This story might be interpreted in at least three ways: A straight-forward, literal take, in which there are two separate Hildas, as well as two fantasy takes, in which either the princess or the pick-pocket version is the other’s fantasy. Each of these two Hildas is basically the same – only their life circumstance is different. This is a story about a real princess of an unspecified land who conjures up an imaginary alter ego to get her through a daunting task, but I hope at least some readers will interpret it differently. (To distinguish between the two Hildas in these notes, I will write ‘Princess Hilda’ and ‘The Other Hilda’.)
It is always a challenge to draw characters who look like the same person across an entire picture book. The challenge was greater here because, apart from the other, dishevelled version, The Princess herself appears in both ordinary and spectacular, dressed-up form. People do look very different when they’re made up. The challenge lies in asking the reader to accept that these two different versions are/could be the same person. There are really three versions of the princess if I include the Photoshopped media version on the magazine.

This title-cover version of Hilda is a hybrid, and if she looks different again it’s because I’ve done a mash-up of the hair-styles.

When creating this story, the title came first. I became interested in the word ‘bewildered’, which means to be confused/puzzled, but has an etymology comprising ‘be’ (thoroughly) and the archaic ‘wilder’ (to lead astray/lure into the wilds). Princess Hilda is bewildered by the magnitude of her responsibility as a royal; this is the most obvious bewilderment. The Other Hilda is bewildered in the older, more literal sense, ending up alone in the wild.

Many fairy tales are set in and around the woods. Fairy tales often feature princesses as protagonists, and that’s how the story got started. But what could I add to the corpus of perfectly good princess/forest fairy tales? I decided to modernise the setting, with contemporary concerns about privacy/social welfare and the homeless/urban invisibility/technology induced narcissism and so on.

The name Hilda is Swedish and means fighter. So the setting is somewhere ambiguously European.

The title page is designed in the style of a 10c detective comic. The mask is somewhat superhero, since superheroes wear costumes when their powers manifest. Like a superhero, Princess Hilda has an alter ego (even if it is entirely in her own mind). She masks her face using only her fingers. The green ring is supposed to look like a power ring.
The main menu sets the scene with a high angle shot of the landscape. This is the town of Fisheye, with sea and dark mountains in the distance. The royal palace in the foreground features glass atriums, drawn to resemble fish-eye security cameras. Throughout the story there are numerous cameras. Hilda (and everyone else) is constantly surveilled.

It is 'Golden Hour', late in the afternoon. Airships floating over the castle show that this story has fantasy elements, reminiscent of Gotham City or similar. The camera flare is an illustrated artefact, of course. A flare can be employed artistically in photography but is more often a consequence of pointing a camera at a light source. Any illustration that includes a camera flare is therefore a deliberate contrivance. I want the reader to be aware – on some level – that they, too, are looking at this story through a screen.

Before technology, the life of royalty was very different – few of a princess’s subjects would know what she looked like, for instance. When Princess Hilda imagines airships, she is yearning for a simpler time. On the other hand, blimps are still used as advertising vehicles. They are modern but have (ominous) links to the past. (They had a tendency to burn and crash.)
The navigation pages resemble the desk of a detective poring over footage collected of The Other Hilda on the night she steals the emerald ring. I do wonder if subsequent generations will recognise a film reel in the age of digital photography. An old key and a magnifying glass hark back to an earlier Sherlock Holmes sort of era.

A police officer works on paperwork, with coffee and donuts from the navigation page. Presumably he is still trying to work out who stole the royal jewels, long after Hilda has run away with them. This is the work of a detective as depicted in the popular imagination, and in the imagination of Princess Hilda, who likes to read crime novels; in reality, not all detectives would live on donuts and coffee! (I guess.)
This is Hilda trying to find time alone so she can contemplate her impending speech. (It was cut from the story and repurposed, because I decided she would be better off hiding in the bathroom.) Here, Princess Hilda considers her reflection in the pond, wondering who she is meant to be, and who everyone expects her to be. Above, the shadow of an airship, which may be taking her photograph. Even in a walled garden of Fisheye Palace Princess Hilda can’t find a moment of solitude.

THE PRINCESS PREPARES

1.

The landscape has lost its green. Darkness closes in.

The day of dread has arrived. Princess Hilda is to open winter this year, with a carefully rehearsed midnight speech.

You may have noticed that the colour green has a starring role throughout Hilda Bewildered. Mention of green in the first line is an attempt at cluing the reader into this symbolism. It’s not just the landscape that has ‘lost its green’; the Princess has come of age and today loses the verdancy of youth. Starting from today she is supposed to feel like a woman of experience. ‘Darkness closes in’ refers not only to the earlier winter sunset but also to her state of mind.

Most pages of Hilda Bewildered include some sort of camera/screen reference. Here it is at its most obvious, with the dressing-room set up for a photo shoot, the appearance of
the photos themselves, and the timestamp, serving to show how long it takes to prepare Hilda for public viewing but also to symbolise the screen of a security camera, or a view through a camera’s viewfinder.

