

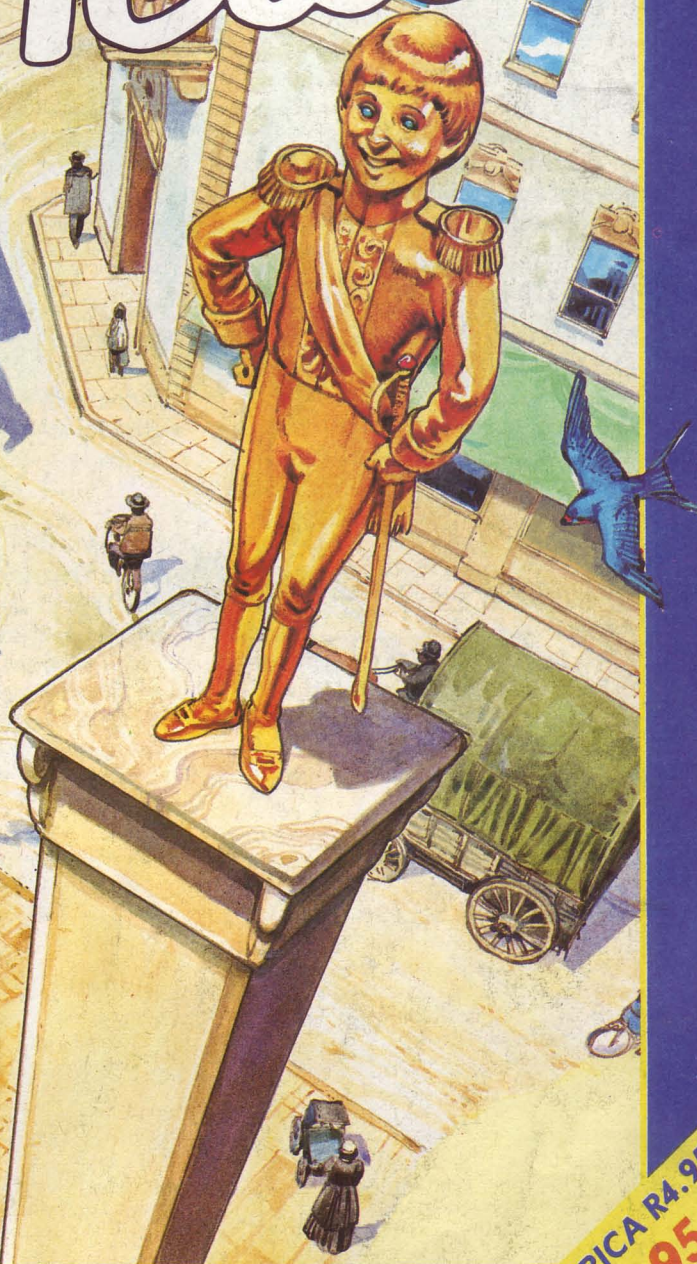
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PART 25

# STORY

A collection of the world's  
best children's stories

# Teller



A Marshall Cavendish Publication

EVERY FORTNIGHT

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# STORY Teller

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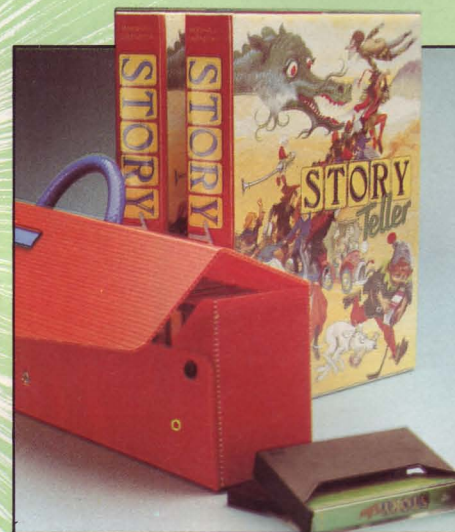
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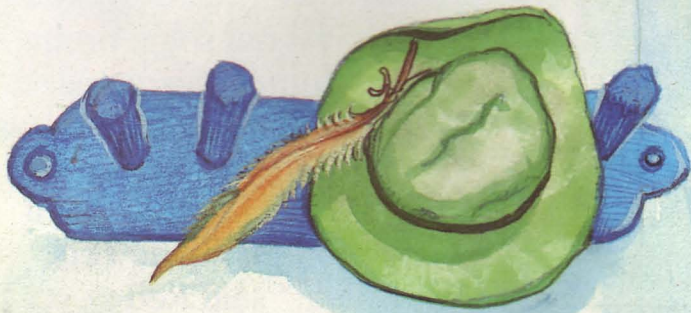
*A Creative Radio Production*

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Aldo: John Brewer, Tina Jones, Nigel Lambert & Steven Pacey  
Mr Miacca: Denise Bryer  
The Great Pie Contest: Steven Pacey  
Stolen Thunder: Tim Curry



# Little Red Riding Hood



"Your Grandmamma is very ill," said Red Riding Hood's mother one day. "Take this basket of food to her. There's soup and cake and fruit and biscuits. I'm sure it will make her feel much better."

So the little girl put on her red velvet cloak with the red velvet hood which her Grandmamma had made her for Christmas. She wore it everywhere. That was why everyone called her Little Red Riding Hood. As she set off into the forest, her mother called after her, "Make sure you come home before dark. And remember — whatever you do, don't talk to any strangers!"

Red Riding Hood had never been to her grandmother's cottage deep in the forest, and she skipped along, swinging her basket of presents.







But when she was halfway there, she suddenly heard a gruff voice close behind her. "Where are you going, Little Red Riding Hood?"

"I'm going to visit Grandmamma," said Red Riding Hood, who seemed not to notice the stranger's sharp teeth and piercing, yellow eyes. "She's very ill and my mother has made her some cakes and soup and biscuits. Look."

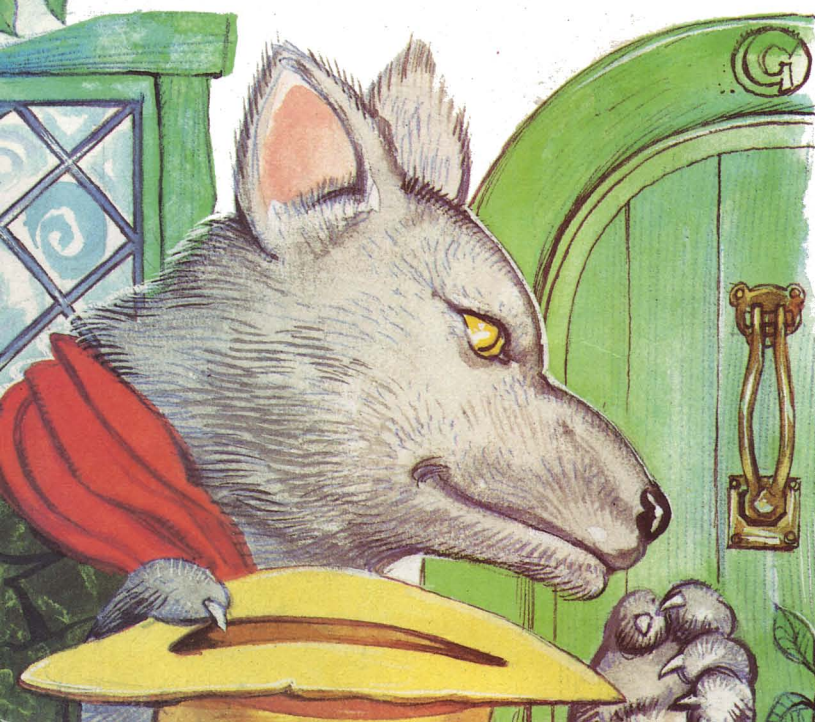
The wolf poked his nose into the basket. "Hm. Very nice, though I don't eat that sort of thing myself. Don't you think she would like some flowers as well?" He pointed out some pretty clumps of primroses growing under the trees. "I'm sure if I was ill, I'd feel much better if somebody brought me flowers."

"What a lovely idea!" said Red Riding Hood. But then she remembered what her mother had said about not talking to strangers. "But she can't mean that I shouldn't talk to someone as kind as this!"

She set down her basket and began gathering primroses. It took a long time, and when she turned back to the path, her basket brimming with flowers, there was no sign of the kind stranger.

By that time, the wolf had run on ahead, and reached Grandmamma's cottage.

He gave a loud knock on the door and called out in a small, piping voice, "It's me, Granny, Red Riding Hood. Can I come in?"







"Lift the latch, my dear. I'm too ill to come to the door."

So the wolf let himself into the cottage and found the old lady sitting up in bed, dressed in her bonnet and shawl. With a sudden leap, he pounced on to the bed and swallowed her down in one great gulp.

The big, bad wolf drew the bedroom curtains to shut out the daylight. Then he went to the wardrobe and found himself a nightdress, bonnet and shawl. A few minutes later, Red Riding Hood knocked on the cottage door. "Lift the latch, my dear," he said, in an old lady's voice. "I'm too poorly to come to the door."

So Red Riding Hood let herself in. "Mother has sent you this basket of food, Grandmamma, and I have picked you these flowers. I do hope you're feeling better today."







"All the better for seeing *you*, Red Riding Hood!" said the wolf. "Come in! Come in! And close the door."

Red Riding Hood stepped closer, and put the basket down on the bed. She saw the wolf's large ears poking out of the pink nightcap. "My! What big *ears* you have, Grandmamma!"

"All the better to *hear* you with, my dear!" said the wolf. "Now, come closer and let me hold your hand."

Grandmamma's hands seemed awfully rough and hairy, but Little Red Riding Hood stroked them tenderly. "Oh! What big *eyes* you have, Grandmamma!"

A pair of yellow eyes flashed from under the nightcap. "All the better to see you with, my dear!" The thought of eating Red Riding Hood made him grin from ear to ear.

"And what big *teeth* you have, Grandmamma!"

"All the better to *eat* you with, my dear!" cried the wolf. And throwing back the covers, he pounced on Little Red Riding Hood and wolfed her down in one gulp — hood, coat and all!





A few minutes later, a woodcutter was passing the old lady's cottage and, knowing that Granny Hood was poorly, he decided to visit her. But what strange noise was this coming from inside? He peeped through the window . . . and saw the wolf lying on the bed fast asleep.

In an instant, he guessed what had happened. He crept into the cottage and with a sharp knife cut open the stomach of the sleeping wolf.

And who should step out but Little Red Riding Hood and her Grandmamma! The woodcutter put his finger to his lips, "Shshsh. Fetch me some stones from the garden as quick as you can."

The woodcutter tucked the stones into the stomach of the sleeping wolf. Then he sewed up the cut he had made with his knife, and crept into the next room with Grandmamma and Little Red Riding Hood.

The wolf woke with a start. "What a nightmare I was having! I shouldn't have eaten so much." And feeling very thirsty, he rushed down to the river for a drink.

With the weight of rocks inside him, he overbalanced and plummeted to the bottom of the river. And *that* was the end of the big, bad wolf.

Little Red Riding Hood gave her Grandmamma the basket of food, and the old lady ate it and felt quite well again. Saying goodbye to her Granny and the woodcutter, Red Riding Hood walked safely home through the forest — and never spoke to strangers ever again.







# THE HAPPY PRINCE

High above the city, on a tall stone column, stood the beautiful statue of the Happy Prince. His body was covered in thin leaves of fine gold, his eyes were two sparkling sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed in his sword-hilt.

"How happy the Prince looks," the townspeople would say, as they wandered through the square. "What a pity we can't all be happy like him."

One night, a swallow flew over the city. Winter was coming, and he was flying south to the warmth and sunshine, charting his course by the stars. All the other swallows had gone weeks before, but this one had lingered behind. Now he was hurrying to join his friends before the snows arrived.

