







Tow-Truck  
**Pluck**





Annie M.G. Schmidt

**Tow-Truck  
Pluck**

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Amsterdam Antwerpen  
Em. Querido's Uitgeverij BV  
2011

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Uitgeverij BV, Singel 262, 1016 AC Amsterdam.

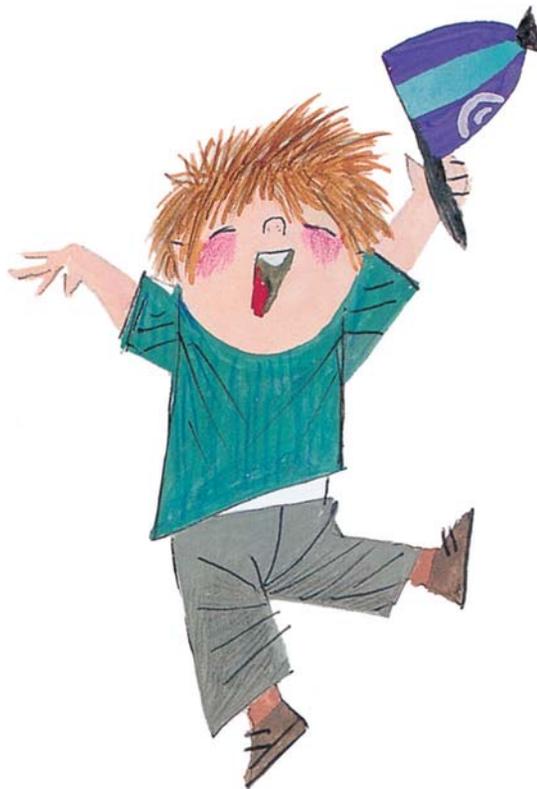
Cover Brigitte Slangen  
Coverillustration Fiep Westendorp  
Inside Design Irma Hornman, Studio Cursief

ISBN 978 90 451 1253 4 / NUR 281, 282

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# Pluck Finds a Home

Pluck had a little red tow truck. He drove it all over town looking for somewhere to live. Now and then he stopped. And when he stopped, he asked people, 'Do you know anywhere I can live?' The people thought for a moment and then said, 'No.' Because all the houses were taken.

In the end Pluck drove into the park. He backed his truck in between two trees and sat down on a bench.

'Maybe I can sleep here in the park tonight,' he said out loud. 'I could sleep in my truck under that tree...' Then he heard a voice above him. 'I know where you can live,' the voice said.

Pluck looked up. There was a beautiful, fat pigeon sitting on one of the branches of the big oak tree.

'The tower of the Pill Building's free,' the pigeon said.

'Thanks,' Pluck said, taking off his cap. 'Where is the Pill Building? And what's your name?'

'I'm Dolly,' the pigeon said. 'And the Pill Building's close by. That great big building over there... See? Right up on top, there's a little tower. And in that tower, there's a room. And no one lives in it. If you're fast, you can move into that room. But don't waste any time, otherwise it might be taken.'

'Thanks,' said Pluck, and he hopped into his tow truck and drove to the Pill Building. He parked out the front, went in through the glass doors and stepped into the lift.

*Whooshhhhh*, up he went.

When the doors opened again, he was outside at the very top of the building. His hair was blowing in the wind, and it was so high up it scared him and made him feel dizzy. But there was Dolly the pigeon on the railing. She had flown up to the top, faster than the lift, and now she was sitting there waiting for him.

'Come on,' she said. 'That's right. Follow the walkway. Look, there's the door to the tower. It isn't locked. You can move right in.'

Pluck went inside. The room inside the tower was fantastic. It was round and it had lots of windows. Because it was so high up, you could look out over the whole city. There was a bed and a chair and a wardrobe, and there was a sink.

'Do you think I can move in here just like that?' Pluck asked.

'Of course you can,' Dolly said. 'It's empty, isn't it? Have fun in your new room and I'll see you later. I'll come and visit.' And Dolly the pigeon flew off back to the park.

