

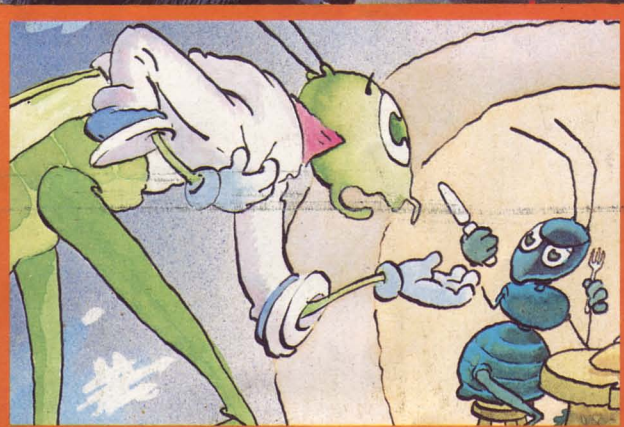
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PART 4

STORY

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Teller



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STORY Teller

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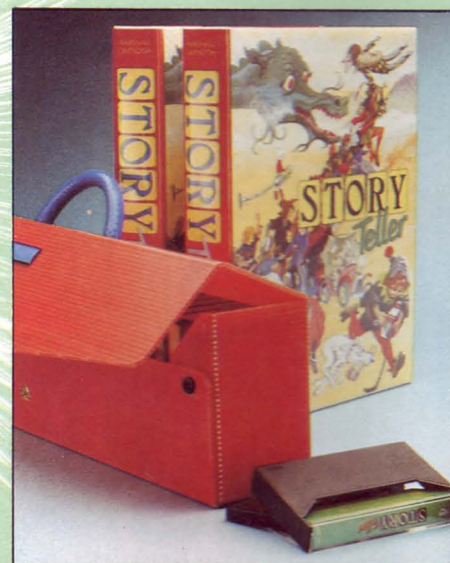
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BACK NUMBERS:

Copies of any part of STORY TELLER can be obtained at the regular cover price from the following address: UK & Rep. of Ireland: Storyteller Back Numbers, Dept AG, Marshall Cavendish Services Ltd, Newtown Road, Hove, Sussex, BN3 7DN.

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Typeset by ABM Typographics Limited, Hull.
Colour work by Melbourne Graphics, London.
Printed in England by Varnicoat, Pershore.

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NARANA'S STRANGE JOURNEY

It was a bitterly cold but sunny day when Narana set off on her long walk back to her village. She had been staying with her sister in the hills, and now she was returning to her husband and children on the coast.

With her snow-shoes, shaped like tennis rackets, Narana was able to walk easily across the soft snow. But suddenly the weather changed. The wind grew stronger and stronger, whipping up the snow, and poor Narana could hardly see where she was going. Soon a blizzard was raging, and the wind was so fierce that it knocked her off her feet. Over and over she rolled, blown by the storm, until she found herself wedged between what seemed to be two great trees.

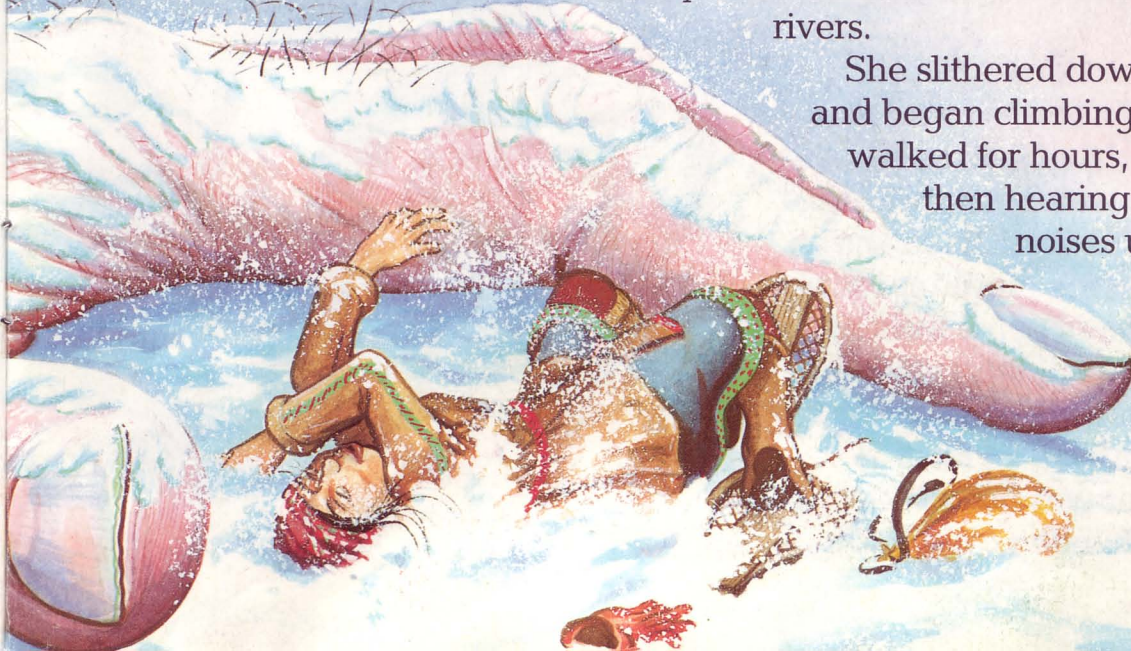
At last the gale died down and the skies began to clear. But Narana had no idea where she was. The hills ahead lay



in four curved ridges—like the fingers of a huge hand. Everywhere there were spiky brown bushes. As night fell she reached the top of the highest ridge and found a hollow where she could shelter from the wind. Tired and miserable, she curled up and went to sleep.

In the morning Narana walked along the ridge. On one side the slopes fell away, covered in strange bushes. On the other, the hillside was marked with enormous blue streaks, like underground rivers.

She slithered down between them and began climbing the other side. She walked for hours, every now and then hearing gurgling, bubbling noises under her feet.



"What a strange place this is," she thought. "I've never been anywhere like it before. I wonder where I am."

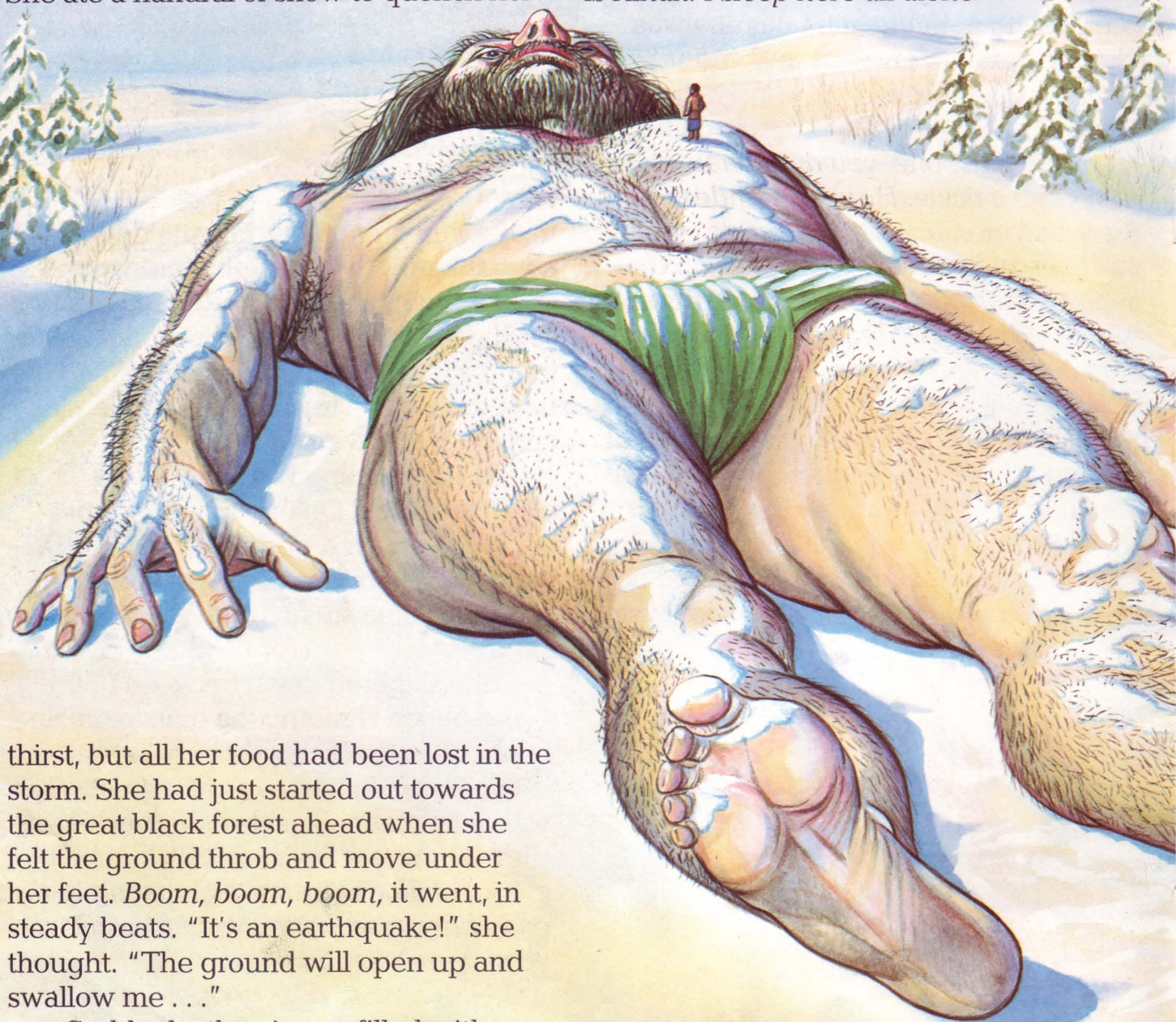
Then she came to a great flat plateau, and in the distance she could see a vast black forest that seemed to touch the sky. Narana trudged towards it, but before she could get there darkness came again and she found a large wood where she could shelter for the night.

Narana woke tired and very hungry. She ate a handful of snow to quench her

you and what are you doing here, where nobody ever comes?"

At first Narana could not speak. She looked all around but could see no-one. "I—I am Narana," she said at last to the skies, her voice trembling with fear. "I was on my journey home when I lost my way in the storm. Who are you . . . what are you? A mountain ghost?"

"No, I am a giant!" rumbled the voice as the earth shook again. *"My name is Kinak. I sleep here all alone*



thirst, but all her food had been lost in the storm. She had just started out towards the great black forest ahead when she felt the ground throb and move under her feet. *Boom, boom, boom*, it went, in steady beats. "It's an earthquake!" she thought. "The ground will open up and swallow me . . ."

Suddenly, the air was filled with noise like crackling thunder: "Who are

on the great plain so that I can stretch without crushing the villages or the trees."

"But where are you?" asked Narana, still looking around.