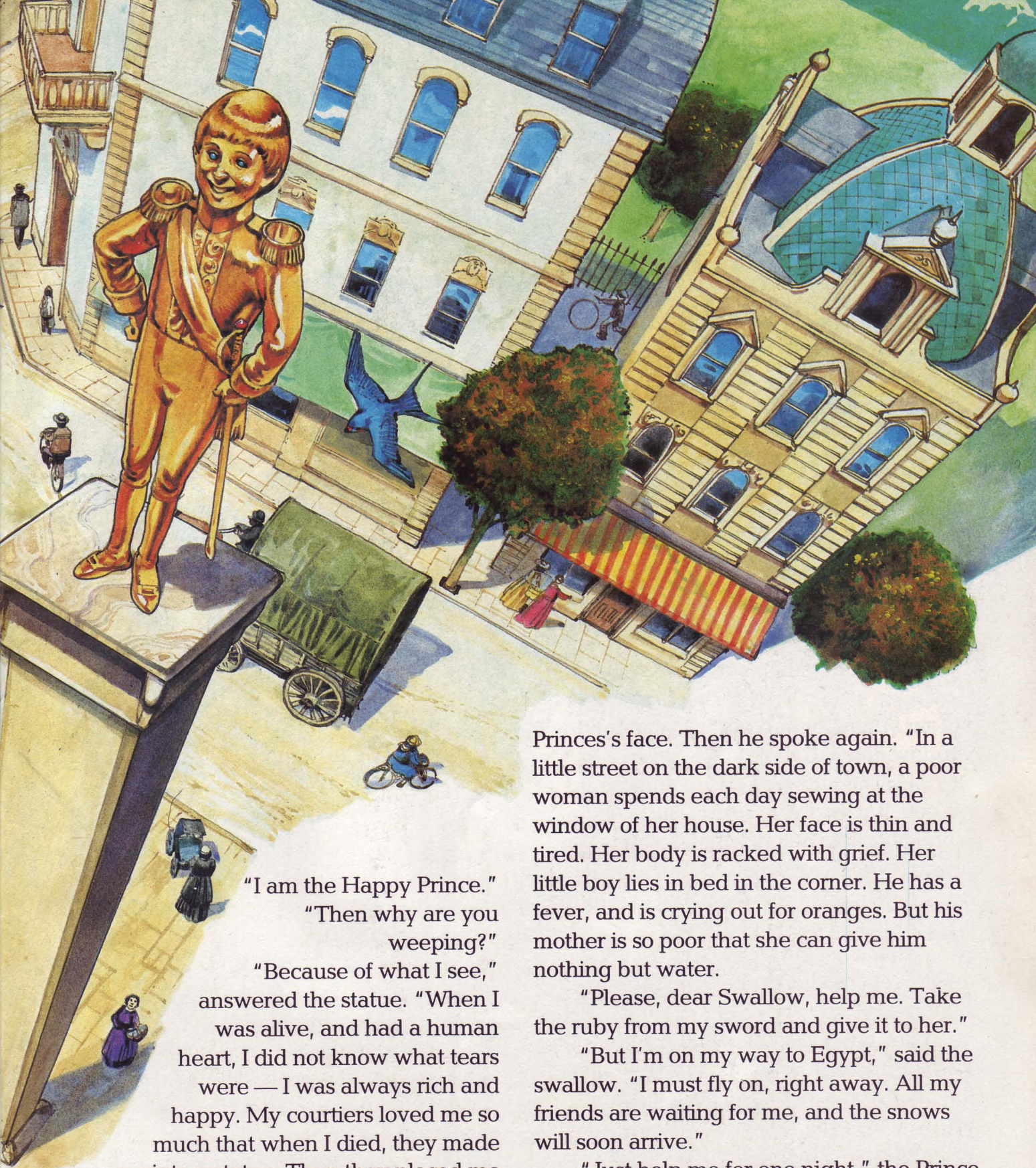
When the swallow saw the golden prince at the top of the stone column, he stopped to take a rest. "What a wonderful statue," he thought. "I'll perch between its

feet to keep out of this wind." But just as he was folding his wings, a large drop of water splashed down beside him. "Rain? On such a clear, starry night?"

A second drop fell. Then another. The swallow shook his feathers irritably. "What use is a statue if it doesn't keep the rain off!" Then he looked up at the Prince and what did he see? The drops were not rain at all, but tears, trickling slowly down from the Prince's golden cheeks.

"Who are you?" asked the swallow, full of wonder.





"I am the Happy Prince."

"Then why are you weeping?"

"Because of what I see," answered the statue. "When I was alive, and had a human heart, I did not know what tears were — I was always rich and happy. My courtiers loved me so much that when I died, they made me into a statue. Then they placed me on this pedestal, high above the city. From here I can see all the ugliness and misery of the city. And though my heart now is made of lead I cannot help but weep."

Three more tears rolled down the

Prince's face. Then he spoke again. "In a little street on the dark side of town, a poor woman spends each day sewing at the window of her house. Her face is thin and tired. Her body is racked with grief. Her little boy lies in bed in the corner. He has a fever, and is crying out for oranges. But his mother is so poor that she can give him nothing but water."

"Please, dear Swallow, help me. Take the ruby from my sword and give it to her."

"But I'm on my way to Egypt," said the swallow. "I must fly on, right away. All my friends are waiting for me, and the snows will soon arrive."

"Just help me for one night," the Prince pleaded, "and be my messenger. The boy is so thirsty — and his mother is so sad."

So the swallow picked out the ruby from the Prince's sword and flew over the rooftops to the little house.





The poor woman was so tired that she had fallen asleep over her sewing. She did not stir when the bird hopped through the window and laid the ruby down by her thimble. The little boy tossed and turned on his bed, burning with fever. The swallow fanned his hot cheeks with his wings, then flew back to the Prince.

"It's strange," he said, "but although it is so cold I feel much warmer now."

"That's because you have done a kind deed," replied the Prince. And the swallow slept peacefully.

Next day the swallow flew around the town, admiring the sights. When he passed the poor woman's house, he saw that the boy was over his fever, and was standing at the window with a basket full of oranges. "Look Mummy — a swallow, so close to winter." His mother hugged her son and smiled.

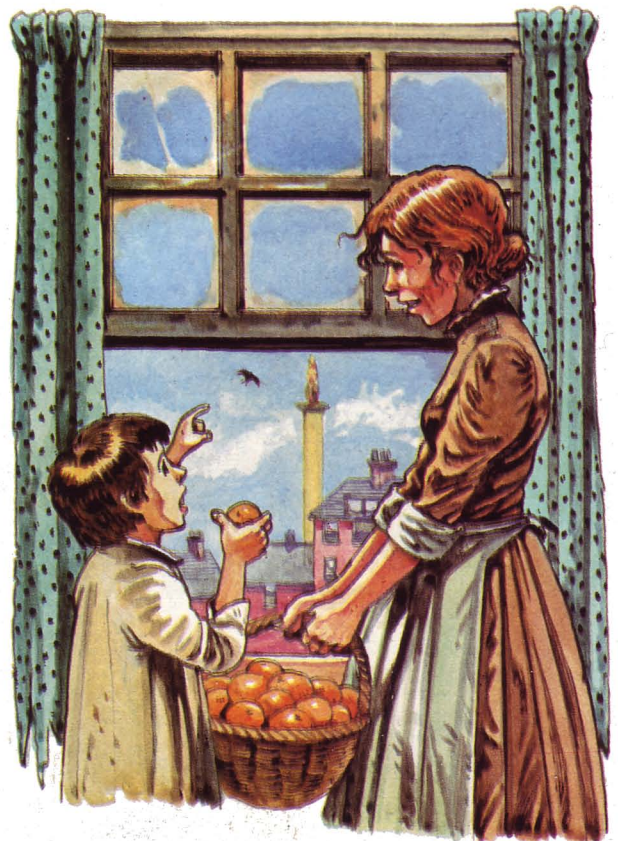
As night drew in, and the stars appeared to guide him, the swallow flew

back to the Happy Prince to say goodbye.

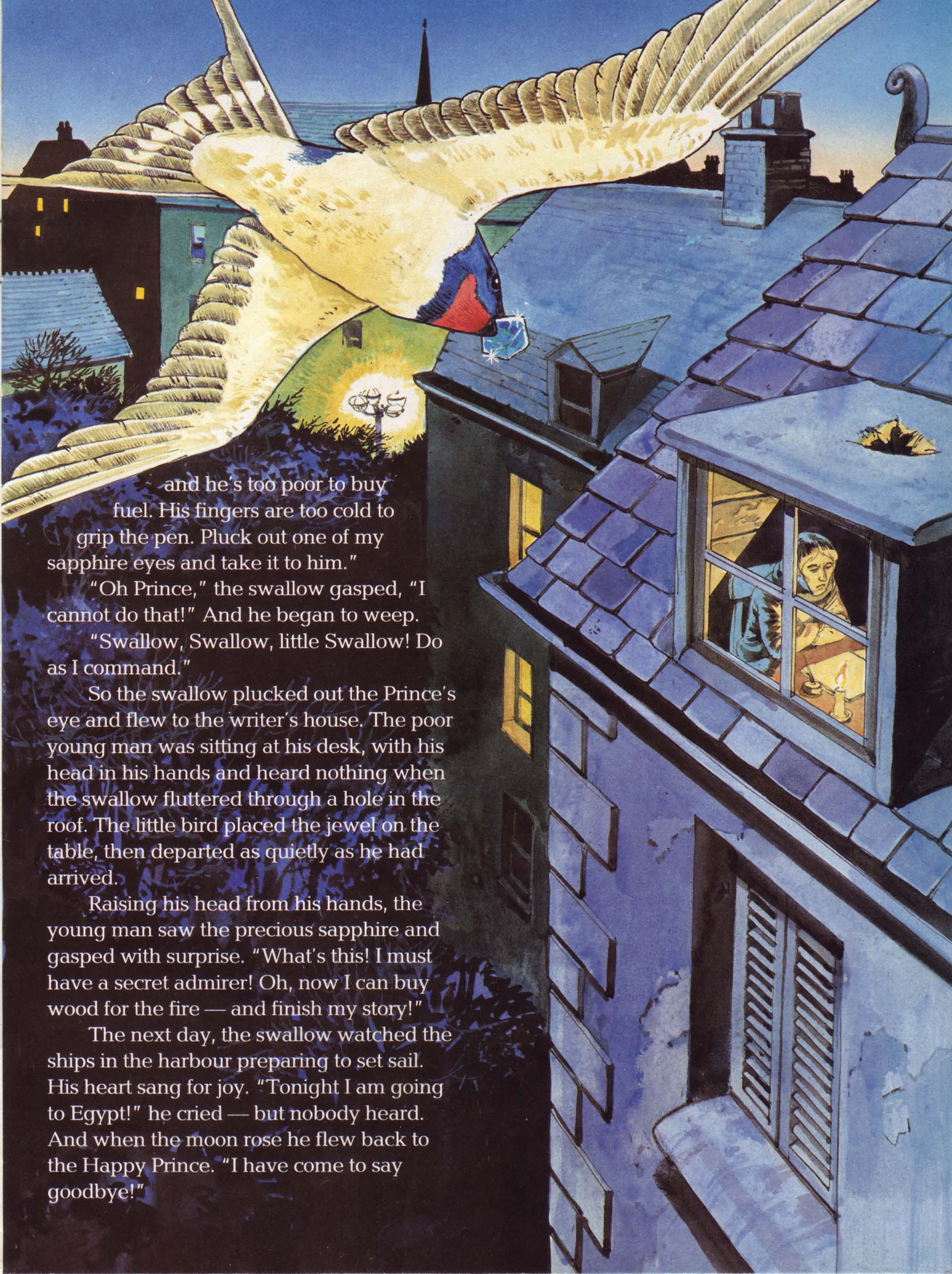
"Can you not stay one more night, little Swallow?"

"My friends are waiting for me, and the winter is almost here. How can I stay?"

"On the dark side of the city, there is a young man hunched over a desk. He's trying to write, but the fire has gone out







and he's too poor to buy fuel. His fingers are too cold to grip the pen. Pluck out one of my sapphire eyes and take it to him."