Pluck was very happy to have a place of his own. He stayed there for a whole hour looking out at the view, constantly changing windows and constantly seeing different parts of town. Until he got hungry.

'I'll go do some shopping,' he said. 'On the ground floor of this building there's a whole row of shops. I noticed them on the way in.'

He took the lift back down. But this time there was someone else in it too. It was a lady with a big spray can in one hand. She looked



Pluck up and down. And then she asked, ‘Do you live here?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Pluck politely.

‘Where?’ the lady asked. ‘Which flat? Which number?’

‘I live in the tower,’ Pluck said.

‘The tower?’ the lady asked. ‘You don’t say!’ She looked at him again with very cold eyes and Pluck was afraid that she was about to ask ‘Do you have permission?’ or ‘Have you rented it?’ But fortunately, the lift arrived downstairs before she had time to ask him anything else, and Pluck hurried out, running

through the glass doors to the row of shops. He bought a loaf of bread and some milk and a bag of apples.

‘I think that’s all I need,’ Pluck said. ‘Oh no, that’s right. I wanted to get a really good comic to read.’

He went into the bookshop. A friendly old man was standing behind the counter. And while Pluck was looking through the comics, the old man asked, ‘Do you live here in the building?’

‘I live in the tower,’ Pluck said. ‘I just moved in.’

'Lucky you,' the old man said. 'Have you met anyone else who lives here yet?'

'No,' Pluck said. 'At least... Oh, that's right. There was a lady in the lift with a spray can.'

'Heavens above! With a spray can? That must have been Mrs Brightner. Where was she going?'

'I don't know,' Pluck said. 'She was in the lift and she went all the way down, just like me. Except I think she kept on going... Is that possible? To the basement or something?'

'Oh yes, definitely! Listen, son,' the old man said, 'I'm Mr Penn. What's your name?'

'Pluck.'

'Good. Look, Pluck, would you please go down to the basement? It's the first green door in the lobby and then down the stairs.'

'What do you want me to do there?' Pluck asked.

'It's like this,' Mr Penn said, 'that Mrs Brightner walks around all day spraying everything that moves with that can of hers. All over the place. That can is for flies and mosquitoes and moths and so on... Do you know what I mean? But the basement is where Zaza lives.'

'Who's Zaza?' Pluck asked.

'A friend of mine,' Mr Penn said. 'Zaza is a cockroach.'

'A cockr -' Pluck blurted in surprise, but Mr Penn gave him a shove and called out, 'Quickly, please! Hurry... otherwise she'll spray Zaza dead.' Pluck raced out of the shop, into the hall, through the green door and downstairs to the basement, where a nasty smell met him. The smell of a spray can.

He was in a very large room. It was hot and dry: there was a big boiler for the central heating and apart from that it was empty and gloomy and echoing and full of the horrible smell of spray can.

The first thing Pluck did was open a window. Then he went looking for Mr Penn's friend. A cockroach... *Who on earth makes friends with a cockroach?* thought Pluck. And he called out, 'Zaza!'

There was no answer. One step at a time, Pluck covered the whole basement, searching everywhere until he finally saw something lying in a corner. An insect. It was Zaza the cockroach. He was lying on his back with his legs in the air. Dead.

'Poor Zaza,' Pluck said. He picked up the cockroach and laid it close to the open basement window. Then he went back to Mr Penn.

'Too late,' Pluck said. 'He's dead.'

Mr Penn sighed. 'It's not that I'm crazy about cockroaches in general,' he said. 'But you see, this was a very special cockroach, a very friendly cockroach, and so intelligent. Dead, you say? From that spray can, of course. One day Mrs Brightner will kill off every living thing around here with that spray of hers. She's always running around with that spray can. When she's not scrubbing or sweeping, at least. She's too clean, you see. And too tidy. Things never shine bright enough for her, she always has to brighten everything up... I think that's how she got her name. But thanks for trying, son, and drop by again sometime.'

