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PART 13

STORY Teller

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world's best children's stories

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Brer Rabbit and the Tar-Baby

Brer Rabbit could be mighty annoying to his fellow animals. And sometimes, when he had stolen their dinner or made fools of them, they got fearfully angry. Take that day he stole Brer Fox's dinner . . .

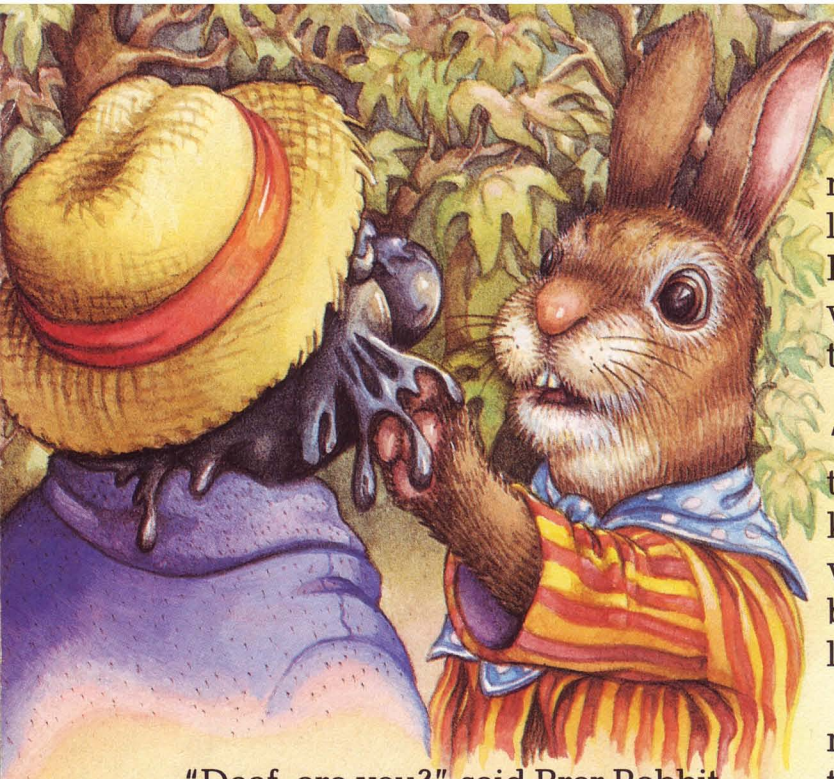
Brer Fox swore to be revenged on Brer Rabbit — and to eat him, too. So he found an old sack and some straw, and made a life-size dummy. It had a swede for a head, a turnip for a nose and radishes for its eyes. Then he daubed it all over with tar and dressed it up with a jacket, a straw hat, and gloves on the ends of its straw arms. And he stood it by the side of the road. It was the smartest tar-baby you ever saw.

Brer Fox hid behind the wall, and waited for Brer Rabbit to come loping down the road.

When Brer Rabbit saw the tar-baby, he stopped in his tracks. "Howdy, friend!" he exclaimed. "What brings you to these parts?" But the tar-baby said nothing.

"Good day to you. How are you this fine morning?" asked Brer Rabbit, feeling particularly friendly. But the tar-baby said nothing.





"Deaf, are you?" said Brer Rabbit, hopping closer and looking for the tar-baby's ear. "I'll shout!" But even when he shouted, the tar-baby said nothing.

"Now see here, you're not the friendliest body I ever met," said Brer Rabbit, beginning to feel insulted. "Say howdy-do or I'll box your ears." But the tar-baby said not a word.

Brer Rabbit gave it a gentle pat round the head . . . and his paw stuck like syrup to a bear! "Let go!" said Brer Rabbit, and gave the tar-baby a push with his other paw. And that paw stuck, too, like treacle to a spoon.

"Take care!" warned Brer Rabbit. "I can kick mighty hard!" But the tar-baby said nothing at all. Brer Rabbit kicked him — first with one foot, then with the other. And pretty soon his two back feet were stuck to the tar-baby like flies to a fly-paper.

"I'm warning you! I'll butt you, and my head's mighty hard!" But the tar-baby said not a word. When Brer Rabbit butted him, his two long ears stuck to the tar like gum to a gum-tree.





"Aha! Got you!" cried Brer Fox, roaring with laughter as he tumbled out on to the road. He took hold of Brer Rabbit by the scruff of his neck and pulled him off the tar-baby and bundled him into a sack.

"Owowowowo! You're not going to throw me into the briar patch, are you, kind Mr Fox?" shrieked Brer Rabbit.

"I've got something *much* worse in store for you!" chortled Brer Fox. "I'm going to roast you!"

"Oh, that's all right then. So long as you aren't planning to throw me into the briar patch."

"What do you mean, 'that's all right, then?'" demanded Brer Fox. "Maybe I'll roast you on a spit!"

"Fine, fine," said Brer Rabbit, "just so long as you don't throw me into the briar patch."

"You're spoiling my fun," whined Brer Fox. "Why aren't you begging and pleading with me?"

"I am! I am! Please, *please*, PLEASE I beg you — don't throw me into the briar patch."

"Well," said Brer Fox sulkily. "I came here to be revenged on you Brer Rabbit, and revenged I'll be!"





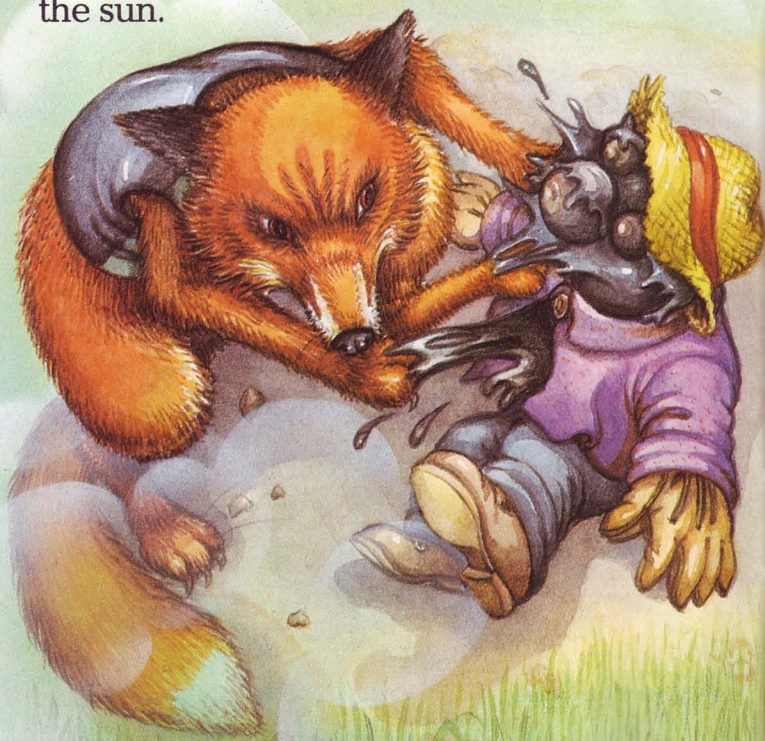
So he tossed Brer Rabbit into the very heart of the briar patch. The briars grew so tall that Brer Rabbit quite disappeared from view.

"Eee! Oooo! Aaww!" came the voice from the briar patch. "Aha-aha-aha-aha-ha!" Brer Rabbit stood up, chewing on a thistle. "Now fancy you not knowing, Brer Fox, that I was born and raised in a briar patch. Oh! but these briars are comfortable against my fur! My, but these thistles are tasty! Care to try one, Brer Fox? No? No, maybe you'd best take that tar-baby home before it catches out some poor, innocent little old rabbit."

Brer Fox ground his teeth and hopped about and shook his furry fists. "Grrr-ooo-aaah. I-I-I'll get you next time, you tricky, cunning, wicked old rabbit. I'll get you next time!" And he was so angry that he turned round and punched the

tar-baby on the nose with all his might.

And that — as you can imagine — was a *big* mistake! Last time I saw Brer Fox, he was all stuck to the tar-baby, shouting cursing, and tugging, and calling Brer Rabbit all the names under the sun.