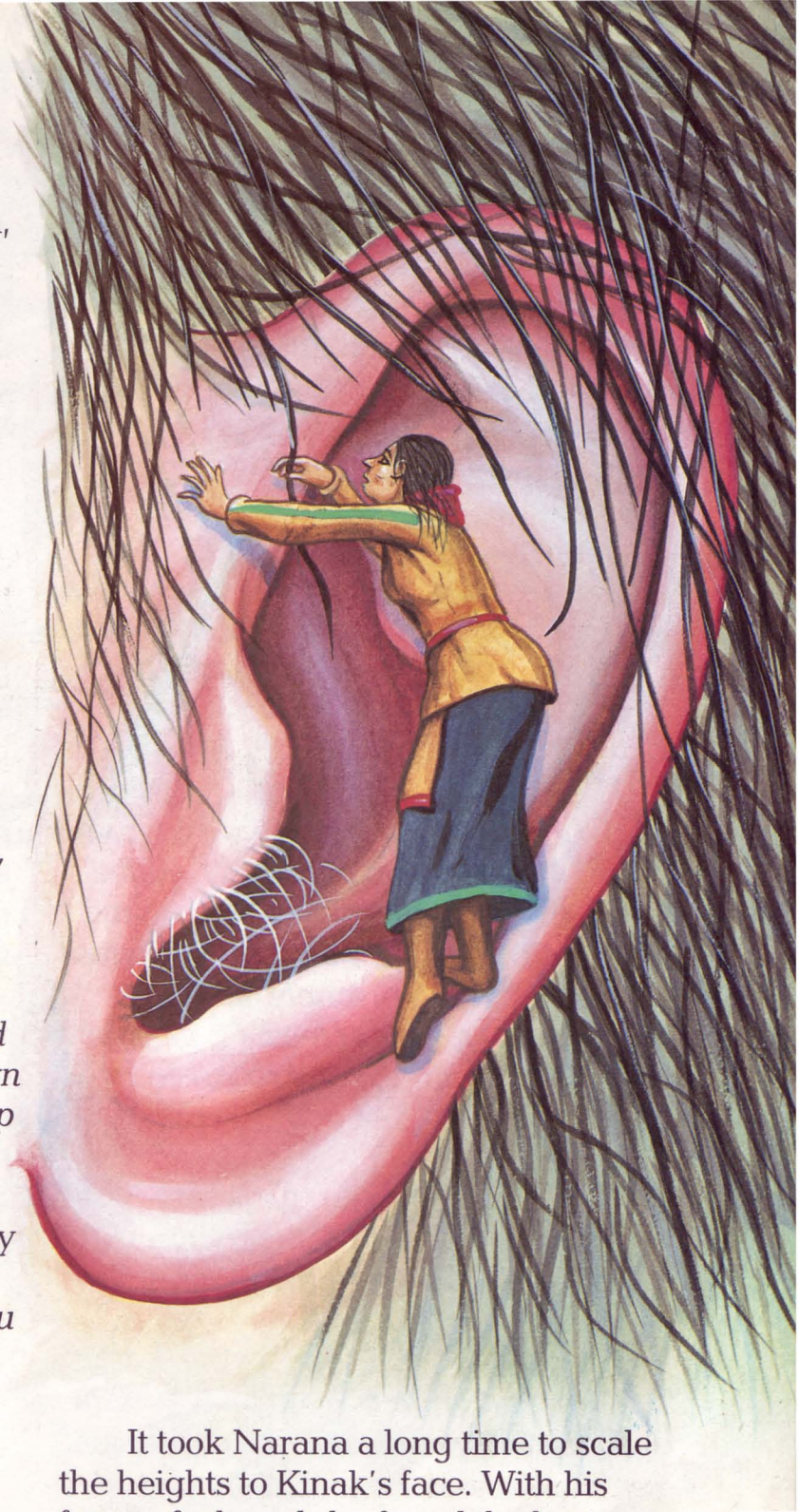
"I'm underneath you, Narana. You have been climbing over me for two days. You started on my left hand and now you are over my heart. I expect you can feel it."

"Yes. Yes I can. Oh, I do hope I haven't hurt you."

The earth shook again, even more violently than before, and Narana was thrown over and over . . . as the giant's laughter rang out for miles across the plains.

"No, little one, you didn't hurt me. Not even a tickle. Herds of reindeer can be a nuisance, but one human is nothing."

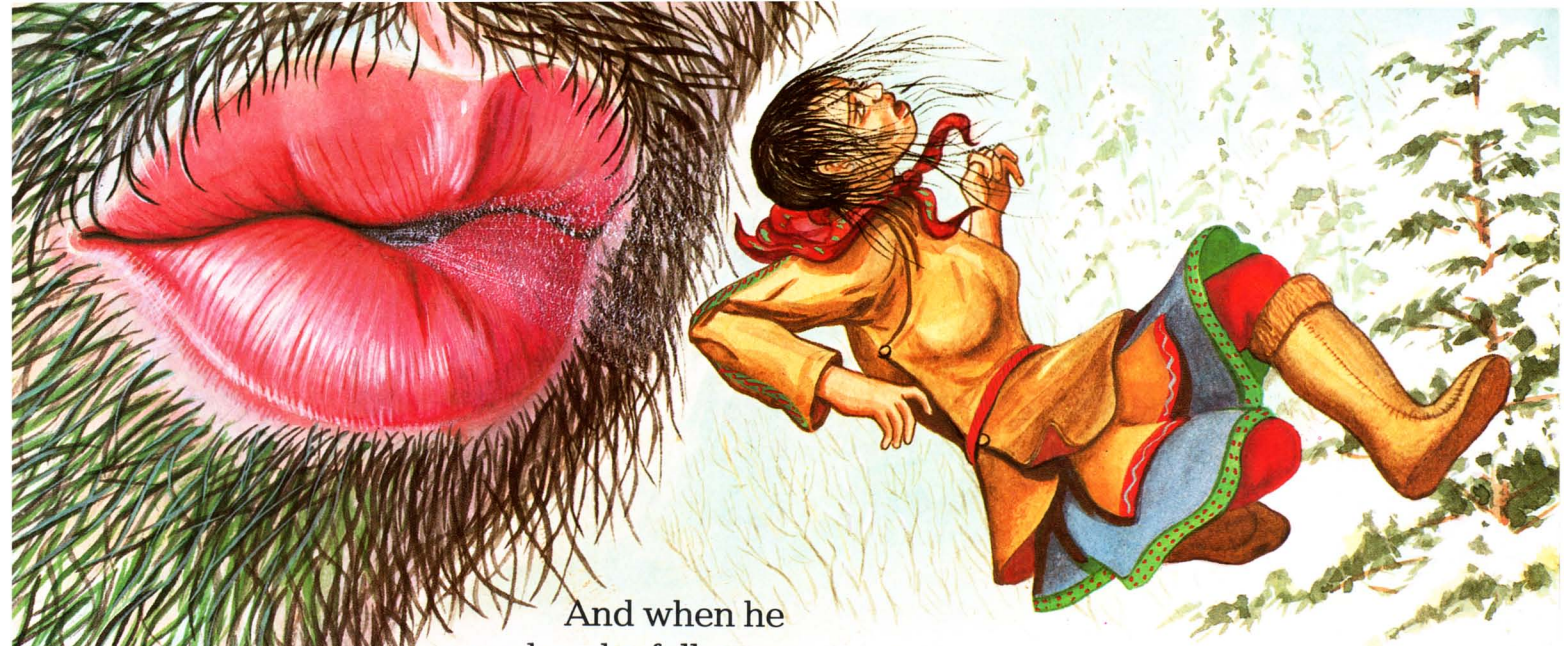
The giant let out a chuckle, and Narana was once again dumped in the snow. "I first saw you when you were curled up asleep between my thumb and finger. Then you clambered down my hand, over my wrist, up my arm and on to my stomach. That's my beard ahead of you. But I can't see you very well now without lifting my head and looking down my nose. Can you climb up on to my face?"



It took Narana a long time to scale the heights to Kinak's face. With his forest of a beard she found the best way was to go along the side of his neck and climb up his ear.

"You had better go right along to the end of my nose. I don't want to swallow you by mistake."

Narana asked the giant if he could whisper because she found his voice frightening.



And when he spoke, she fell over.

But she still had to yell, even from his nose. "I'll have to go soon, Kinak," she said.

"I'm two days late and my family will be worried to death about me."

"Well, if you have to. But I shall miss you Narana. It's very lonely out here some times. Oh well, at least I'll be able to have a good stretch and roll over. I've not moved since I first noticed you for fear of crushing you."

"Thank you, Kinak, that's very kind," said Narana. "But where am I?"

"It doesn't really matter. Where do you live?"

"The village of Tivnu, by the sea."

"Oh, not far then. I can blow you there."

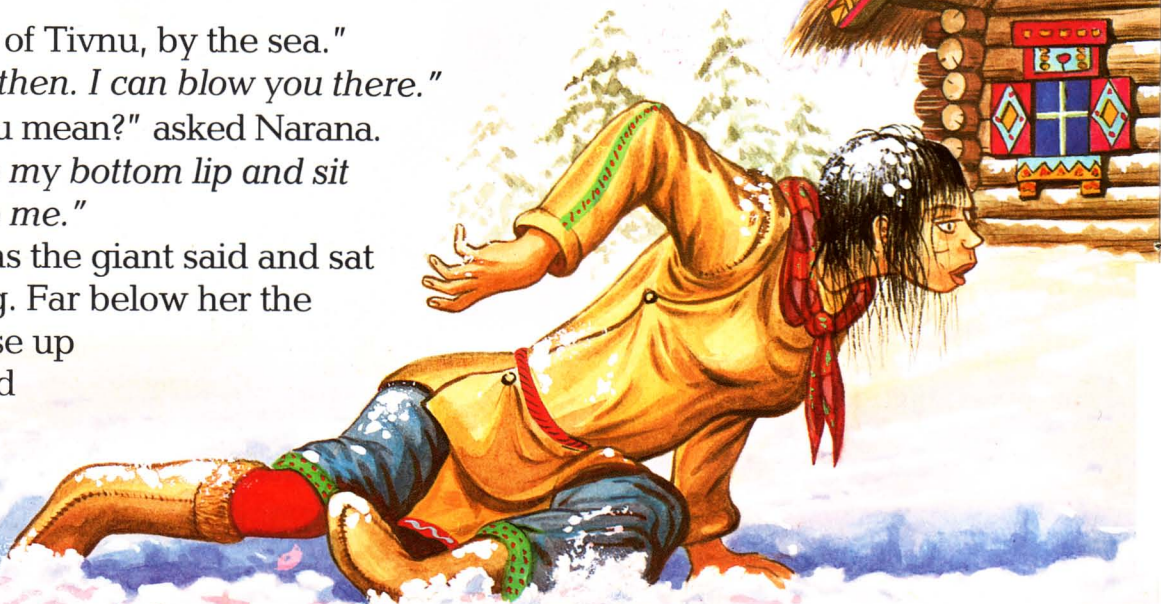
"What do you mean?" asked Narana.

"Climb on to my bottom lip and sit with your back to me."