In the world of the story, a magazine crew has turned up to document this lengthy preparation. The focus is on fashion and outward appearances. Even when the princess has wild, tangled hair, the media puts a positive spin on it and calls it ‘French bed-head’. Because Hilda is a princess, this is called ‘effortless chic’ rather than plain old ‘unkempt’. This story is partly about the difference between reality and public image; it’s important that the reader sees Princess Hilda in a state of partial undress – the initial image of Hilda in which the foundation rings her eyes is particularly unflattering, and her ghostly appearance will be mirrored on the final page, when her alter ego disappears into the cold. In short, the half-done makeup is a metaphor: There are indeed two different princesses no matter which way you read it – the ordinary girl and the girl made up, cultivated for public consumption.

Princess Hilda’s ‘upside-down love heart braid’ is a motif in two ways: She is about to face an audience who ‘love’ her (but only in the most objectified way), and the ‘upside-down’-ness of the hairstyle is part of the whole ‘reflections and inversions’ theme, in which each Hilda is constantly looking into reflective surfaces, seeing someone she is not.
After the lengthy primping and preening, the Queen escorts her daughter down to the ballroom, where Hilda must now endure an entire evening of smiling and small talk.

Nerve-wracking throngs gather outside. Despite her royal duties, the young princess wishes only to drink peppermint tea and read crime novels under the duvet.

(Queen’s speech)

“Come away from the window, Hilda. Everyone fancies himself a paparazzo these days.”

“Even those branded airships will have long range cameras attached.”

The princess looks from a window at the crowds. The Queen strikes a powerful pose. From practice in the public eye Hilda’s mother is genuinely (or perhaps expertly-fake) confident, unlike the teenaged Hilda, who presses herself against the wall. Although it’s clear from the previous page that Hilda is wearing white, in this light she looks darker, and almost melds into the wall itself – as she would indeed like to do.

Above Hilda on the wall is a portrait (inspired by an actual painting of Queen Victoria) – one of Hilda’s (great) grandmothers. The portrait shows off an important ring, emphasising the jewel’s significance in the world of the story. The heirloom status of the ring makes the stakes higher when it goes missing.

The queen might comfort her daughter if the two were closer. Instead, she stands aloof at a different window. The queen is of no emotional help to Hilda. She is all about the practicalities of celebrity.
Camera angles can sometimes indicate psychological, moral or political meanings in films and in static images – victims are seen from above and oppressors from below. Although the princess and the queen are socially and economically powerful, the high angle view of the stairwell makes Hilda seem small and powerless. The queen, standing at the top of a flight of steps, wearing a large, billowing dress, is less so.

**HILDA WORKS THE CROWD**

Enthusiastic royalists wait near the podium. They’ve propped up their canvas chairs and now they busy themselves with flasks of soup.

A different flame-haired Hilda pickpockets her way through the crowd. Unlike her royal namesake, this Hilda is invigorated by large gatherings.

In the pictures taken on someone’s phone, you see The Other Hilda’s gloved hand about to snatch a wallet from a man’s back pocket. Unlike Princess Hilda, this Hilda is a nobody and therefore socially invisible. She uses this invisibility to her advantage.
Inside the palace, important guests chat and mingle. They nibble and cavort; they quip and they sip.

The Princess smiles and nods, though she thinks only of the crowds, those storm clouds of crowds: a festering mass of darkness below!

Speech bubbles:

I remember when you were just a babe in a bib. To think, now you’re a grown princess, about to deliver her first public address!

And a fine job you shall make of it, too. Just breathe. In out, in out.

You look as white as a winter snowflake, m’lady.

I remember my first big speech as duke.

I do confess, I wished that I were someone else.

The winter-themed party is blue and white. The music has a panicky, vaudevillian tempo. There’s no relaxing with this playing all around you. Since the guests wear masques, we don’t see their underlying expressions and emotions. The older lady is wearing a smooth-faced mask that makes her look youthful, if grotesque. She advises the princess to imagine she is one of the crowd. (Sure enough, you can see a red-headed character as part of the crowd on the final page.) Masks are a widely used metaphor: Even without the physical object, the face we present at social gatherings is a kind of mask.

Hilda clutches the stem of the wine glass as if her whole body feels tense.
The duke’s wish to be someone else will now be employed by Hilda. She will imagine she is the inverse of a princess by conjuring up an alter ego.

**THE MASQUED GATECRASHER**

With buoyed spirits and a healthy sense of entitlement, pickpocket Hilda launches herself over the barricades, scales the castle wall and joins The Glitterati inside.

With this masque of bark and feathers, no one will notice an extra guest.

This brave version of Princess Hilda supposedly climbs through a window. It is dark outside, but the inside of the palace is light and bright. Here the silhouettes are white. Compare these to the black silhouettes of the townspeople. These royal guests are the ‘chosen ones’, bathing under some imaginary light of privilege.

Feeling under intense public scrutiny, the Princess imagines police detectives later fingerprinting her imaginary intruder.
From the dining hall, the Princess ruminates upon the darkening chocolaty hills, populated by thousands of expectant, sugar-dust faces.

But Fearless Intruder Hilda feels right at home.

“Mm-mm!”

“Wh- Who are you?”

“Why, I am the nobody doppelgänger you wish you were.”

“You look like me, but are you... of eminence?”

“Have you not been out in the world, m’lady? Every girl's a princess.”

(off screen)

“Hilda, for goodness’ sake. The gateau is for display purposes only. Those sticky crumbs! Your maquillage!”