Geordie's Mermaid

Isa Heslop was the kind of mother who was always worrying. She worried about her son, Geordie, because his eyes were light and misty, like something under water. She worried because his hair was damp-looking and limp. And she worried, too, about Geordie's father, Fred, who never made much money for them to live on.

But the time she worried most of all was when Fred came home from salmon poaching not with a salmon — but a mermaid.

Just think of it! A little girl mermaid, silky, pale hair and a twist of a tail that shimmered like mother of pearl.

Fred fetched her out of the sack and set her proudly on the red tablecloth. "And what do you think of that?" he said. "Isn't she just champion, now?"

Isa, who was worrying about her best tablecloth getting wet, and the

terrible bad luck of bringing a mermaid into the house, just wrung her hands.

"Oh, but how did you come by her, Fred?"

"That's just what I'm trying to tell you. Come up the river from the sea, she did, just like the salmon do this time of the year. I've brought her for Geordie. He can have her for a pet!"





Hearing this, the little mermaid burst into tears.

"But I don't want to be a pet!" she wailed. "I want to go to the circus!"

Fred and Isa exchanged horrified glances.

"She doesn't want to be a pet?" echoed Fred.

"She wants to go to the circus?" stammered Isa.

"I . . . I came up the river, purposely!" wept the little mermaid.

Well, what with the mermaid's cries, and Fred and Isa's raised voices, it was not long before Geordie himself got out of bed to see what all the fuss was about.

When he saw the little mermaid,

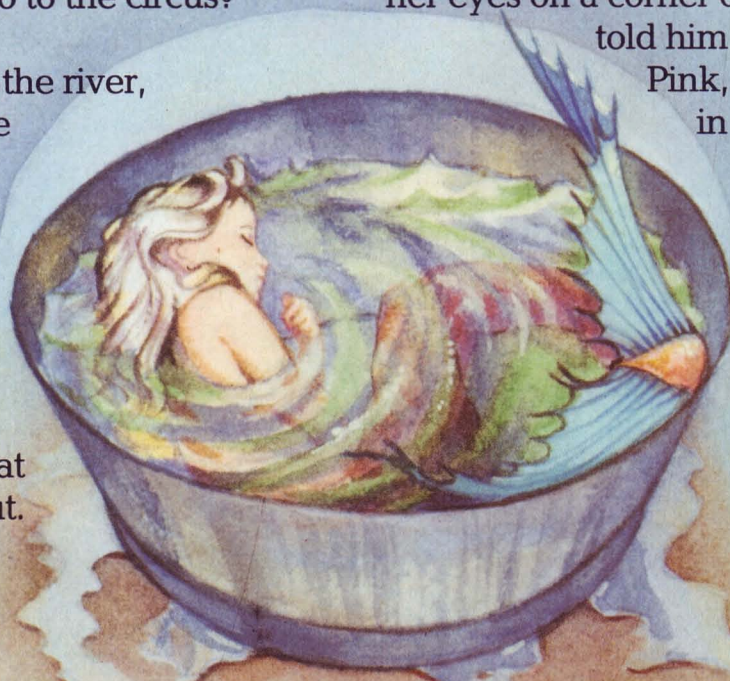
pink and pretty and shrieking because she wanted to see the circus, he could hardly wait to comfort her. For, as it happened, there was nothing in the world Geordie wanted more than to see the circus.

Geordie did his best to explain this to the little mermaid, and at last she dried her eyes on a corner of the tablecloth,

told him her name was Shell Pink, and agreed to sleep in the wash-tub under the scullery sink.

In bed at last, poor Isa could not sleep for worrying.

She kept sitting up and giving her husband a shake, saying, "Well, Fred Heslop, have you thought of anything yet?"



Then she worried about what she could give Shell Pink for breakfast. "And to think our Geordie wanted to see the circus so much and never said. I suppose he knew we had no money for tickets." At last Isa sat up and saw that it was morning. "Well, man, have you thought of anything yet?"

This time, she got the shock of her life, because Fred just said sleepily, "Yes, hinny. Our troubles are over!"

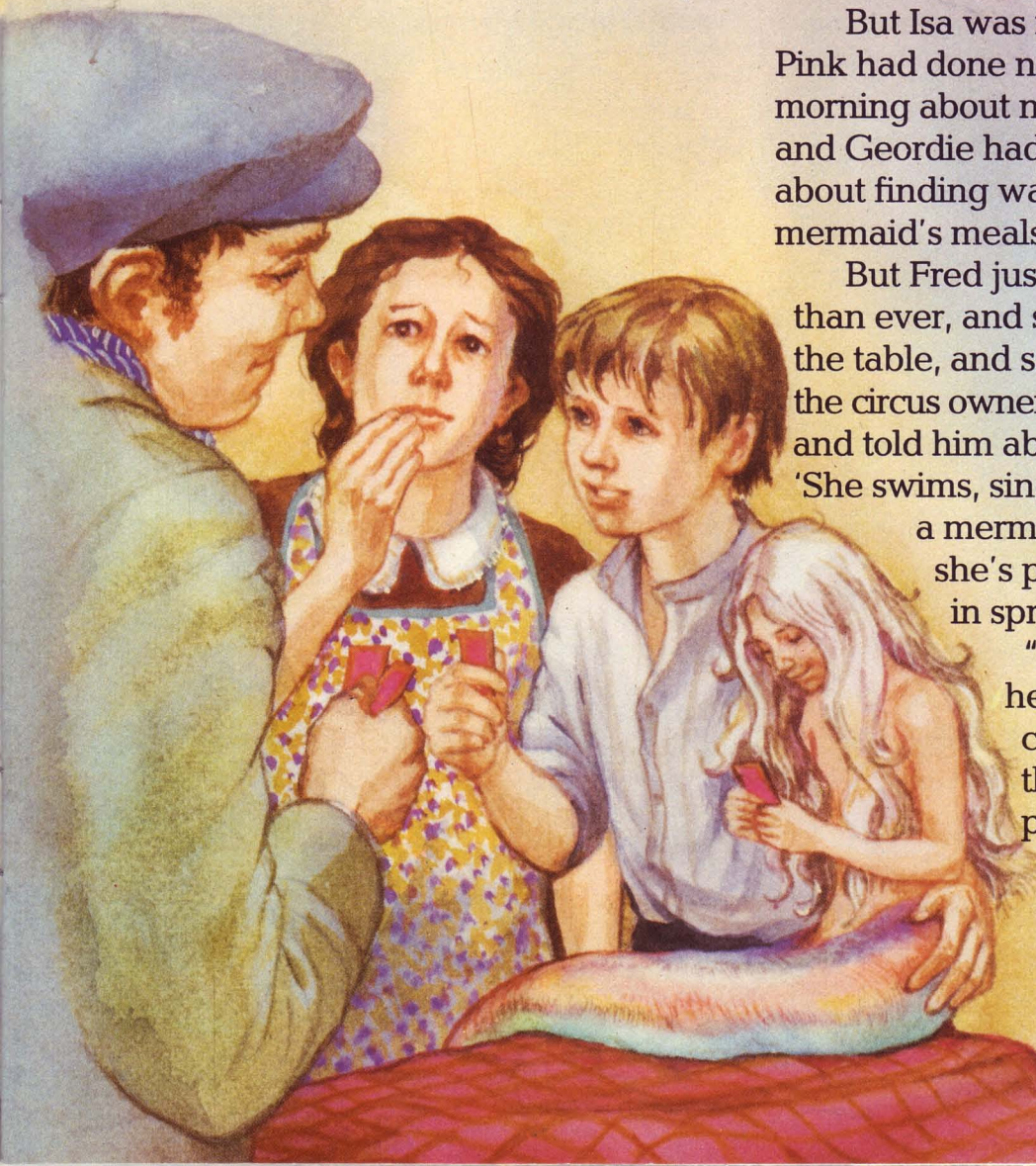
And not a word more would he say. But as soon as he had had a cup of tea, out he dashed to the town, and did not come back till dinner time. Sitting down at the table, he said, cheerfully, "Well, now, and how've you all been getting on without me this fine day?"