"Oh Prince," the swallow gasped, "I cannot do that!" And he began to weep.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow! Do as I command."

So the swallow plucked out the Prince's eye and flew to the writer's house. The poor young man was sitting at his desk, with his head in his hands and heard nothing when the swallow fluttered through a hole in the roof. The little bird placed the jewel on the table, then departed as quietly as he had arrived.

Raising his head from his hands, the young man saw the precious sapphire and gasped with surprise. "What's this! I must have a secret admirer! Oh, now I can buy wood for the fire — and finish my story!"

The next day, the swallow watched the ships in the harbour preparing to set sail. His heart sang for joy. "Tonight I am going to Egypt!" he cried — but nobody heard. And when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince. "I have come to say goodbye!"





"What a pretty piece of glass," she said, and ran home laughing.

The swallow felt so warm and happy that he flew back to the Prince and said, "You are blind now. I will stay with you always."

"No, little Swallow," said the poor Prince. "Go away to Egypt."

"I will stay with you always," said the swallow, and slept at the Prince's feet.

All next day he sat on the Prince's shoulder, and told him stories of the strange lands he had seen. The Prince listened and then said, "Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see!"

So the swallow flew over the city and saw the rich people in their beautiful houses, eating and dancing and laughing. Then he flew over the drab streets where the poor people lived, and saw the starving children huddled together for warmth.

"Swallow, little Swallow, stay with me just one more night," said the Prince.

"But it's almost winter, and the snows are coming! I *must* fly to Egypt and join my friends — if I don't go now, there will be nowhere left for me to build my nest!"

The Prince was silent for a moment, then he said, "There is a little match-girl down there in the square. She hasn't sold any matches all day, and when she goes home her father will beat her. She has no stockings or shoes, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye and give it to her!"

"I will stay here with you one more night — but I cannot pluck out your eye! You would be blind."

"Swallow, little Swallow, do as I command."

So the bird plucked out the Prince's other eye, and swooped down to the match-girl. He dropped the shimmering sapphire into her palm and she looked at it with joy.





When he told the Prince what he had seen, the Prince said, "I am covered in fine gold. You must pick it off, leaf by leaf and take it to the poor."

So the swallow picked away the gold, leaf by leaf, until the Happy Prince looked dull and grey. Then he carried it to the poor. As he dropped the gold at the children's feet, the swallow was gladdened to see their faces grow rosier, and hear their happy laughter.

Then the snow fell, soft and heavy on the rooftops. The swallow grew colder and colder and flapped his wings to keep warm. He would not leave the Prince, for he loved him dearly, but he knew he was going to die. He just had the strength to fly up to the Prince's shoulder one last time.

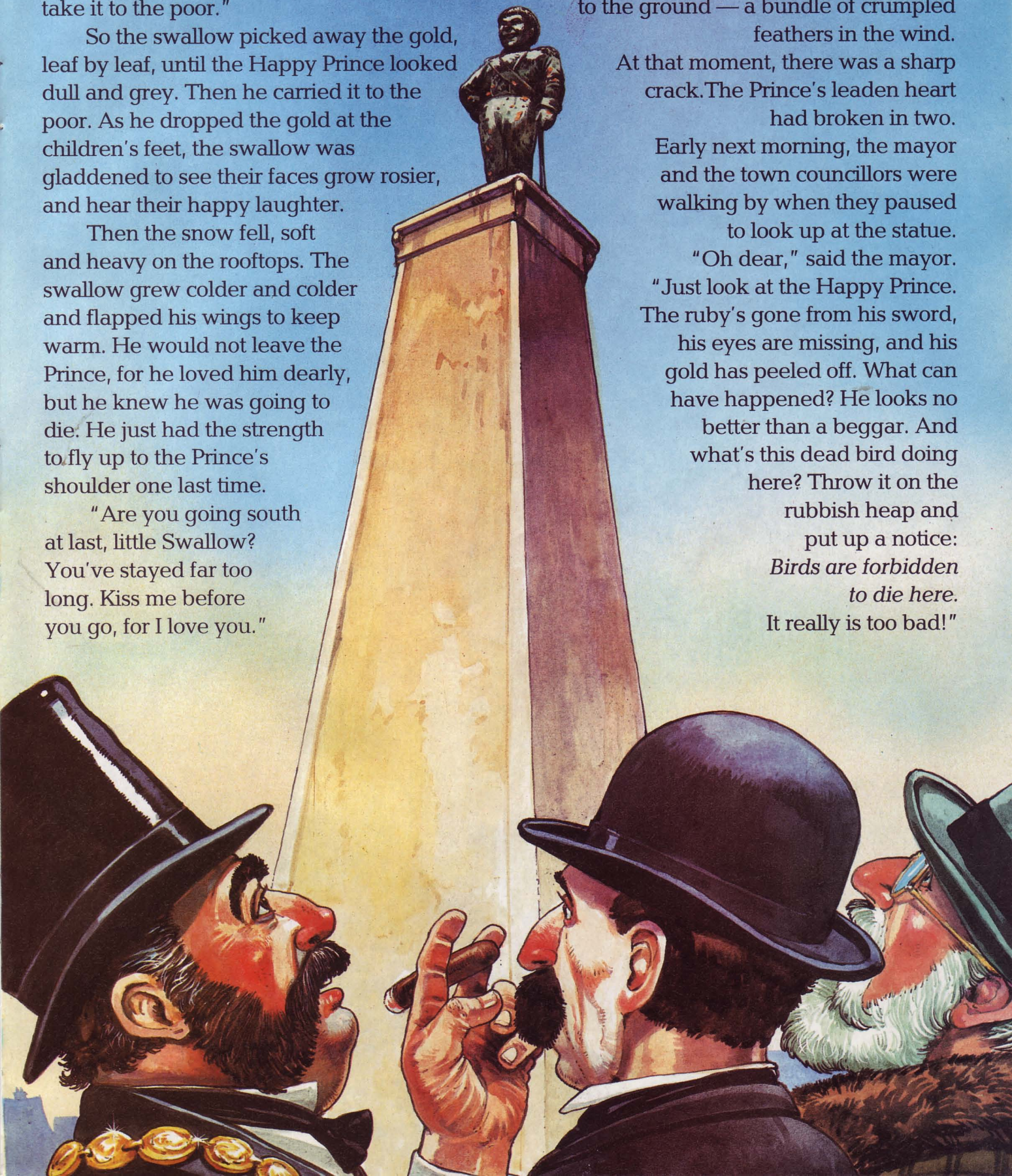
"Are you going south at last, little Swallow? You've stayed far too long. Kiss me before you go, for I love you."

"I cannot fly to Egypt, Prince," said the swallow. "I am going to die." And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips and fell dead to the ground — a bundle of crumpled feathers in the wind.

At that moment, there was a sharp crack. The Prince's leaden heart had broken in two.

Early next morning, the mayor and the town councillors were walking by when they paused to look up at the statue.

"Oh dear," said the mayor. "Just look at the Happy Prince. The ruby's gone from his sword, his eyes are missing, and his gold has peeled off. What can have happened? He looks no better than a beggar. And what's this dead bird doing here? Throw it on the rubbish heap and put up a notice: *Birds are forbidden to die here.* It really is too bad!"



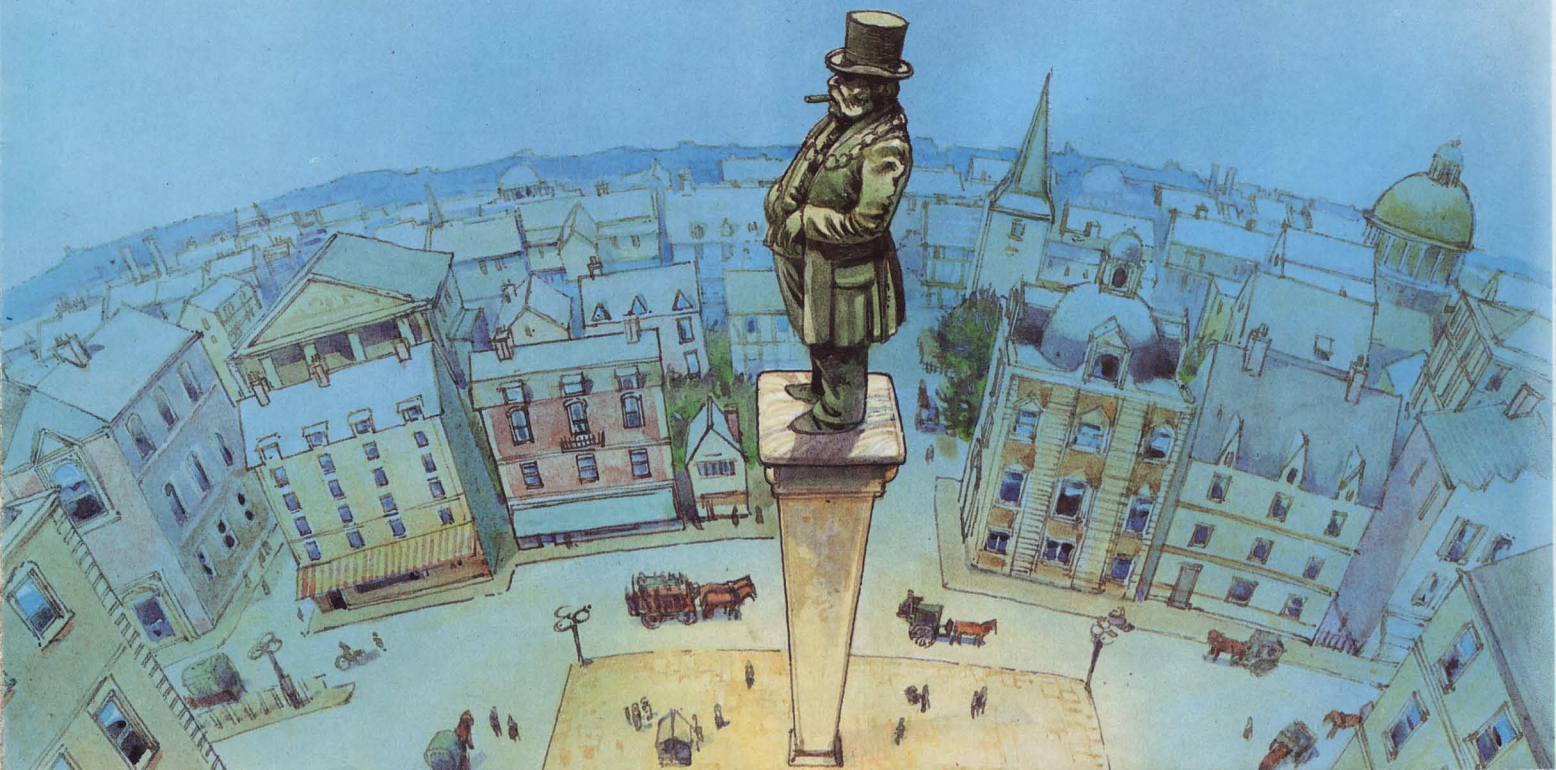


They pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince and melted him down in a furnace — to make a new statue, of the mayor.

But the Prince's leaden heart would not melt in the furnace. "That's strange," said the foreman when he found it, and he tossed it carelessly on the rubbish heap, beside the dead swallow.

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of his angels. And the angel returned with the leaden heart and the dead bird.

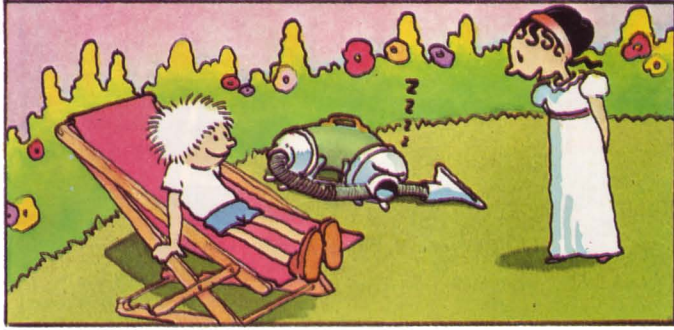
"You have made the right choice," said God. "For in my garden of Paradise, this tiny bird will sing for ever, and the Happy Prince will live in my city of gold."





