



PART 20

STORY

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Teller



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STORY Teller

CONTENTS PART 20

CLASSIC FAIRY STORIES

Rumpelstiltskin.....533

The Brothers Grimm created their version of the Rumpelstiltskin story from four regional variations told in Germany. Dozens of other versions existed throughout Europe, with the dwarf known variously as Trit-a-Trot, Whuppity Stoorie, Ricdin-Ricdon and Tom Tit Tom.

THE STORY TELLER SERIAL

Heidi: Life in the City.....540

Her new friend Clara seems very much better for Heidi's company — but then Heidi succumbs to a strange illness herself.

FOLK TALES OF THE WORLD

The Green Maiden of the Lake.....547

Beryl Maude-Jones tells how one Welsh community accounts for the sturdy characteristics of the black Welsh cattle. The author is an enthusiastic collector of folk tales,

and highly accomplished at adapting them to be enjoyed by children.

COMIC HEROES

The Book of Beasts.....552

In his struggle to recapture the fiery dragon — now spreading terror amongst his subjects — King Leo enlists the help of another fantastic animal from The Book of Beasts.

RHYMES AND VERSE

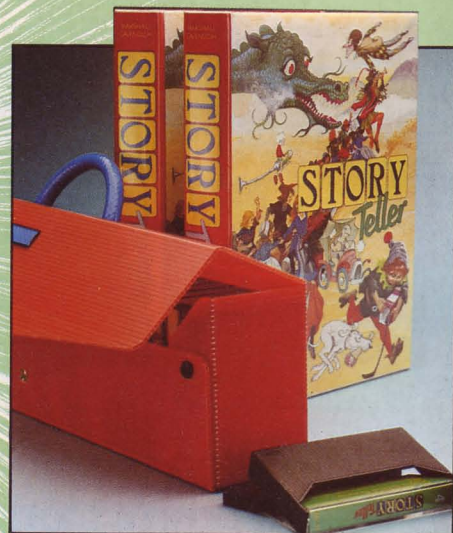
It Makes a Change.....556

Mervyn Peake's revelation about the nocturnal habits of whales is from *A Book of Nonsense*, by Mervyn Peake, published by Peter Owen Ltd.

THE MAGIC WORLD OF ANIMALS

Lutra the Otter.....557

This entrancing tale about a day in the life of a young female cub was written specially for STORY TELLER by Jane Edmonds, and draws on recent observations on otters in the wild.



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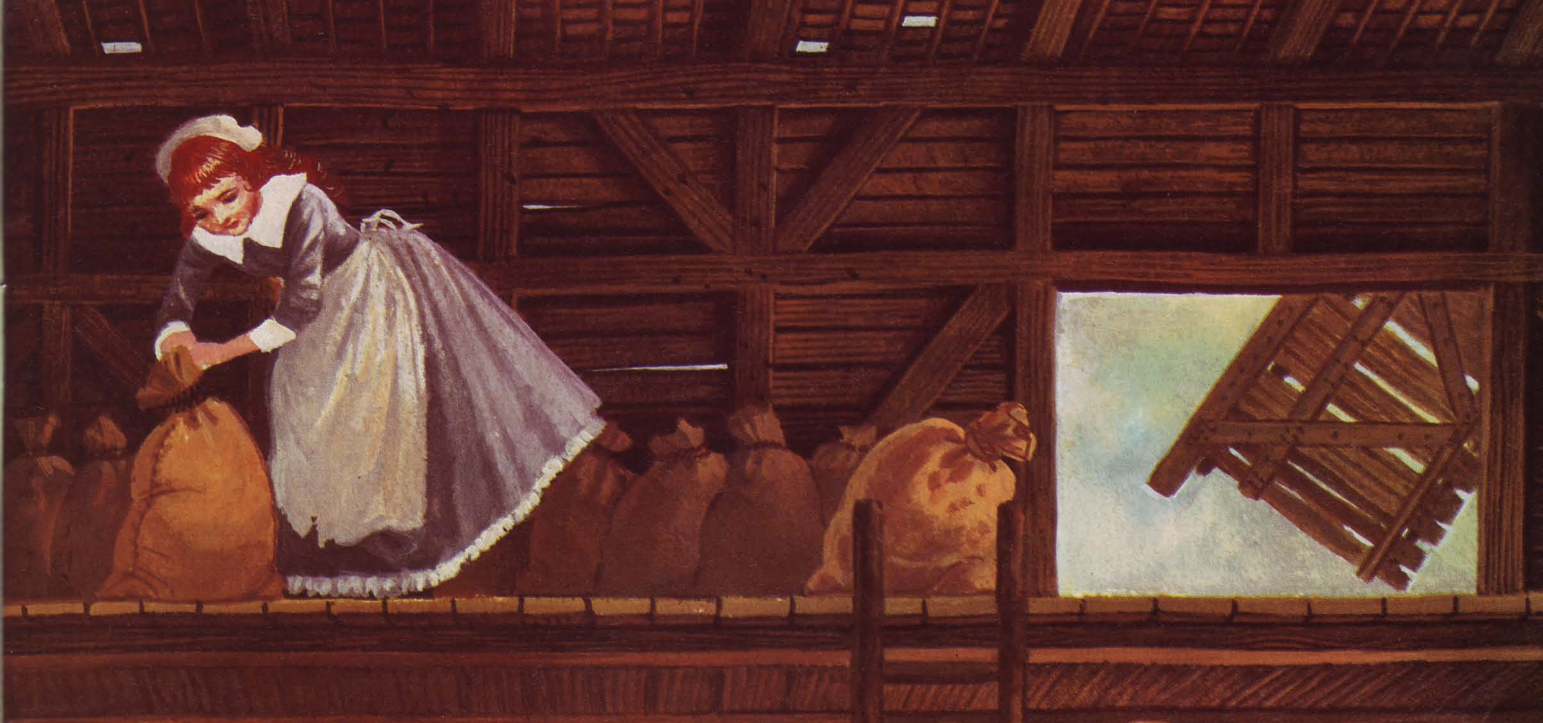
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Rumpelstiltskin

Once upon a time there was a miller who was always boasting. He said that he ground the finest flour, that his wife made the best puddings, and that his cat could catch a thousand mice in a single day. But most of all, he boasted about his daughter, Eloise.

One day a servant from the palace was at the mill, collecting flour for the King's bakery. "Do you know," the miller started bragging, "my daughter isn't just the most beautiful girl in the kingdom, she's also the most clever! Why, she's so clever she can . . . she can even . . . spin straw into gold!"

The servant knew how much the young King loved gold, so that night he told him of the miller's silly boast.

"Oh, nonsense," said the King. "He was just bragging. I'll teach him not to tell such lies. Send for the miller's daughter. We'll soon see if she can spin straw into gold!" So the royal guards were sent to

the mill to fetch her.

When Eloise arrived at the palace the King led her down some dark steps to the cellars. In the corner of a small room stood a spinning-wheel, a stool and a pile of straw.

"Your father says you can spin straw into gold," said the King. "Well, spin this into gold before sunset or I'll throw your father into jail for lying!"



Eloise tried to explain, but it was no good. The King strode out of the room and locked the door.

"I can't spin straw into gold," she sobbed. "Nobody can!" And she sat down on the stool and began to cry.

"I can!"

There in front of her stood the funniest-looking little man she had ever seen. He was scarcely bigger than a dwarf, with pointed ears, a red nose and a long, silky beard. His clothes were brilliant red and green, and he wore a huge floppy hat with an ostrich feather.

"You can?" said Eloise. "How?"

"Never mind how. What reward will you give me if I spin this straw into gold for you?"

"Oh anything! Anything at all!"

"Your lovely bracelet?"

"Yes, yes, of course!"

So the funny little man hopped on to



the stool and began to spin. In just a few minutes, he had changed the whole pile of straw into a hundred bobbins of pure gold thread.

"Now you must give me your bracelet," he said.

Eloise laughed and gave her bracelet to the dwarf, thanking him over and over again.

"It's nothing. Glad to be of service." And with that the strange little man disappeared into thin air.

At sunset, when the King came back, he could not believe his eyes. But





"What will you give me if I spin all this straw into gold for you?" he asked.

"Oh, anything! Anything at all!"

"Your silver ring?"

"Why yes, of course."

So the funny little man hopped on to the stool and began to spin. In just a few hours, a thousand bobbins of pure gold thread were stacked against the wall.

"Now, give me your silver ring," he said, jumping off the stool.

"It belonged to my mother, but I'll willingly give it to you." And she thanked him a thousand times.

"It's nothing. Glad to be of service." And with that he disappeared into thin air once again.

At sunset, when the King entered the room, he was thrilled by the sight of the gold. He loved gold so much that he could not bear to send Eloise home until she had made him the richest king in all the world.

instead of thanking the girl, he locked her up overnight and would not let her go home.

The next morning, he led her into a larger room. In the corner was an even bigger pile of straw, with the same spinning-wheel beside it. "Spin this straw into gold by tonight," he said. As he left, he bolted the door behind him.

Eloise burst into tears. "Oh, what can I do! If only that wonderful little man could find me again!"

"Never fear, I'm already here!"

Eloise was so relieved to see the dwarf standing there in front of her that she could hardly speak.





So the next morning he took her to the largest room she had ever seen. It was filled almost to the ceiling with straw, and in the corner stood the same little spinning-wheel. "If you can spin all *this* into gold before sunset," he said, "I'll marry you. If you don't, I'll keep you locked up for ever."

"I can't be so lucky a third time," sobbed Eloise. "The little man will never find me again!"

"Don't be so sure — I'm here on the floor. What will you give me if I spin all *this*

straw into gold for you — and you become queen!"

"Oh, anything! Anything. But I've nothing left that you could possibly want!"

"I'll think of something." And he hopped on to the stool and worked faster than ever. Even so, the sun was setting as he spun the last thread. The great pile of straw had been turned into a hundred bales of pure gold. Eloise thanked him over and over again.

"Ah, but now you must give me your first-born baby!" cried the dwarf with a cruel laugh.

"That's my price!"

"I'm not even married!" cried Eloise.

"You will be soon. And I'll wait . . ."

"Then I will . . ."