But Isa was not cheerful at all. Shell Pink had done nothing but whine all morning about not getting to the circus, and Geordie had been far from helpful about finding water-weed for the little mermaid's meals.

But Fred just smiled more broadly than ever, and spread four tickets on the table, and said, "I went straight to the circus owner himself — Earl Slater — and told him about Shell Pink. 'She swims, sings and does everything a mermaid should,' I said. 'And she's pretty — pretty as a lamb. in spring!'

"And Earl Slater said that he would buy her for a circus act, there and then, for five hundred pounds."





he had just built for her.

Next day, Isa set to work to make Shell Pink a beautiful little bodice embroidered with shells, and a suit for Georgie covered with gold braid.

So the months went by, while Georgie and Shell Pink travelled with the circus and people crowded up to see 'The Only Performing Mermaid In The World'.

And every week Georgie sent his wages home. Often he was left with no money at all and had nothing to buy food with. Then he would say to Shell Pink,

Isa, of course, was worrying already. It did not seem right, somehow.

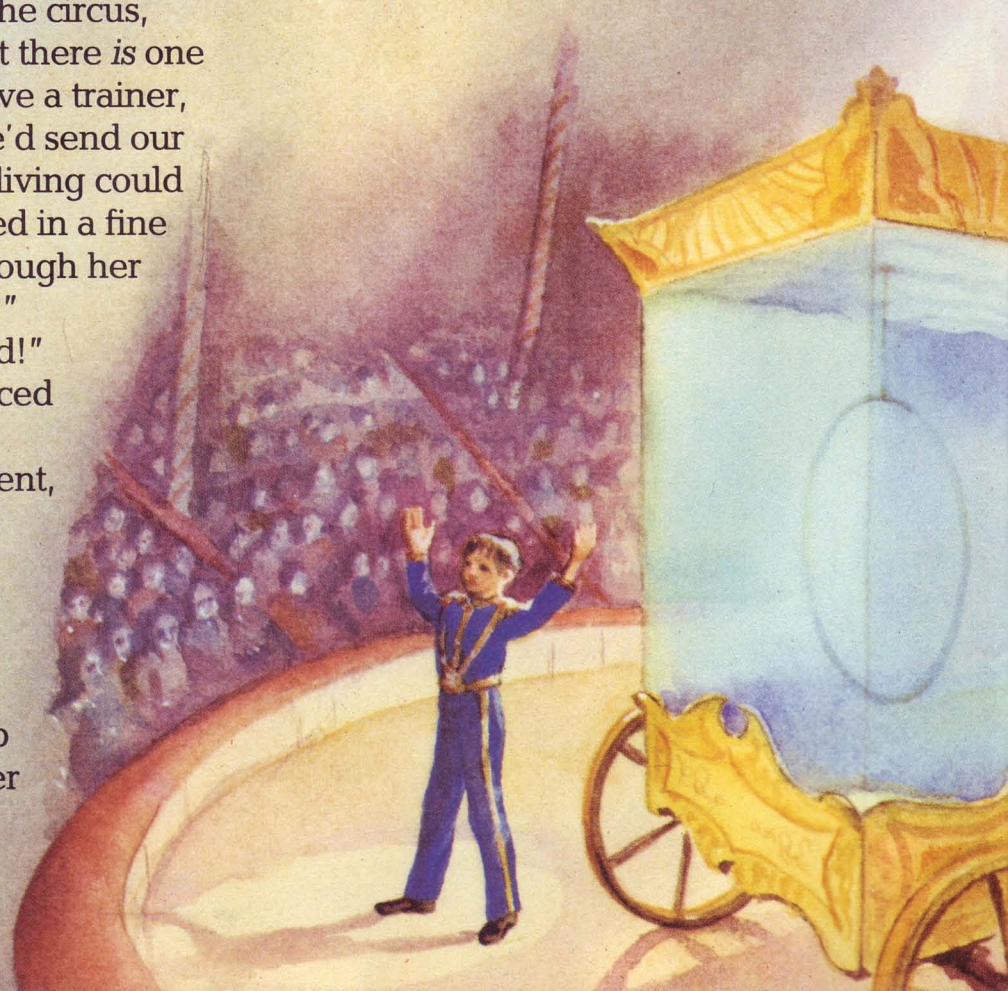
"But . . . but supposing she doesn't want to be a circus act?"

"She wanted to go to the circus, didn't she?" said Fred. "But there *is* one other thing. She's got to have a trainer, Mr Slater says. So I said we'd send our Georgie along. What finer living could he want than that — dressed in a fine suit, putting a mermaid through her tricks in a travelling circus?"

"Why, I'll see the world!" cried Georgie. And he danced off to tell Shell Pink.

Only his mother sat silent, holding the money in her hand and wondering what would come of it all.

That evening, they all went to see the circus. Earl Slater himself came up and shook Shell Pink by her little cold hands, and showed her the tank





"Oh, it's a pity humans can't eat seaweed."

And the little mermaid would hold up a long, tempting, green ribbon of seaweed, and coo, "But you'd love it, Geordie, if you'd only try. Why don't you?"



And at last he did, he was so hungry. And after that he had some of Shell Pink's dinner every day, and just as she said he would, he grew to love it.

But one day, he noticed something strange. His trousers seemed to be getting too tight. He tugged and tugged, but he must have been growing suddenly, because their shape was all wrong for him. There was something else — his legs were changing colour. They shone pink and green, when the light caught them.

Geordie had always loved water, but



now he spent more time in the tank with Shell Pink than ever, and they played and sported among the bubbles.

At last, when two pointed tail-pieces peeped out of his trouser-legs, instead of feet, he knew that he did not want to be a mermaid-trainer any more. He wanted the sea: the big, heaving ocean, where the mer-people, like the seals and porpoises, could swim on for ever.



"Shell Pink," he said. "I'm tired of this little tank and the circus and everything. Let's go down to the sea?"

Shell Pink nodded. "I've been thinking just the same myself, Geordie."

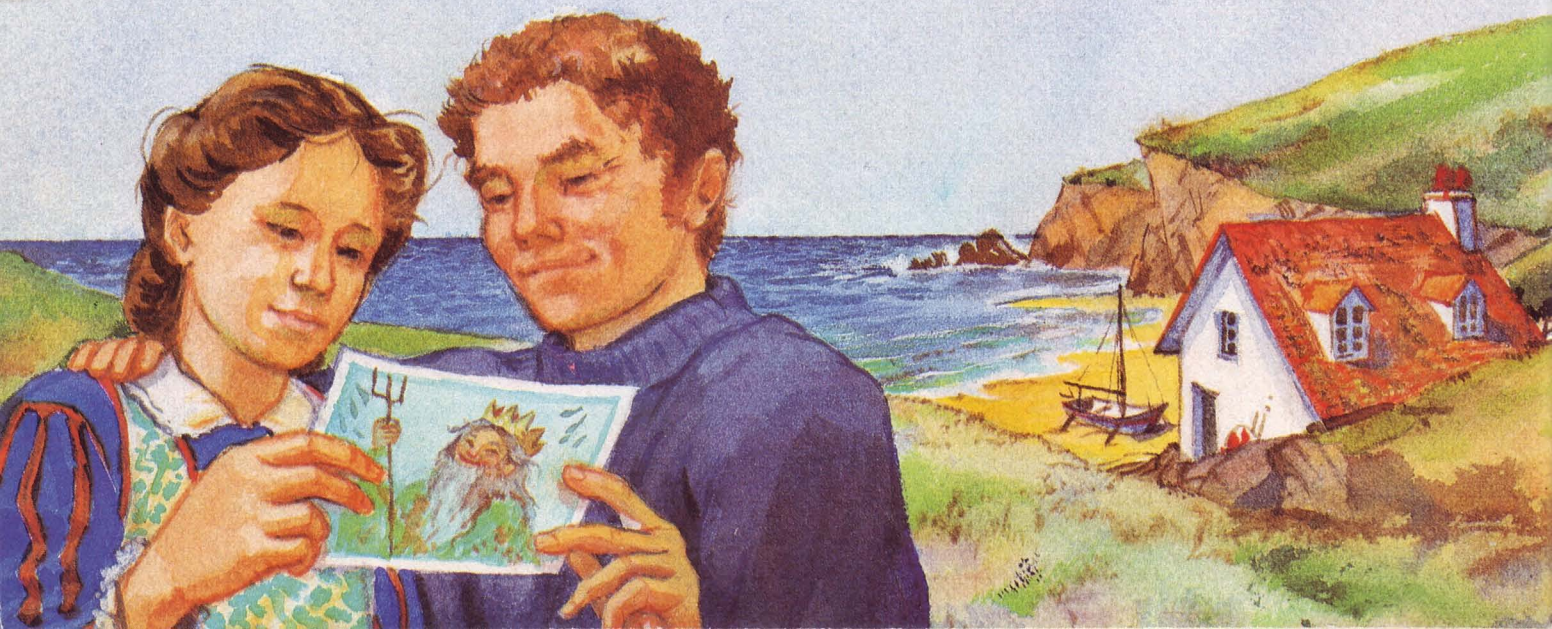
So, next time the big pipe at the side of the tank was opened to let out the water, they held hands and dived down it together. It was a long, dark swim, but in the end they got to the sea. It was broad and grey and as full of adventure as Geordie had dreamed.