# ALDO

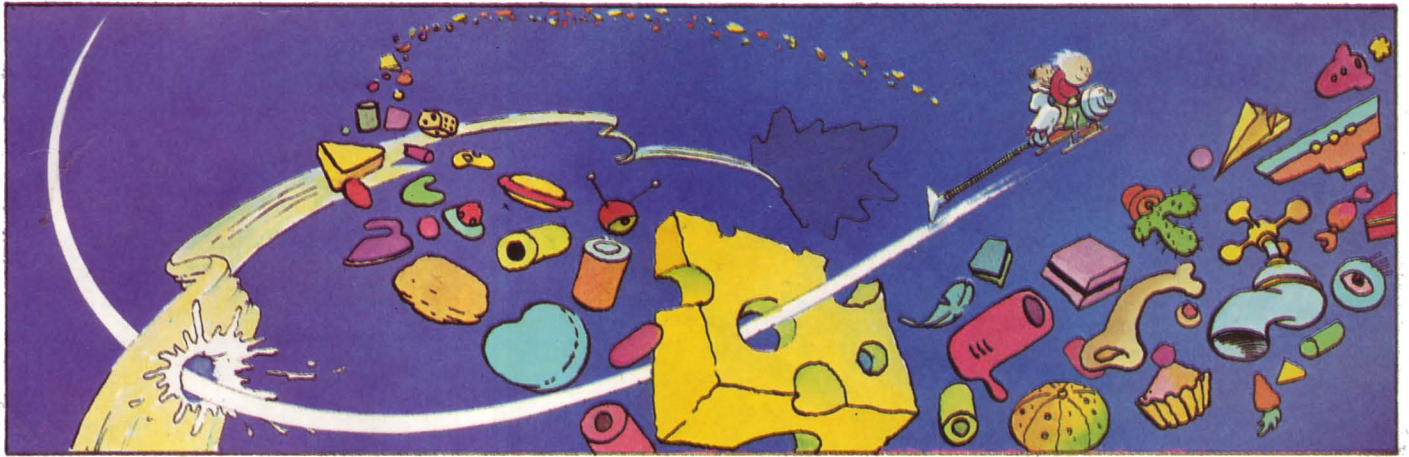
in Arcadia



One summer day the Princess came to see Aldo.  
"It's a great day for a spin, Aldo!"



"Good idea, Princess. Where shall we go?"  
"Oh, make it a mystery tour, please, Aldo."

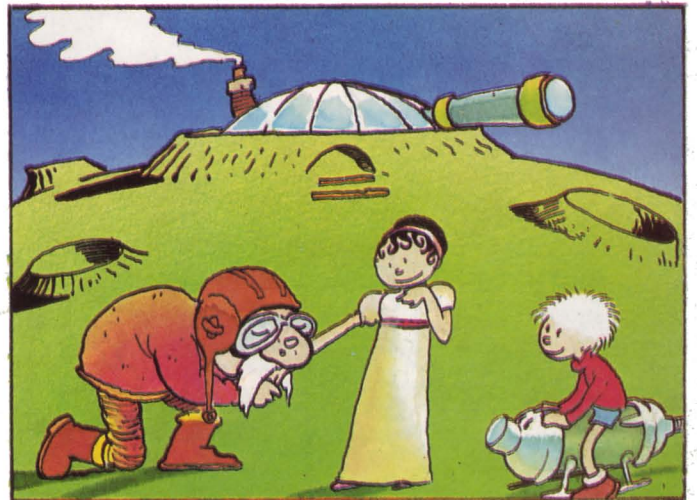


"Well, Princess, what do you think of this?"  
"Super, but I wish I'd brought my umbrella."

"Look at that! It's a giant slice of cheese!"  
"It must have fallen down from the Milky Way."

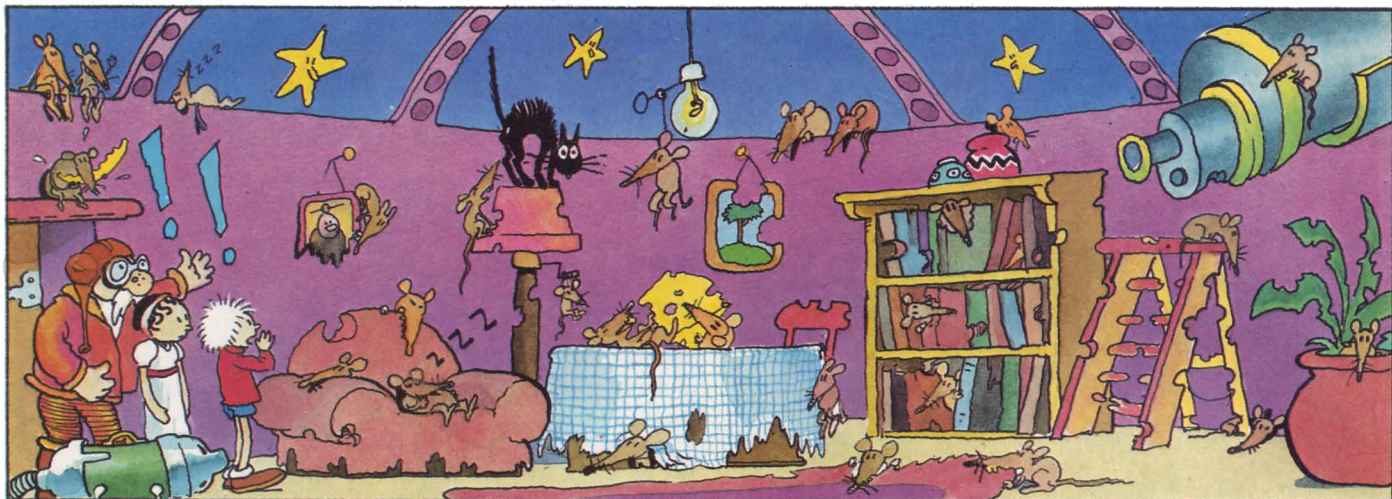


"There's the moon. Is that made of cheese too?"  
"We'll go and see. My friend lives there."



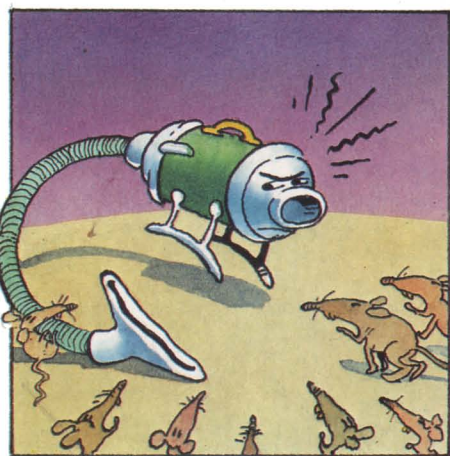
"Princess, meet the man in the moon."  
"Your servant, Ma'am. Please stay for tea."



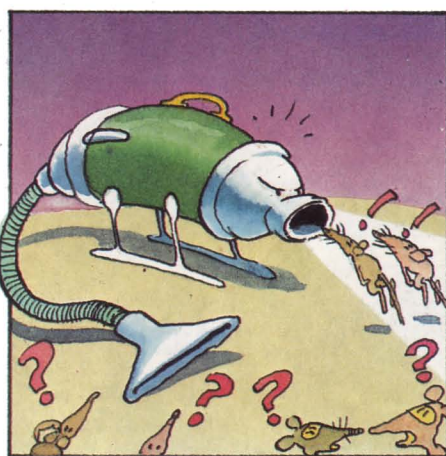


"Gosh! Look at all those mice — they're eating the whole place up."

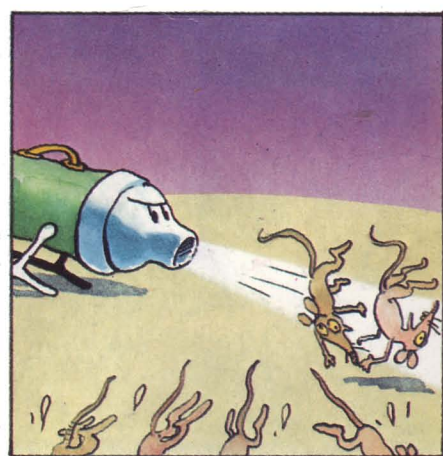
"Yes, they'll eat anything now that the cheese in the moon's run out."



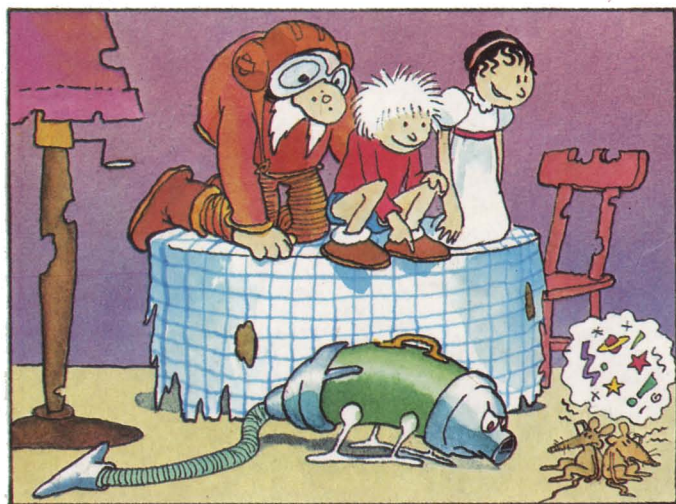
"Mind your tail, vacuum, or you'll lose it!"



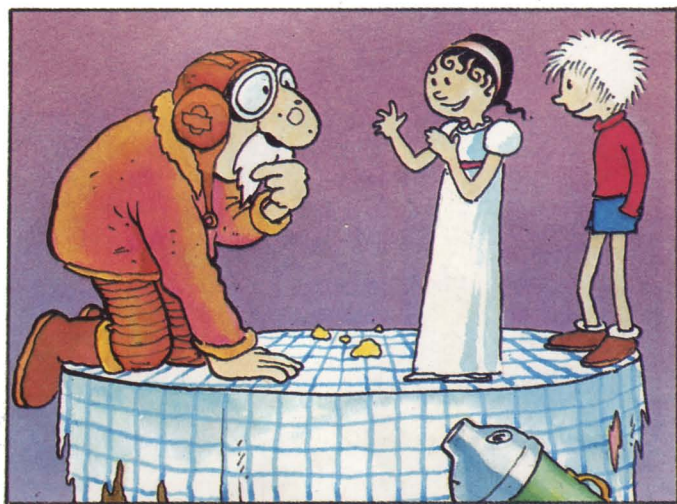
"Oh, look, he's sucked them up. I hope he doesn't hurt them."



"It'll teach them a lesson — they won't bother him again."