Narana did as the giant said and sat on his lip, waiting. Far below her the earth began to rise up as Kinak breathed

in deeply. He puffed gently and she flew off his lip and shot through the air, twisting and rolling and turning like a whirlwind. A few seconds later she landed in a deep drift of snow, safe and sound. She stood up, brushed the loose snow off her — and there, just a short walk away, was the village of Tivnu.

As Narana began to walk joyously towards the houses, she thought she heard the faint sound of rumbling in the distance, like short rolls of thunder. It was almost like the sound of a giant, sobbing.





Rhubarb Ted

I knew a funny little man
His name was Rhubarb Ted;
They called him that because he wore
Rhubarb on his head.

I'd grown so used to this strange sight,
The cause I did not seek;
But then one day to my surprise,
I saw he wore a leek.

I asked him if he'd please explain,
And let me know the reason;
He said, 'I'm wearing leek because
Rhubarb's out of season!'



GOBBOLINO

The Kitchen Cat



he said. "Perhaps you're hungry. Would you like a saucer of milk in my kitchen?" And he opened the door to the cottage.

Gobbolino was amazed. In the kitchen stood Rosabel, the serving girl who had looked after the Lady Alice in the forest tower. She was the woodcutter's grand-daughter!

"Rosabel! What are you doing here?" shouted the old man. "Why aren't you with your lady at the tower?"

Before she could answer the girl saw Gobbolino in the doorway.

One dark night, little Gobbolino was trotting along a lonely forest road. Then he saw an old woodcutter walking along in front of him, carrying a heavy load of wood. Feeling lost and lonely, Gobbolino was delighted to see someone, so he followed silently at the woodcutter's heels until they reached a tiny cottage. The old man threw down his bundle of sticks, and only then did he see Gobbolino.

"Well! Where did you come from?"



"Send him away!" she screamed.
"Send him away! He's a witch's cat! He made the tower fall down and he woke up the dragon. Turn him out, grandfather!"

But the woodcutter picked up Gobbolino and spoke to him gently. "Is this true? Are you a witch's cat?"

Gobbolino just gave a long, sad *meee-oww*.

The old man could not believe that such a pretty little cat could do anything really bad, and he refused to turn Gobbolino out. And although at first Rosabel sulked and refused to talk to Gobbolino, after a few days she began to like him.

Every morning Gobbolino sat comfortably in a chair while Rosabel washed the dishes and cooked the dinner. And every evening she would ask her grandfather for money to buy a new dress. She begged and pleaded so much that at last he gave her a silver coin. Now Rosabel had to wait for the pedlar-woman to pass the cottage, selling her silks and satins.

A few days later the pedlar-woman arrived. "Come in by my fire and have a cup of tea and show me your wares," said Rosabel. The woman laughed as she tied up her donkey outside the cottage door. There was something about her cackle that made Gobbolino prick up his ears and look at her closely. Only witches laugh like that and have such long, crooked noses, he thought.

At last Rosabel chose a material the colour of pure gold, so bright that it glittered in the sunlight.



"How much would it cost to make a dress of this beautiful gold satin?" she asked.

"Two silver pieces!" said the witch.

"But I only have one!"

"What! Do you think I can give it away?" And the witch began gathering up her things.

"Stop! Wait! Won't you take something in exchange?" begged the girl. "Won't you take my silver piece *and* one of these cakes. Or my silk bedspread? Or our cuckoo clock?"





was very bad-tempered. But then she suddenly changed. She poured Gobbolino out a saucer of cream and whispered, "Beautiful Gobbolino. Look at this. It's my best velvet bag. Wouldn't it make a handsome bed for you?"

"How kind," thought Gobbolino. "How wrong of me to think that she was bad-tempered!" And he hopped inside the bag at once. The moment he was inside Rosabel drew the strings tight so that he could not get out.

"Ha! Ha! Now I can have my gold dress. I'll tell grandfather you ran away." And she hurried through the forest with the velvet bag until she reached the hut.

The old woman was just packing up to leave. "Ho! Ho!" she croaked. "I knew you would come." She took the bag and hung it on the donkey's saddle, and gave Rosabel the gold satin in exchange for Gobbolino and the silver coin.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the old woman. "I eat wild berries and I sleep in ditches and I tell the time by the sun and the moon. Don't offer me cakes or bedspreads or clocks! But there is just one thing I will take in exchange, my dear. Give me that handsome cat and the silver piece and you can have the satin."

"But the cat belongs to my grandfather!" said Rosabel.

"He would never forgive me if I gave away Gobbolino."

"Hmm, well, never mind. I will be at the wooden hut on the edge of the forest for three days if you change your mind."

For the next two days, Rosabel



For weeks Gobbolino travelled through dreary witch country, where the sun never shone. Then the pedlar-woman paid a visit to a friend of hers who lived in a cave high on a mountain. At the mouth of the cave sat a young black cat with eyes as green as grass. It was Gobbolino's twin sister, Sootica!

The little cats were very glad to see each other. They shared a bowl of soup cooked in the witch's cauldron and Sootica showed Gobbolino all the witch's cat tricks she had learned.



She made strange music come out of the cauldron and flying pigs swoop about the cave. She made the witch invisible, and for a moment turned Gobbolino bright red. "Now show us some of your tricks, Gobbolino!"

"He can't do anything at all," sneered the old pedlar-woman. "A few sparks, a bit of disappearing, the odd prank. But he refuses to do anything *bad!*"

"It's true," said Gobbolino. "I never wanted to be a witch's cat. Witches' cats are bad, bad, *bad*. And witches' spells are so *cruel!*"





"No need for thanks," said Sootica. "After all, you are my brother. But you're a disgrace to the family and I never want to see you again. I'm going to drop you now. It's time I was going home." The next moment she cried "Jump!" and gave Gobbolino a little push with her paw.

Down, down, down he fell until he splashed into a cold river. "Oh, I'm drowning, I'm drowning!" cried Gobbolino. As a witch's kitten he had swum like a fish. But now he found he could only struggle and flap the water.


Luckily some children were playing on the bank. "Look! Look!" they cried. "A little cat! Quick! Quick! Get it out!"

The boys ran to get a stick and fished out Gobbolino, all dripping wet.

"Miserable cat!" shrieked the witch. "Cruel? What kind of word is that for a witch's cat?" And she picked him up and hurled him into the cauldron. He sank and bobbed and gasped . . . and all the magic that made him a witch's cat washed off in the witch's brew.

"Jump up behind me, brother," said Sootica, as she mounted a broomstick. Gobbolino struggled out of the cauldron and on to the broom. It soared up, up, up, higher and higher above Hurricane Mountain.

"Oh thank you for saving me, Sootica!" sobbed Gobbolino. "Thank you!"



"Oh!" they cried. "It's Gobbolino—the kitten we rescued ages ago. Can you still blow sparks out of your nose? Can you still become invisible?"

He shook his head sadly, but the children still hugged him and carried him home. "Look what we found drowning in the river!" they said to their father. "The witch's kitten has come back again!"

"Witch's kittens swim, they don't drown," he said. Then he took Gobbolino out of their hands and looked at him very carefully. "This isn't a witch's kitten," he said. "It's a common kitchen cat!"

"Can we keep him, then?"

"I don't see why not."

One by one the delighted children went off to bed.

The farmer's wife gave Gobbolino a saucer of cream.

Then he crept on to her lap and dozed.

At last, after so many strange adventures, Gobbolino was happy and content. He had found a home for ever. He was Gobbolino, *the kitchen cat!*

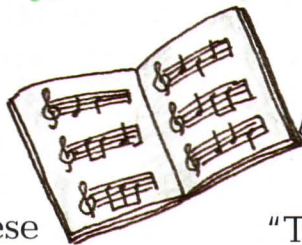
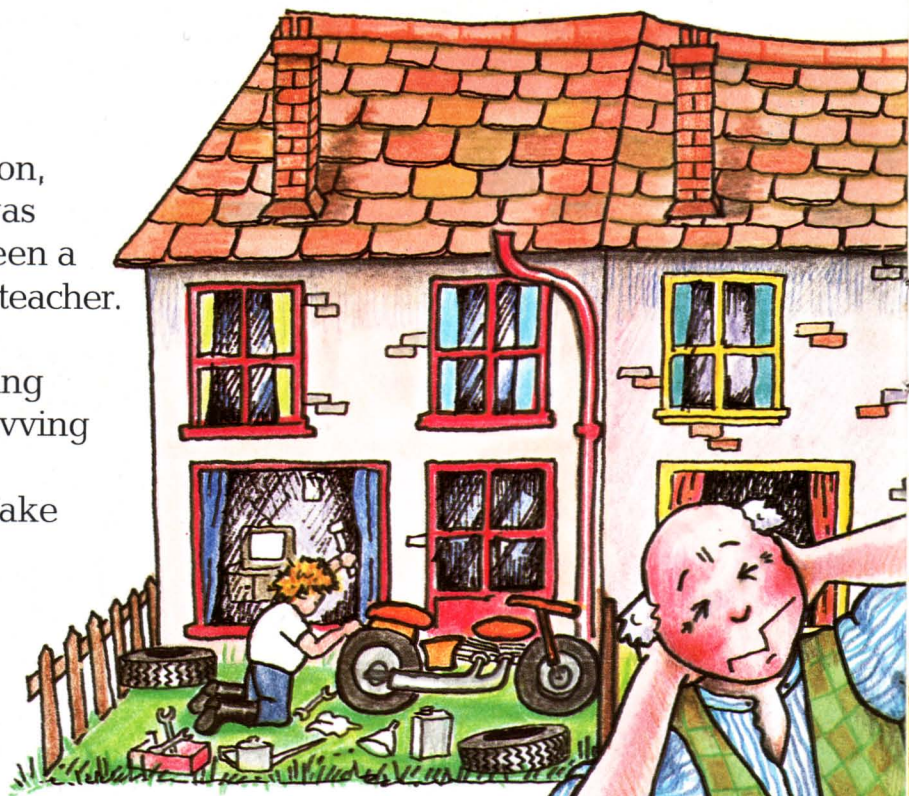
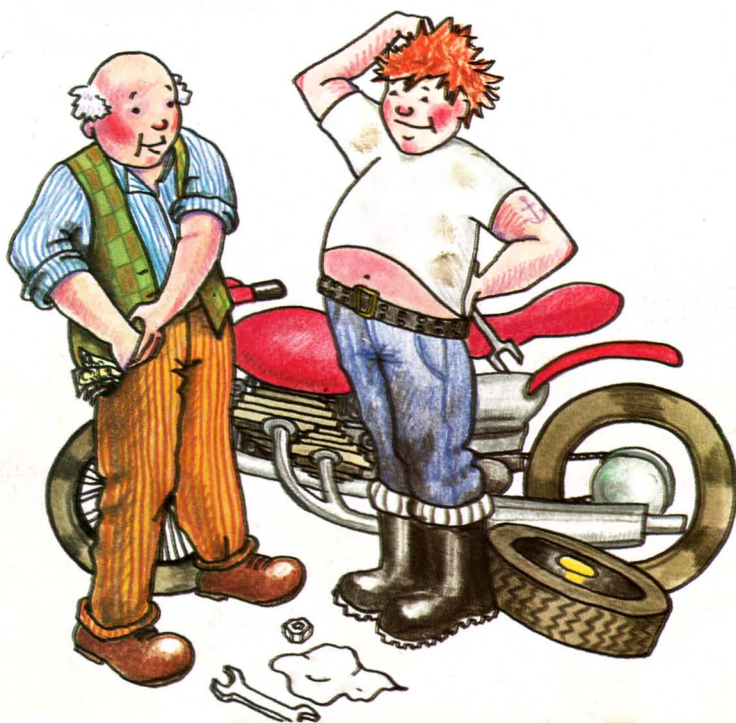


In a terraced house between the gasworks and the railway station, lived a very miserable man. He was miserable because he lived between a motor-bike mechanic and a music teacher.