But before she could say another



word the dwarf disappeared . . . just as the King was unlocking the huge doors.

He looked around at the bales of gold. "Amazing! Fantastic! Everything your father said was true! And I *shall* marry you!"

Within a week there was a magnificent royal wedding at the palace. Eloise was so happy that she soon forgot about the dwarf and the promise that she had made. She did not even remember him when she gave birth to her first baby.

But one day, as she was sitting with her baby son in her arms, the little man suddenly appeared. "I have come for my reward," he said. "Your first-born baby."

"No! No! You can have anything — my crown, my palace, anything! But not my baby!"

"I thought so," sneered the dwarf.



"You don't want to keep your promise. But you will . . . unless you can guess my name."

"Your name?"

"My name. Have as many guesses as you like. But if you can't guess my name in three days, I'll take your baby."

And he vanished before she could say another word.





more hours of guessing, he said, "You'll have to try harder tomorrow. It will be my last visit."

The Queen was near to tears. What could she do?

There was a soft knock at the door. It was the messenger, returning from his search. "I went to the very borders of the kingdom, my lady," he said. "I asked every witch and wizard for help. But it was hopeless. Finally I got so tired that I lay down on a hillside to sleep. When I woke, I happened to see a fire flickering

The poor Queen sent off her most trusted messenger to make a list of every unusual name in the kingdom. She read through all the books in the royal library, and when the little man suddenly appeared in her sitting-room, she said, "Is your name Ferdinand or Balthazar or Engelbert or Isambard? Or Garamond or Baskerville or Bembo or Gill . . .?"

"No, no, no! You'll have to do better than that!" And after she had guessed names for nearly an hour, the dwarf disappeared.

The next day, she tried to think of all the silly names that a dwarf might use. And when he appeared in front of her, she said, "Are you called Knobbly-knees or Fly-by-night or Hobbledehoy or Scragbeard . . . Longshanks or . . ."

"Nothing like it. Nowhere near!" cackled the little man. And after two



through the trees and, creeping closer, I saw a funny little dwarf dancing round the fire. He kept singing, over and over again:

*Guess away, oh lady fine,
Tomorrow your baby will be mine.
I'll never lose this royal game,
For Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"*

The Queen gasped with joy. She gave the servant a gold ring from her own hand and thanked him a thousand times.

When the dwarf appeared



the next day, he was carrying a basket to put the royal baby in.

"Come on, come on, guess!" he teased the Queen. "Guess my name."

"Is your name Matthew or Mark or Luke or John? Is it William or Peter or Nicholas or Philip or, or . . .?"

"No, no, no! Give in! Give up!"

" . . . or Brian or Norman or . . . or *Rumpelstiltskin!*"

The dwarf gave a great shriek and stamped his foot in a tantrum. "Cheat! Cheat!" he screamed. "It's not fair!" And this time, he stamped so hard that he fell right through the floor — and was never seen again.



HEIDI

Life in the City

It was evening when Heidi and her Aunt Detie reached Frankfurt. They walked through dark, narrow streets until they came to a large, gloomy-looking house. Detie rang the bell.

"I've brought Heidi to be a companion to Clara," she said, when the butler opened the front door. They were shown into the study, where Clara was waiting for them with Miss Rottenmeier, the governess. Clara sat in a wheelchair and was as thin and as pale as a ghost, but she seemed very pleased to see Heidi.

"What's your name?" asked Miss Rottenmeier.

"My name's Heidi. What's your's?"

"Don't be so rude! And Heidi's not a proper name. We shall call you Adelheid."

"But I'm *Heidi*. And did you know your servant looks just like Peter the goatherd?"

Clara giggled behind her hand, but Miss Rottenmeier was not amused. "What have you learned while you have been living with your grandfather?"

Heidi thought for a while. "I've learned that flowers die if you pick them, and that the fiery red on the mountains is the sun's way of kissing them goodnight, and I've learned how to milk a goat and make cheese, and I've . . ."

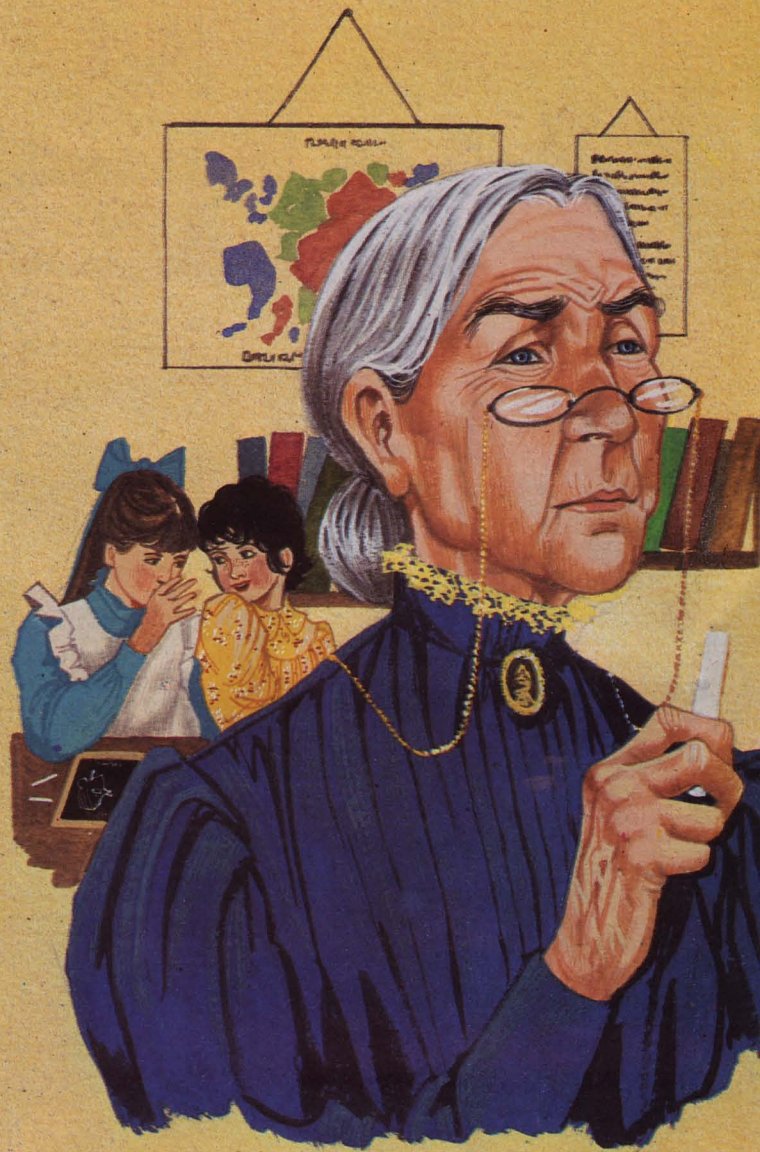
"Stop! I mean what books have you been studying?"



"Books? I haven't studied any books. I can't read."

"Can't read!" spluttered Miss Rottenmeier. But Clara clapped her hands and laughed. "I think you and I are going to have fun, Heidi!" she said, when Miss Rottenmeier had left the room.

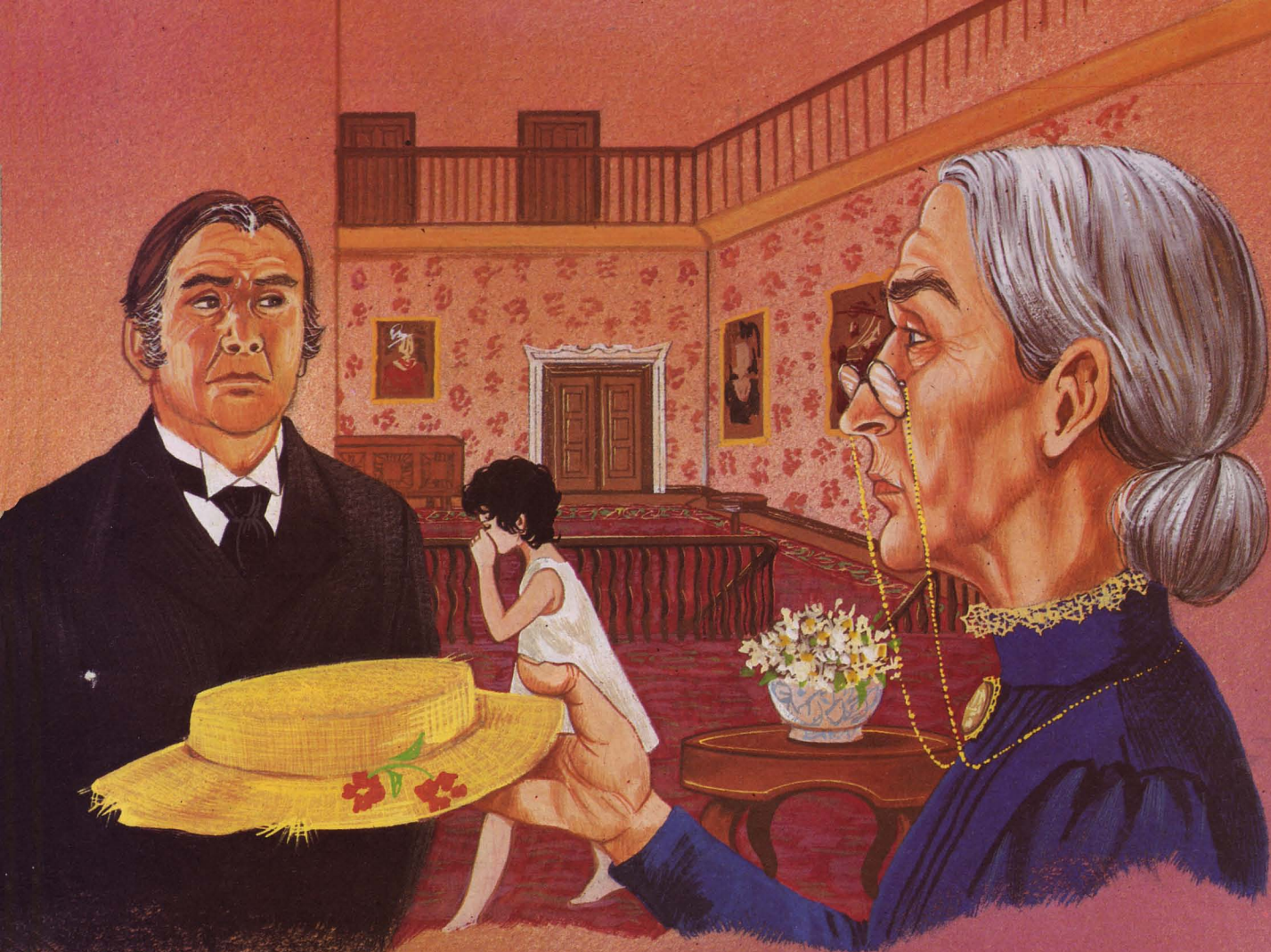
The next morning, when Heidi woke, she jumped out of bed and ran to the tall window. But the curtains were thick and heavy, and when she crept behind them, the window was closed tight. Like a bird in a cage, she ran from window to window, trying



to open them and breathe the morning air.