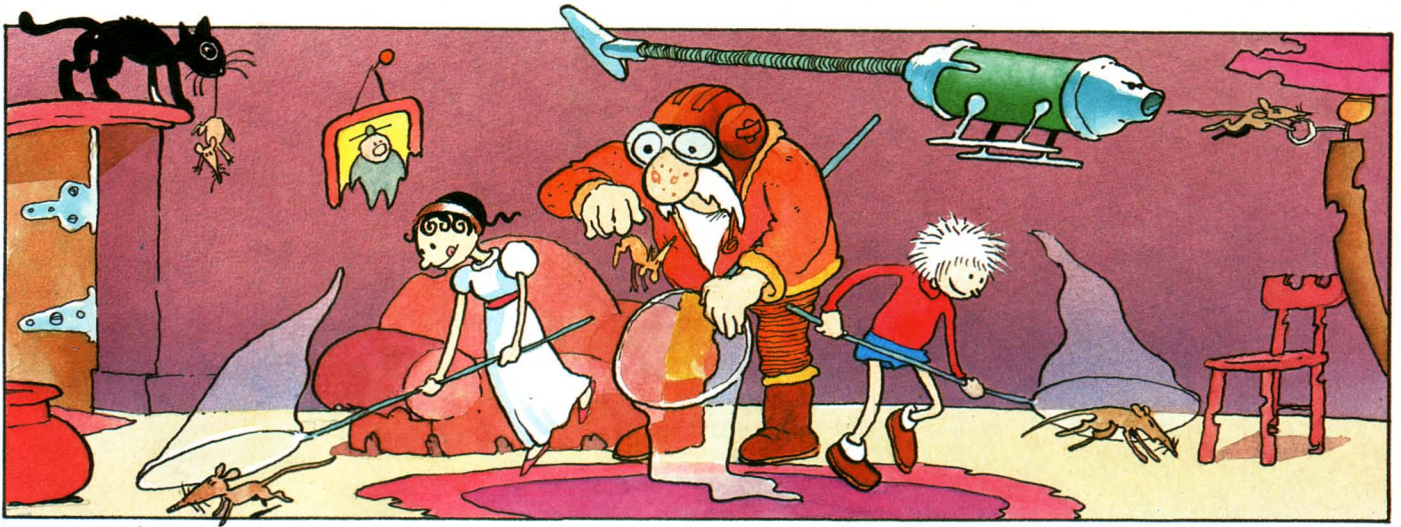


"I say, Aldo, vacuum's just given me a smashing idea."



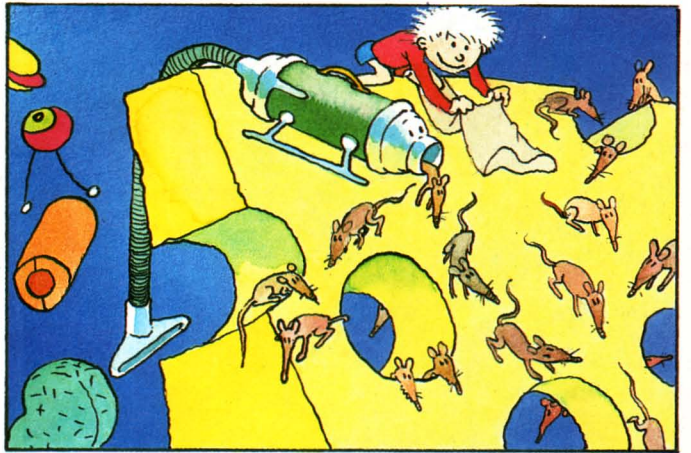
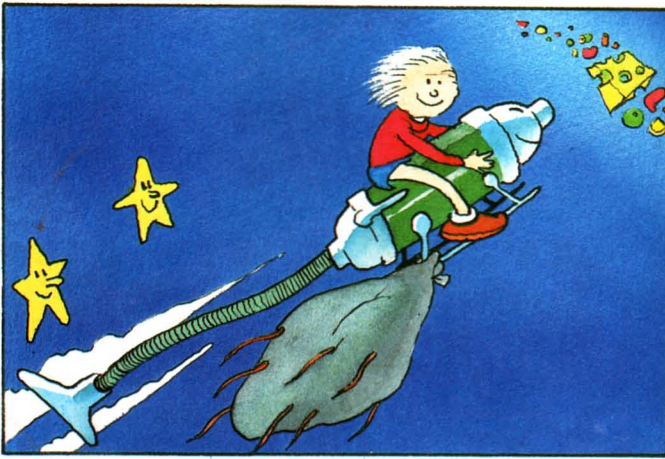
"Remember the asteroid made of cheese? Let's take the mice back there to live!"





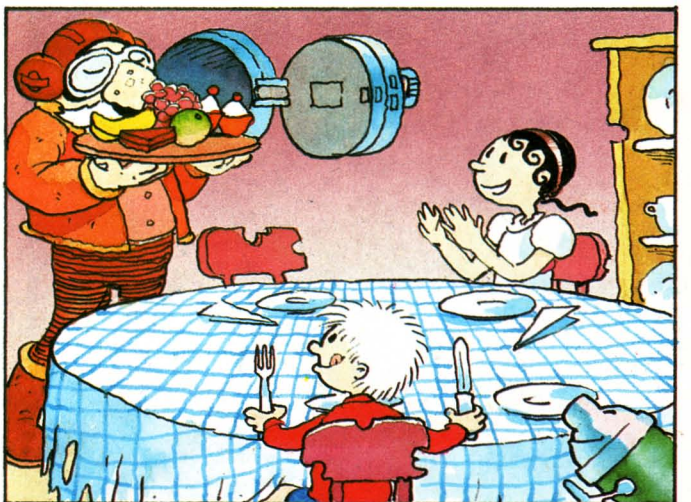
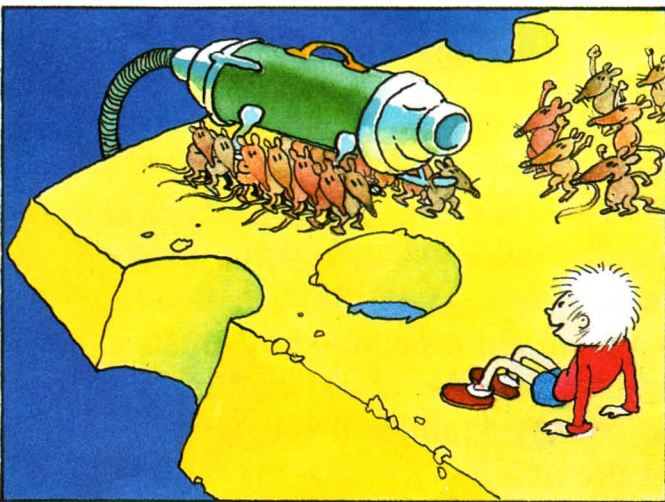
"Got you! Quick, Aldo, there's another one right behind you."

"Whew, that's the lot. Wait here, Princess, we won't be long."



"I hope the mice don't get spacesick, vacuum."  
"Squeak, squeak, help!"

"Well, mice, here you are, tuck in."  
"Squeak, squeak, yum, yum, delicious!"



"Come on, hero, it's time for *our* tea now. So long, mice, don't eat it all at once!"

"Grub up, chaps!" "Oh, isn't this lovely, Aldo. Now, what shall we do tomorrow?"



# Mr. Miacca

Tommy Grimes was sometimes a good boy, and sometimes a bad boy — and when he was a bad boy, he was a very bad boy. Now his mother used to say to him, "Tommy, Tommy, be a good boy, and don't go out of the street, or else Mr Miacca will take you." But still, when he was a bad boy, he would go out of the street and one day, sure enough, he had scarcely got round the corner, when Mr Miacca did catch him and popped him into a bag upside down, and took him off to his house.

When Mr Miacca got Tommy inside, he pulled him out of the bag and sat him down, and felt his arms and legs. "You're rather tough," he said, "but you're all I've got for supper, and you'll not taste bad — boiled. But body o'me, I've forgotten the herbs, and tis bitter you'll taste without herbs. Sally! Here, I say, Sally!" and he called Mrs Miacca.

So Mrs Miacca came out of another room and said, "What d'you want my dear?"

"Oh, here's a little boy for supper," said Mr Miacca, "and I've forgotten the herbs. Mind him, will you, while I go for them?"

"All right, my love," said Mrs Miacca, and off he went.

Then Tommy Grimes said to







Mrs Miacca, "Does Mr Miacca always have little boys for supper?"

"Mostly, my dear," said Mrs Miacca, "if little boys are bad enough, and get in his way."

"And don't you have anything else but boy-meat? No pudding?" asked Tommy.

"Ah, I love pudding," said Mrs Miacca. "But tis not often the likes of me get pudding."

"Why, my mother is making a pudding this very day," said Tommy Grimes, "and I'm sure she'll give you some,

if I ask her. Shall I run and get some?"

"Now, that's a thoughtful boy" said Mrs Miacca, "only don't be long and be sure to be back for supper."

So off Tommy pelted, and right glad he was to get off so cheap. And for many a long day he was as good as good could be, and never went round the corner of the street. But he could not always be good and one day he went round the corner, and as luck would have it, he had scarcely got round it when Mr Miacca grabbed him up, popped him in his bag, and took him home.





When he got him there, Mr Miacca dropped him out and when he saw him, he said, "Ah, you're the youngster that served me and my missus such a shabby trick, leaving us without any supper. Well, you shan't do it again. Here, get under the sofa, and I'll sit on it and watch the pot boil for you."

So poor Tommy Grimes had to creep under the sofa, and Mr Miacca sat on it and waited for the pot to boil. And they waited and they waited, but still the pot did not boil, till at last Mr Miacca got tired of waiting, and he said, "Here, you under there, I'm not going to wait any longer. Put out your leg, and I'll stop you giving us the slip."

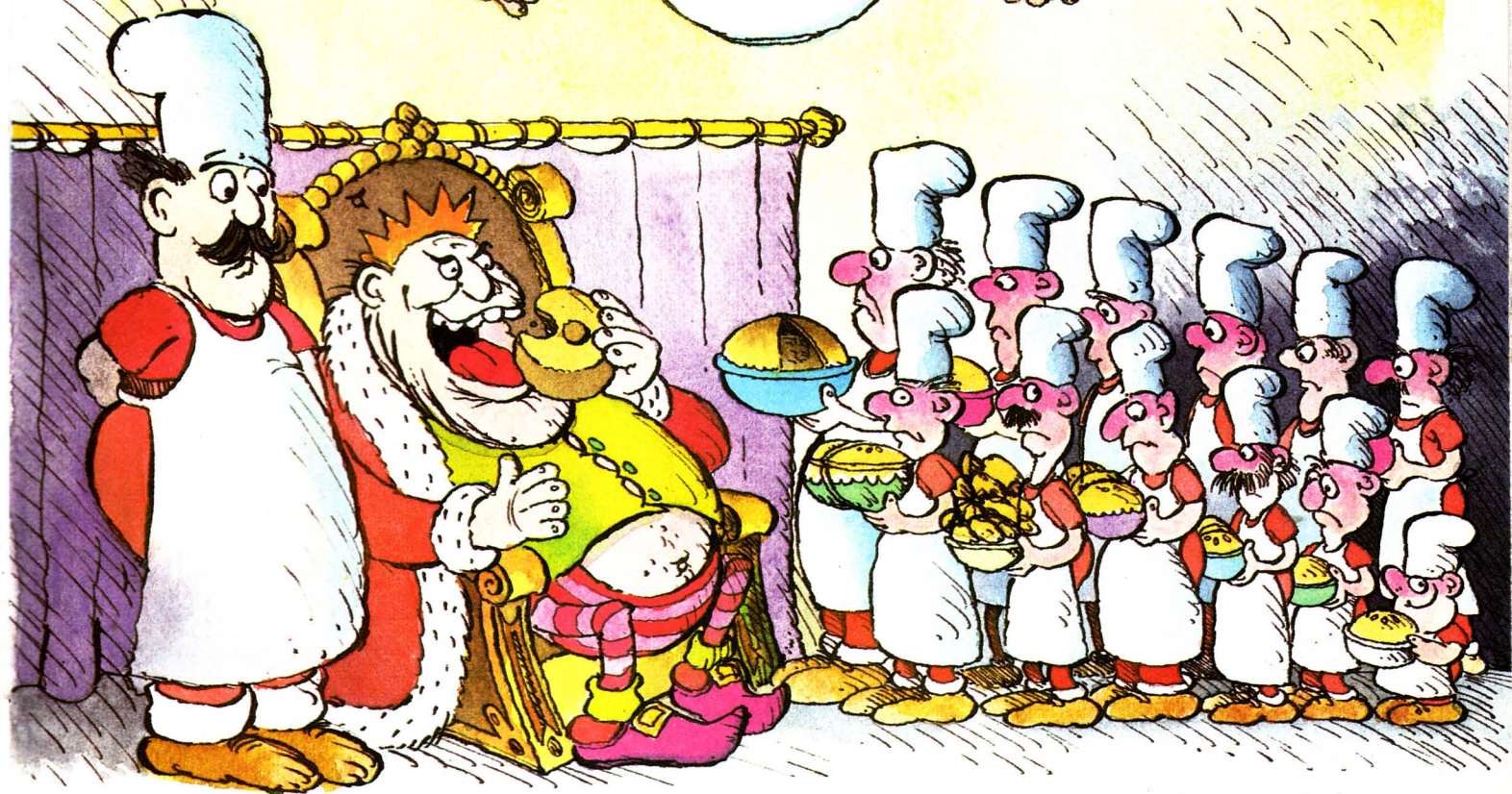
So Tommy put out a leg and Mr Miacca got a chopper, and chopped it off, and popped it in the pot.