Every morning, the man was woken by the mechanic hammering and banging and clanging and revving away on motor-bikes in the yard. It seemed as if the noise would shake the house down.

Then the first pupil would arrive at the music teacher's house, and there would be a screeching of violins, or a thundering of pianos, or a caterwauling of trumpets, or the ear-splitting whine of a flute played flat. It seemed as if the music would break every window in the middle house.

The man living between these noisy neighbours tried everything — ear-plugs, ear-muffs, putting his head under the pillow, even locking himself in the cupboard. But the engines revved and the music jangled, until he thought his head would burst.



NOISY

"This just can't go on," he thought to himself one morning. But he could not hear himself think, so he had to shout it aloud instead. *"This can't go on!"*

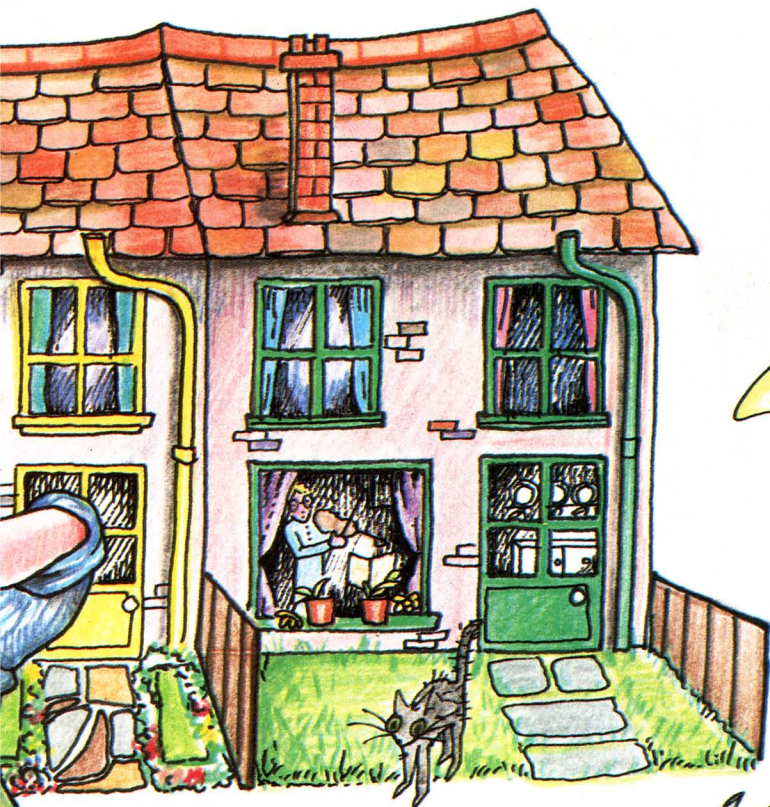
So he went next door to the mechanic's house and offered him a fistful of money if he would sell his house and move.

"Anything you say, chief!" said the mechanic, who had never held so much money in his oily hands. "I'll move out tomorrow!"

Then the man went to his other neighbour, the music teacher, and offered her all the money he had left if she would sell her house and move.

"Oh, of course, absolutely my dear!"



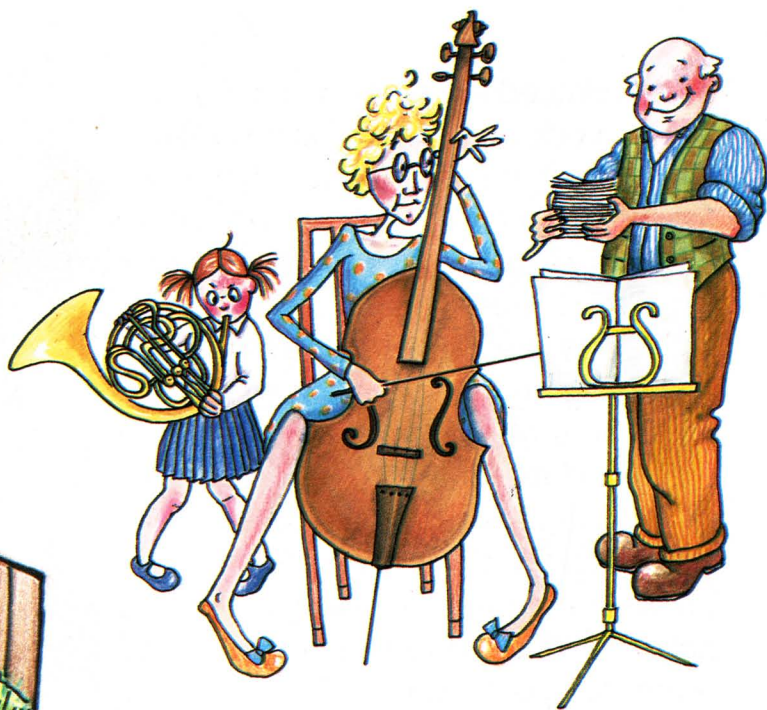


NEIGHBOURS



said the teacher, who had never seen so much money in her life. "I'll move tomorrow!"

So the man from the middle house went home happy and locked himself in the cupboard with his ear-plugs and a pillow over his head for the last time.



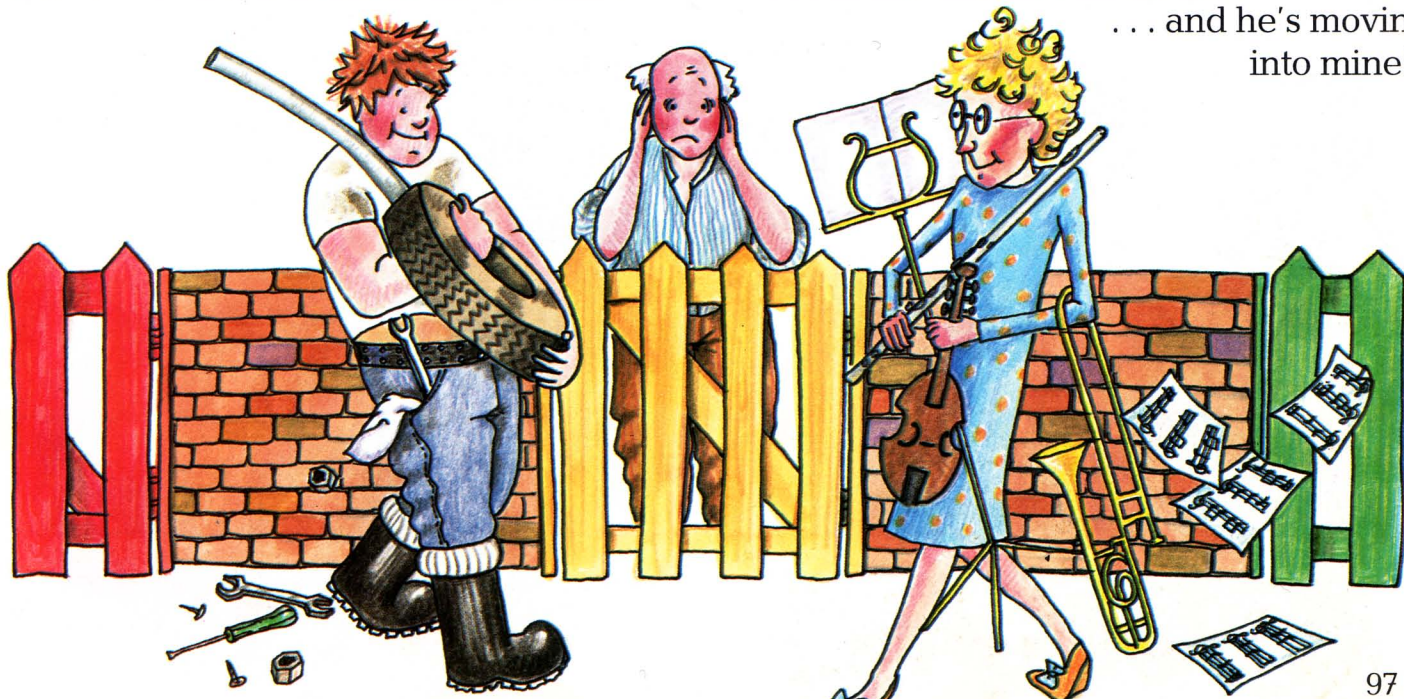
And he wondered why he had never thought of the remedy before.