With the two Hildas standing side-by-side, this shows that these two characters would look the same if one were dressed as the other. Their body language eating cake forms a mirror image.
Sure enough, the intruder has had her fill of cake, and now she makes a well-timed escape with some stage riggers.

Lucky, lucky, escapee Hilda, who doesn’t have to deliver any confounded speech!

There needed to be a way within the story that an intruder version of Hilda would be able to make an escape. Leaving with the stage crew on a stagecoach seemed the best way.

I thought of making something of the homophone of ‘stage’ in ‘stagecoach’, but decided against it. This wasn’t the right point in the story for that.

The Masquerade Ball music can be heard from outside the palace. Or actually, Princess Hilda has never left the palace.

A: The Princess attempts her own escape, but doesn’t have much luck. Sick with nerves, she feels hot and cold both at once.

To confound matters, she’s already lost that weighty, priceless emerald ring.

Speech bubbles:

Hilda darling, listen. Tonight’s all about the princess. She can’t take refuge in the loo.

What’s she doing in there, anyway? I told her not to eat the cake, but did she listen? No.
Hilda, your job is to mingle. Mingle, mingle!

B: The ring probably slipped off when she removed her gloves for cake. With any luck it won’t go far.

Designing the toilet of a Princess posed a challenge because I wanted the ‘set design’ to achieve two things at once: It needed to be a bit grimy, to show that even a Princess uses a toilet and has bodily functions like a regular person, but I didn’t want the reader to wonder if such a basic toilet would exist inside a palace, so I created a golden toilet seat while at the same time showing a bit of plumbing, and a grimy, unlit floor. (I stopped short at decorating the inside of the bowl with chunky splatters.) The Princess slumps on the floor in unladylike fashion. Even in the bathroom she doesn’t get a moment’s peace. It doesn’t really matter who is harassing her from the other side of the door—maybe her mother, but it could be any one of her unseen entourage.

Green is of significance again in this scene: The green of sick, the green of a green room, the green of envy, as Princess Hilda wishes she could properly escape. This is a distinctive greenish-yellow hue which I reserved for the bathroom scenes only.
A. Meanwhile...

Stowaway Hilda considers the magnitude of her daredevilry. What has she just done?

(speech bubbles)

“Kid, what the-- This is a private vehicle, you know that?”

“My mistake. Thought it was a commuter bus.”

“No one teach you to read?”

B. This invisible kid with the unoriginal name wears a heavy ring of gold and emerald. She’s as good as royal, now.

A further note on the choice to draw silhouettes of the background characters: If this story takes place entirely inside the Princess’s imagination, I wanted strangers to look indistinct in the way dream-people and book characters are real to us but don’t have distinct faces. Second, the Other Hilda is herself a background character, and I want to hammer home the idea of invisibility of the common people/strangers. Third, Princess Hilda is about to face a crowd of featureless people, all strangers; they are just people to her, scary in their lack of familiarity.

When the bus morphs into an airship this becomes a dream within a dream. The bluish-green interior becomes a part of the sky. This change in colour is also a bit like a film negative, and the windows look a little like a receding filmstrip.
A real princess is not the slightest bit scared of heights. She flies first class, gazing down upon her beautifully freckled lands. This princess watches the lights of her palace fade, until they are nothing but a fleck and a smudge.

For Princess Hilda the bright lights are coming from the crowd below, with their camera flashes and brightly lit screens. For The Other Hilda, the lights might simply be that she ‘has stars in her eyes’, meaning she sees herself a star.

The lights are just dots on the landscape below, much like Hilda’s freckled face. Hilda is a part of this landscape – whether she is the royal version or the wild one. Hilda describes the nightscape as ‘freckled’ but she is really describing herself. She is a ‘girl of the land’, earthy, with all that entails, including her dirty fingernails and forest home. Though Princess Hilda’s freckles are hidden with thick make-up as if the freckles themselves are unacceptable, this other Hilda considers them ‘beautiful’. 
A. The airship descends and lands in a very un-princessly part of town.

(Speech bubbles)

“All right lass, you’re on your own from here.”

“You’re shivering. Take my coat for warmth?”

“Your chivalry is kind, but I’m made of star stuff.”

B. The stagehands disappear into a smoggy gloom. A true princess never feels the cold, no matter the flimsiness of her gown.

Fairy tales often feature stark good and evil characters. In a modern fairy tale I prefer the adults to be somewhere in the middle, offering some kindness but not too much. Sometimes a little kindness from a stranger can heighten your loneliness, by highlighting the contrast.

Being part fantasy, part realism (within the fantasy!), the colour scheme of this page needed to be both blue and grimy brown. The airship of the earlier scenes was a metaphor for Hilda’s heightened emotional state. In the second scene there is no airship (and probably never was).

An advertisement on the back of a commuter bus advertises a reality show ‘So You Want To Be A Princess’. I don’t know if such a show exists, but many similar shows do exist in the real world. If the Other Hilda is a real girl, she is part of a milieu in which every girl is encouraged by the media to aspire to riches and celebrity. Much like the modern real world, in fact. This imaginary Hilda decides to take her aspirations to the next level, but by breaking into the palace she’s only doing what she’s been told to do her whole life, albeit in a too-literal way.
The second screen, from another security camera, shows the smallness of Hilda as well as her aloneness. The ‘smoggy gloom’ provides another layer of invisibility.