Suddenly he called out, "Sally, my dear, Sally!" and nobody answered. So he went into the next room to look out for Mrs Miacca, and while he was there Tommy crept out from under the sofa and ran out of the door. For it was a leg of the sofa that he had put out.

So Tommy Grimes ran all the way home, and he never went round the corner again till he was old enough to go alone.







There once was a king called Guzzle, who was so fat and greedy that he employed thirteen bakers — one master baker named Gruff Puff, and twelve assistant bakers: a true baker's dozen!

Gruff Puff's men were highly skilled at their work. They made pies, cakes and pastries of every description, all of them delicious and a delight to see. And like the food they made, the bakers came in every shape and size. Gruff Puff the master baker was as large as the tallest wedding cake. The next twelve were each a fraction smaller, like a set of pudding basins. And the smallest of all was Wee Puff, who was so tiny that he could be popped inside a sausage roll!

In fact, this sometimes happened, because to tell the truth the other bakers

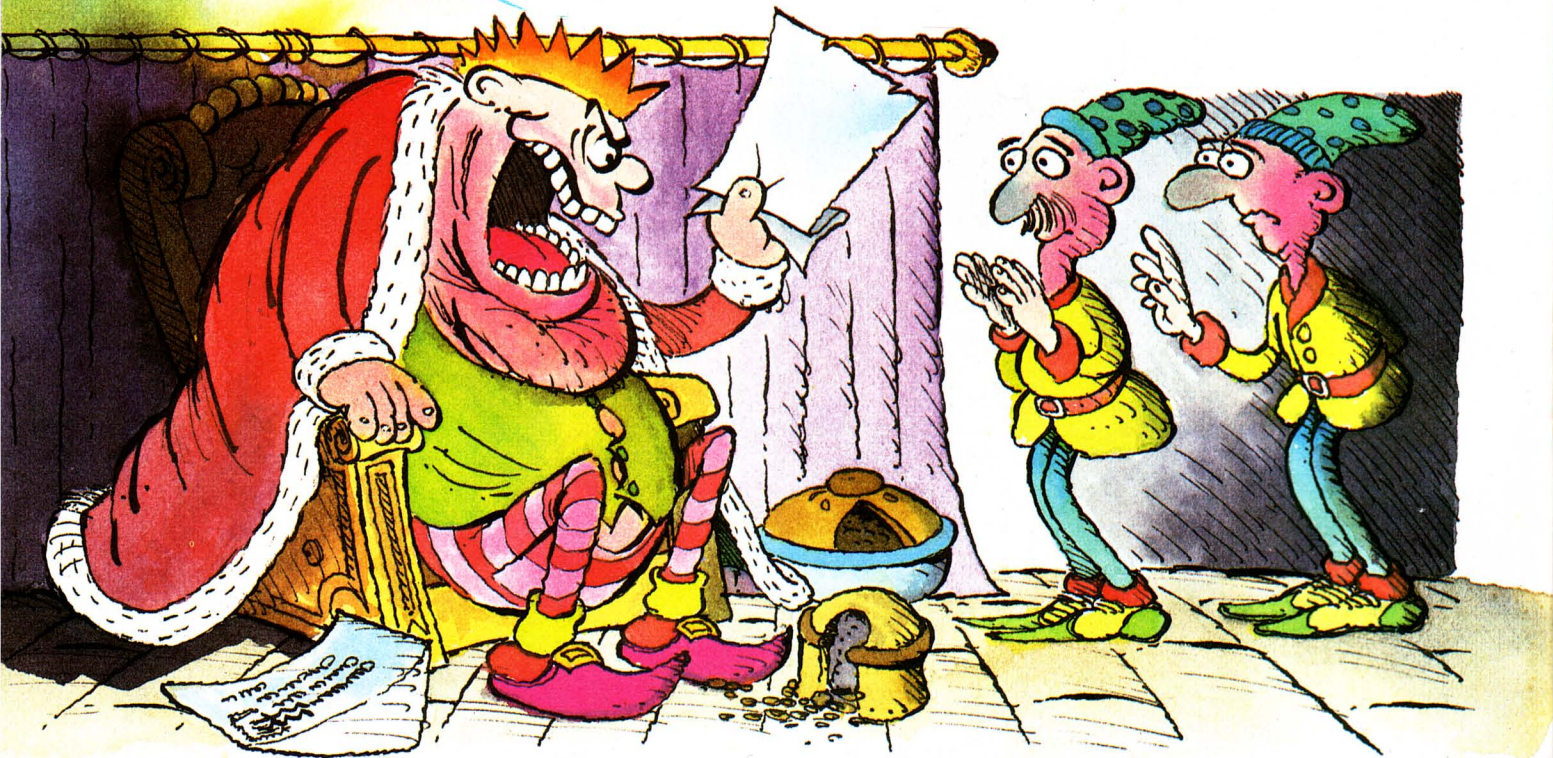
were not very kind to Wee Puff.

"Ho, ho! How tiny you are!" Gruff Puff would jeer when he had a moment to spare from his baking. "One day, mark my words, you will end up in the oven yourself!"

Day in, day out, the bakers made fun of Wee Puff. It made him very unhappy. But it made him determined too. "I'll show them," he promised himself. "Sooner or later I'll prove that I'm as good as any of them!"







One day, King Guzzle received a letter which made him very angry. His red face went purple and he shouted even louder than usual: "Where are my servants?"

Cringe and Crouch came rushing in. "You know my great enemy, King Sourchops?" roared Guzzle.

"Yes, your majesty."

"Do you know what he's done now?"

"No, your majesty."

"Fools! Idiots!" King Guzzle waved the letter under their noses. "Sourchops says his baker Crusty Cake makes the best pies in the world! He says they are better than ours, and he's challenged us to a contest!"

"What sort of a contest, your majesty?" asked Cringe and Crouch.

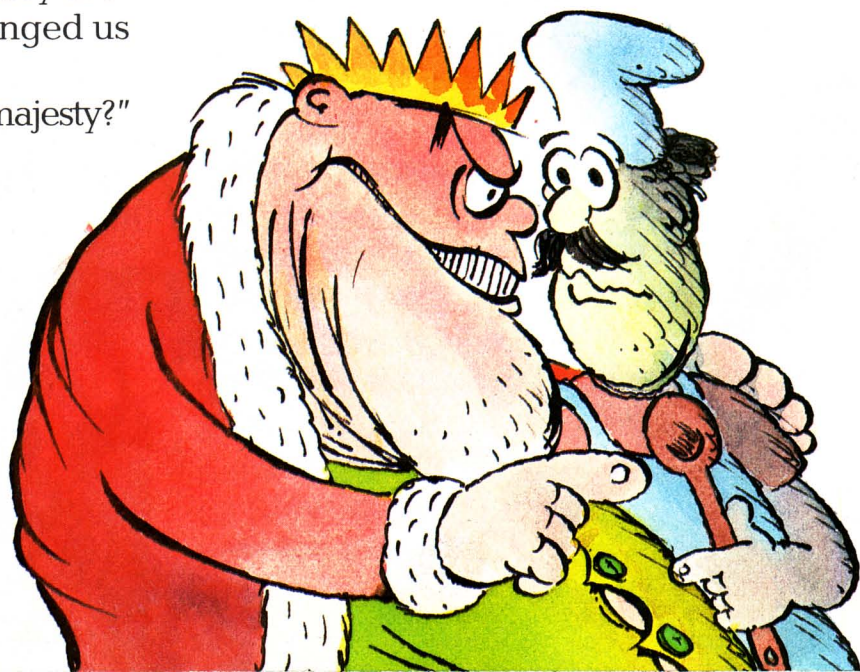
"You clods!" King Guzzle gave his servants such a box on the ears that their heads span right round. "A pie-cooking contest, of course! The winner will be the cook who bakes the most wonderful pie in the world. Now go and fetch Gruff Puff

at once!" So Gruff Puff the master baker was told the news.

"Get to work immediately, Gruff Puff," ordered the King. "Crusty Cake and his men will bring their pies here one week from today."

"A week, your majesty?"

Guzzle put his large, fat hand on the master baker's shoulder. There was a cruel smile on his lips. "A week, Gruff Puff. And if you and your men should lose, I will have your heads cut off. Do you understand?"







Gruff Puff stumbled off to the bakehouse and told his assistant bakers the terrible news. They were crestfallen! Poor Wee Puff was the most worried of all, but as usual no-one cared about him!

Soon the bakehouse was rocking to the clatter of spoons, the bang of plates and the thump of rolling-pins on pastry. The great oven flared and glowed all day and all night. Some of the bakers made pies shaped like castles. Some made them look like animals, some like ships. Only

Wee Puff made an ordinary little round pie, set in an ordinary little white dish. Gruff Puff would have been furious if he had seen it — but he was far too busy to notice.

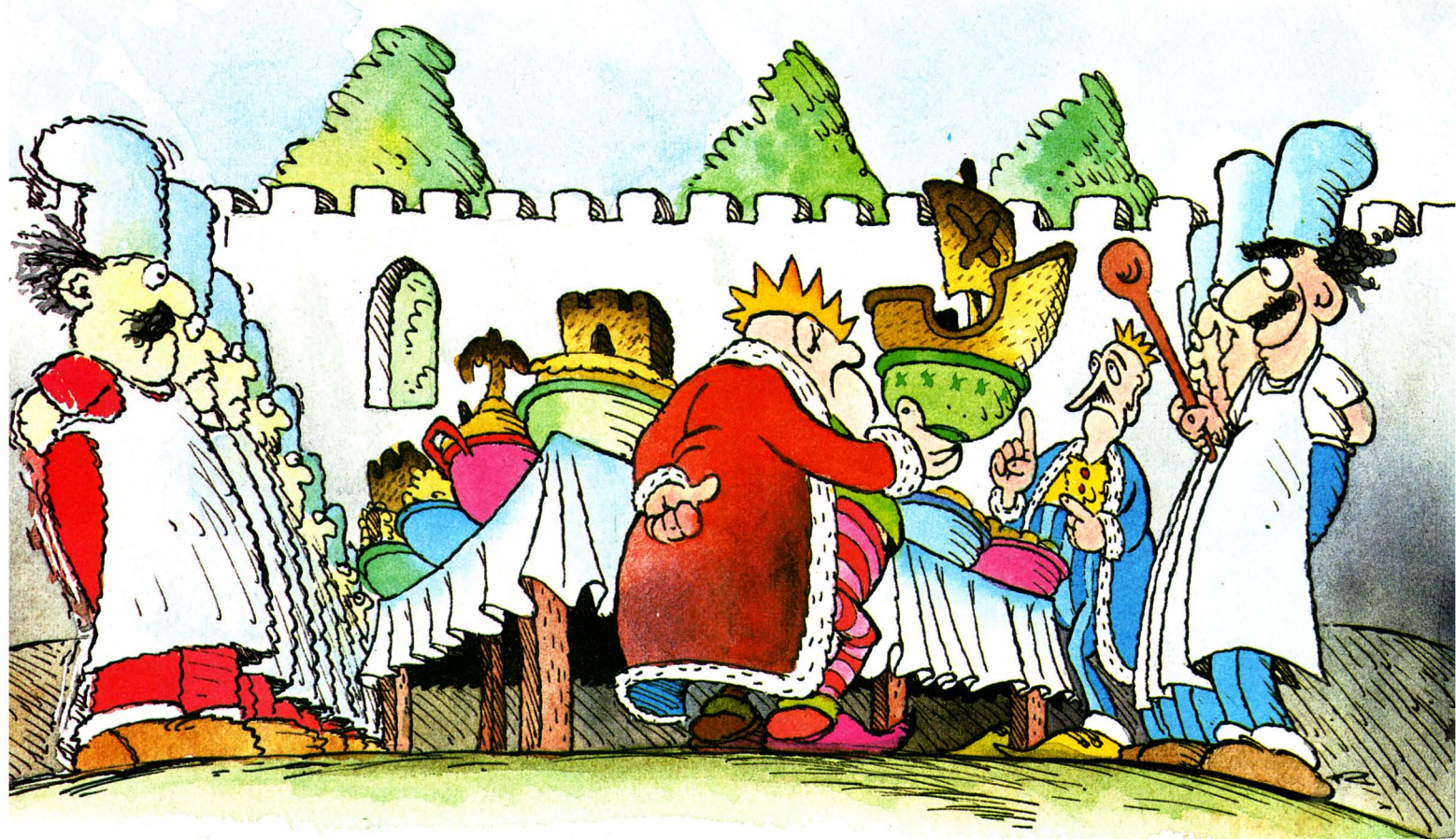
At last the great day came, and King Sourchops and his bakers arrived in a vast, covered wagon. They unloaded their wonderful pies on to a long table, which stretched all down one side of the courtyard.