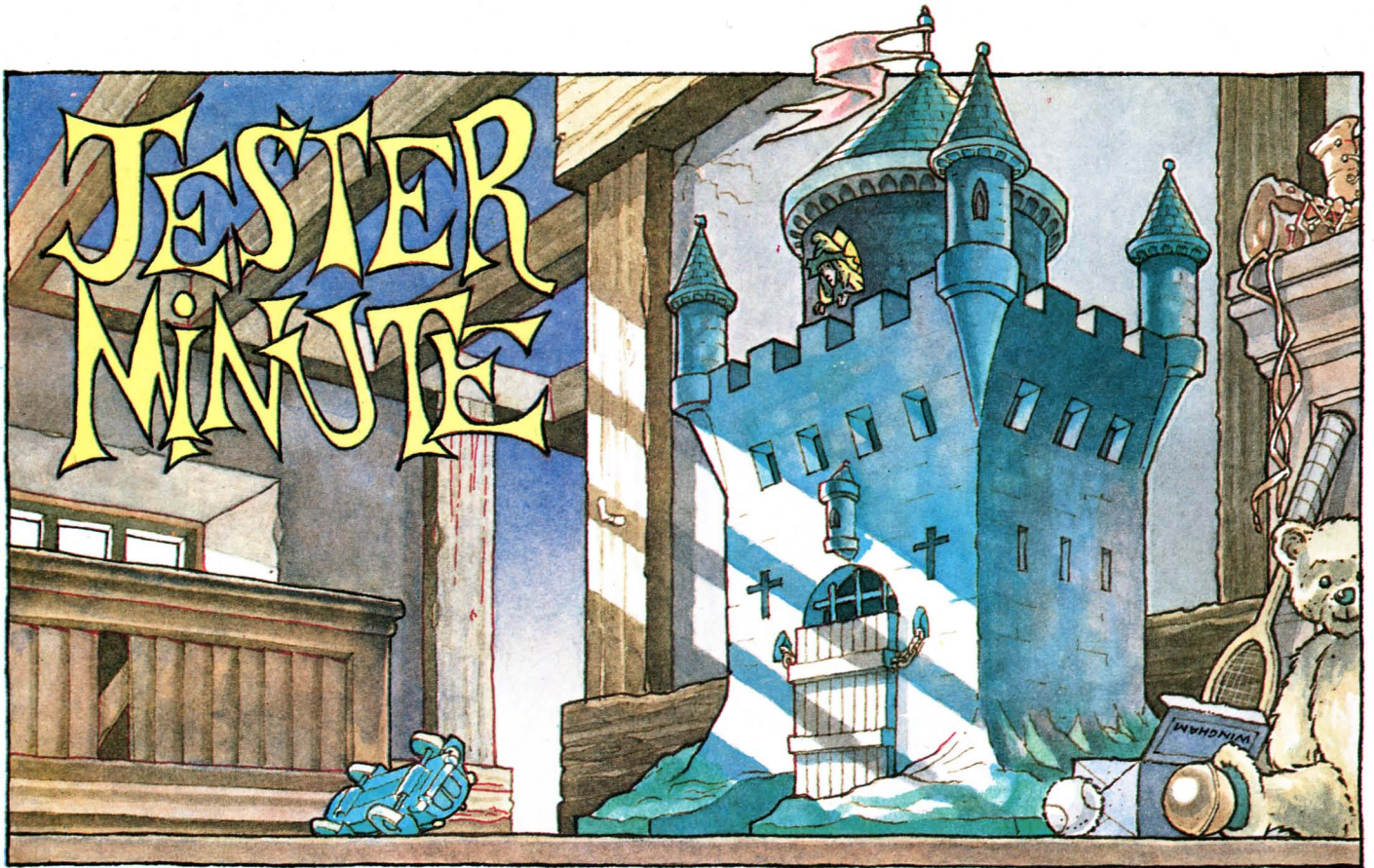
Next morning, he even went round to help the music teacher pack.

"I hope you've found somewhere nice to live," he said as he helped her carry the piano downstairs.

"Oh, yes thank you. I was really very lucky. I found out that the motor-bike mechanic who lives two doors away was also looking for somewhere else to live. So I'm moving into his house

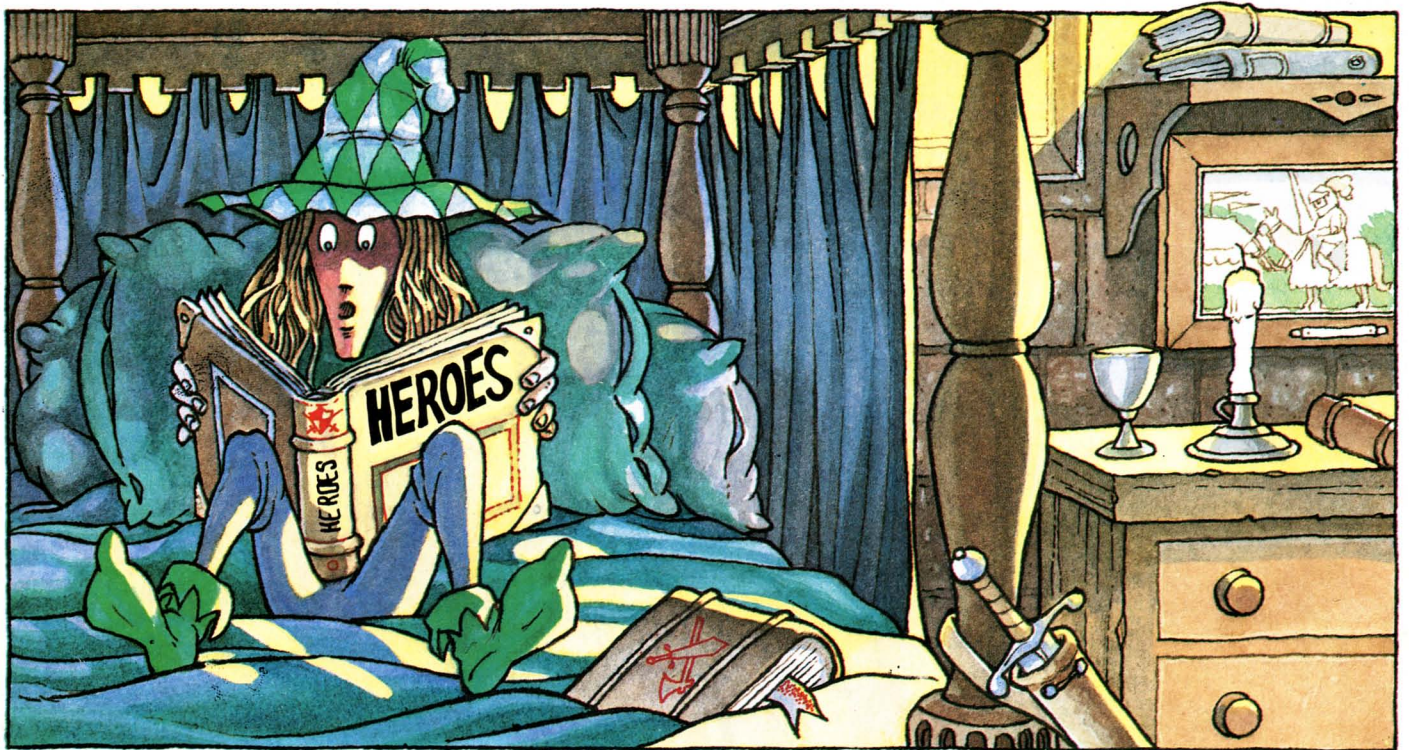
... and he's moving into mine!"





Jester Minute was a sad little figure. He hardly ever went outside the walls of his toy castle because

everyone laughs at a jester, especially one that stutters. And Jester hated being laughed at.

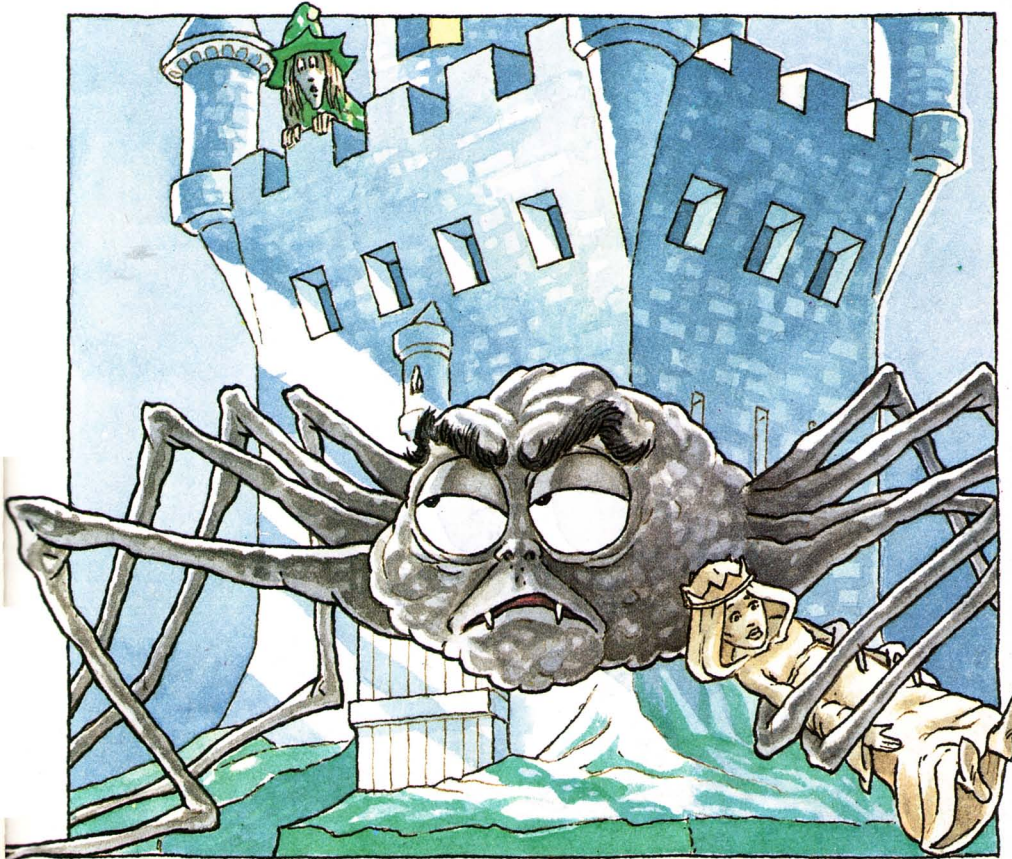


Every day Jester stayed alone in his bedroom reading about knights and

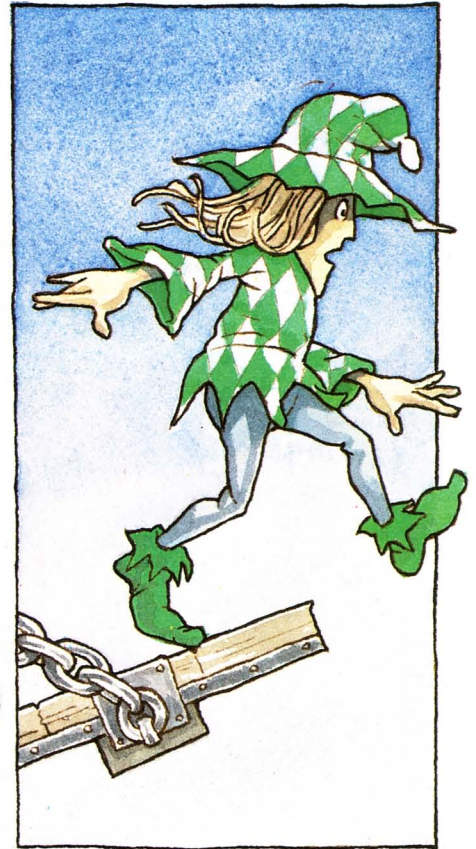
dragons and heroes. He dreamed of being a hero, performing splendid deeds.