She copes with this isolation by telling herself that she is a princess, and therefore worth something. (This is also the real princess thinking, of course, summoning up the confidence to deliver a royal speech.

THE BEAUTY OF DEBRIS

No one expects to see a bejewelled princess Down Town. Indeed, no one notices her at all.

A true princess finds beauty in everything. Cracks in the concrete resemble a make-believe kingdom from far, far above.

Downtown debris takes on a life of its own.

Shattered glass glimmers and glints.

The one-off dents and folds of flyaway foil form valleys in her own miniature kingdom.

She admires the unique crush of a discarded can.

This Other Hilda has needed keen eyes in order to survive, noticing everything, living on her wits, taking every opportunity to scavenge and pickpocket. She has just got away with stealing the most precious jewel in the land. She now sees beauty in everything. ‘One off dents and folds’ is a metaphor for ‘people are all unique, not just the designated special ‘royal’ ones.
As for the princess, it helps for Princess Hilda to imagine her kingdom as miniature – fewer people, less nervousness. On the other hand, her elevated social status (another thing symbolised by the airship) makes her feel so far above the common people that she has nothing in common with them at all.

This crouching position will be seen later in the story.

The silhouettes in the office block above and those dashing past are an illustrated emulation of ‘double exposure’ – another camera technique. Looking into their phones, these dashers-by are in two places at once. Remember that Princess Hilda has drunk an entire glass of something bubbly. The double vision has both literal and figurative meanings.

**COSY DESTINATIONS**

13. **On a street nearby, shiny things wink from nooks and crannies.**  

Friday night commuters dash towards cosy destinations.

[furry rugs, warm feet against mine, logs on the hearth, wispy smoke from chimney, crock pot of stew, warm hugs, enthusiastic dog greeting, hot bath, steamy shower, handmade quilt, homemade supper waiting, squares of yellow from window, candles and incense, favourite TV show, family together, flannelette pyjamas, fleecy linings, fluffy slippers, bread and butter pudding, gravy boats and roasting trays, hot chocolate, warm buttered scones, loving goodnights, drawing of curtains, bubbles and soap, the smell of my pillow, softness of mattress, sinking into slumber, peaceful rest, pageturner novel, cat purring on my lap, dinnerparty with good friends]

Hilda stands in the shadows. People glide past, all rugged up and focused on their
destinations. Unlike the Other Hilda, they each have a place to go. I’ve tried to recreate that feeling you get when you’re in a new city, trying to find a place to sleep for the night, watching the locals get on with their daily lives, so much more comfortable than you are in this strange land. The green of the bubbles = envy. The Other Hilda would love somewhere cosy to go. Princess Hilda, who lives in a castle but without emotional support, also craves the simple comforts in life.

Close to nature (literally a tree), Hilda can blend invisibly into dark shadows. From here she can pickpocket oblivious passers by. ‘Shiny things wink from nooks and crannies’ as ‘expensive things beckon from pockets and handbags’.

BURGER BAR

A. Hilda shivers, not with excitement now, but with newfound realisation of the cold. This cloak of night provides no warmth.

A street-sign mocks her solitude.

B. Aromas of crackling and spice draw her inside. A real princess is always just a little bit hungry. These backlit snacks look so delicious.

(Speech bubbles)

“Excuse me, can I please have—“

“Hello?”

“Um, may I order one of your free range burgers, please?”

Burger Bar
Eventually she is noticed. With small change she buys a towering burger.

The royal references continue (ironically) with a run-down fast-food joint called ‘Burger Queen’, a riff on Burger King, which is, in the real world, a riff on the more established MacDonalds restaurants. (Everything MacDonalds does, Burger King does a version of.) Likewise, the Other Hilda is a cheap version of the real Princess Hilda. Everything is reminding her so.

The pedestrian street sign shows a couple walking together. I’ve always thought that if you were a pedestrian feeling lonely then this ubiquitous image of two people together would only rub it in. The arrow points away from Hilda. The word ‘mock’ (in the bubble that comes out of the sign) has two meanings: ‘to tease or laugh at in a scornful or contemptuous manner’ and also, ‘not authentic or real’. I chose this word for both of its senses.

A dog trots past, also alone. (Perhaps he is part of the menu…) The dog casts a creepy shadow across the window as it runs past sniffing the ground. Even stray dogs ignore The Other Hilda. Incidentally, the dog is the animal symbol for ‘envy’, one of the seven deadly sins.

The Other Hilda must work hard to be heard, invisible in here as outside. There are downsides to being socially invisible.

Hilda’s feelings towards the burger mirror the way she feels about herself. She is supposed to be this ‘towering’ public figure but inside she feels small.
But everything is different if you dare to peek beneath.

The sign outside the shop has said the meat is ‘free range’ which it technically is, because this rat has come from the nearby underground. However, the image conjured up by ‘free range’ is more typically of grassy fields.

The language of advertising does not often match up to reality. In popular culture, fast food hamburgers are often used to make this very point, since the pictures of the burgers often look vastly different from the products you buy. Rat used as meat in this story takes the example to an extreme. Likewise, the public presentation of a princess does not match the reality. The highly put-together princess covered in white foundation has real skin underneath.