As for Fred and Isa, when they heard the news from Earl Slater, they were dreadfully upset. But by now, Isa had learned to make the best of things.


"Fred," she said thoughtfully, "as

our Geordie's turned into a mer-boy, it's only common sense — if we want to see him, we must live by the sea."

So they bought a cottage by the sea, and Fred became a hard-working fisherman. And sometimes he would catch a glimpse of Geordie and Shell Pink waving merrily, far out to sea. And every Monday morning Isa would receive a picture postcard from them, and sometimes even a parcel. So she knew that they were safe and she never worried about anything ever again.



GROGRE THE GOLDEN OGRE



Grogre, his father and the Slurm floated and bobbed in their red bubbles into the centre of the city of the Black Ogres. Behind them, Bogre was doing somersaults in his bubble, rolling himself downwards into the city. His friends were heading towards one of the huge spiral towers — it was covered with sharp spikes. They had no time to roll away!

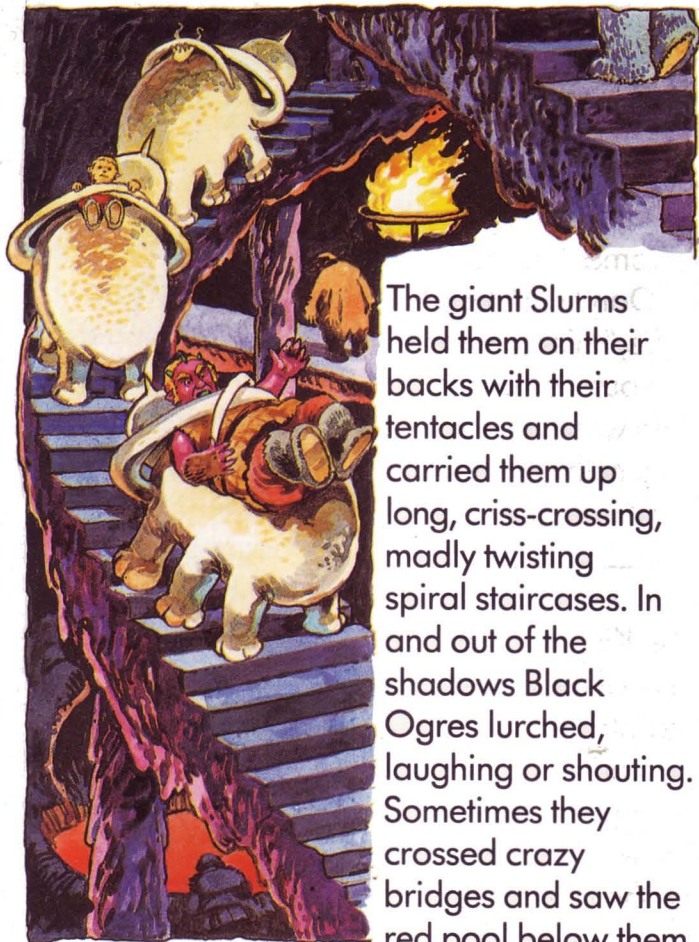
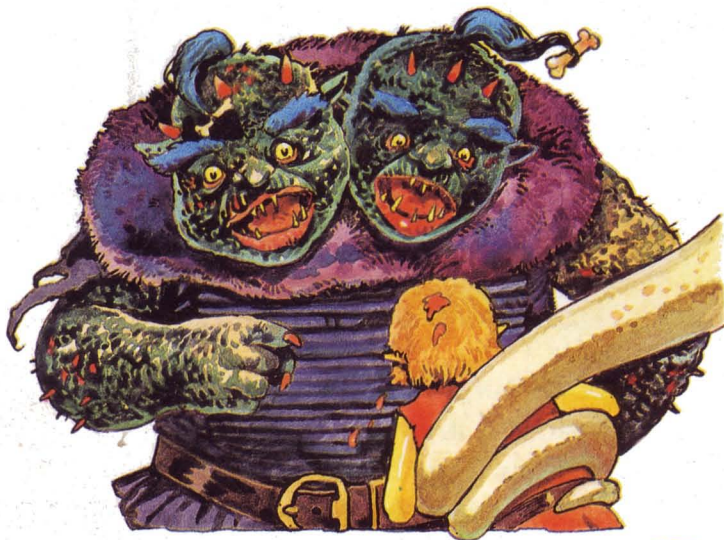


Their bubbles burst; they tumbled on to the spiral edge of the tower, which was as smooth as glass. They began to slide round and round, faster and faster, down and down into the city.



Past bridges and towers — they slid into a tunnel and out into a huge red pool of foam and bubbles in the centre of a vast black hall, lit by lamps of hanging fire.

Crowding round the pool were Black Ogres and Slurms. Three Slurms, even bigger than Grogre's father, pulled them out. They had no chance to use their swords. A big fat ogre with two heads shouted at them with both his mouths, "A red Ogre, a baby Slurm and . . ." he stared with all four eyes, "a Golden Ogre. The King might give me a present for a Golden Ogre. To the King now!"



The giant Slurms held them on their backs with their tentacles and carried them up long, criss-crossing, madly twisting spiral staircases. In and out of the shadows Black Ogres lurched, laughing or shouting. Sometimes they crossed crazy bridges and saw the red pool below them.



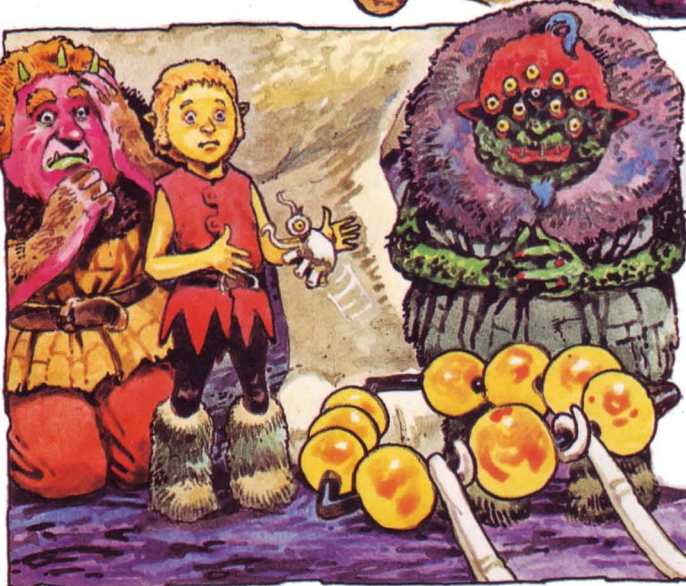
They came to a great round room with giant open windows — the top of the tower. Black Ogres stood all around. The King of the Black Ogres sat in the middle of the room on a throne of white bones. He was not much bigger than Grogre. He had

no neck, arms or legs and was covered all over with white pimples. He had one red eye that could move to any part of his body. In front of him, on a small pillar of shiny black stone, were nine yellow stones fitted to a black metal triangle — the Sun-stones!