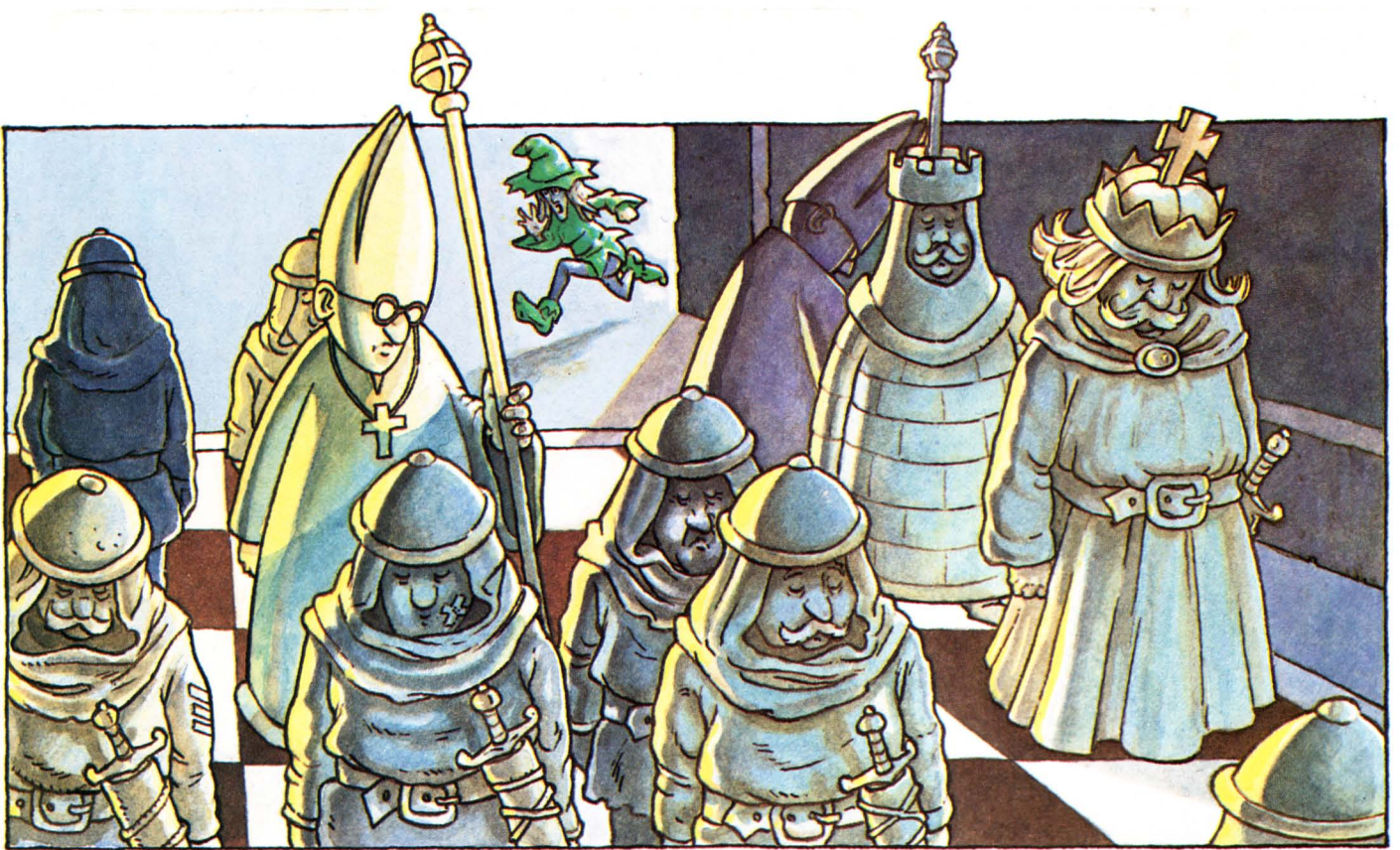
He longed to be a great swordsman . . . but was just too clumsy. Jester carefully followed the rules but always seemed to trip over his sword.



One day, sitting sadly by a turret window, he saw Badweb the fierce ugly spider. He was clutching the White Queen under his arm. "He's s-stolen the White Queen," cried Jester.



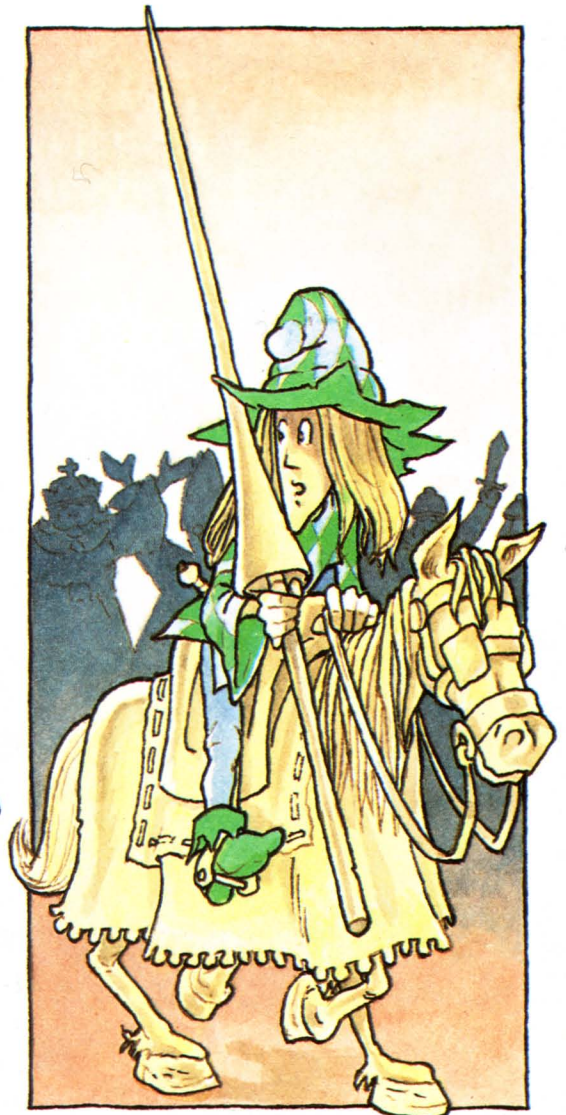
"I-I must w-w-warn the King." So he raced across the drawbridge.



He ran to the Great Chessboard, but found the King and his Knights fast asleep. "W-wake up, w-wake up, a t-t-terrible thing has happened."



When the chessmen woke up there was uproar. "Give this brave volunteer a horse!" ordered the King. And he handed Jester his very own sword.

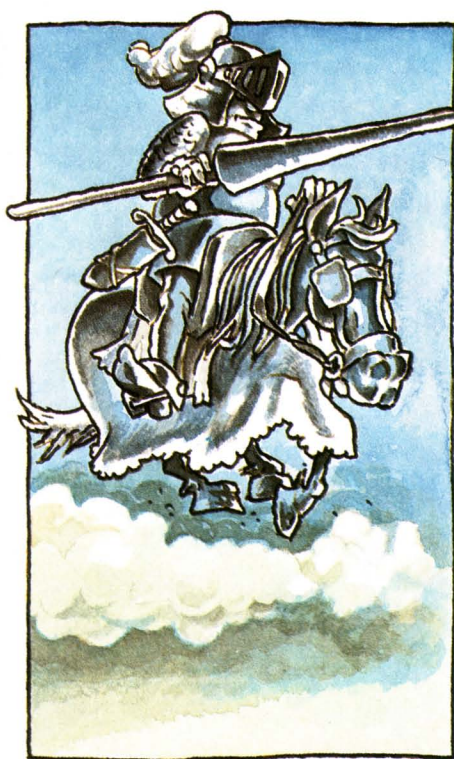




"B-but w-why?" squeaked Jester. Then he heard a clanking behind him.

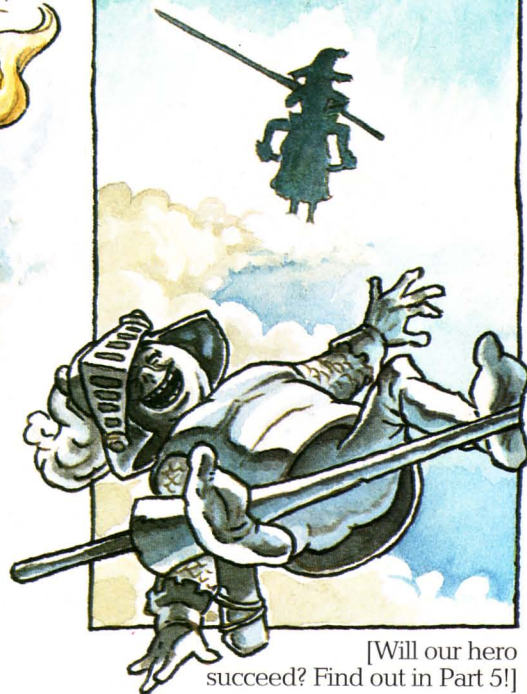


It was the Black Knight. "Stand and joust!" he roared. "J-j-joust?" cried Jester.



It was too late. The Black Knight had started his charge. But when he saw Jester Minute he began to laugh. "I can't joust with a jester!" And the Knight laughed so much that he fell off his horse.

Poor Jester, everyone mocked him. But he would show them. He would rescue the White Queen. So he galloped off in search of Badweb. "I-I'll s-save her."



[Will our hero succeed? Find out in Part 5!]

Long ago, a young prince lived in a far-off land. But he was not a very happy prince, because he could not find a real princess to marry.

"Oh, you're much too fussy!" said the queen. "I've introduced you to the most beautiful, the most clever, the most charming princesses from here, there and everywhere, but you're never satisfied."

"I'm very grateful to you, mother," the prince replied, "but a *real* princess is very rare. I'm sure I'll find her one day."

In his heart, he knew that somewhere, sometime he would meet her. He would never stop searching. "I've met many girls who call

The PRINCESS and the PEA

themselves a princess," he said. "The whole world calls them princesses. Some are very beautiful, some are very clever. Many are very charming. But *my* princess will be all these things and more!"

For a year he sailed around the world in search of his perfect bride. He visited palaces in Persia and Peru, castles in China and Spain. But he did not find the face he was looking for. When he returned to his own country, sunny summer was darkening into cold, grey winter.

One night, not long after his return, there was a terrible storm. Thunder roared, lightning flashed, and the icy wind crept in through every window and door in the palace. The prince had gone to bed to keep warm, while the king and queen sat downstairs, reading.

The old king shivered as he pulled his chair closer to the fire. "I'm glad I'm





wrapped up here in the warm. I feel very sorry for any of my subjects who are caught in this awful weather."

"Nobody with any sense would be out on such a dreadful night," replied the queen.

Hardly had she spoken when they both heard a knock on the door. And then again, even louder. The king hurried to the hall. He drew back all the bolts and with a great heave pulled the door open. A gust of wind blew freezing sleet into the hall and a flash of lightning lit up the porch.

"Brrrh!" shivered the king. And then, peering into the darkness: "Well, bless my soul! Who are you, my poor girl?"

There, with the storm raging all around her, stood a pretty young girl. Her dress was soaked through, and her shoes were covered in mud. Her long, golden hair hung in damp ringlets round her shoulders.

"I'm a princess," the stranger replied, her teeth chattering.

"Yes, yes, my dear, of course you are," the king smiled. "Well, you had better come in. I must say, though, I've never known a princess to arrive in anything but a grand carriage."

"No, nor have I," thought the queen.

"I'll soon find out if she's a real princess or not."





So while the young stranger was warming herself in front of the fire, enjoying a hot meal, the queen and her maids set to work upstairs. First they removed all the covers from the bed in one of the guest rooms. Then the queen placed a dried pea on the mattress. After that they turned out all the cupboards in the palace until they found twenty more mattresses. These they placed, one by one, on top of the small, hard pea.