See also: Fast Food Advertisements Vs What You Actually Get from Buzz Feed
UNDERFOOT JUNGLE

Outside, the night feels colder than ever.

A slipstream of warmth enshrouds her.

The ground has opened up. It swallows her whole.

In the world of the story the underground train network is called The Underfoot Jungle. This is The Other Hilda’s ‘forest’, where her pickpocketing is the equivalent of hunting, or picking berries. Hilda is at home in this jungle because she is a child of the wild.

The mouth of a subway entrance opens before The Other Hilda on the pavement. So she descends again. So far she has descended from the airship. Later she will descend down a road and into the forest. Key idea: descent, from influence and from privilege. The Princess wishes that the ground would open up beneath her and swallow her up, because this would be preferable to giving a speech.

Each of the advertisements makes use of a royal analogy to persuade consumers that if only they bought a particular product then they, too, could live like royalty. The irony here is that the real royalty does not want to live like royalty; the real Princess has the fantasy of being dirty and poor and without a home.
A vendor sells sweets, trinkets and magazines.

Now that she has seen the true princess at close range, Hilda feels an uncontrollable need to know more. So she swipes a magazine.

‘Lottery tickets’ concern the luck-of-the-draw nature of being born into rags or into riches. ‘2 for 1 deal’ refers to the two Hildas.

A train-station kiosk is a convenience as long as you have money. Otherwise it looks like a forbidden bush covered in berries.

As Hilda takes to her stage at the end of the story she sees artificial lighting overhead. But down here she is cocooned and safe. It is dark and no one pays her attention.

Whether they are listening to music, reading books or looking into their phones, or buying something from a kiosk which promises to make their lives better, or perhaps just dreaming of being somewhere else, these commuters are each somewhere on the fantasy-land spectrum themselves, oblivious to the presence of a pickpocket looking on.
But the cover girl with the incandescent teeth is changed.

This two-dimensional creation -- the one with the airbrushed skin and the digitally enhanced eyes -- stares right past the adoring public gaze.

Beyond the camera, Hilda sees a grimmer vision.

The Other Hilda has seen the Princess close up, and studies this magazine knowing all the while that there is no real difference between them. Alternatively, the Princess Hilda is having difficulty with the idea that she is this person on the front of a magazine, who looks very little like her unadulterated herself. (Any person on the front cover of a magazine has been Photoshopped. Women are more heavily Photoshopped than men.)

This sort of publication is designed to appeal to young women who aspire to a princess lifestyle but who don’t have the big budget with which to do so. (These sorts of magazines are amazingly simple to parody, to the point where I wonder if I’ve actually made a parody or if it just reads as normal!) These magazines are full of impossible contradictions: One article will be about weight loss; turn the page and the reader is provided with recipes and encouraged to enjoy food. On this cover the phrase ‘winter soups’ is immediately followed by ‘diet tip scoops’, as if by eating the soup you must then go on a diet in order to look like this girl on the cover (who doesn’t actually exist). Reading this image in a metafictive way, this illustration of a girl is nothing but pixels on your iPad screen, yet readers of women’s magazines are encouraged to look like her.

Touch the screen and the background shimmers, changing from a yellow safety line on a subway platform to a police-do-not-cross tape. Earlier in the story was a scene in which Princess Hilda imagines her ring has been stolen. Now she imagines police coming to the palace, looking through security camera footage, procuring fingerprints, and whatever else police do in the her imagination.
The contrast between the pretty magazine cover and the unflattering police description represent two ends of a scale: Two girls can look identical. But if one is a celebrity everyone will aspire to look like her, whereas a criminal is always described in pejorative terms, as if the crime itself has contributed to the inferior appearance of the perpetrator. Identikit pictures are seldom flattering; magazine cover pictures always are.

PICKING BERRIES UNDERGROUND

The platform fills time and again. Crowds of homebound passengers exude an unfamiliar but reassuring warmth.

Excuse me, would you happen to have the time?

Sir, is the next train headed north?

Merry First of Winter, ma’am. I love your scarf!

The warmth of the strangers is ‘unfamiliar’ not because The Other Hilda has never pickpocketed before but because she has no warmth at home. Being trapped on all sides by a crowd is the closest The Other Hilda can get to physical affection. Warmth cocoons her in a primal way. Nobody has touched her in years. Yet these things are also true of the Princess. In her exalted social position, she never gets close to strangers. The warmth of a crowd holds a certain appeal, especially to one who is about to be so very alone on stage.

‘Mind the gap’ is sometimes used in popular culture in a metaphorical sense, for example when reminding us to consider social inequalities.
Hilda emerges to find the night is no longer young. This princess of the street hails a chauffeur.

Hail is of course a weather situation associated with the cold. Snow conditions will come later; it is not actually true winter yet at this point of the story, but the breeze blowing through Hilda's hair and her lack of a coat aim to convey a general froideur. "To hail a cab" is a common English idiom, and simply means to 'call out in order to stop', but 'hail' also has royal connotations because it means to 'cheer, salute or greet'. Related to this, it can mean to ‘acclaim’ or ‘approve enthusiastically', which is what the crowd will do for Princess Hilda when she takes to her stage. This is an interesting word because it manages to blend the ordinary and the extraordinary.