After breakfast there were lessons in the study. Heidi found it very hard to sit still and concentrate, and when Miss Rottenmeier was not looking she chattered to Clara about Uncle Alp and the goats and Granny and tobogganing.

Poor Heidi. Every morning was the same. She woke in the big, dark room and went to her dreary lessons. And though she came to love Clara, she missed her grandfather very much. Every afternoon, when no-one was around, she would gaze out of the high, closed windows and imagine herself back in the mountains with Peter and his goats.



As the weeks passed she found that she could bear it no longer. So, one morning, instead of wearing one of the dresses Clara had given her, she put on her old cotton petticoat and battered straw hat and crept out of her bedroom, determined to run away. But just as she was about to run downstairs Miss Rottenmeier appeared on the landing. "*Adelheid!* Where *do* you think you're going? I told you *never* to go out on your own!"

"But I'm not going *out*. I'm going *home*. Little Snowflake will be lonely, and Granny will wonder why I don't visit her any more, and Grandfather needs me to help with the cheese, and I just *must* see the sun kiss the mountains goodnight!"

"Ungrateful little child!" boomed the governess. "You have this fine house to live in, a nice soft bed, new dresses to wear

and Clara to talk to. What more do you want? And what's that stupid thing on your head? Take it off immediately!"

Miss Rottenmeier called out to Sebastian, the butler. "Burn that hat the child is wearing."

"Oh no! Not my hat!" But Miss Rottenmeier snatched it off her head and gave it to Sebastian.

Heidi ran to her room and wept until she thought her heart would break. But when she went to bed that night, she found her old straw hat hidden under the bedcover. Sebastian had saved it from being burned.

As the weeks passed and spring turned into



summer, Clara grew healthier and stronger, but Heidi grew sadder and thinner. Then one day Clara's father returned home from a business trip abroad. He was met at the door by the governess.

"Really, Mr Sesemann, I must protest! Something must be done!"

"Whatever's the matter, Miss Rottenmeier. Is something wrong with Clara?"

"It's that girl, Adelheid. She must go. She's a dreadful influence on Clara. Last week she brought stray kittens into the house! And she fills Clara's head with silly talk of goats and birds and cheese and . . . and she still can't read a single word — not a single word!"

Mr Sesemann went up to his daughter's room, where he found her sitting at the window. "What's this I hear about Heidi upsetting you, Clara? Miss Rottenmeier says I should send her away."

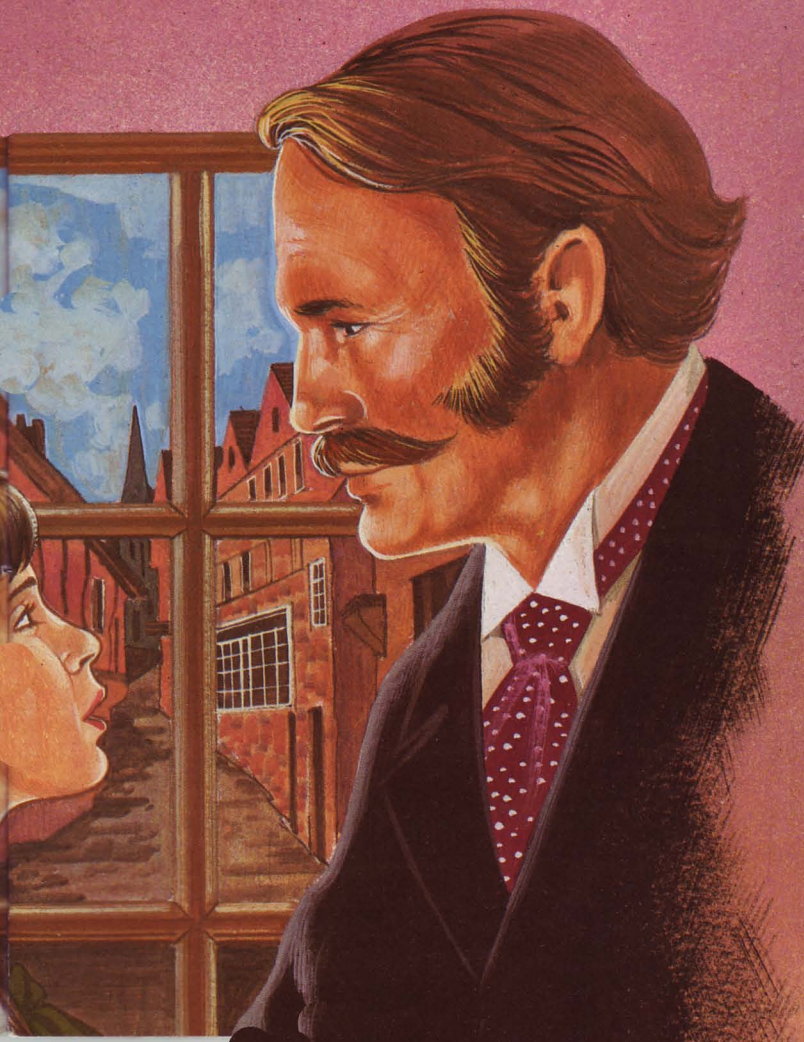


"Oh no, Papa! She's my friend. Something exciting happens every day now Heidi's here. We have such fun — and I'm never lonely any more! Please don't send her away!"

So Heidi stayed on at the house in Frankfurt, though she often cried herself to sleep, wishing she was tucked up in her bed of hay in Grandfather's attic.

Then news came that another visitor was expected. It was Clara's grandmother, and when she arrived Heidi liked her immediately. "You must be Adelheid," said Grandmother with a smile.

"Well, Lady Gracious, I always *thought* I was called Heidi." The old lady laughed out loud. "Lady Gracious! Is that how you speak to people in the mountains? You must call me Grandmamma, as Clara does. And I'll call you Heidi. Now come and open the present I've brought you."



Grandmamma's present was a wonderful book of coloured pictures. There was a picture of a whale and one of a boat and one of a donkey and one of a mountain. And there was a picture of a shepherd watching over a herd of goats. Heidi took one look at it and burst into tears.

Grandmamma stroked her hair and said softly, "It reminds you of someone, or somewhere, doesn't it? Shall I read you the story that goes with the picture?"

"Oh yes! Yes, please!"

Heidi made Grandmamma read her the story over and over again. She could never hear it often enough. "How I'd love to be able to read it myself," she sighed, resting her head on the old lady's knees.

"Why don't you?" asked Grandmamma.

"Oh I can't read. Peter told me that it's far too difficult."

After that, Grandmamma spent an hour every day teaching Heidi to read. It seemed

so much easier to understand when she explained than when Miss Rottenmeier did. Gradually the squiggles on the page began to mean something. And before very long Heidi found she could read!

At night, she would carry the beautiful book upstairs to bed and stare at the picture of the shepherd and the goats in their field at sunset. But Heidi told no-one how much she missed the mountains. Clara was such a good friend now, and Grandmamma was so kind to her that it seemed wicked to be unhappy.

But one morning at breakfast, when the girls had gone to their lessons, Grandmamma said to Mr Sesemann, "Was Heidi so very thin when she first came from Dorfli?"

"Thin? Everyone said she was so brown and healthy that she made poor Clara look like a ghost."

"And did she have those awful dark circles under her eyes?"

"What dark circles? She's always so cheerful."

The old lady shook her head. "Well, she's breaking her heart over something, and it's making her very ill."

Later that day, Grandmamma called Heidi and Clara to her room. "Clara," she said to her grand-daughter, "do you like having Heidi here as your companion?"





you're suffering from homesickness — and that can be a very terrible illness."

"Homesickness?" said Heidi in confusion. "But where will you send me?"

Grandmamma's face looked so serious. "There's only one cure for homesickness. And only one place you can go to be cured,"

"Where? Oh where?" pleaded Heidi.

"Why home, of course!" laughed Clara.

"Yes, you must go home to Uncle Alp and Granny and Peter and Ursula and all your other friends."

Heidi could hardly believe her ears. But the next morning her old straw hat was taken out of the cupboard and packed into a suitcase with some new dresses.