It was an extraordinary sight! There were fish pies, meat pies, vegetable pies and fruit pies. There were pies shaped like palaces, and pies shaped like dragons, pies shaped like coaches and pies shaped like thrones. King Sourchops and Crusty Cake walked up and down, smiling smugly.

King Guzzle watched his rivals in fury from a window in the palace. He ground his teeth and his face went purple. He glared down at the table on the other side of the courtyard, where Gruff Puff and his men were setting out their pies. The bakers were trembling so much that they nearly dropped the dishes! Hardnose, the King's Executioner, was standing nearby, sharpening his axe.







Trumpets sounded. King Guzzle waddled into the square and bowed to King Sourchops. Sourchops bowed too, but he curled his lip and sneered.

Then the two kings walked first to one table and then to the other, tasting each pie in turn.

The crowd fell silent. Gruff Puff and his bakers stood shivering in their shoes. Cringe and Crouch peeped from behind a pillar. Scrape, scrape, scrape, went Hardnose, sharpening his axe.

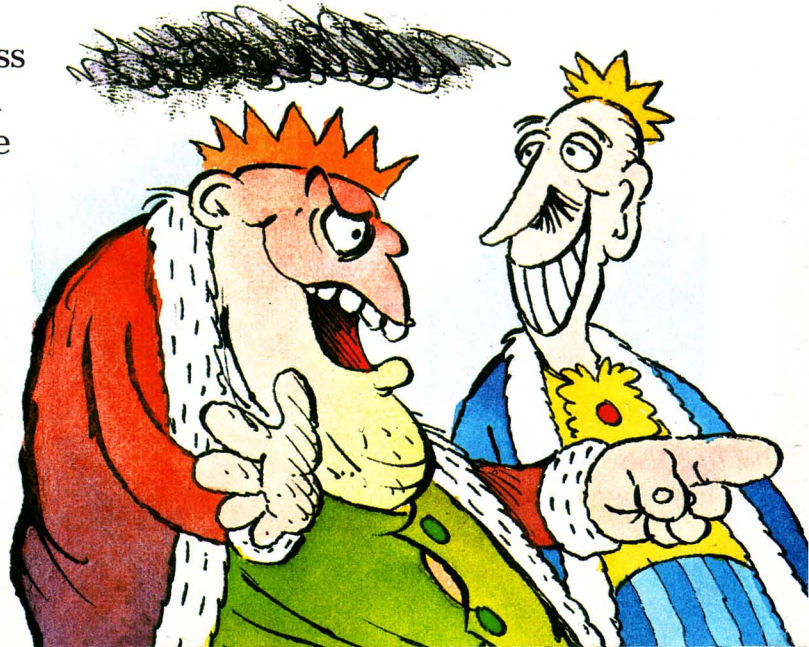
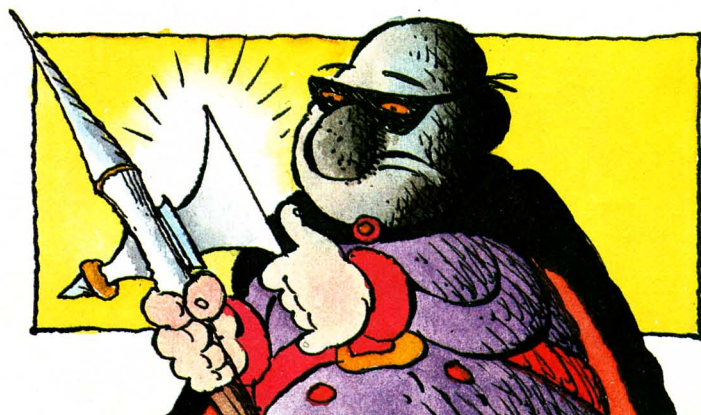
Slowly, very slowly, Sourchops began to smile and a frown spread across Guzzle's face. There was no doubt at all that Crusty Cake's bakers had made the most wonderful pies!

Gruff Puff's heart sank to his boots. So did the hearts of his bakers. They looked fearfully at Hardnose, who was running a grimy thumb along the blade of his axe, testing the sharp edge.

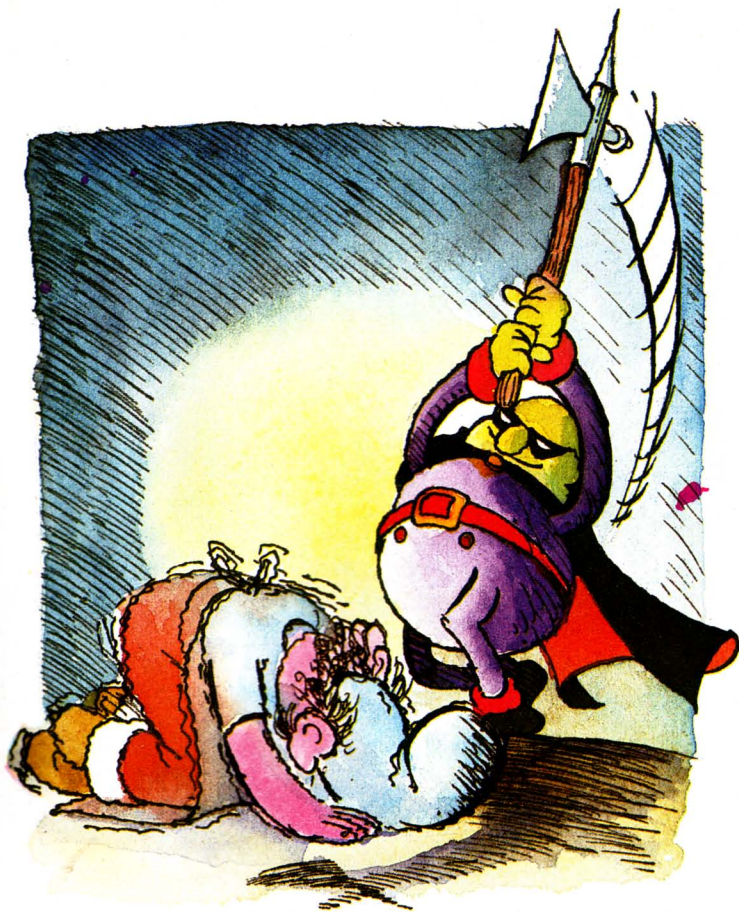
"You win, Sourchops," Guzzle said grimly. "But before you leave, I have something to show you. The execution of my entire staff of bakers!" Sourchops sniggered. "Well, if you insist . . ."

"You can be first, Gruff Puff!"

Poor Gruff Puff! The fat master baker

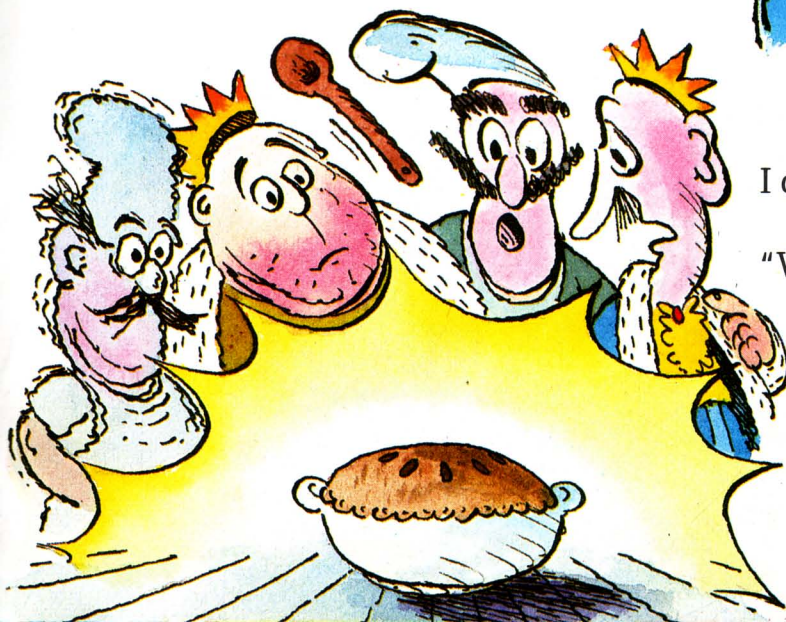






knelt down and closed his eyes. Hardnose raised the axe. But at that moment, a strange, squeaking noise came from the table where King Guzzle's men had laid out their pies. It came, not from a large pie shaped like a castle, or an animal, or a ship, but from an ordinary little round pie set in an ordinary little white dish.

"Wait a minute," said the pie. "Crusty Cake hasn't won yet. I am the most wonderful pie — because I can talk!"



"Oooh!" went the crowd.  
 "Oh ho!" went Guzzle and Gruff Puff.  
 "Aaah!" went Crusty Cake.  
 "Bah!" went King Sourchops. And Hardnose the executioner just stood there looking sick!

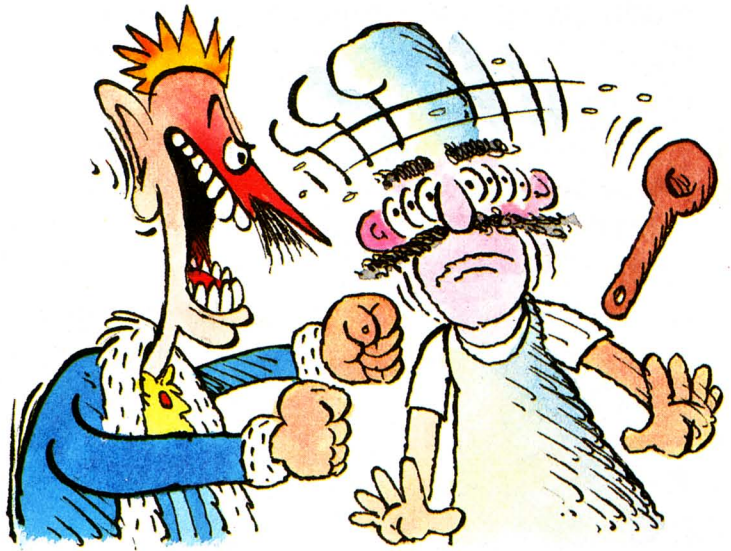
The ordinary little pie chattered on until King Guzzle recovered from his amazement and said, in his proudest manner: "Tell me, my dear Sourchops, can any of *your* men make a talking pie?"