‘The night is no longer young’ is a transferred epithet: It is Princess Hilda who is no longer young. Now that she is considered a young woman she must face her royal responsibilities. The Other Hilda has been looking after herself for a while now, presumably, but the excitement of this evening has allowed her the childish folly of pretending she is someone important. From this moment, even The Other Hilda is no longer young.

The Other Hilda has enjoyed delusions of social importance this evening, so rather than imagine that she is getting into a plain old taxi, she thinks of the driver as hers, for personal use. Princess Hilda, on the other hand, would likely call all drivers ‘chauffeurs’ as she would have been driven by chauffeur throughout her childhood. Although she might imagine a yellow cab during this pre-speech dalliance inside her mind, her imaginings would never be one hundred per cent civilian. (Later she imagines herself locked in a basement but she still calls it a 'suite'.)
The pull focus interactivity is another symbolic faux-lens movement to show that Princess Hilda is always on camera. She can’t find a place out of view. The Other Hilda of her imagination draws interest only when she does something outrageous like taking a crown jewel, in which case her image is depicted via security cameras. The choice of pull focus on this page is a considered one, because Princess Hilda has drawn herself back into reality after emerging from a kind of mental cave (the underground) and is telling herself to ‘focus’ in preparation for her speech. The other interpretation has The Other Hilda switching from one mindset to another: She has spent the evening pickpocketing and thieving, and now she must ‘focus’ on finding shelter for the night. The excitement has ended; now it’s all about meeting the basic need of sleep and shelter.

**TAXI DRIVER AGREES**

21. She opens her own door. Slight of body, Hilda’s entrance is so graceful that at first the driver does not notice he has company.

Perhaps he has recognised the regal composure of her face. He peers into the rearview mirror for a long moment, then pulls out into traffic.

Hilda: “Take the Low Road, sir.”

This is an illustration from The Other Hilda’s point-of-view. (The reader sees exactly what Hilda sees.) There’s a crack making its way across the windscreen. The light is green and grimy. The taxi driver looks directly at the viewer and because we only see his eyes the view is menacing and distrustful. Can this girl pay? This is what it feels like to be The Other Hilda. This is not a ‘chauffeur’ experience.

Dice symbolise luck, and superstitious drivers occasionally keep fluffy dice in the car hoping to save themselves from a car accident but in this story the dice symbolise
fortune in a wider sense: The only thing that separates Hilda from the princess is luck of birth. The words on the dice are from a classic nursery rhyme Tinker Tailor.

‘At first the driver does not notice her.’ This is part of Hilda’s invisibility. People don’t notice her, partly because she is good at not being seen, but also partly because she is not important. ‘Sleight of hand’ refers to a type of card or coin trick employed by magicians, also known as ‘quick fingers’. The human eye is drawn to movement. It’s an evolutionary advantage. Magicians make use of this by drawing attention to one moving hand while doing something sneaky with the other. A pickpocket is a type of magician.

A HELICOPTER SEARCHES

Tall buildings turn into squarish, squat ones.

Helicopters search for Hilda the Jewel Thief.

The transformation of the buildings underscores the difference between the Hildas – not physically, but in ‘majesticness’ (majesty). ‘Squarish and squat’ feel like the opposite of a high castle. More literally, buildings do get smaller as one leaves an urban area.
INTO THE WOODS

City lights become sparsely dispersed street lamps

which become rare glimpses of light... Then finally nothing but stars.

The canopy of trees makes a night of its own.

The snapshots of the taxi are presented as if from a screen of security cameras.

The gradual disappearance of light is a metaphor for the ebbing of The Other Hilda’s ‘bright lights’ fantasy in which she is a princess. Then there’s the obvious reference to ‘stars’ as in ‘celebrities’.

‘A night of its own’ suggests that this is a completely different world — it even seems to have its own night — this is day and night as in ‘opposites’.
Hilda furls her thin body tightly into a ball. She listens to the radio news at midnight and feels glad to be invisible.

(Radio news)

Thousands gathered for the royal address in Fisheye County this evening, as Princess Hilda delivered her first live speech to open Winter. Three arrests were made for disorderly behaviour in the crowd, but police are still looking for any witnesses who may have seen a member of the public scale the castle wall. Further information on the nature of the crime has not been released, though speculation from insiders suggests a crown jewel has gone missing, possibly stolen, during the pre-speech celebrations. The Palace refuses to confirm details, saying that, at this stage, there is no evidence that anything has been unlawfully removed.

So continues the Princess’s fantasy about what may have happened to the ring that she has left on the plate of cake crumbs. Her foreshortened body gives The Other Hilda grotesquely large hands, to fit a grotesquely important ring.

(By the way, if the accent of the radio announcement sounds slightly Scottish, part Russian, that’s an attempt to recreate no accent in particular, but from a cold climate.)
The taxi driver accepts a masculine-looking wallet from a bony, outstretched hand. He asks no questions and doesn’t linger.

A dark mansion looms, reminiscent of horror flicks, with a neon sign advertising ‘TROPICAL PALACE’. Except some of the letters are blown out so it reads ‘ROIL PALACE’. ‘Roil’ is homophonous with ‘royal’ and only serves to emphasise the difference between Hilda’s abode and the palace of the real princess.