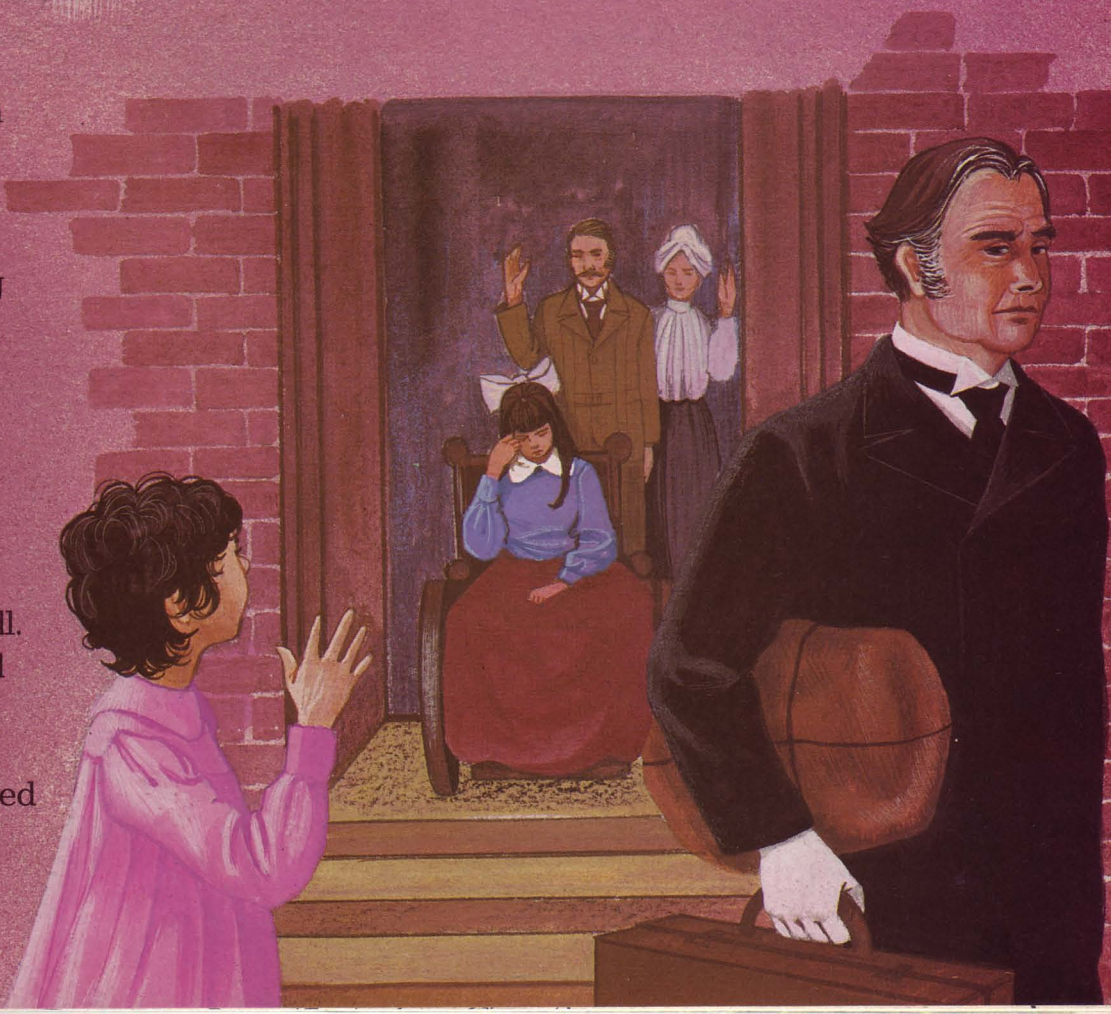
Clara wept when it was time for Heidi to leave. Sebastian took her to the station and soon the houses of Frankfurt were flashing past the window of the train.

Clara laughed with surprise. "But of course I do! She's my best friend in all the world. I don't even mind being an invalid now that Heidi's here."

"But supposing Heidi were ill, so ill that she had to be sent away for a while to get better?"

"Heidi mustn't be ill. Of course we must send her away if it would make her better."

Grandmamma kissed Clara. "I thought that's what you'd say. Heidi,





At Dorfli, Heidi was met by the miller, who drove her in his shabby, horse-drawn cart to Uncle Alp's. Heidi saw again the lush green slopes, the snow-capped mountains and the evening sun glowing red on the rocks. And when they were halfway up the mountain, Heidi saw Uncle Alp sitting outside his chalet, looking down over the valley.

Jumping down from the cart, Heidi raced over to Uncle Alp, flung her arms around him, crying over and over again, "Grandfather! Oh, Grandfather!"

The old man said nothing. Then, for the first time in many years, tears came to his eyes. "So you've come back to your old Grandfather, have you? Didn't they feed you in that big city? You've grown so pale and thin."

"Nothing tasted nearly as good as the milk from Little Swan," she laughed, kissing the old man. She skipped happily after him into the little chalet, delighted to see that everything was just as she had remembered.

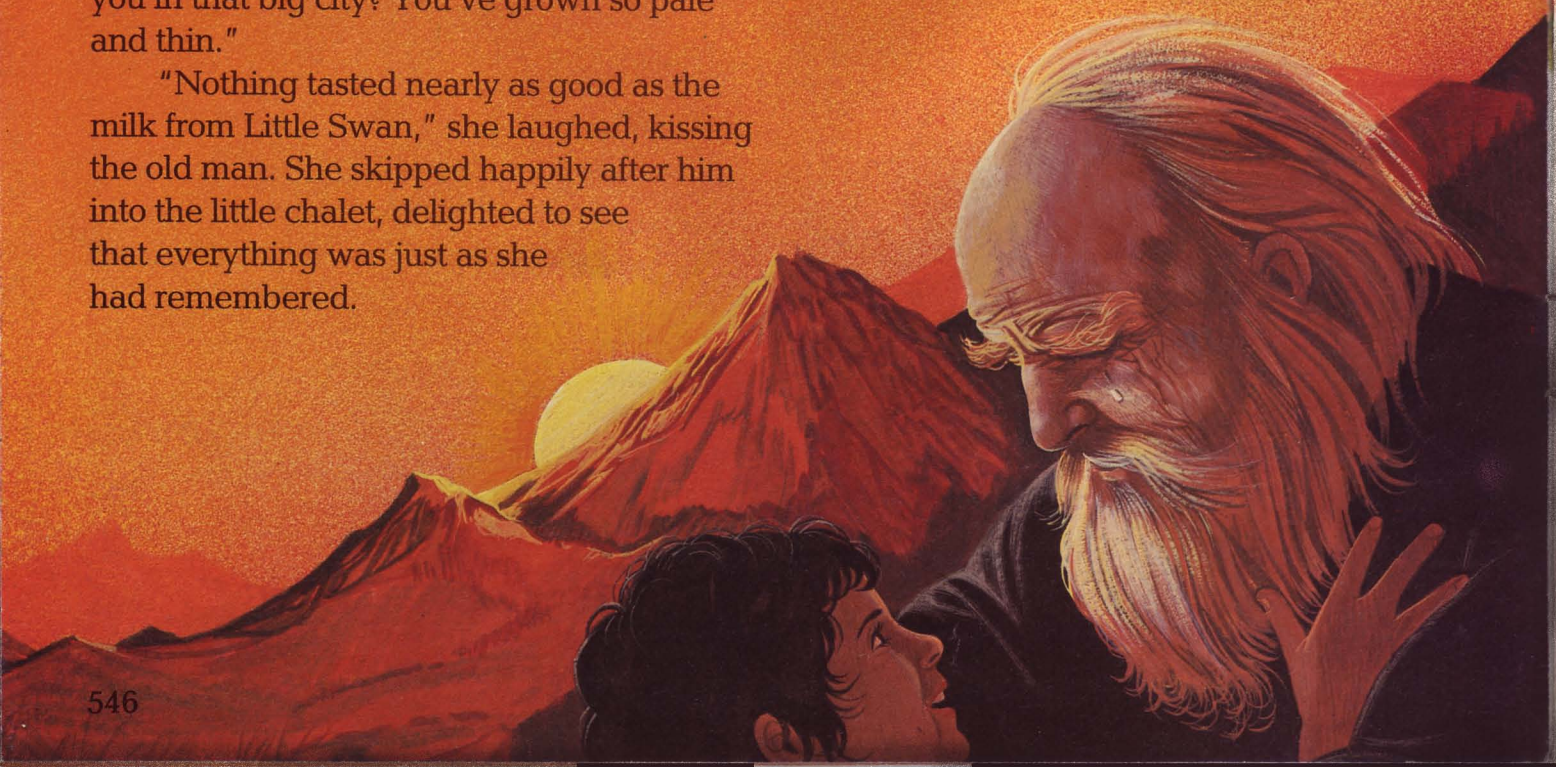
Then she sat on her high stool and drank a bowl of milk.

As the sun was sinking behind the mountains, Little Swan and Little Bear arrived, Heidi thought her happiness was complete.

That night, tucked up in her little attic bed, she whispered, "I'm very silly, Grandfather. When I was in Frankfurt I missed you. But now I'm here, I think I'm going to miss Clara."

"Well, if it will make you happy," the old man replied, "Clara can come and visit us here." And with that Heidi fell asleep, happy to be home again in the mountains.

[Heidi's wish comes true in Part 21]



The Green Maiden of the Lake



*"Rise, arise my faery kine,
Follow your leader into line.
Up Lightfoot, Silk Tail, Bright,
Haste Speckled One, Snow and White."*

There was one little cow called Snowflake, who was always last. Either she lingered too long below the water, or strayed too far from her mistress. On one occasion, she had even wandered as far as the white-washed walls of the big farmhouse.

The Green Maiden had scolded her. "Remember, little one, we must all return to the lake before the bells stop chiming."

One evening, when the Green Maiden was busy weaving a new cloak out of the long rushes, Snowflake strayed away once more. Along the winding path she went, stepping daintily over the stones, until she found herself near the farm gate. Peering between the bars, she was so fascinated that she did not hear her mistress calling.

Long ago, not far from Aberdovey in Wales, there lay within a field of hills the Lake of the Bearded One

Aberdovey Church was famous for its sweet-sounding bells, and no-one liked them better than the beautiful Green Maiden who lived at the bottom of the lake.

Each evening, when the bells rang out, she would rise from the lake, bringing with her a herd of milk-white cows. She would carefully look around to see that no-one was watching, then call the cows one by one:



But she did hear the voice of the rosy-cheeked dairy-maid, whose name was Nancy.

"What a pretty little white cow!" she exclaimed. "And where did you come from?"

Then Evan, the young cowherd, approached the gate with his herd of brown cows, and stopped to admire the strange animal. "She's a little beauty!" he cried, stroking her silken coat.

Down by the lake, the Green Maiden, sensing danger, desperately blew on her silver bugle, warning Snowflake to return.

Nancy and Evan shaded their eyes against the setting sun, and stared towards the lake. But they could not see the Maiden standing amid the tall green rushes. Turning back to the little cow, they looked carefully at her smooth neck in the hope of finding a mark or name. When they could see nothing they decided to take her into the cowshed and keep her safe for the night. With outstretched arms, they shooed Snowflake and the other cows into the shed. Then, when all the herd was safely inside,

they locked the gate with an iron bolt.

