at stories. Do you know any?'

'Stories?' murmured the man, his pencil gliding over the page. 'Ah, yes. I know many good stories. Are you good listeners?'

Tik nodded.

'Good,' said the pilot. 'But first, I 'ave some mail for you. From Buenos Aires.'

Tik tore the letter open and started to read.





'You are unhappy,' said the thin man, 'because you want something you do not have.'

'Yes,' sighed Tik. 'I want to know what happened to the Ice Maiden.'

'Let go of the want and the unhappiness will go with it,' said the man.

'I can't. I won't,' Tik insisted. 'I must find out.'

'If you do find out, some other want will take its place. There's always a new one.' The thin man closed his eyes. 'Enough. Until tonight.'

'I can't say that I thought overmuch of the story, myself,' said Tok to Tik as they strolled through the garden. 'You couldn't say that dogs were central to it, could you? Not a leading role. Not essential.'





'This is my last night,' said the gentle man, walking slowly towards the thin man's tree.

Tik looked at him sadly. 'Why?' he asked.

'A friend needs me,' the man replied.

'Where will you go?' asked Tik.

'To a hill where the wind and the sand pick the bones by starlight.'

'I will miss you,' said Tik shyly.

'No need,' smiled the man, his eyes brimming. 'No need.'

The others arrived one by one and they all sat down beneath the tree: the gentle man, the old man, the thin man, the pilot and Tik and Tok. They sipped water and shared an orange, but no-one spoke for the noise outside the wall was deafening. Here and there pieces of timber showed above the parapet.

