

Cora and the King

Cora and the King is a story about a young girl called Cora whose village is left starving after a drought. After her attempts to beg the King for food fail, Cora joins a plot to overthrow him. When the plot is uncovered, Cora is arrested and taken to the castle to await her trial.

Cora and her captor eventually arrive at the castle. As she stands before the towering stone walls, her throat feels dry and her hands are trembling so much her shackles begin to clatter. She raises her eyes to the sky and inhales deeply. Greedily, she drinks in the rays of the weak afternoon sun which illuminate her pale skin.

5 "You're right to make the most of it," says a cold, gleeful voice. The castle porter*, in the process of opening the great wooden door, pauses to eye her curiously. "You won't be able to enjoy it much longer. The charges against you are stacked about as high as this tower."

Cora remains exactly where she is, and with a quavering voice says, "Even the tallest towers can come tumbling down."

10 The porter scowls at her for a moment before shaking his head. He heaves open the heavy door and leads Cora to a small dingy cell at the base of the castle's tallest tower. As the lock scrapes and the porter's thudding footsteps recede, an oppressive, tomb-like silence slinks into the room. It wraps itself around Cora and seems to press her from all sides.

15 Cora peers around in the gloom, then stares in astonishment. A thin shaft of light is floating uncertainly in the darkness. She drops to her knees and crawls towards its source. It seems to be coming from under the bed. She wriggles beneath the frame, then jumps as a large spider scuttles out in panic. Undeterred, Cora drags herself further forward and feels along the rugged stone wall. A small wooden hatch! It's bolted from the outside, but a tiny gap is visible where one of the panels has begun to rot. Cora's eyes shine in the darkness. She digs her 20 nails into the softened wood and patiently begins to scrape.

A rabbit lollops along the grass in front of the castle. The first rays of the sun are peeping above the high tower, and a warm pink glow yawns and stretches itself across the cold blue landscape. The rabbit pauses. It watches with interest as a creature emerges from a burrow by the tower. First comes a head with long dark hair, then comes a stocky body. The rabbit 25 waggles its ears and narrows its eyes as the creature twists and squirms and eventually collapses onto the grass. Straightening up, the creature begins to creep around the edge of the castle. The rabbit looks on, puzzled for a moment, then bobs away into the lightening dawn.

Written by Louise McEvoy.

Glossary

castle porter — person responsible for letting people in and out of a castle

1 How do you think Cora is feeling in lines 1-4? Explain your answer.

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 2 marks

2 What do you think Cora means when she says "Even the tallest towers can come tumbling down" (lines 8-9)?

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 1 mark

3 This extract is written in the present tense. What effect does this have on the reader?

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 2 marks

4 The phrase "the porter's thudding footsteps" on line 12 is an example of (circle one):

- a. alliteration b. personification c. onomatopoeia d. a metaphor

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 1 mark

5 The author writes from a different perspective in lines 21-27. Explain how this helps to create tension in the extract.

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 2 marks

6 Would you like Cora to succeed in her escape from the castle? Explain your answer.

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 2 marks

Total
out of 10