The Slurms made Grogre and his father kneel down. The two-headed ogre began to crawl on his stomach towards the King. "Don't hurt me, don't hurt me," his two voices shouted, but not together, he was so nervous. "I've something nice for you to kill . . . a Golden Ogre."



The King's eye darkened. Five of his white pimples shuddered, and out of each shot a long white bony finger. They picked up the two-headed ogre, tossed him up and down three times, then hurled him through a window. The other Black Ogres laughed and clapped or waved their tentacles.



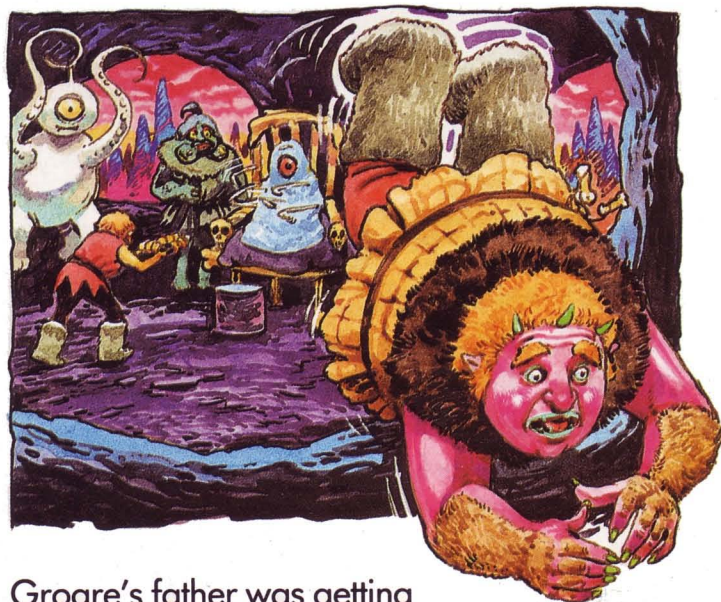
Grogre was horrified and, although he was very frightened, he said, "Why, why kill your own ogres?"

A thin, mean whisper came from a slit at the top of the King's head.

"To show that I alone am King." But then his voice rose to an enormous scream and his mouth became a great red hole, "I ALONE AM KING," he roared.

The Black Ogres and Slurms shuddered and moaned in fear. The King aimed the triangle of stones at the baby Slurm — it jumped into Grogre's arms.

"Put that Slurm down so I can kill it," whispered the King. Grogre was too terrified to reply but he would not put the Slurm down. The King's eye turned black, a streak of yellow light shot from the end of the triangle straight into a big ten-eyed ogre which vanished, leaving only a little shaking yellow flame. "Put the Slurm down or you will both be next."

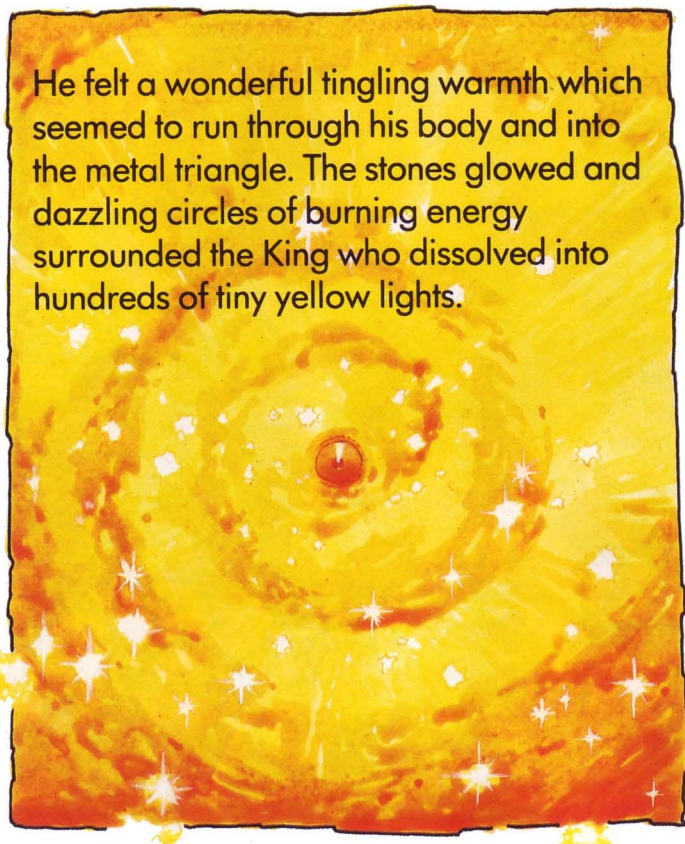


Grogre's father was getting angrier and angrier: he threw himself at the King. The King's terrible rattling bony fingers seized him, throwing him, up and down, up and down, and then out of a window. Grogre burst into tears, ran towards the triangle of stones and pointed it at the King. "Only I can fire the Sun-stones," laughed the King. "Only I can hate enough. Hate is how they work."



Suddenly, Grogre heard a voice calling his name — from outside the tower — Bogre's voice! Flying through the window on the back of a bat-frog came Bogre and, still angry, Grogre's father. "Dad's not dead. Caught him." Bogre swooped and rose. "Great hate fires stones," yelled Bogre almost falling off, "great love's stronger." Grogre thought of his father, of Bogre, of the baby Slurm and of Zagon.

He felt a wonderful tingling warmth which seemed to run through his body and into the metal triangle. The stones glowed and dazzling circles of burning energy surrounded the King who dissolved into hundreds of tiny yellow lights.



Bogre's bat-frog flew down. The baby Slurm jumped on to Grogre and, still holding the triangle, Grogre jumped on the bat-frog's back. Out through the window they sailed.



Black Ogres on their bat-frogs were swarming upwards from the middle tower.

"Kill 'em, kill 'em!"

yelled Bogre to Grogre.

"I can't hate, not even the Black Ogres, so I can't fire the stones."

"Think of us, save us, think of Zagon," called his father.

Grogre aimed — arrows of light flew into the tower turning it into a blinding pillar of gold before it sank flaming into the centre of the city.



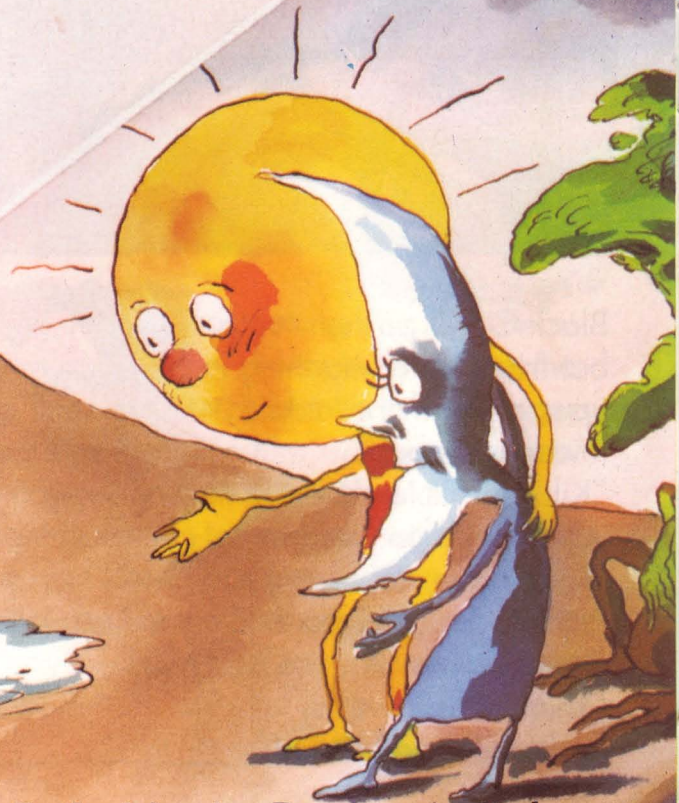
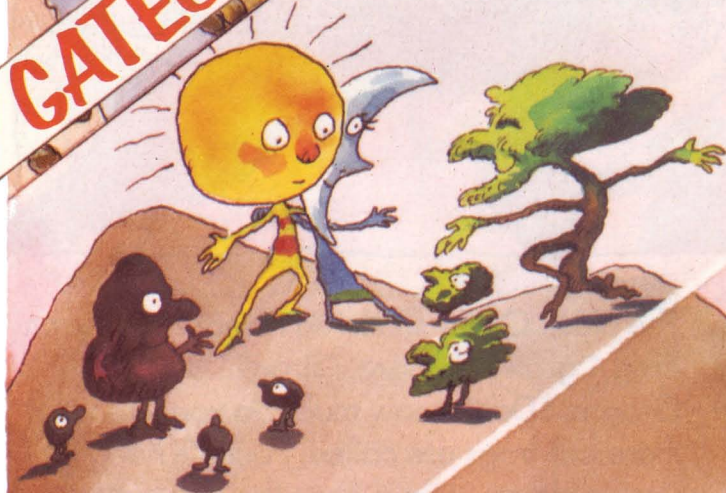
The Black Ogres scattered in fear. "Come on Brog," growled Bogre. "Brog?" asked Grogre. "Don't know much do you? It's what these bat-frogs are called. Found it hanging upside-down. Stole it. Then thought better rescue you. Caught your dad as he fell. Almost didn't." "Thank you for saving us," said Grogre. "Almost didn't but said to myself, 'Shall I? Shan't I? Shall I? Shan't I?'" "And then you said 'all right, *all right*, ALL RIGHT,'" laughed Grogre.