Pluck went back to the lift with his shopping, but suddenly realized that he'd left the bag of apples in the basement. He hurried back down the stairs to get them. Just as he was about to leave again with the apples, he heard a quiet, bashful little voice saying, 'I wouldn't mind a piece of apple peel.' Pluck turned around in surprise. There, close to the basement window, stood Zaza the cockroach, a picture of health with all six feet firmly on the ground.

'I fainted,' he said. 'But I'm better now. Will she be back with that terrible spray?'

'I don't know,' Pluck said. 'But I think you'd be better off up in my tower with me. She doesn't go there. And from now on you can have all my apple peelings.'

Carefully he picked Zaza up and put him in the bag with the apples.

When he went to bed that night, he was very happy. *I have a place to live*, he thought. *And I've already got two friends. No, three. Dolly and Mr Penn and Zaza.* 'Are you comfy in there, Zaza?' he called out.

Zaza was lying in a matchbox lined with cotton wool. 'I'm fine!' he shouted in his tiny little cockroach voice.

'See you in the morning then,' Pluck said. And he fell asleep.



# *The Stampers*

You couldn't imagine a more beautiful room in the whole world than Pluck's little room at the very top of the Pill Building.

In the morning when he got up, the first thing he did was look out through all the windows. He saw the whole city, he saw the sky and the clouds, he saw the traffic down below him and, if he leant out of the window far enough, he could even see his own little tow truck parked downstairs on the pavement.

When he was ready for breakfast he called out to Zaza first to wake him up. He was really a very nice and very polite cockroach. He lived off apple peel and hardly ate any of that either, so he wasn't an expensive houseguest.

After a few days in the Pill Building, Pluck had got to know a few more people. He knew the doctor and old Mrs Jeffrey, and he also knew the big ginger tom, the Pill Cat, but Pluck didn't get on very well with him, because he stalked birds. He even stalked Dolly, who sometimes came to sit on the walkway outside Pluck's room. The Pill Building was enormous and very tall. There were more than twenty floors and sometimes Pluck took the lift from one floor to another. He'd walk along the walkways and look at all the doors to see who lived in the different flats. Sometimes he'd stop to talk with someone and almost everyone was nice to him.

One morning, he saw a little boy sitting on the tiled floor near the lift. He was holding a bottle and crying. Pluck stopped and wondered what had happened.

The boy looked up with a tear-stained face and said, 'Sir, do you know where I live?'

'Don't you know how to get back home?'

'No. Do you know where I live, sir?'

'Just call me Pluck,' Pluck said. 'I'm no sir. What's your name?'

'I'm a Stamper,' the little boy said. 'I'm one of the little Stampers.'

'What do you mean? Is that your name?'

'Yes.'

'I think...' Pluck thought deeply for a moment. He'd seen the name Stamper on the front door of one of the flats. 'Come with me. I think you're on the twentieth floor. I'll take you back home.'

He took the boy into the lift and on the way up he asked, 'You've got brothers, haven't you?'

'Yes,' the boy said. 'There's six of us. Six little Stampers and one dad. And my five brothers have all got measles. But not me. That's why I had to go to the chemist. To get some medicine.' He held up the bottle.

The lift stopped at the twentieth floor and when the little boy looked out, he shouted happily, 'Now I remember! This is our walkway!'

'Remember, it's the twentieth,' Pluck said. 'Then you can't go wrong.'

'I live here,' the little boy said. The door to the flat opened and Mr Stamper was standing there in an apron with an enormous spoon in one hand. 'At last,' he exclaimed, 'you're back.'



‘I got lost,’ said the little Stamper.

‘And I showed him the way,’ said Pluck.

‘Come in,’ said Mr Stamper. ‘Come in. I’ve seen you around. You’re the one with the tow truck, aren’t you? Who lives up in the tower? I’m just frying up some chips. Never mind the smoke. Ignore the mess. Come in. Then you can have some chips.’