There were mattresses of every colour of the rainbow, of every shape and size, and each one was quite thick enough for an ordinary person to sleep on in perfect comfort. You can imagine what a strange sight they made.

"That's it," said the queen. "We'll soon see if she's a real princess or not." And she went back downstairs.

"I've prepared a bed for you," she told the lovely stranger. "I'm sure you'll have a good night's rest."

So the girl went upstairs, changed into a nightdress, and climbed the ladder to reach her high bed.

The storm died away overnight.

The queen was smiling to herself when the visitor came down to breakfast.



"And how did you sleep, my dear?" she asked as the girl sat down at the table.

"I'm sorry to say that I didn't sleep well at all," replied the stranger. "It sounds very rude, but even with all those mattresses I was still uncomfortable."

"But that's impossible," said the king. "You had the best bed in the palace!"

The girl blushed, afraid of sounding ungrateful. "Well, I felt as if I was lying on a pebble. And this morning, I'm black and blue all over."

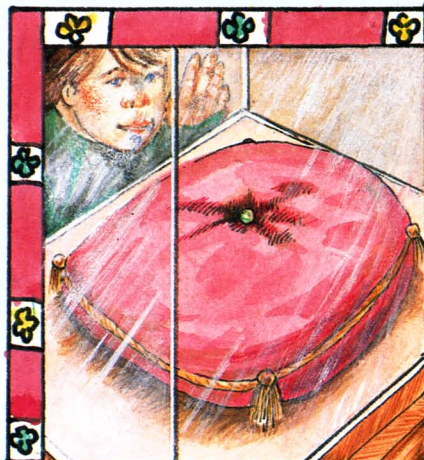
The queen could hardly believe her ears. "Then you are indeed a princess!" she cried. "Only a royal person could have such tender and sensitive skin. Only a real princess could feel a dried pea through twenty-one mattresses!"

That was exactly what the prince thought, too. When he came into the breakfast room, he took one look at the

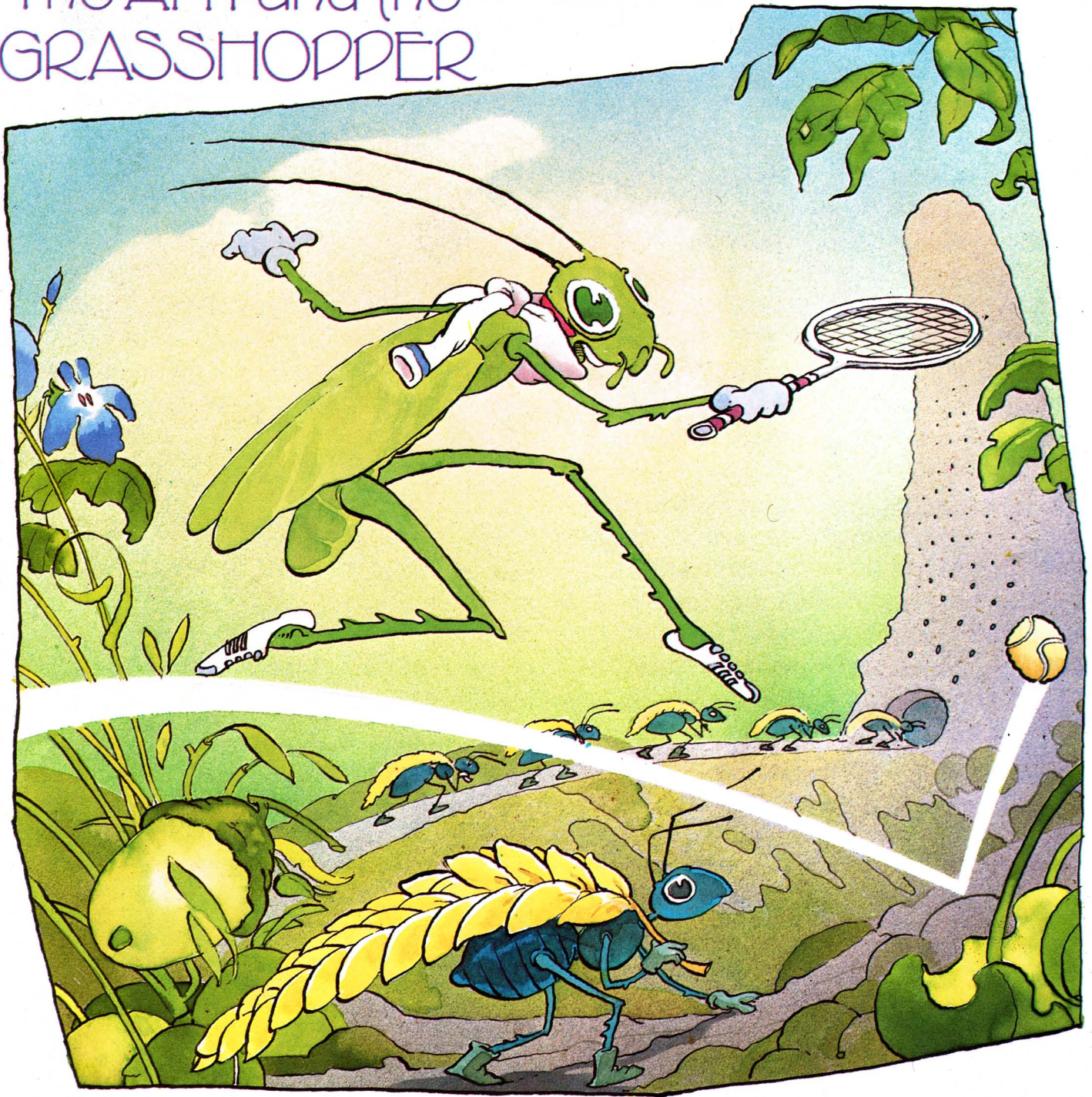
beautiful girl and knew at once *she* was the one he had been dreaming of. He did not need to be introduced. He needed no dried pea, no twenty-one mattresses for proof. His heart told him at once that he had found his true princess.

The king proclaimed a holiday for everyone in the land, so that they could all celebrate the wedding of the prince and princess. And the prince made sure the pea was put on display in a glass case in the city square for all to see.

And do you know . . . to this day it is still there, to remind people of his one and only love, the *real* princess.



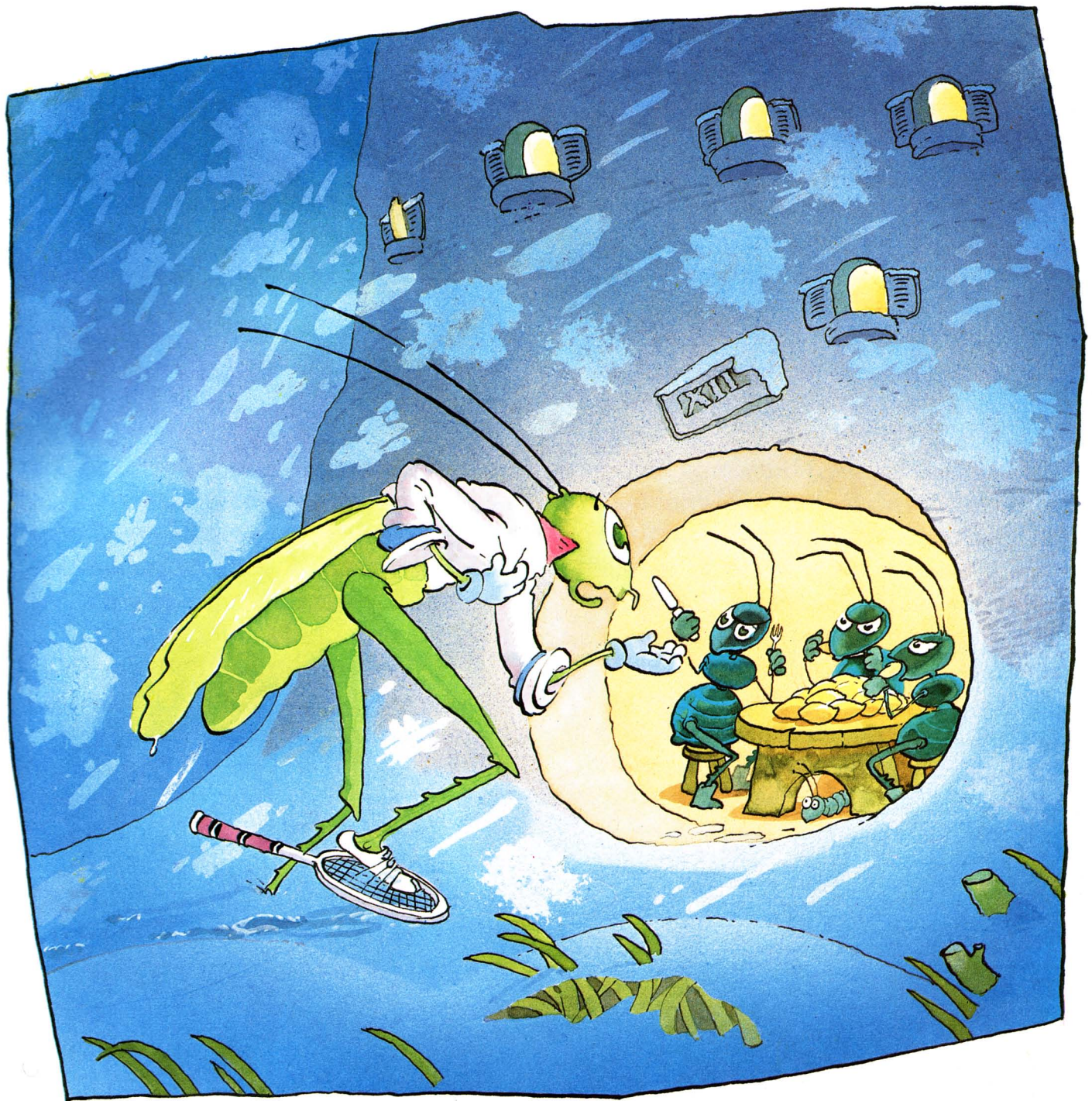
The ANT and the GRASSHOPPER



One glorious summer's day, a grasshopper was sitting on a blade of grass, enjoying the warmth of the sun. "This is such a lovely time of year," he said to himself. "I can't understand why everyone else is working. They should follow my example and have a good time."

Out of sheer happiness he then began to leap from one blade of grass to the next. He leapt right over a tiny black ant who was struggling to carry a grain of corn back to her store-cupboard. "Stop working so hard," cried the grasshopper. "Come and enjoy this wonderful day."

The ant looked up at him and sighed. "I'm thinking ahead," she said. "And so



should you. If you don't start storing some food now, you'll have nothing to eat in the winter." But the grasshopper laughed. "Think of the present," he called, and leapt out of sight.

One morning, a few months later, the grasshopper was creeping over the frozen ground. He was so cold and hungry that he could hardly move. As he trudged slowly past a group of ants, he

saw that they were tucking into a breakfast of corn. "Oh, please give me some of your food," he pleaded. "You have so much, and I have nothing."