Bogre was amazed. "How do you know?" Grogre said, "And then one of your horns became golden, just like one of yours, father." It was true, neither had noticed in the struggle. Even Bogre laughed he was so happy. They flew towards their village through a golden sky, the Slurm asleep in Grogre's arms. Zagon would be well and soon they would be home.



GATECRASHERS



The Sun and the Moon have not always lived in the sky, you know. They used to live together, husband and wife, in a huge, rambling house on the top of a hill in Africa.

They were a very friendly couple, and always welcomed visitors. They invited the Tree to tea, and she brought her cousins the Bushes. They invited the Rock and he brought his step-children, the Pebbles. The Moon invited her daughters, the Stars, to lunch and they brought along their uncles, the Planets. Indeed the parties at the house on the hill soon became very famous.

"Moon," said the Sun one morning. "We've never invited the Dew, it's high time we did."

So the Morning Dew was invited to dinner. "But I might make your lawn wet," said the Dew.

"Oh, don't worry about that. And do bring along your friends and relations if you like."

So the Dew arrived in good time for dinner — and brought her cousin the Rain. The Rain poured down on the hill until it was surrounded by water.

"I hope you don't mind," said the Rain, "but I've brought along my cousins the Ponds."

"Delighted to see you all," said the Sun, as big ponds and little ponds splashed up the garden path.

"I hope you don't mind," said the Ponds, "but we brought



along our cousins the Lakes."

"Pleased you could come," said the Moon, as grey lakes and blue lakes, deep lakes and shallow lakes rippled indoors.

"I hope you don't mind," said the Lakes, "but we brought along our friends the Rivers."

"Delighted to meet you all," said the Sun, as rushing rivers and sluggish rivers, wide rivers and bending rivers flowed up the stairs. "I hope you can all find somewhere to sit."

"I hope you don't mind," said the Rivers, "but we brought along our cousins the Estuaries."

"So nice of you all to come," said the Sun and the Moon looking at each

other anxiously. "Um . . . make yourselves comfortable."

Soon the guests had filled the upstairs as well as the downstairs, and the Sun and the Moon found themselves sitting on the roof, with water lapping at their feet.

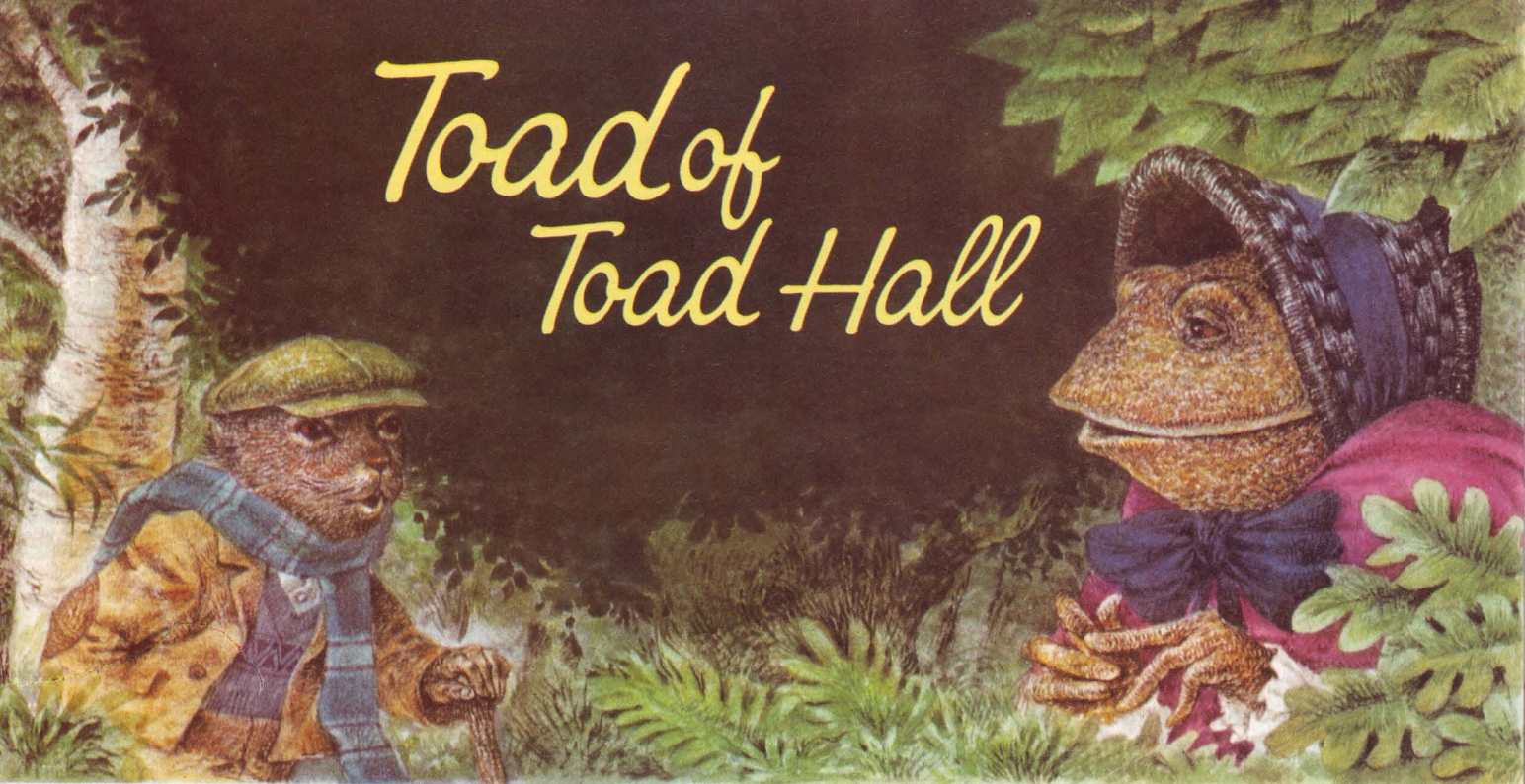
"I hope you don't mind," said the Estuaries, "but we brought along our cousins the Oceans . . ."

"Glug," said the Sun.

"Glug, glug," said the Moon. And they floated off into the sky.

And there the Sun and Moon have lived ever since, gazing down on the oceans and the rivers which crowded them out of their house. One day, when the party is over, they might go home!