As soon as she saw this, the Green Maiden knew that she had lost Snowflake — for faery folk cannot enter where iron bars the way. Sadly she returned with her herd into the lake and, as the bells of Aberdovey Church died away into the distance, a heavy grey mist covered the hollow.

Later that evening, the miserly farmer who owned the farm grumbled about



feeding the stray white cow. He wanted to get rid of her. But the very next morning, when he saw that she yielded far more milk than his own cows, he changed his mind.

"I've never seen such rich, creamy milk!" he said. "It will make the finest cream and butter and cheese!"

"She'll make your fortune, master," said Evan proudly.

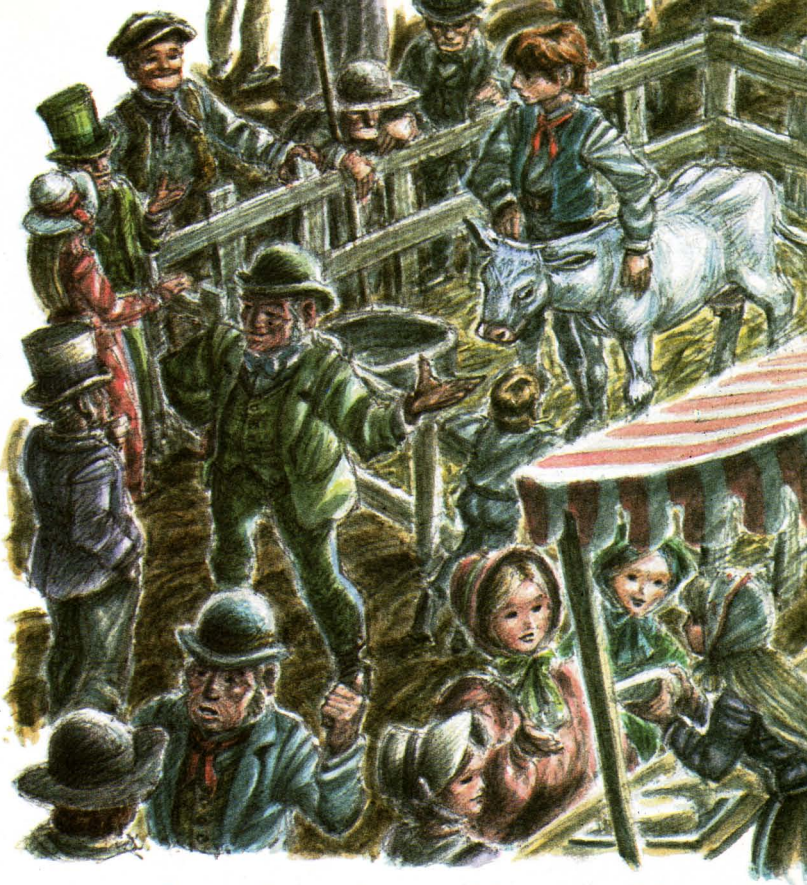
The greedy farmer was determined to keep Snowflake. Soon he was showing her off at local fairs, and people flocked to buy the delicious butter and cheese made from her milk. Over the years, he became more and more rich, as all the neighbouring farmers paid gold for one of Snowflake's beautiful white calves.

At first Snowflake was very content. Only when the church bells of Aberdovey rang out each evening did she feel strangely restless. But as she saw her white calves sold, one by one, she grew sadder and sadder. And she produced less and less milk.

Nancy and Evan loved her dearly, and treated her as their special pet. So they were horrified one day, when the farmer said that he was determined to get rid of her.

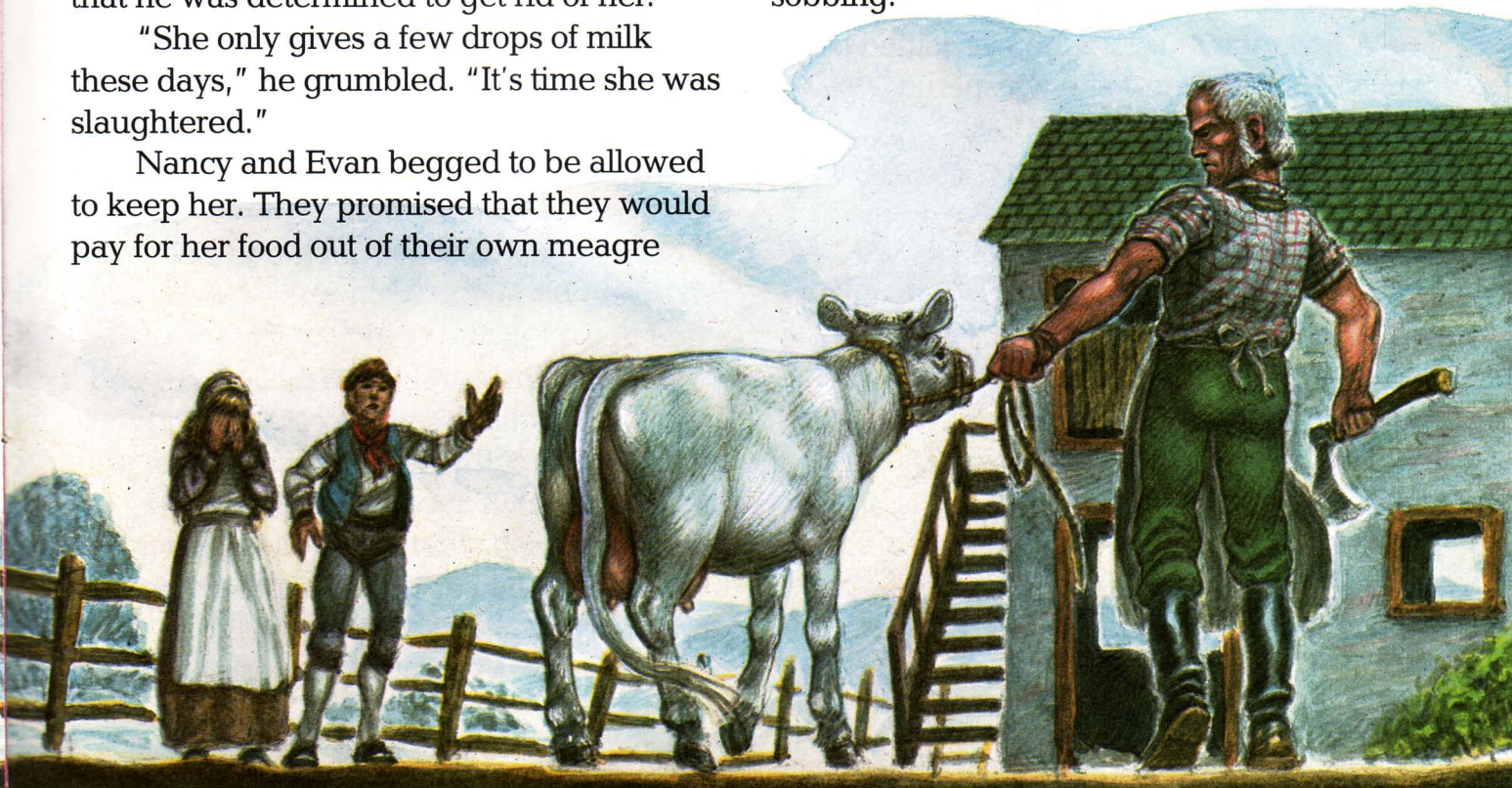
"She only gives a few drops of milk these days," he grumbled. "It's time she was slaughtered."

Nancy and Evan begged to be allowed to keep her. They promised that they would pay for her food out of their own meagre



wages. But nothing they could say would soften the farmer's heart.

The following evening, as the bells of Aberdovey Church rang out, the farmer led Snowflake to another shed to be slaughtered. Evan could not bear to watch. Pushing the farm gate wide, he rushed to the lakeside and flung himself down on the grass, sobbing.





A few moments later he was joined by Nancy. "Look, Evan," she whispered suddenly. "Look at the lake!"

Evan raised his head and gasped. For there in the tall rushes stood the Green Maiden, silently watching the farm. The sharp axe was about to fall on Snowflake's neck when the maiden raised her silver bugle to her lips and blew loudly. The axe remained frozen in mid-air, and the rope holding the little white cow dropped to the ground.

The farmer could move neither hand nor foot as Snowflake trotted away, passing through the gate and up the pathway to the lake.

Nancy and Evan watched, overjoyed, as the Maiden called:

*"My stray white cow, come home,
come home;
Back to the lake, no more to roam.
Your mistress calls you, loud and clear,
To bring back your white calves, sleek
and dear."*

Then, to the astonishment of Nancy and Evan, all Snowflake's white calves came streaming out of the neighbouring farms. First in ones, then in twos and threes, they trailed after each other, towards the lake, and soon they had encircled it like a great white daisy chain.

The Green Maiden put her arms round



Snowflake's neck and hugged her. Then she walked round the calves, fondly patting each one, until she reached the sturdiest and strongest of them all.

She smiled at the young couple. "Here is a reward for your kindness. I know you will take great care of her as you have taken care of Snowflake. But first I must make her different from the faery cows of the lake." Touching the calf's head, she said:

*"Cast off now your faery white,
And take the colour of the night."*

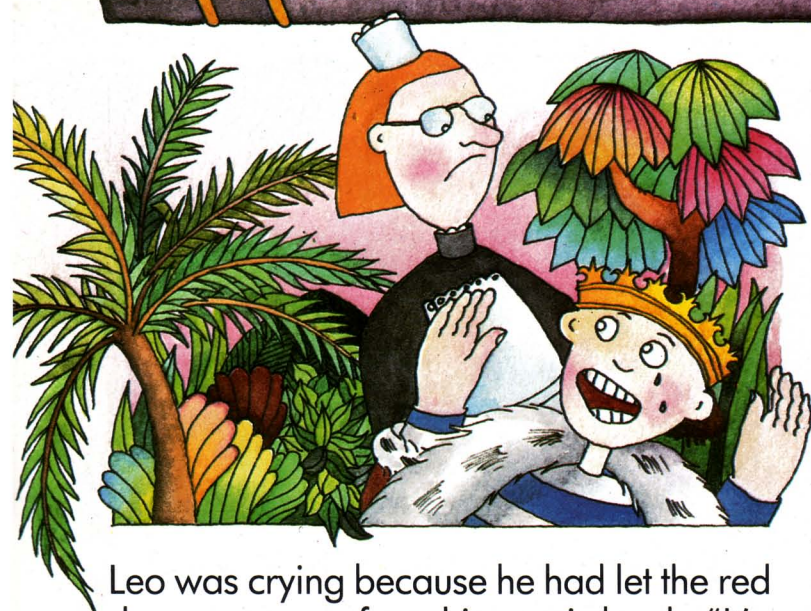
Even as she spoke, the sturdy calf changed colour. She was no longer white, but black from head to tail.