Sourchops' thin face grew thinner than ever. He turned to Crusty Cake.

"Can we make a talking pie?" he asked, through gritted teeth.

"I beg your pardon," mumbled Crusty Cake.

"CAN WE MAKE A TALKING PIE?"



"Well . . . er . . . we can't . . . um . . . I don't know if . . ."

"Don't know!" shrieked Sourchops. "Well you ought to know!" And he gave his master baker the hardest box on the ears ever seen in King Guzzle's palace. The crowd roared with delight, and Guzzle laughed so much that he nearly fell over backwards into the pies.



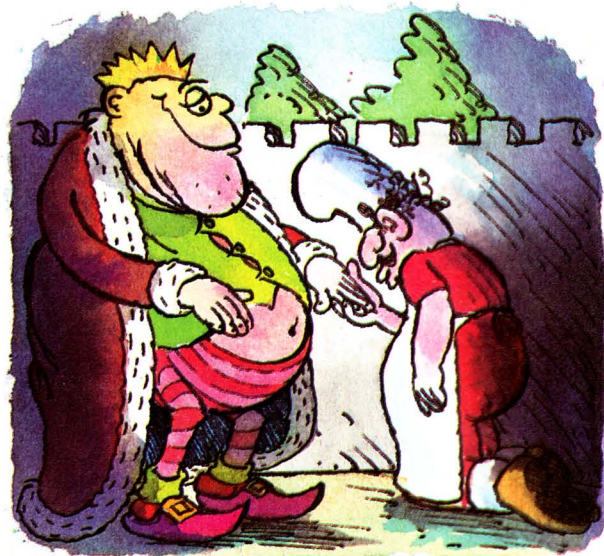
Sourchops and his bakers packed their covered wagon and went off in disgrace. Then King Guzzle allowed Gruff Puff to kiss his hand, as a special mark of favour.

"Well done, Gruff Puff! Well done. Now tell me, which of your bakers made the talking pie? He also must be allowed to kiss my hand!"

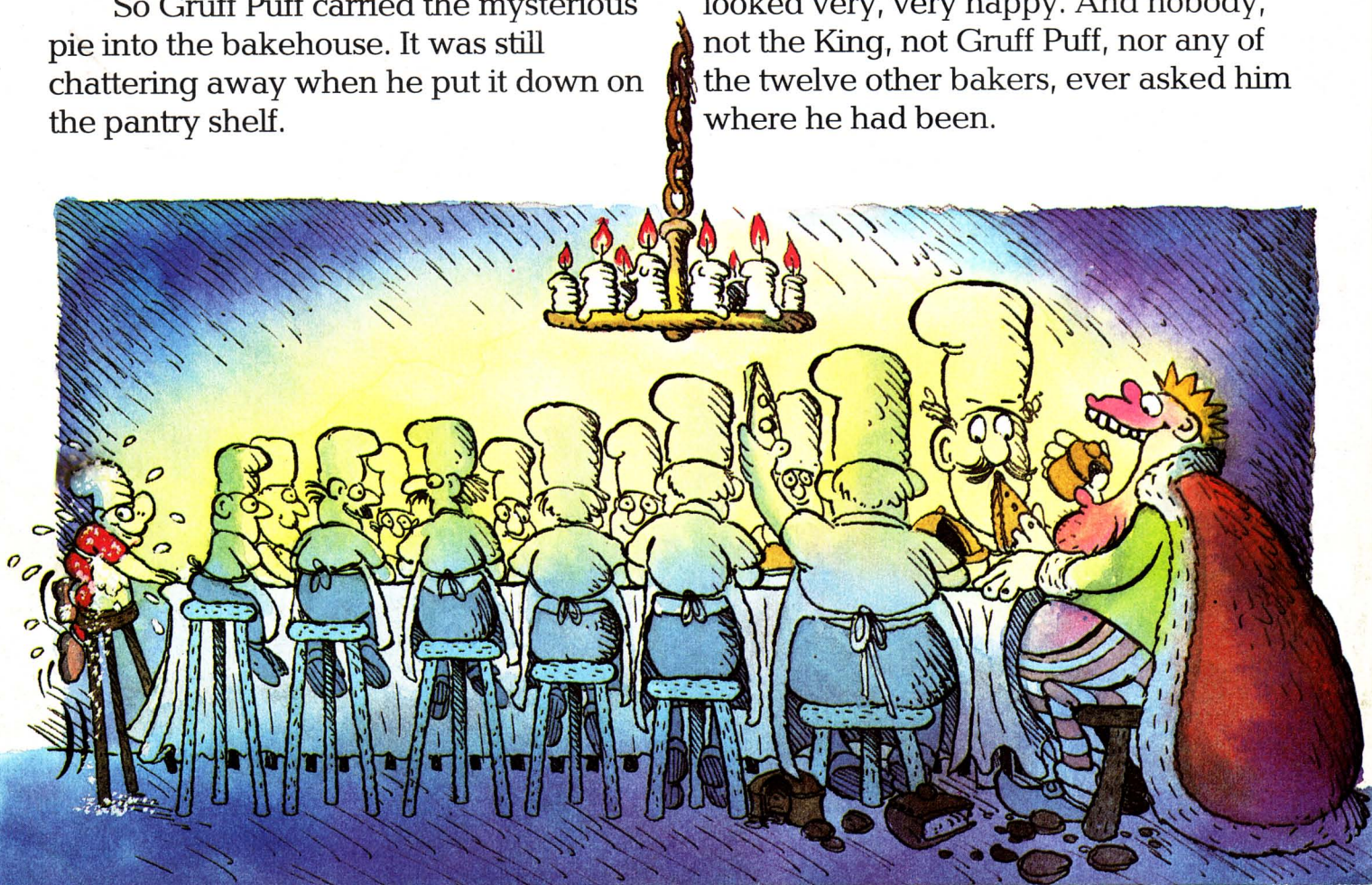
"I'm afraid I don't know, your majesty," gulped Gruff Puff. And he looked round to see eleven assistant bakers all shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders.

"It's a miracle!" exclaimed Guzzle. "Still never mind, never mind! Let us sit down right away and enjoy this magnificent feast. But first take the talking pie inside, and keep it in a safe place. You never know when it will come in handy!"

So Gruff Puff carried the mysterious pie into the bakehouse. It was still chattering away when he put it down on the pantry shelf.



All that evening, the bakers sat and feasted with their king. They enjoyed themselves so much that no-one noticed when Wee Puff came in late and scrambled on to his chair at the far end of the table. His hair was full of flour, and his coat was dripping with gravy, but he looked very, very happy. And nobody, not the King, not Gruff Puff, nor any of the twelve other bakers, ever asked him where he had been.





# STOLEN THUNDER

Thor, God of Thunder, woke up in Valhalla. It was a beautiful morning, and Thor was full of life. "Today I shall hammer on the mountains until the whole world shakes to the sound of my thunder! The noise will echo down the fjords and shatter icebergs in the Northern Sea." And he sprang out of bed. "Now where did I put that hammer?"

But Thor's magic hammer — the thunderbolt — was nowhere to be seen. He looked under his bed. He lifted up his clothes — the thunder clouds — which were scattered around his bedroom. He emptied his cavernous cupboards. He opened his door and his voice boomed through the great hall of Valhalla, "Where's my hammer?"

In the end his friend Odin had to come and help him look — and realised that Thor's hammer had been *stolen*.


"But who would dare to steal from Valhalla?" roared Odin, King of the Gods.

"Who but the Giants?" said Loki, God of Mischief.

So Odin comforted Thor, and tried to calm him down, while Loki borrowed the flying cloak from Queen Freya, wife of Odin. And Loki flew down to the Realm of Giants.





An illustration of Loki, a man with long red hair and a brown tunic with a feathered cape, kneeling on a grassy hill and gesturing with his hands. He is facing a giant, Din, who has a large, brown, ogre-like face, a long white braid, and a green tunic. Din is sitting on a rock and looking down at Loki. The background shows a cloudy sky and distant hills.

"Yes, I know where Thor's hammer is. It's buried, fifty fathoms deep under the ground. I know, because I put it there myself. And I won't give it back until Queen Freya comes down here to be my bride!" He laughed, opening a mouth as deep, dark and dirty as a cave, with teeth like broken rocks. "And when you send her, tell her to bring her flying cloak and her golden necklace. Haw! Haw!"

Loki kept his temper, and smiled evenly. Then he flew back to Valhalla, and repeated the message to Odin, King of the Gods. "Din

The first person he met there was the giant Din.

"Do you know where Thor's hammer is?" Loki asked.

Din, the biggest and the dirtiest of the giants, grinned from ear to ear. He scratched himself, and a cloud of dust rose up and made him sneeze. But he wiped his nose on his sleeve and went on grinning.

will not give back Thor's hammer unless we give him your wife, Freya, as a bride."

Odin's eyes blazed with anger — grey and wild like the sea, then white and swirling like the sky, then hot and red as fire. "My wife as his bride!"







"Ah," said Loki. "But I have a plan."

Two bright shapes flew down through the clouds, and across a dark landscape to the door of Din the giant. Loki had brought a bride for Din, wrapped in the magic cloak and adorned with the gorgeous golden jewellery of Freya, Queen of the Gods.

Then Din prepared a sumptuous wedding feast. The tables groaned under the weight of food and the barrels of red wine. All the giants were there (though none of them had washed specially) and their scrawny dog slunk under the tables, scrounging any food that was dropped. Din watched with delight as his bride sat down to eat.

First she ate a side of roast beef, then a shoulder of pork, then a broiled

swan — then she picked her teeth with a bladebone. And she drank so much wine that Din had to send out for more.

"She's got quite an appetite, this Freya of yours," said Din. "How does she keep her figure?"

"That's easily explained," Loki replied smoothly. "She hasn't eaten all day because she's so thrilled at the thought of marrying you."

Din blushed. "Well, well. So she wants me that much, does she?"

"You've never seen a woman more excited! I almost think she must have been secretly in love with you for years and years."

Din jumped to his feet. "For that she deserves a kiss! Come here, my little sugar-mouse!"





"Why is she looking at me like that?" he whispered to Loki.

"Can't you tell?" answered Loki. "She couldn't sleep a wink last night, for the thought of you. And now she sees you, she can't take her eyes off you!"

"Oh," said Din nervously. "Good." As the banquet came to an end, Loki coughed politely and remarked, "I don't like to mention it on

But his bride looked at Din with eyes as blue and wild as the sea, which then turned as white and swirling as the sky, then as hot and red as fire.

Din gulped and stepped back, rather alarmed.

so happy an occasion, but do you think we could have Thor's hammer back now? That was the agreement."

And Din clapped Loki on the back and roared, "Of course, Loki, old friend. A deal's a deal — I get the woman, you







get the hammer! Servants! Bring me Thor's thunderbolt right away."

The doors opened wide and a steely grey hammer was carried in. Three giants staggered and grunted under its weight. Then Din laid the hammer down in front of Loki.

"How I wish Odin was here!" Din gloated, edging towards his bride. "I'd give anything to see his face when Freya sits on my lap and starts kissing me . . ."

"You have your wish!" bellowed the bride. And there, throwing off his disguise, stood Odin, King of the Gods! He snatched up the hammer. "And here — you shall have your kisses!" He swung the massive hammer in the air, and smashed it down

three times on Din's fat head. Then Odin swept through the hall, felling giants on every side. Within seconds, all lay sprawling on the ground — and the dog gobbled up the rest of the banquet.

Odin and Loki flew back to Valhalla, where Freya and Thor were waiting.

"Thank heavens," she said. "I don't know why you're wearing that dress, dear, but I'm glad to see you've got Thor's hammer back. He's been impossible since it was stolen."

With the hammer back in his hands, Thor was happy again. He whooped with joy! And then he beat on the mountain tops until the whole world shook, and the thunder echoed down the fjords and shattered icebergs in the Northern Sea.





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