Toad of Toad Hall



Toad awoke in the wood feeling cold, hungry and very lonely. But as he sighed and blew and stared before him, he saw some bright, small thing shine and twinkle and move towards him. As it approached, a face grew up gradually around it, a familiar face — it was Ratty!

"Toad," said Rat when they arrived at his little riverside home, "go upstairs at once and take off that old cotton rag. Clean yourself thoroughly and put on some of my clothes and try and come down looking like a gentleman, if you *can*."

By the time Toad came down again, lunch was on the table, and while the two animals ate, Toad told Rat all his adventures.

Rat listened in silence until at last he said, "Now Toady, I don't want to give you more pain after all you've been through but . . ."

"Go on Ratty! Don't spare me, what is it?"

"You mean, you mean to say you



don't know . . . about the stoats and weasels? . . . and how they've . . . taken Toad Hall?"

Toad leaned on the table, resting his chin on his paws. A large tear welled up in each of his eyes, overflowed and splashed down, *plop! plop!*

"Go on, Ratty," murmured Toad, "tell me all. The worst is over. I can bear it."

"Well, one dark night, a band of weasels armed to the teeth crept up to the front entrance of Toad Hall. At the same time, a body of ferrets took over the back-yard and offices, while a company



of stoats occupied the conservatory and billiard-room. And they've been living in Toad Hall ever since".

"Oh, have they?" said Toad, getting up and seizing a stick. "I'll jolly well see about that!"

"It's no good Toad!" called Rat after him. "You'll only get into trouble!"

But Toad marched rapidly down the road, his stick over his shoulder, fuming and muttering to himself till he got near to his front gate. Suddenly there popped up from behind him a long yellow ferret with a gun.

"Who goes there?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Toad very angrily. "What do you mean by talking to me like that? Come out at once or I'll . . ."



The ferret brought his gun up on to his shoulder. Toad dropped flat on the road and *bang!* a bullet whistled over his head.

The startled Toad scrambled to his feet and scampered off back to Ratty's as hard as he could.

"What did I tell you?" said Rat. "They've got sentries posted everywhere, and they're all armed. You must wait."

Just then there came a heavy knock at the door and in walked Badger!

His shoes were covered in mud, and he was looking very rough and tousled. He shook Toad by the paw and said, "This is a poor home-coming, unhappy Toad!" Then he turned his back on him and sat down at the table.

Presently there came another knock at the door, and in came Mole, very shabby and unwashed, with bits of hay and straw in his fur. "Hooray! Here's Toad," he cried. "Fancy having you back again!" And he began to dance round him.

Ratty, Mole and Toad all talked at once and the noise was simply deafening.

"Be quiet at once!" Instantly everyone was silent. Badger got up from his chair and looking at them severely, said very slowly, "Now then, I'm going to tell you all a secret. There's an underground passage that leads from the river bank near here, right up into the middle of Toad Hall."

"Nonsense!" said Toad. "I know every inch of Toad Hall, inside and out. Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

"My young friend," said Badger, with great severity, "your father showed it to me. 'Don't let my son know about it,' he said, 'he's a good boy, but he simply can't hold his tongue. If ever he's in a real fix tell him about the secret



passage — but not before."

"Well," said Toad sulkily, "perhaps I am a bit of a talker. But never mind, go on Badger. How's this passage of yours going to help us?"

"There's going to be a big banquet tomorrow night at Toad Hall," continued Badger. "It's the Chief Weasel's birthday, and all the weasels will be gathered together in the dining-hall, eating and drinking and laughing and suspecting nothing. No guns, no swords, no sticks, no arms of any sort whatever!"

"But the sentries will be posted as usual," remarked Rat.

"Exactly," said Badger. "And that's where the passage comes in. That very

useful tunnel leads right up under the pantry, next to the dining-hall."

"We'll creep out quietly into the pantry . . ." cried Mole.

". . . with our pistols and swords and sticks . . ." shouted Rat.

". . . and rush in upon them," said Badger.

". . . and whack 'em and whack 'em and whack 'em and whack em!" cried Toad, running round and round the room and jumping on the chairs.

"Very well," said Badger, "our plan is settled. So, as it's getting late, all of you go right off to bed at once. We'll make all the arrangements tomorrow."





The following night each animal armed himself with sword, stick and pistol. When finally they were ready, Badger took a lantern in one paw, and grasping a great stick with the other, said, "Now then, follow me!"

The secret passage, when they found it, was cold, and dark, and damp, and low, and narrow. So they groped and shuffled along, with their ears pricked up and their paws on their pistols, till at last Badger said, "We ought by now to be pretty nearly under the Hall."

Suddenly they heard people shouting, and cheering, and stamping their feet on the floor, and hammering on the tables.

The passage now began to slope upwards. They groped a little further. The noise broke out again, quite distinct this time and very close above them.

"Ooo-ray-oo-ray-oo-ray-ooray!" they heard.

They hurried along the passage till it came to a full stop. They were standing under the trap-door that led up into the pantry!

"Now then, boys!" said Badger, and the four of them put their shoulders to the trap-door and gave a great heave. Hoisting each other up, they found themselves in the pantry, with only a door between them and the dining-hall!

Badger drew himself up, took a firm grip of his stick with both paws, glanced round at his comrades and cried, "The hour is come. Follow me!" And he flung the door wide open. What a squealing and a squeaking and a screeching filled the air!

Well might the terrified weasels dive under the tables and spring madly up at the windows! Well might the ferrets rush wildly for the fire-place and get hopelessly jammed in the chimney! Well might tables and chairs be upset and glass and



china be sent crashing to the floor, in the panic of that terrible moment when the four heroes strode into the room!

The mighty Badger, his whiskers bristling, waved his great cudgel through the air. Mole, black and grim, brandishing his stick and shouting his awful war-cry, "A Mole! A Mole!" Rat, his belt bulging

with weapons of every age and variety, strode into battle. And Toad, frenzied with excitement, swinging his stick above his head, went straight for the Chief Weasel and sent him flying across the table with one blow.

Though they were but four in all, to the panic-stricken weasels the hall seemed full of monstrous animals,

whooping and flourishing enormous cudgels. And they broke and fled with squeals of terror and dismay, this way and that, through the windows, up the chimney, anywhere to get out of reach of those terrible sticks.





It was soon over. Up and down the whole length of the hall strode the four friends, whacking with their sticks at every head that showed itself. And in five minutes the room was cleared.

On the floor lay some dozen or so of the enemy, on whom Mole was busily fitting handcuffs. Badger, resting from his labours, leaned on his stick and wiped his brow.

"I want some grub. Stir yourself, Toad, and look lively!"

Toad felt rather hurt that Badger did not tell him what a fine fellow he was and how splendidly he had fought. But he bustled out, and so did Rat, and soon they found some jelly, some trifle, a cold chicken, a tongue and quite a lot of lobster salad.

So they had a splendid supper and presently retired to rest in their beds, safe in Toad's ancestral home, won by matchless valour, clever planning and a proper handling of sticks.



The Princess Who Met The North Wind

There was once a Princess who lived in a very cold land. The white mountains reached almost to the sky, and the rivers shone as brightly as the silver chain the Princess wore around her neck.



The King and Queen loved their daughter very much and gave her beautiful presents each birthday, but the time came when she had far too much of everything.

"Not another ruby snowbird's egg," said the Princess crossly as she opened up her parcels. "I have three already! And you can take away these pearls — I have so many I could play marbles with them."

"But my child, what *can* we give you?" asked the poor King, wringing his hands. "I've searched high and low to find you something different this year."

"I've told you, father," replied the Princess stamping her foot in annoyance. "I want the most beautiful jewels in the world to hang from the chain around my neck. I'm going to forget about birthdays until you manage to find them for me."





So she marched off to bed, taking no notice of her cake which was built in the shape of an iceberg. The King shook his head sadly and gave the pearls to the youngest parlourmaid.

That night, as the Princess lay sleeping, the North Wind began to call and blow around her room at the top of the palace. He blew so fiercely, the heavy clouds rolled away across the sky and the stars shone, clear and bright, into the bedroom. The Princess thought it must be daylight and sat up in bed, staring and blinking.