‘Roil’ is a word in its own right, which in its most literal sense refers to making a liquid muddy by disturbing the sediment. In an extended metaphorical sense it is synonymous with ‘rile’, to describe stirred-up emotions. Both of these senses refer to Hilda’s evening: One has created some chaos; the other has turbulent emotions.

The second illustration is a screenshot of the software the taxi driver uses on the dash, emphasising the word ‘roil’ (in case anyone missed it!).
Mother has lit the fire. At least the foyer is not cold.

Welcome, welcome

Mother:

“You’re back late. I thought the thing finished hours ago.”

“The night’s half gone. Doesn’t mean you can barter me down! Ha.”

This draughty old mansion has been decorated in a kitsch tropical theme. On the wall is a sign saying ‘Welcome to Bermuda’, an allusion to the Bermuda Triangle, where it is thought people mysteriously disappear. A ‘tropical’ tune comes out of a radio on the counter.

A ‘painted woman’ sits behind a counter, knitting with black wool. Her hair (or wig) is black with a grey, witch-like streak. The colourful lei around her neck contrasts with her black dress. There is a talking parrot sitting on the lampshade – the tropical equivalent of a witch’s black cat, who says ‘Welcome’ in a croaky, unwelcoming tone. Mother has eaten hot soup even though she is apparently in a warm oasis. In a supernatural fairytale, this could be a witch’s lair. The reader will be used to the icon of the witch and may deduce ‘witchery’ from the grey hair and the black costume.

The wording of ‘not cold’ suggests that although the temperature is not cold, the mother is. She calls Hilda ‘girl’ rather than by her name.
THE MOST PRECIOUS THING IN THE LAND

Hilda releases the elastic of each sleeve. She pulls precious goods from her bun. With pride and ceremony, she displays her achievements across the counter.

And then, after a well-timed pause, Hilda produces the shiniest, most coveted thing in the land. This! This is surely the prize to make Mother proud.

Incongruously, this winter stoneware soup cup has been decorated with a cocktail umbrella. Mother wishes for summer but gets winter. She no doubt wishes many things about her life were different, and her dreams are manifest in the interior décor.

‘The most precious thing in the land’ is not the jewel itself but Mother’s approval. Hilda is not about to receive that. The items she has collected are worth something to someone, but not to Mother.

Apart from the royal emerald ring, the Other Hilda has stolen/found a rather innocent collection of items. She is attracted to shiny things not because of the status they afford her but because she is genuinely attracted to them. She has almost certainly stolen the spoon from the palace, and the camera from someone’s handbag or pocket, but she would have found the bottle top and picked it up simply because it took her fancy. There is no reason, really, why a shiny bottle top with beautifully corrugated edges can’t be considered as magnificent as an emerald ring. Like the Hildas themselves, one of these items is considered valuable; the others have their own beauty but are cast aside.
28.

THE BASEMENT SUITE

But Mother is inexplicably wild. For two days and three nights, Hilda occupies the basement suite.

(speech)

Have you any guests this season? A scraggly, scruffy girl, for instance?

Oh, that one. She was here all right. But she took off that-a-way with both nickels intact.

When you catch her, I’m short two months’ worth of digs.

Thank you, ma’am. Much obliged.

Mother locks the Other Hilda in the basement. This act is a mixture of punishment and protection – protecting Hilda from the authorities who are bound to visit, and protecting Mother’s main (only?) source of income. Punishment for not being more savvy in her thievery. The Princess is well attuned to the gilded cage of her position.

Hilda unties her hair. She looks at stars, though if this is a hallucination of The Princess, she is presumably seeing camera flashes. In a literal reading, The Other Hilda sees actual stars and imagines they speak directly to her; she reimagines herself as star-worthy. (I’m made of star stuff, she said to the bus driver, earlier. Carl Sagan popularised the phrase, ‘We are made of star stuff.’)

The following day it rains. Droplets gather on the window like crowds of little faces outside.

On the following night the Other Hilda sees mother talking to police officers, leading them astray with her pointing finger. Their security footage – and perhaps a chat
with Hilda’s taxi driver – has led them to the Tropical Palace.

The narration is close third person, and so ‘basement suite’ is a phrase either of the Hildas would use: The Princess because she is used to luxury and in the habit of saying words like ‘suite’, and The Other because she lives in a dream world in which she is perpetually royal.

The period of three days can be interpreted as a somewhat religious one, preceding a transformation.

The idiomatic expression ‘writing on the wall’ signals the end of something, and contains a sense of foreboding. These are an outworking of Hilda’s mind-worms, based on what Mother has presumably shouted at her (off-screen). Hilda’s mind-worms are dark; this is a dark basement, and the wintry weather outside doesn’t lift the pall.

**PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY**

Becalmed by the dark, each Hilda prepares for a lonely journey.

Mother: “Come out now, Hilda. Take this cursed jewel far, far into the wild. Fling it into the deep.”

Mother: “Come out now, Hilda. A live broadcast waits for no one.”

“By the way, one of the junior cooks happened upon your grandmother’s emerald ring amongst the kitchen waste.”

“We’ll spare you the lecture, for now, given your heightened emotion.”
“But you really need to face the music and get mic’d up.”