"I know you," one of the ants cried. "You laughed when I told you to plan ahead. 'Think of the present' you said. Well, now you can go and find your own food." And the ant turned her back on the grasshopper and cheerfully finished off her breakfast.

Santa's Early Christmas



Santa Claus finished buttoning his thickest vest, pulled on his pullover and cardigan, stepped into his big red coat, and fetched his scarf from the hall.

"What a night to go out!" he said as the hail clattered against the windows, and snowflakes flurried under the door. "This is a night for sitting by the fire and eating hot buttered toast." He pulled on his woolliest socks, knocked the mud off his boots and fumbled for his gloves.

Looking at himself in the mirror, he thought, "No wonder everybody thinks I'm fat. Look at all the layers of clothes I've got on!"

Outside, Rudolf the reindeer was

impatient to be on his way. It was so cold that the runners of the sleigh were freezing to the ground. Santa checked that all his presents were aboard and set off at a gallop through gusts of snow across the unfriendly night sky.

"Ho, ho, ho," he said loudly, but he did not feel any jollier. "I can't seem to put my heart into Christmas this year, Rudolf. Why do they always have it in the middle of winter, when the weather is so awful?"

Rudolf blew on the sleigh bells, which had frozen solid. "I agree," he said. "This isn't travelling weather. A reindeer could break a leg."



They came to a halt on a steep roof, slippery with ice. Rudolf looked sideways at Santa bulging with his warm clothes. "Couldn't you give the chimney a miss this year?" he said.

Santa shrugged his shoulders. "How else can I get in? Do you want me to knock on the door?"

Swinging first one foot and then the other into the chimney-pot, he held his nose and dropped down into the dark below.

But he was wearing one vest too many. He was just too plump in all his woollies to slide down into the grate and out into the room. Wedged tight, he wriggled and grunted and breathed in to

make himself thinner. The old fire was still smouldering in the grate below, and wisps of smoke made him cough. The soles of his boots were getting very warm.

It was only when Rudolf tipped the sack of presents down on top of him that Santa popped out of the chimney like a cork out of a bottle. He lay on the hearth rug, surrounded by parcels and sweets.

"Never again," he muttered. "Never again. Christmas will just have to be *early* next year."

Even after he had filled the children's stockings and climbed back to the roof he was still complaining. "Never again! I'm coming early next year!"





"How early?" said Rudolf, disappearing under a drift of snow.

"July!" said Santa. And he felt better just thinking about it. "Ho, ho, ho!"

July came round all too quickly. Santa was so busy getting all the presents ready in time that he did not even go on holiday. "Well, they do say a change is as good as a rest," he told Rudolf. "I'm really looking forward to Christmas this summer. Get out the six-wheeled cart. We don't need to take that heavy old sleigh."

Then Santa had a shave—he only grew a beard in winter to keep his face warm—and got dressed in his favourite jeans, tee-shirt and sandals. He looked in the mirror. "Fit as a whippet!" he exclaimed, and bounded out of the house.

Because of the heatwave that July, the roofs were all dry and easy to climb.



The six-wheeled cart was light to pull and Rudolf was still fresh when they landed on the first roof.

Its narrow chimney was no problem this year. Santa was down it as easily as a letter down a pillar-box. He stood on the hearth rug, sneezing soot out of his nose.

But looking around him, he soon saw that things were not quite right. There was no glass of sherry or piece of cake waiting to welcome Father Christmas. There was no Christmas tree. There were no decorations. There were none of the presents that Mums and Dads buy for each other. The house looked lonely and bare.

Gradually, the truth dawned on him. The family had gone on holiday! "How dare they! They've gone on holiday and never a thought for me!"

Worst of all, there were no stockings



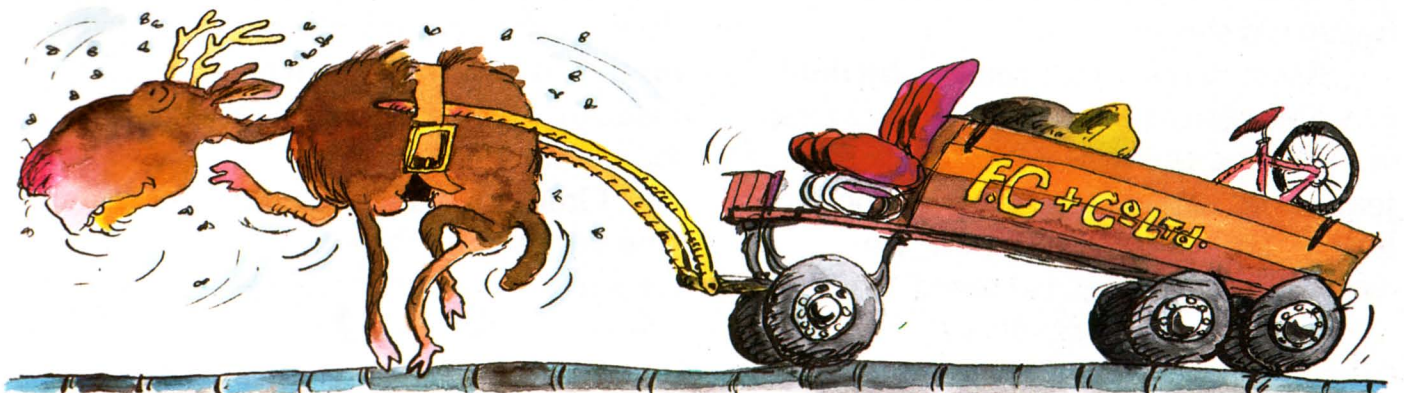
or pillow-cases hung up. He had to battle back up the chimney with all the presents.

"They weren't expecting me!" he said as he struggled out of the chimney-pot, sweating with the heat. "They've gone on holiday! Would you believe it?"

Rudolf was not paying attention. He was troubled by swarms of horse-flies and gnats and mosquitoes. "You don't get flies like this in winter," he grumbled, flicking his reindeer tail.

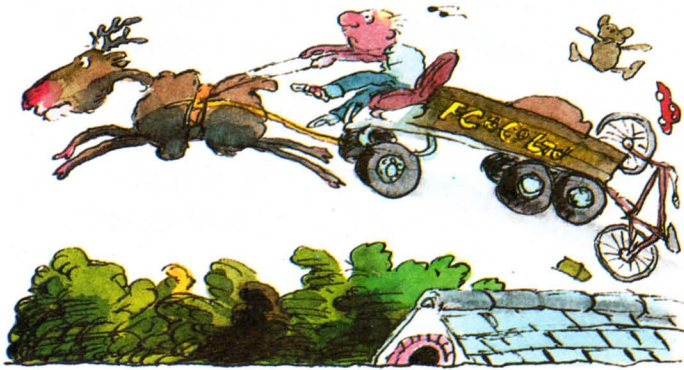
It was the same at every house. Either the family was away on holiday or, worse still, the children were lying awake because of the heat. More than once, Santa had to dodge back up a chimney for fear of being seen. One family even called the police when they heard strange noises in the chimney.

"A burglar," they said, over the telephone. "And we think there's another one on the roof."



"Never again!" said Santa, leaping into the six-wheeled cart and galloping hard until sunrise. The undelivered presents tilted and toppled behind him. "Mistaken for burglars! Whatever next! Never again!"

To deliver all the presents properly, he had to go out as usual on Christmas Eve. He buttoned up his thickest vest, his jumper, cardigan and red furry coat, then pulled on his scarf and gloves. Rudolf



dragged out the heavy sleigh and they galloped through pelting snow without either of them saying a word.

Santa did not feel like yelling out "Ho, ho, ho!" In fact he could not



manage even a single "ho". He had forgotten to put on a second pair of socks. His teeth began to chatter.

When they came to the roof with the narrow chimney, Santa tightened his belt, put a sack over his shoulder and sat like an egg in an egg-cup, on top of the chimney-pot. "I don't know why I b-b-bother," he mumbled as he struggled to squeeze down inside. Then he plunged out of sight.

Downstairs in the living-room, ten paperchains leaped across the ceiling



like ten paper rainbows. A tall fir tree stood in a red barrel, its arms outstretched to balance a hundred coloured lights. Its needles were wreathed with silver tinsel. A white light sprang through the windows off the crisp snow outside, and lit the writing on fifty Christmas cards: *Season's Greetings . . . Best Wishes . . . With lots of love . . .*

For Santa, said the note on the table alongside a glass of sherry and a piece of



cake. Santa ate and drank and looked around him with a new, glowy feeling.

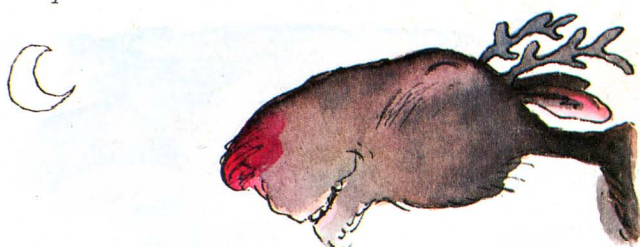
Upstairs the children were sleeping, snuggled under red bedclothes. A stocking hung at the foot of each bed — with a special Christmas card addressed *just to him*.

"Ah, isn't Christmas *lovely*," he sighed to himself, and a lump in his throat stopped him saying a quiet ho, ho, ho.

He went back up to the roof. The climb did not seem so hard, and his winter whiskers *did* stop the soot going up his nose. "I'm sorry, Rudolf," he said, emerging from the chimney-pot, "but in future I'm going to make *all* my deliveries on Christmas Eve."

Rudolf did not seem to be listening. He was staring out across the snowy rooftops at the frosty stars. A tinsel moon shook to the sound of church bells as they rang in Christmas Day.

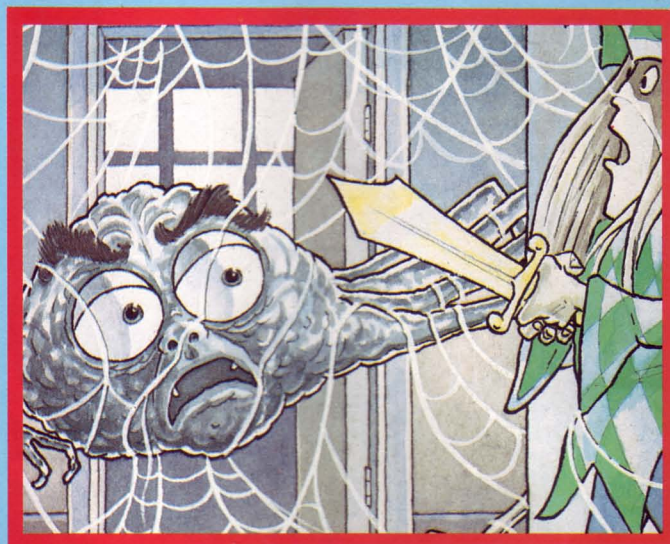
"Ho, ho, ho," said the reindeer under his breath. "Isn't Christmas *lovely*!"



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