The Green Maiden walked to the edge of the lake and beckoned to the herd of white cows to follow her. In a few moments they had all vanished beneath the water — just as the bells of Aberdovey died away.

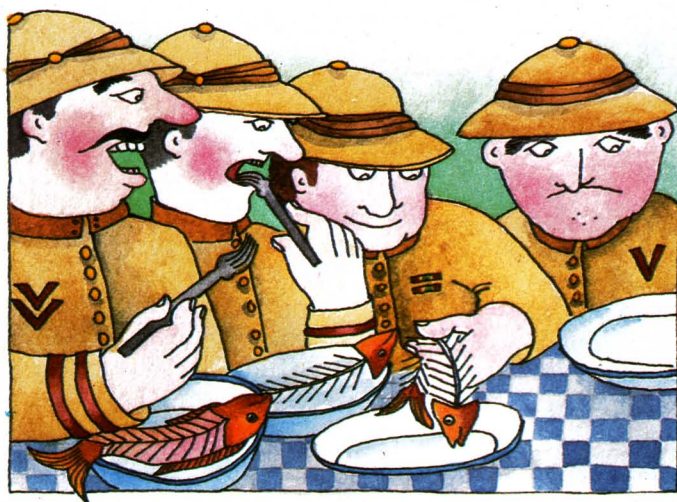
Nancy and Evan would have thought it all a dream if they had not heard the mooing of that little black calf. But their gift from the lake will never be forgotten, for she was the first of the breed of sturdy Welsh black cattle, famous today throughout all the world.



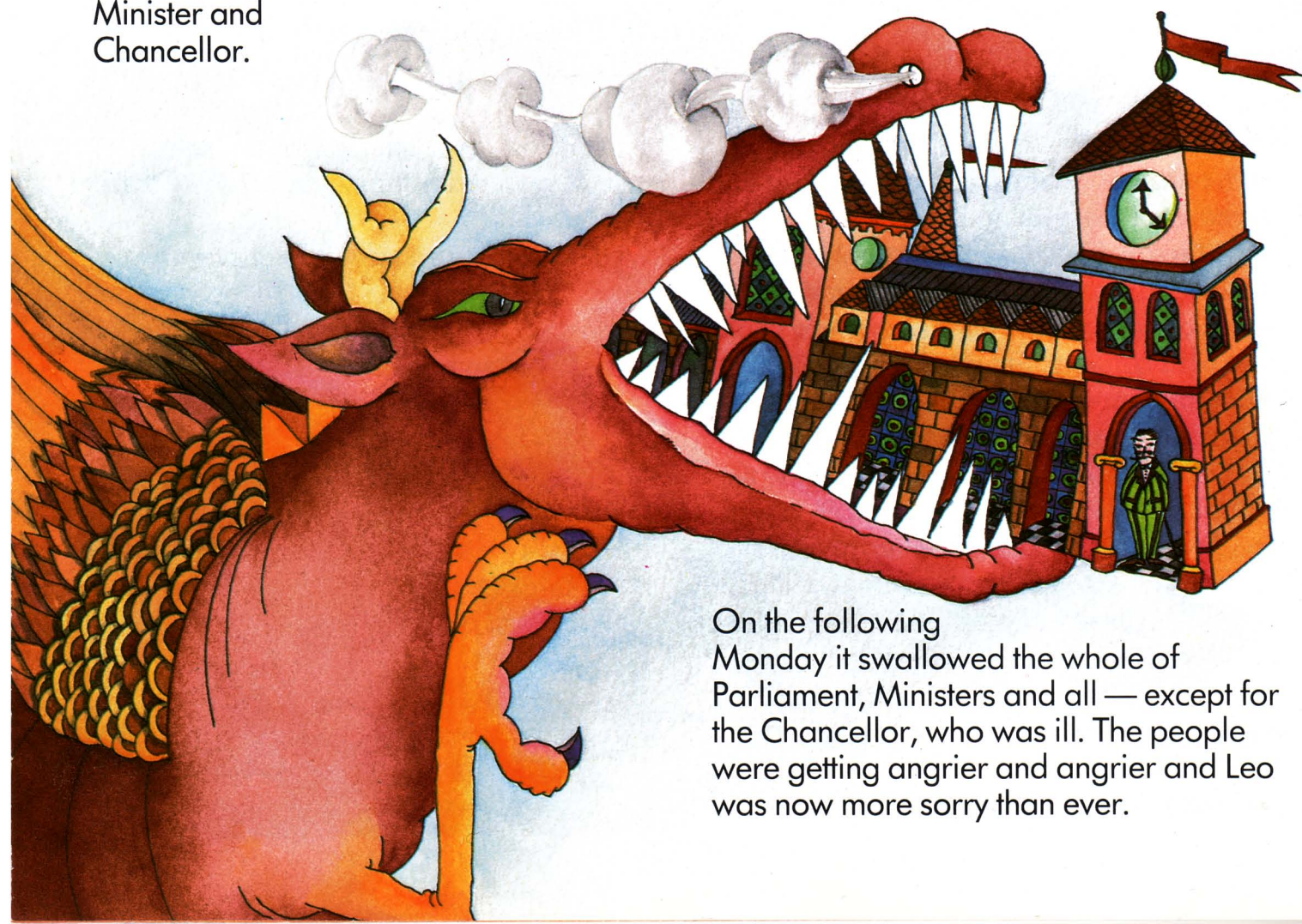
The Book of Beasts



Leo was crying because he had let the red dragon escape from his magic book. "It's flown off to the hills," he sobbed to Nanny Moss. "Oh dear," said Nanny, hugging him. Then she went to tell the Prime Minister and Chancellor.



They warned everyone to beware of the dragon. The army lay in wait for it until Saturday afternoon and then went home for a late lunch. But the dragon was hungry too — and ate an entire football team.

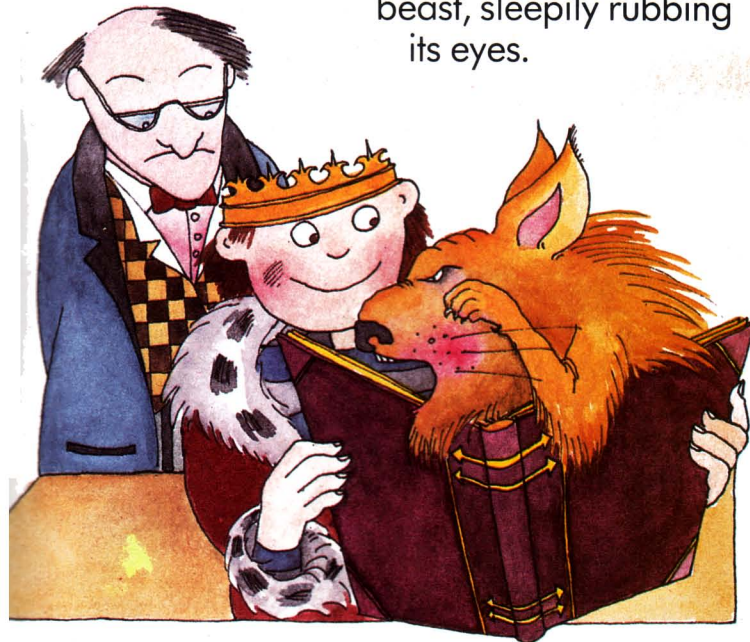


On the following Monday it swallowed the whole of Parliament, Ministers and all — except for the Chancellor, who was ill. The people were getting angrier and angrier and Leo was now more sorry than ever.

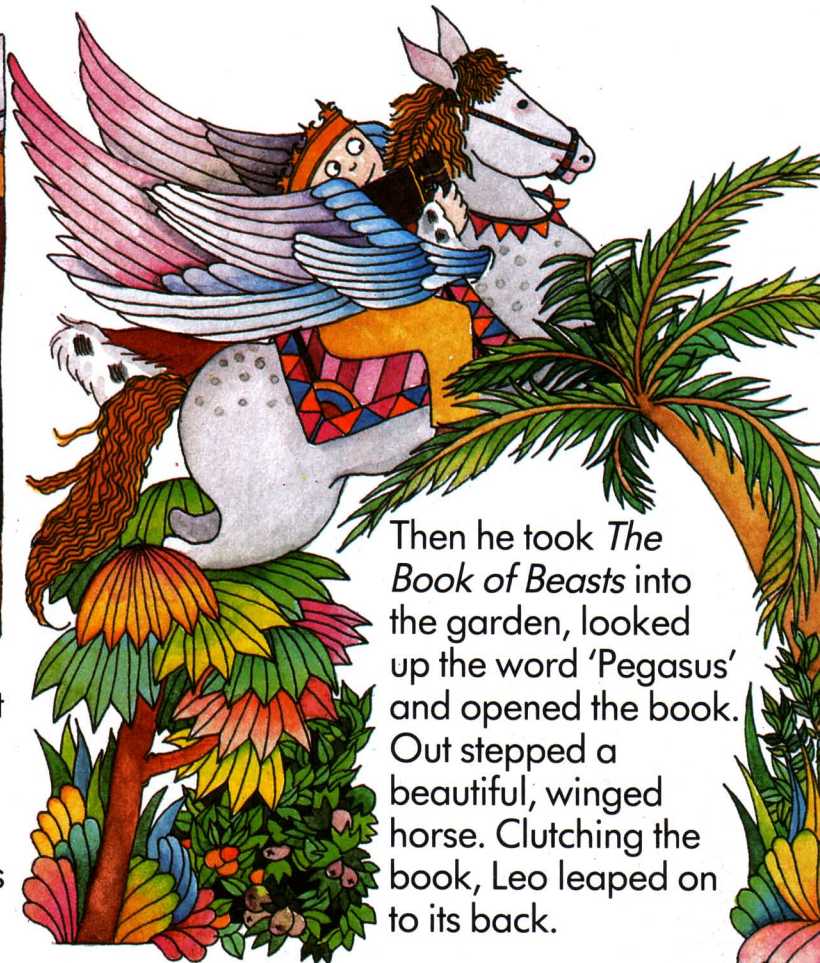
He asked the Chancellor's advice. "The only thing that can kill a dragon is a manticora, your majesty," he said. So Leo looked up 'manticora' in the index of *The Book of Beasts* and turned to the correct page. Out rolled the beast, sleepily rubbing its eyes.