‘Oh, no,’ Pluck said, ‘there’s no need for that.’ But Mr Stamper pulled him in, shouting, ‘Don’t be silly! The best chips in town! Never mind the mess.’

It really was a terrible mess inside the flat. There were jumpers and trousers and comics strewn everywhere. And the floor was covered with mattresses. Sewn-together mattresses lying wall to wall. It was nice and soft to walk on, but your shoes sank into it and Pluck stared at it with surprise.

‘That’s for the noise,’ Mr Stamper explained. ‘We have Mrs Brightner living right below us. Do you know her?’

‘I’ve seen her around sometimes,’ Pluck said.

‘Well, you see, Mrs Brightner kept complaining about the noise because of all the little Stampers stamping on the floor so much, you see? And this is what I came up with. The best thing is that we don’t need chairs anymore. We all sit on the floor. But we’ve got beds to sleep in. See.’

Pluck looked up. There were seven bunks against the wall. One for Dad and six for the boys. And there were sick Stampers lying in five of the bunks. They didn’t look sick at all and they climbed out of bed. They were cheerful, messy little boys with amazingly bushy hair.

‘Are you Pluck?’ they cried. ‘Pluck with the tow truck? Pluck with the cockroach? How’s the cockroach?’

How did they know all these things? Pluck

blushed. He hadn’t known there were people in the building who already knew him. He asked, ‘Who told you that?’

‘We saw the tow truck!’ the Stampers cried. ‘And Mr Penn told us that you rescued Zaza the cockroach.’

‘And you’ve got a pigeon too, haven’t you?’ screamed the smallest Stamper. ‘The big fat one? Dolly?’

‘She’s not *my* pigeon,’ Pluck said. ‘She’s a





free pigeon from the park. She's just a friend of mine.'

Now Mr Stamper appeared with an enormous bowl full of chips. They all sat down on the mattresses on the floor and started eating chips with mayonnaise and ketchup. They spilt a lot on the mattresses but that didn't bother the Stampers at all.

'Oh no...' Mr Stamper said suddenly, 'we're such idiots!'

'Why? What's the matter?'

'We invited Pluck in. And now he might get measles... and it will be our fault.'

'No,' Pluck said. 'I've already had measles. You can't get them twice.'

When the chips were finished, Mr Stamper said, 'Have you met Aggie yet?'

'No,' Pluck said. 'Who's Aggie?'

'A little girl in a pink dress. A pink dress that's always perfectly neat and tidy.'

'Oh, yeah,' Pluck said. 'I saw her out on one of the walkways the other day. I think she was bored. I asked her if she wanted to come and play but she didn't want to.'

'She's not allowed to...' Mr Stamper said, 'the poor girl.'

'She's not allowed to play?' Pluck asked.

'She's not allowed to get dirty,' said Mr Stamper. 'Aggie is Mrs Brightner's daughter and she's never allowed to play outside because her mother's scared she'll get dirty.'

'But that's horrible!'

'It is. And that's why... if you see her again... you should try to get her to go with you, so she can play and have fun for once. Out on the street or in the park.'

'I will,' Pluck said. 'And thanks for the chips... Bye. Does Aggie live right under here?'

'Yes!' shouted the little Stampers. 'Right under here. And when we make a racket, her mum gets really angry.'

Pluck said goodbye, promising to come back soon. He took the stairs down to the nineteenth floor and saw her standing there, the little girl called Aggie. She was leaning over the rail and staring into the distance. Her dress was very pink and very pretty and very clean. But her face looked sad and Pluck decided to talk to her. He coughed shyly. He wasn't sure how to start, but just then he heard wings flapping. Dolly the pigeon flew up and landed on Pluck's shoulder.

'Pluck, you have to come straightaway. You have to help. Hurry...'



# Dizzy

‘What is it?’ Pluck asked.

‘It’s an emergency!’ Dolly exclaimed. ‘Someone’s in danger!’

‘Who?’