Hilda’s ‘shadow’ against the wall is actually an inverse shadow, paler in colour than the wall. (Think of the white silhouettes inside the palace.) ‘Both Hildas’. Who are both Hildas? Might one of the Hildas be that shadow? No. The second scene takes the reader back to the Princess, who has been in the loo all this time.

In further contrast to our popular images of a princess, this particular princess reads books while on the toilet. She is part of the way through a novel called ‘The Imposter Syndrome’, which is a rather ham-handed way of communicating to the reader that this princess character feels like a fake.

In the reflection of the floor tiles Hilda sees another vision of herself. She covers her own reflected face with one gloved hand. She doesn't want to consider how she appears to others; this very self-consciousness is what's giving her the nerves in the first place. On the other hand, she sees herself reflected everywhere – in pop-culture, on the covers of magazines – and now that she's performing the duties of a grown member of royalty, must find a way to deal with this omnipresent mirror version of herself.
The time has come. With the confidence of an imaginary girl who has nothing to lose, Princess Hilda takes to her stage. Flashes from the ether punctuate her stride.

The Princess imagines walking into a forest, but she is really walking onto a stage. Cameras flash from the audience, reimagined by the princess as lightning. To get through this ordeal, the princess imagines she is in a forest, surrounded not by people and stage equipment but by trees and their branches. She imagines standing next to her more confident and bolshy, but completely imagined, alter ego. The Other Hilda grasps the white-gloved hand of the princess. Since ‘every girl is a princess’, both Hildas wear the ring, which has been found by a kitchen hand.

A. Behind a dual-purpose screen of projection and protection, the princess delivers her speech.

Somewhere in the crowd, another Hilda mouths the words.

B. The Princess beholds appreciative tufts of tussock, waving in a chill breeze.

(Speech)

This festival which we know as The First Day Of Winter is above all a celebration of charity. To everyone in this Great Land I send a message of gratitude and greeting, from myself as from all my peoples.

Today we express thanks for the successful crops of spring and for the hard
work of farmers over our marvellous summer. We give thanks to the ordinary homespeople, whose wood-chopping, pickling and preserving efforts will see us all through the darkest days of another chill winter.

I would send a special word of greeting to the less fortunate among us. To the orphaned, the bereft and the poor, and I ask you as good citizens of this most fortunate land to extend a helping hand wherever you see the opportunity. We must all look after one another and extend charity through the cold.

Princess Hilda sees her alter ego in the crowd (with the red bun). Next, she imagines the crowd morphing into tree stumps. She is in nature. Although the real world of the story is midnight-dark, the sun rises on Princess Hilda; this is the start of something for her. (Adulthood. Increased confidence, relief etc.)

Princess Hilda’s speech is based on historic UK royal speeches and writings, with phrases taken from the QE2’s Christmas Day broadcast of 1939. It is full of standard platitudes. Princess Hilda, with no firsthand experience of poverty, urges the townsfolk to be kind to their neighbours. The speech offers no hint of a society lacking resources. Farmers have had a good year. Still, are there children slipping through the cracks?

The audience watches Princess Hilda projected onto a big screen. The meaning behind ‘screen’ is its own opposite (such words are sometimes called contranyms): A screen can offer insight into another world while at the same time sheltering us from reality. While gazing at the famous Princess Hilda, everyone ignores the other, destitute Hilda from the forest. Let’s say for a moment the story of the Other Hilda is the real one, in which an urchin completely imagines the Princess plot: Despite a little pickpocket’s wish to be important, The Other Hilda’s invisibility is to her advantage, because her very invisibility is the cover, which allows her to fleece oblivious members of the crowd. Invisibility has its upsides (privacy) and its downsides (you can slip through the cracks).
By hook or by crook, the Princess has done it. Some part of her has delivered the winter speech.

No longer needed, the figment fades away.

Though Hilda’s lonely heart races, there’s no one there to know.

The two scenes of this page are opposing colour temperatures, the first in cold blues, the other in warm yellows and pinks. In the bathroom, Princess Hilda felt ‘hot and cold both at once’. Apart from describing a physiological reaction to nerves, this juxtaposition runs through the story, starting on the very first page with Hilda’s ‘cool’ suede coat which will keep her ‘toasty warm’. The ‘tropical hotel’ in the middle of a dark forest in the middle of winter is perhaps the most obvious juxtaposition.

There are others:

- Hilda’s ‘signature scent’ has top notes of ‘cinnamon pie’ (hot) then, impossibly, it is said by the magazine to also smell like freshly settled snowflakes (cold).
- Then there is the crowd eating flasks of hot soup outside in the cold.
- ‘Flame’-haired Hilda wears a flimsy nightgown in the chill air.
- The warmth of the taxi and air-conditioned Burger Queen against the cold reception Hilda gets once inside, not to mention her expectations of a towering burger against a rat on a bun.
• **Grimy scenes** (often through the viewfinder of a security cam) against **lively scenes inside a palace**

• **How a princess is supposed to feel** (confident) compared to **how Princess Hilda really feels** (insecure and lacking a sense of entitlement)

• **Red and blue lights** from the police car symbolise alternating danger and sadness/heat and cold/fever and tremors

• The **snowy field** of the penultimate page is ‘populated’ by burnt stumps. So although it is snowing, a **fire** has ripped through here.

**THE END**