"Go on, go and fight the dragon!" cried Leo. But the manticora did not want to fight any dragons and hid in the royal stables. The dragon found it covering there the next day — and ate it up in two gulps!



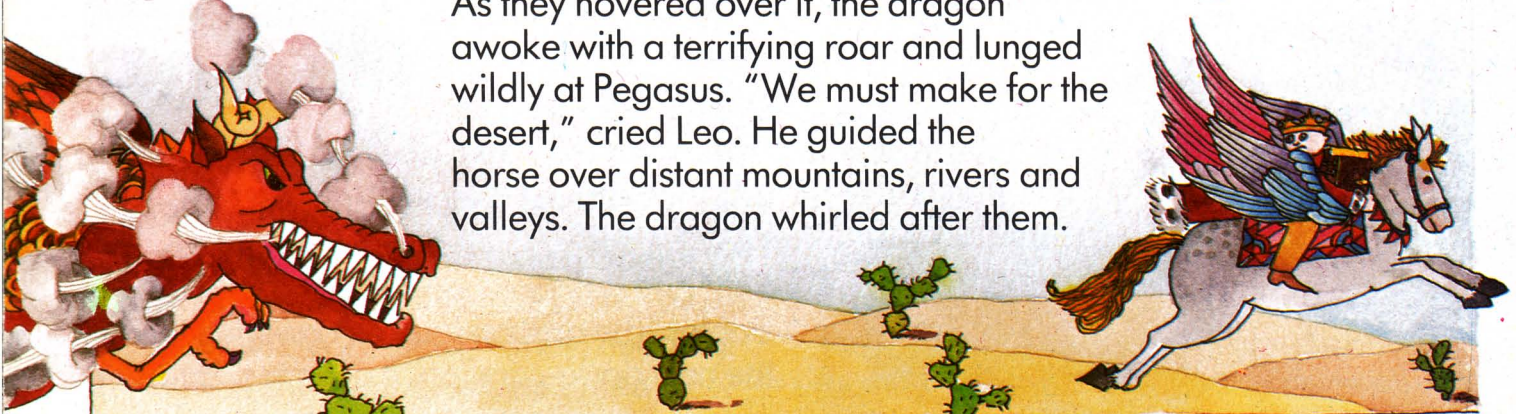
Now there was no-one left to help. "I must save my people myself," thought Leo. He shut himself in the library for a day and read all the books on dragons. At last he learned one very important thing: dragons can catch fire in the midday sun.



Then he took *The Book of Beasts* into the garden, looked up the word 'Pegasus' and opened the book. Out stepped a beautiful, winged horse. Clutching the book, Leo leaped on to its back.

A boy with a crown and a red cape, Leo, is sitting on a white Pegasus. They are in a lush forest with green and yellow leaves. Leo is holding a book and pointing towards the right.

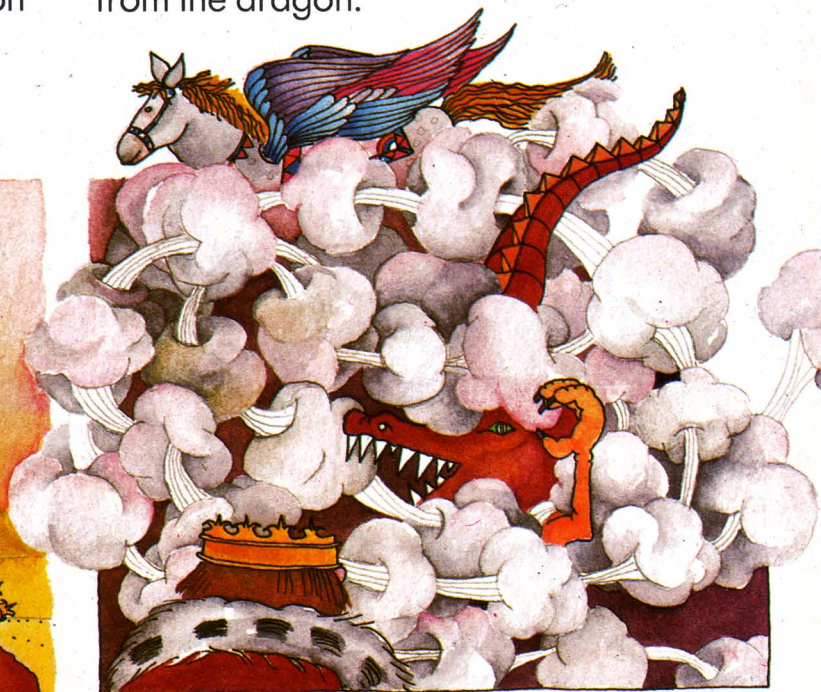
Off they flew to the hills in search of the dragon. And as they got nearer they saw a wisp of grey smoke rising from some trees. "That must be where the dragon is," shouted Leo. And sure enough, there it was, enjoying its early morning doze.

A red dragon with a crown and a yellow star on its forehead is on the left, breathing smoke. On the right, a white Pegasus with a rider is running across a sandy desert landscape with small green cacti.

As they hovered over it, the dragon awoke with a terrifying roar and lunged wildly at Pegasus. "We must make for the desert," cried Leo. He guided the horse over distant mountains, rivers and valleys. The dragon whirled after them.

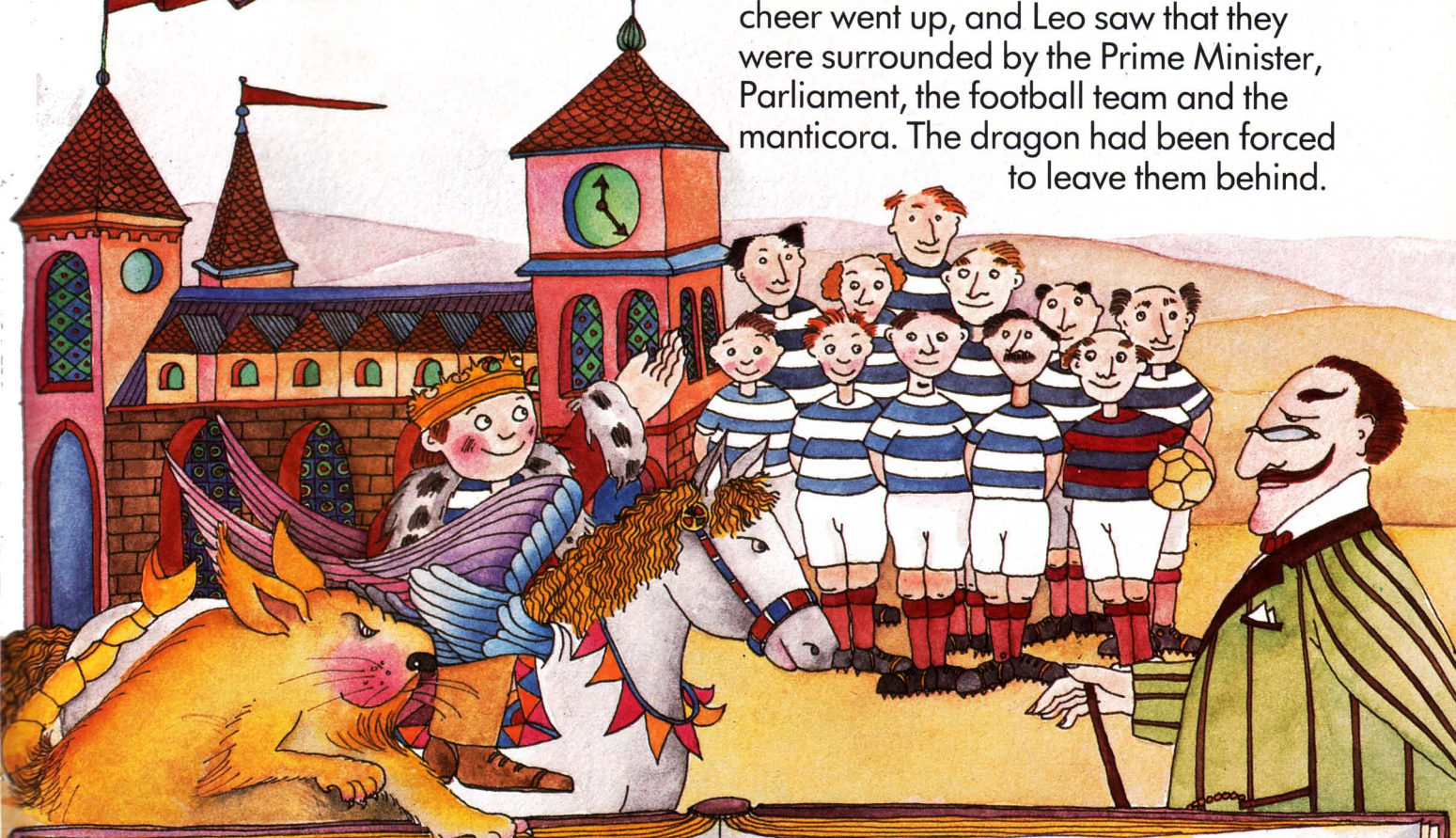
At last they came to a vast stretch of barren desert. There was no shade and the sun was high and bright in the sky. As soon as Pegasus landed, Leo jumped off and laid *The Book of Beasts* open on the ground at the page with the palm-tree on it. But as he was scrambling back on to the horse he slipped and fell. Then the dragon arrived!