‘Quick...’ Dolly cried again, fluttering nervously around Pluck. She called out, ‘Third oak on the left... near the pond.’ And then she flew off.

Pluck wanted to go straight to the lift. He started running, hoping to get to the park as fast as he could, but after two steps he stopped and turned back. The girl in pink was still standing there next to the railing. Mrs Brightner’s daughter: immaculate Aggie. She was never allowed out because she always had to stay clean. Pluck stepped towards her and said, ‘Listen, would you like to help me?’

Aggie looked up in surprise. She had been leaning over the rail staring out at the view the whole time and hadn’t even noticed Pluck and Dolly’s conversation.

‘I have to go to the park with my tow truck,’ Pluck blurted. ‘I need to rescue someone.’

‘You need to rescue someone?’ Aggie said. ‘Who? How?’

‘I don’t know yet,’ Pluck said. ‘But I’m worried I won’t be able to manage it alone. Will you come with me, please?’

Aggie hesitated. Then she shook her head. ‘I’m not allowed,’ she said. ‘I’d get dirty in the park. That’s what my mother says. I’m not allowed to go to the park, ever.’

‘You are if it’s to rescue someone,’ Pluck

said. ‘You coming? Or not? There’s no time to waste.’

Aggie shook her head. ‘I’d get in trouble,’ she said.

‘Fine,’ said Pluck. ‘I’ll go alone.’ And he hurried off to the lift. But just before the door shut, Aggie ran up, panting. ‘I’ll come after all,’ she said.

A little later they were on their way in the red tow truck. Pluck drove as fast as he could and Aggie trembled and held on to the seat, calling out, ‘I won’t get dirty, will I? I’m sure my mother won’t approve. I don’t even know who you are! Or what your name is!’

‘I’m Pluck. And you’re Aggie. So stop whining,’ Pluck snapped. ‘Here’s the park. The pond is just around this corner. And now it’s the third oak on the left.’

‘That must be this one,’ Aggie said. ‘This is the third oak on the left. What’s supposed to be happening?’

Pluck had stopped his truck. Together they stared up. But they couldn’t see anything.

‘What are we looking for?’ Aggie asked.

‘Someone in danger,’ Pluck said.

‘I can’t see anyone in danger,’ Aggie said. ‘No one *in* danger and no one *out of* danger, if you see what I mean... I can’t see anything at all. Except for a squirrel.’ She pointed. ‘You see that squirrel? Right up at the top?’

‘Yes,’ Pluck said. ‘But I can’t see anything special about it.’

Nearby the leaves rustled. It was Dolly sitting on a branch. ‘So you made it at last,’





she said. 'Did you see him? The poor thing?'

'Poor thing?' Pluck asked. 'All we can see is a squirrel.'

'That's him!' Dolly cried. 'That's Dizzy. A very sad case. He's scared of heights.'

'Scared of heights?' Pluck asked. 'A squirrel who's scared of heights?'

'Yes, tragic, isn't it? It's very rare in squirrels. He's too scared to climb. Ever. Well, you can imagine how the rest of the family makes fun of him. That's why he tried it for once. Now he's right at the top... but he's too scared to come back down. So help him, Pluck. With your crane!'

Pluck drove his truck as close to the tree as he could get it and raised the crane until it was just below the branch the poor animal was sitting on. But it didn't reach up high enough. There was still quite a gap. Dizzy would have to jump. But Dizzy was scared of heights and hung on tight.

'Come on, Dizzy, jump! Jump onto the crane.'

Nothing happened. The poor animal was petrified.

'I'll get him,' Aggie said.

'You sure?' Pluck asked. 'What about your dress? What about your mother?'

But Aggie had forgotten all about her dress and her mother. She was already halfway up. She climbed smoothly from branch to branch and in no time she was close to the frightened squirrel. She reached out to him, but he crept back fearfully.

'Stay still, silly!' Aggie cried. 'I almost had you.' She climbed after him, reached out... and grabbed him.

