

Through the Glass

Sol lay in his room, looking out into the huge conservatory on the other side of his window.

This is perfect, he thought. The conservatory was full of tall trees and twining creepers.

Brightly coloured birds flew in and out of the branches, pecking at fruit and sipping nectar from huge, flamboyant flowers.

Everything he could see was beautiful.

Inside his room, the walls were lined with screens and machines. The screens told him that the world beyond the conservatory was ugly and cruel and unfair—but that didn't matter. His machines could make anything he wanted, so he never needed to leave his wonderful room. He stretched out on the bed and smiled.

All at once he noticed a small brown bird beside his window. Small and brown and *dull*. He frowned. What was that doing in the conservatory?

Then the little bird started to sing. Sol couldn't hear it through the glass—but he saw all the other birds stop to listen. And suddenly—

CRI-I-I-ICK! His window cracked. A huge piece fell to the floor and the little bird's song poured through the hole. It was the loveliest sound that Sol had ever heard.

It made him want to join in. He took a deep breath and opened his mouth.

And all the other birds joined in too. The conservatory was full of trilling and cheeping, whistling and squawking and tweeting. One by one, its big glass windows cracked and fell out, letting in the cold fresh air. With a rush of colour and a flutter of wings, the birds flew out of the conservatory. Toucans and finches, humming birds and parrots, bee-eaters and lorikeets and birds of paradise streamed across the sky, flying free.

Only the small brown bird was left. It put its head on one side and looked at Sol.

Sol knew his machines could make new windows. He could use his screens to order more birds. All he had to do was give the instructions.

He looked at the little brown bird.

It opened its beak and sang one more phrase, lovelier than all the rest. Then it spread its wings and flew away. And Sol climbed through the window and followed it, into the ugly, cruel, surprising, beautiful world.