The dragon was by now so hot that it was beginning to smoke. Pegasus flew round it, beating his wings like bellows in front of a fire. The smoke billowed in all directions, hiding Leo from the dragon.






It gave a screech of rage which turned into a gasp as it looked around desperately for shade. Then, seeing the palm-tree, it dived into the page and curled up in its old place.



"Hooray, we've done it!" cried Leo, hugging Pegasus. All at once a great cheer went up, and Leo saw that they were surrounded by the Prime Minister, Parliament, the football team and the manticora. The dragon had been forced to leave them behind.

"Pegasus, you must take us all home two by two," said Leo. It took several days, but everyone was so glad to be rid of the dragon that they didn't mind waiting their

turn. They passed the time by telling each other how their new little King had defeated a dragon — with a little help from Pegasus, of course.



There's nothing makes a Greenland Whale
Feel half so high-and-mighty
As sitting on a mantelpiece
In Aunty Mabel's nighty.

It makes a change from Freezing Seas,
(Of which a Whale can tire),
To warm his weary tail at ease
Before an English fire.

For this delight he leaves the sea,
(Unknown to Aunty Mabel),
Returning only when the dawn
Lights up the Breakfast Table.



LUTRA

the OTTER

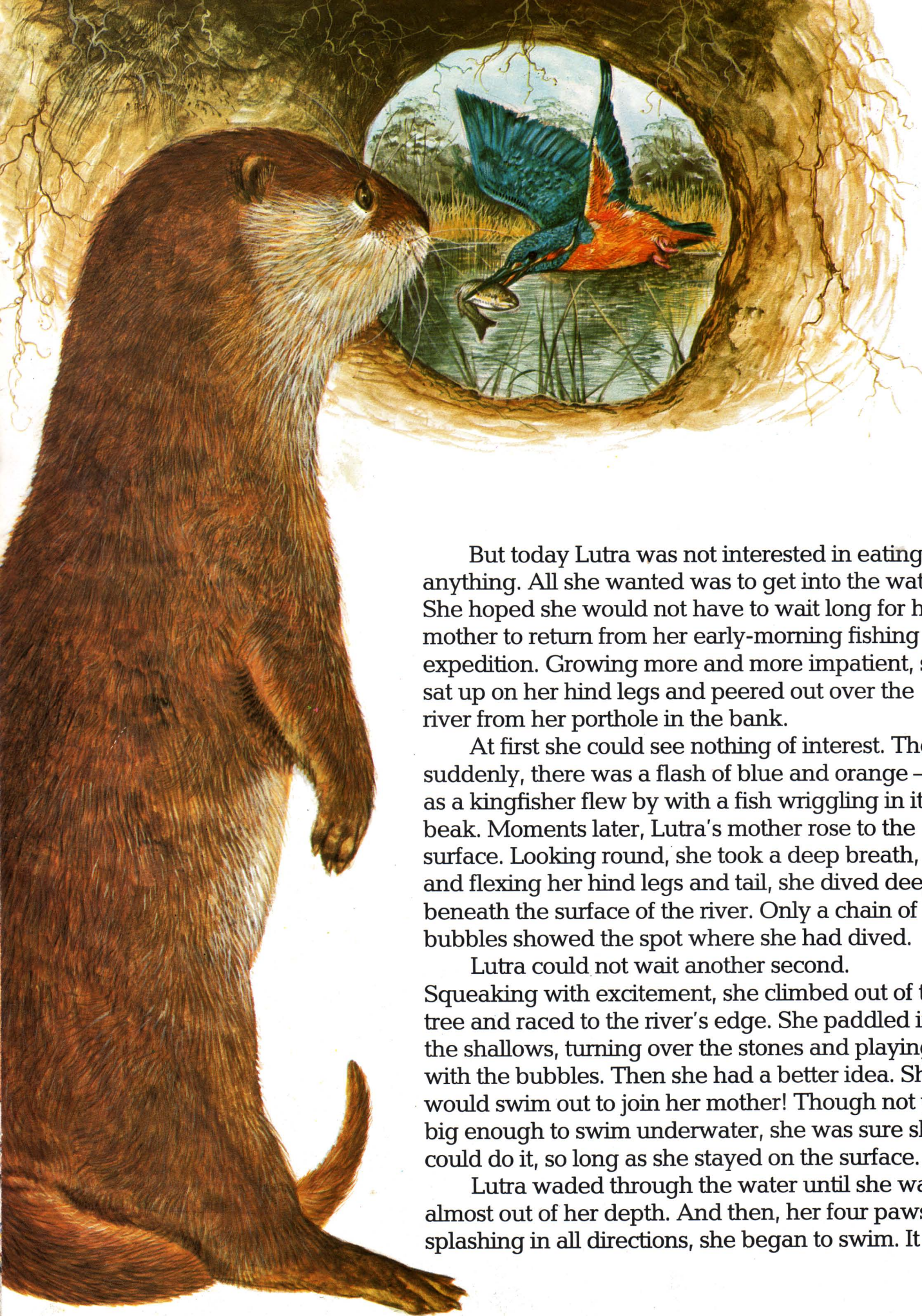
Lutra woke knowing that today was very special. For a moment she could not understand why. Then she remembered. Today she was going to be taken for her first swim.

For several days now Lutra had longed to follow her mother as she swam straight out of their holt and into the river. The holt was built inside the roots of a tree which clung to a steep river bank. It had been Lutra's home since the day she was born, almost three months before. As a tiny cub she could not see, and had stayed curled up in her cosy bed of twigs, reeds and grass. But almost as soon as she could walk she had been eager to explore the world outside.

She soon discovered that there was more than one way out of the holt. She could not follow her mother through the underwater exit, but she could scramble up to a hole in the tree. From there she climbed up into the branches or down to the ground, where there were pebbles and feathers and bones to play with.

Once she found a dead crayfish lodged between some boulders at the river's edge. She had played with it for a while and then tried to copy her mother by crunching its shell between her sharp teeth. But her jaw was not strong enough, and she had flung it down in dismay.





But today Lutra was not interested in eating anything. All she wanted was to get into the water. She hoped she would not have to wait long for her mother to return from her early-morning fishing expedition. Growing more and more impatient, she sat up on her hind legs and peered out over the river from her porthole in the bank.

At first she could see nothing of interest. Then, suddenly, there was a flash of blue and orange — as a kingfisher flew by with a fish wriggling in its beak. Moments later, Lutra's mother rose to the surface. Looking round, she took a deep breath, and flexing her hind legs and tail, she dived deep beneath the surface of the river. Only a chain of bubbles showed the spot where she had dived.

Lutra could not wait another second. Squeaking with excitement, she climbed out of the tree and raced to the river's edge. She paddled in the shallows, turning over the stones and playing with the bubbles. Then she had a better idea. She would swim out to join her mother! Though not yet big enough to swim underwater, she was sure she could do it, so long as she stayed on the surface.

Lutra waded through the water until she was almost out of her depth. And then, her four paws splashing in all directions, she began to swim. It

was much harder than she had expected. There seemed to be some kind of force in the river dragging her away from her mother, away from her home.

No matter how hard she tried, she just could not swim against it. Soon she was exhausted. She felt a moment of panic. What was happening to her? How was she going to get back to the safety of the holt? Where was her mother?

Lutra felt herself sinking. She let out a cry of terror. Then her mother surfaced right beside her. "Keep still," she said firmly, "and you'll be safe." Then she held Lutra in her mouth and swam with her to the bank.

Once on dry land, Lutra began to shiver. "You weren't in the water long enough to get cold," said her mother. "You've just been a naughty cub and had a nasty fright. Well, you must forget all that now and do what all otters do after a swim. Roll in the grass to dry your coat."

Lutra did as she was told, feeling that at last she was really beginning to grow up. Soon she would be swimming well enough to follow her mother on a fishing expedition.



By the time Lutra was thoroughly dry again, her mother was feeling hungry. "I'm going to catch us a fish, but first I want to make sure you don't get into any more mischief. You must come back with me to the holt and stay there while I'm out hunting."

Lutra was too tired to argue, so she padded back to the holt and thankfully closed her eyes.

She did not know how long she had been asleep when a harsh growling woke her. It was a sound quite different from anything she had ever heard before. She sat up and peered out of the tree.

But all she could see was a pair of swans swimming lazily at the water's edge.

"Well, I know *they* didn't make that noise," she thought. So she climbed down to a thicket of brambles by the water's edge to a get better view. Again she heard the strange sound, very close. It was a deep-throated growl. She looked up. To her horror she saw a large, shiny black face, with two eyes, a nose and a mouth.





But its head seemed much too large for its body and there were two strange flaps on either side.

The dog pushed its nose forward and growled once again. Lutra tried to back away, but she got caught in the brambles and could not move.

Suddenly, there was a loud chittering noise. The noise grew louder and higher and sounded like a scream of rage. Alarmed, the dog turned round to see the fierce face of Lutra's mother. She was nowhere near as big as the dog, but she was very angry.

She sat up on her hind legs and, baring her teeth, she lunged at the dog's neck. The dog yelped in pain and surprise as the otter's teeth bit into its neck. Then he heard his master whistling and calling his name, and ran off quickly to join him.

Lutra's mother sighed with relief. She knew it had been a lucky escape. She also knew that the dog might return and he might not be so easily frightened away a second time. "We can't stay here," she said to Lutra. "We must go and find anotherholt."

As the sun began to sink, Lutra and her mother set out across the meadows on their exciting journey to find a new home.





IN PART 21 OF STORY Teller

THE BOLD LITTLE TAILOR killed *Seven At One Blow!* Impressive... but seven what?

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING is a cunning old beast—he's so sharp he could cut himself!

When a proud Russian peasant dares boast that his daughter is **WISER THAN THE CZAR**, the poor girl has to prove it—to the Czar himself!

BOBBIE AND THE MAGIC GO-KART go for a spin to the carnival in Fireworks Village

Why does the Hippopotamus hide in rivers? Why does the Elephant root up trees and bushes? Could it have something to do with **THE MIGHTY RABBIT?**

HEIDI is home again with Uncle Alp. But her happiness won't be complete until all her friends are together in the mountains

Readers include
**MICHAEL HORDERN,
NIGEL LAMBERT
& DENISE BRYER**