"Come to the window," sang the North Wind, "and I will give you the most beautiful jewels in the world for the chain around your neck."

The Princess ran to the window and looked up at the sky, where thousands of stars were twinkling and glistening.

"Oh, how beautiful," she whispered. "If only I could reach them."

"Put on your warm cloak and shoes and come with me, Princess," said the North Wind. And he led her down the stairs, through the palace gates, and up the side of the highest mountain in the kingdom.



"I must have the stars for my necklace!" she cried. And she began to slide and slither down the mountain, tearing her cloak and cutting her hands on the rocks.

The Princess did not know that the cold breath of the North Wind had frozen the lake below the mountain, and that all she could see was the reflection of stars from the sky above. She reached the bottom of the mountain, ran to the lake, stretched out her hand for the nearest star and gave a cry of bitter disappointment.

The Princess was not at all happy on the mountain. Her feet were wet, her hands numb, and all the time the North Wind blew, so that her cloak billowed all round her. The more she climbed, the further away the stars seemed to be, twinkling and laughing.

"They are so beautiful," she gasped to the North Wind, "but there must be an easier way to reach them."

"Look down, look down," said the North Wind. And the Princess stared in surprise, for now the stars were below as well as above her, and the whole night seemed on fire with them.





taught you not to be selfish," he said. "I am the Prince of the North Wind, and I have given you the most beautiful jewels in the world."

He took the Princess by the hand and led her back to the palace, where there was much laughter and rejoicing.

The North Wind blew so hard that the pine-trees shivered and the snow fell from their branches on to the Princess. She tried to pull her cloak together, but it was badly torn.

"Oh why did I ever think that I could capture the stars?" she said. "I'm certainly being punished for my silliness, for here I am at the bottom of a mountain, hungry, frozen and miles from home."

As the Princess thought of her warm bed, and the birthday tea she had refused to eat, and the kindness of her mother and father, three tears trickled down her nose and chin and hung, frozen, to her silver necklace.

Suddenly the branches of the pine-trees stopped shivering and all was still. A young man appeared at the side of the Princess, and pointed to the frozen tears which hung to her necklace, gleaming green, purple and blue in the Northern Lights.

"My father, the North Wind, has



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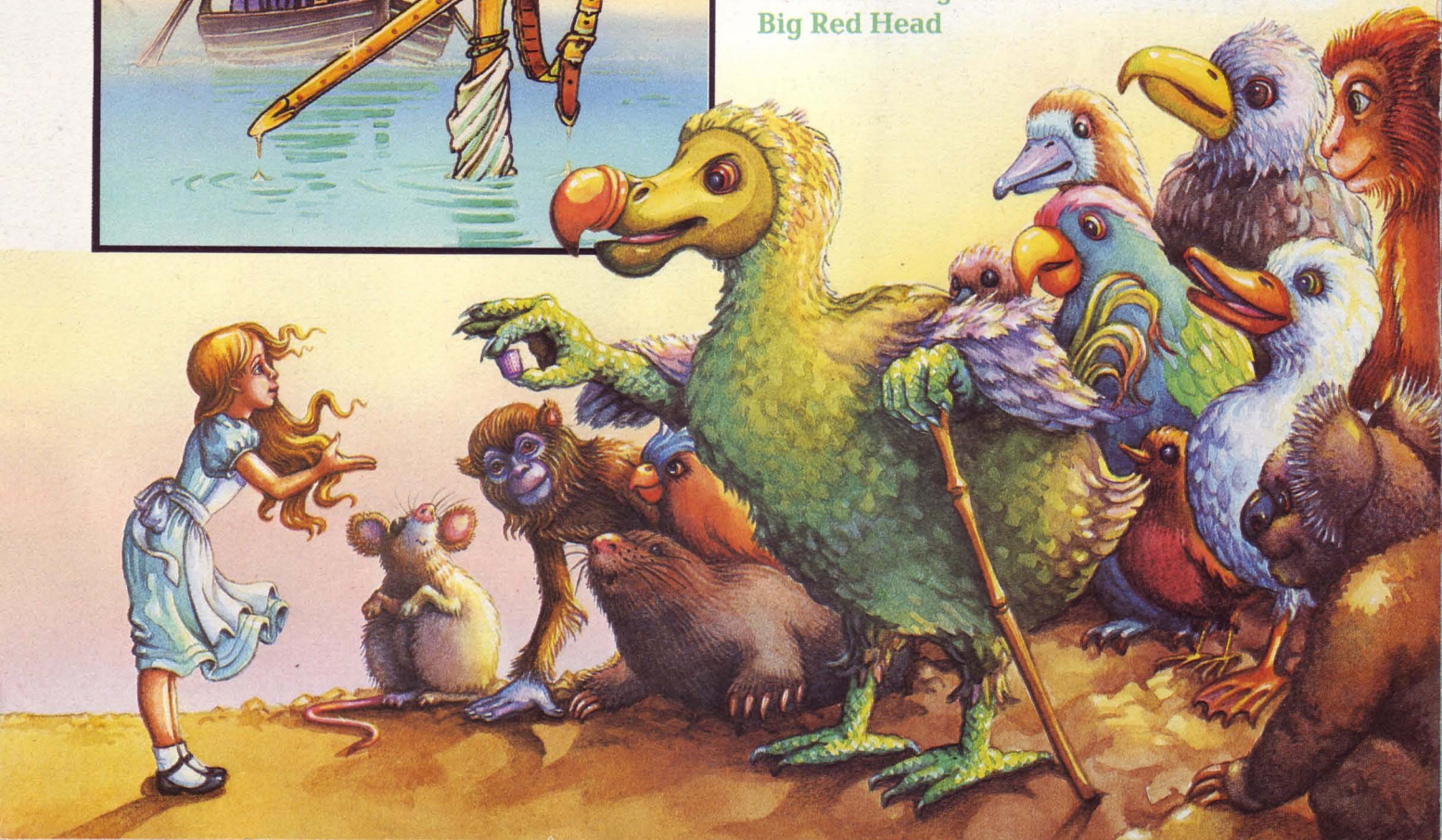
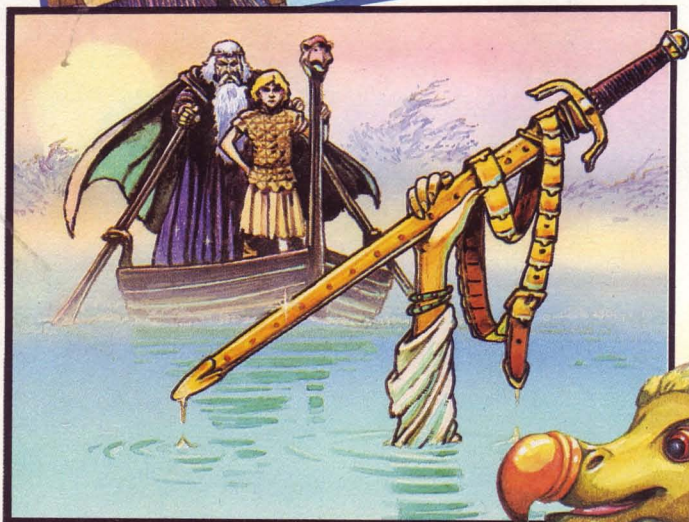
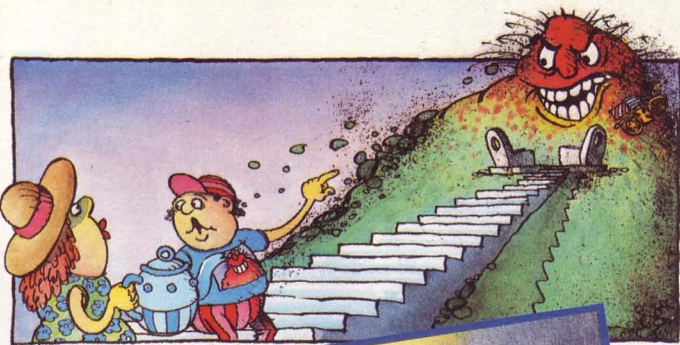
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