'Hold on to the crane!' Pluck shouted. 'Then I'll lower you down.'

Aggie held on to the crane and soon she was safe in the truck with Pluck, holding the squirrel in her arms.

'What do we do with Dizzy now?' Pluck asked. 'Does he have to stay on the ground?'

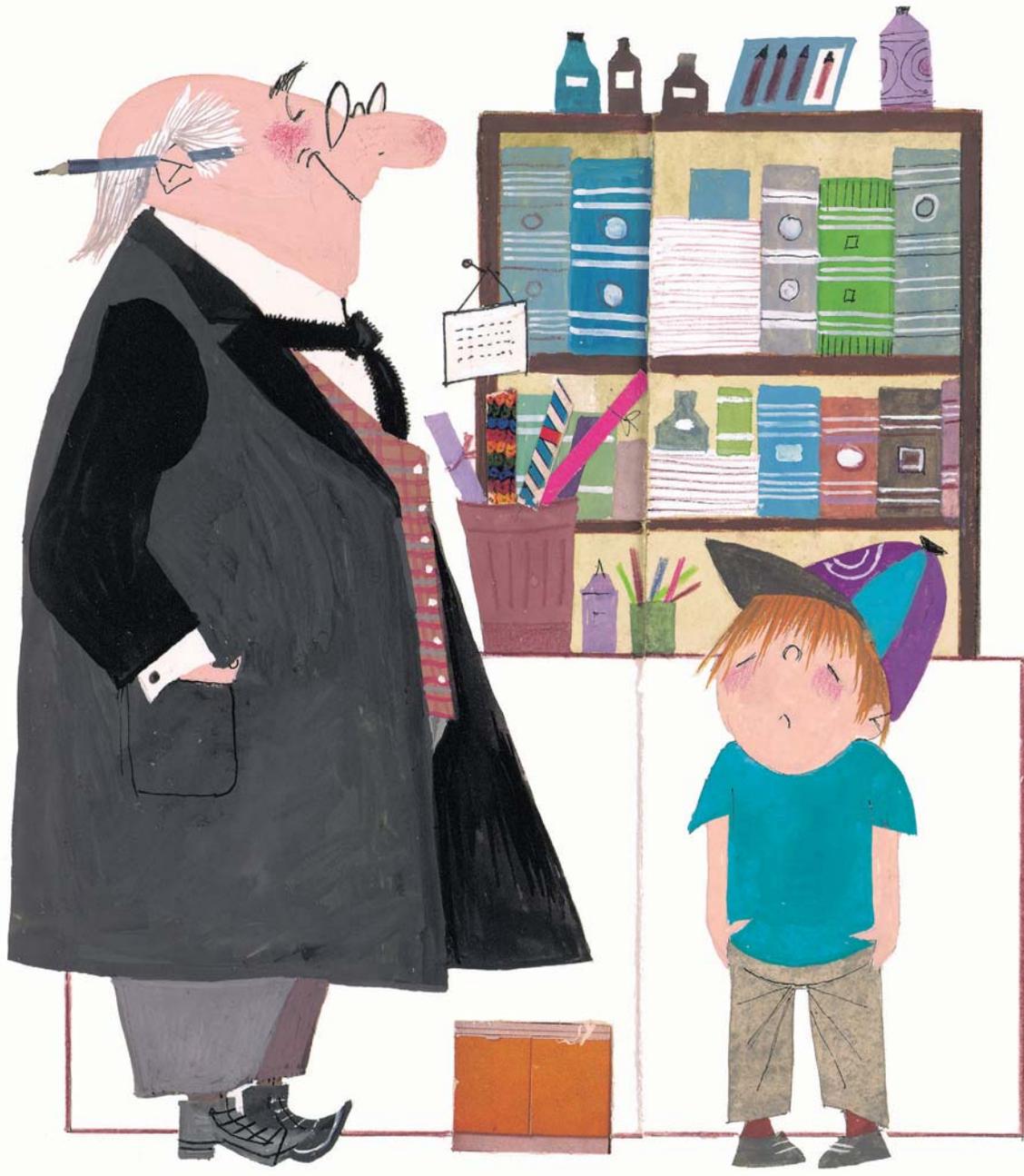
'No!' Dolly cried. 'No! That's much too dangerous. He'd get eaten by a cat or a rat.'

'Then we'll take him with us,' said Pluck, who turned to Aggie and got the shock of his life. She looked terrible. It wasn't just that her dress was covered with green and brown smudges. It was also torn from climbing through the branches. She noticed it too and got very frightened.

'Pluck...' she said quietly, 'I'm scared. I can't go home like this.'

Pluck thought for a moment. 'We'll go see Mr Penn,' he said. 'Maybe he's got an idea.'





They drove back to the Pill Building and Pluck stopped at the bookshop.

'We've got a squirrel who's scared of heights...' Pluck said as they walked in, 'and Aggie's dirty and messed up and too scared to go home.'

'Tell me more,' said Mr Penn. Pluck told him the whole story and finished by asking, 'Shall I take Dizzy up to my tower with me?'

Mr Penn shook his head. 'A tower is the last place to put a squirrel who's scared of heights,' he said. 'I've got a better idea. He can learn how to climb in my storeroom. Come with me.'

At the back of the shop there was a room where Mr Penn kept his supplies in tall cupboards and bookcases. There were ladders all over the place for him to get to the top shelves. Mr Penn put the squirrel on the bottom rung of a ladder. 'So,' he said. 'Now you can get some practice, Dizzy. When you feel like it. Move up one rung at a time, then you'll get used to it.'

They went back to the shop, where Mr Penn shook his head as he looked at poor, dishevelled Aggie. 'Hmm...' he said. 'What are we going to do about this?'

'I'll never be able to go home again....' Aggie moaned.

'Nonsense,' said Mr Penn. And suddenly he clicked his fingers and cried, 'I know! We've got Keep-em-on Cleaner's right next door.'

'What's that?' Pluck asked.

'Come and see,' said Mr Penn. 'It's a laundry service where you don't have to take off your clothes. They wash them while you're still wearing them. That's why it's called Keep-em-on Cleaner's!' Mr Penn took them next door and said a few words to the lady from the laundry.

'Just pop into the steam booth for a minute,

dear,' the lady said. She opened a kind of wardrobe and pushed Aggie in. Then she pressed a button. There was a buzzing noise on the inside and wisps of steam came out through the chinks.

'Isn't it dangerous?' Pluck asked anxiously. 'All that steam... Can she breathe in there?'

'Don't worry,' the lady said, 'we do this all the time.' She opened the door to let Aggie out. She was perfectly pink, without a stain in sight. But her dress was still just as ripped.

Aggie was about to start moaning again about being too scared to go home, when the lady from the laundry grabbed her arm and said, 'Now just step up onto the spraying disc.' She put Aggie in the middle of a big disc and pressed another button. The disk rotated while a gigantic spray can began to spray. Aggie turned around and around as a pink fluid sprayed out over her.

'It's a kind of plastic,' said Mr Penn, who was also watching. 'Once it's dried, all the rips and tears will be fixed.'

The lady turned off the machine. After spinning around so much, Aggie was as dizzy as Dizzy and Pluck had to grab hold of her.

'Careful...' the lady said, 'she's still wet. You have to give it a minute to dry.'

It was incredible. There wasn't the slightest trace of a rip. They had all been filled with spray. Aggie was spotless again and in one piece. Pluck reached out to touch her. 'She's dry!' he shouted.

'Lovely,' said Mr Penn. He paid the lady and said, 'Go home anytime you like, Aggie. You're totally respectable!'

'Can we have a quick look at Dizzy first?' Pluck asked.

'Let's.'

They went back to Mr Penn's storeroom, opened the door a crack and peeked in. Dizzy was sitting on the seventh rung of the ladder.