



PART 8

# STORY

## Teller

# 2

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



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# STORY Teller 2

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At the back of the classroom somebody is musing on the advantages of being a Martian. R. C. Scriven's poem first appeared in *Journeys*, a BBC publication of Spring 1968.

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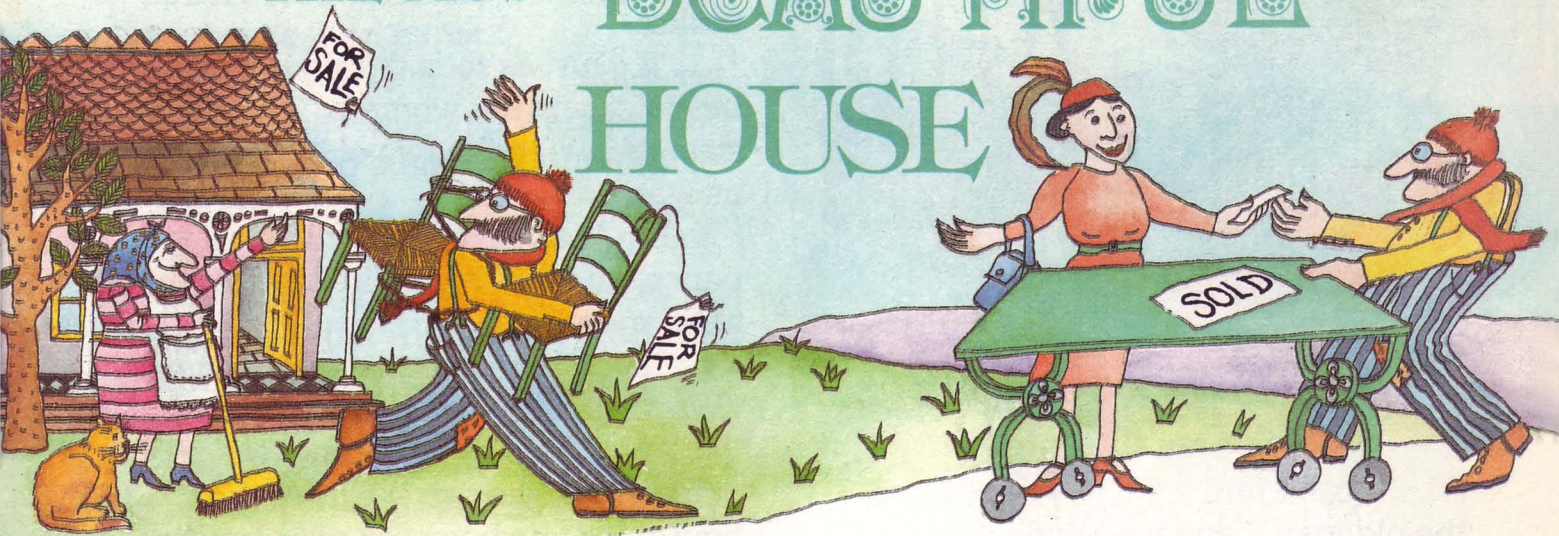
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# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOUSE



Long, long ago there was an old man who lived with his wife in a little house that had a table with two chairs, a bed and a wicker basket for the cat.

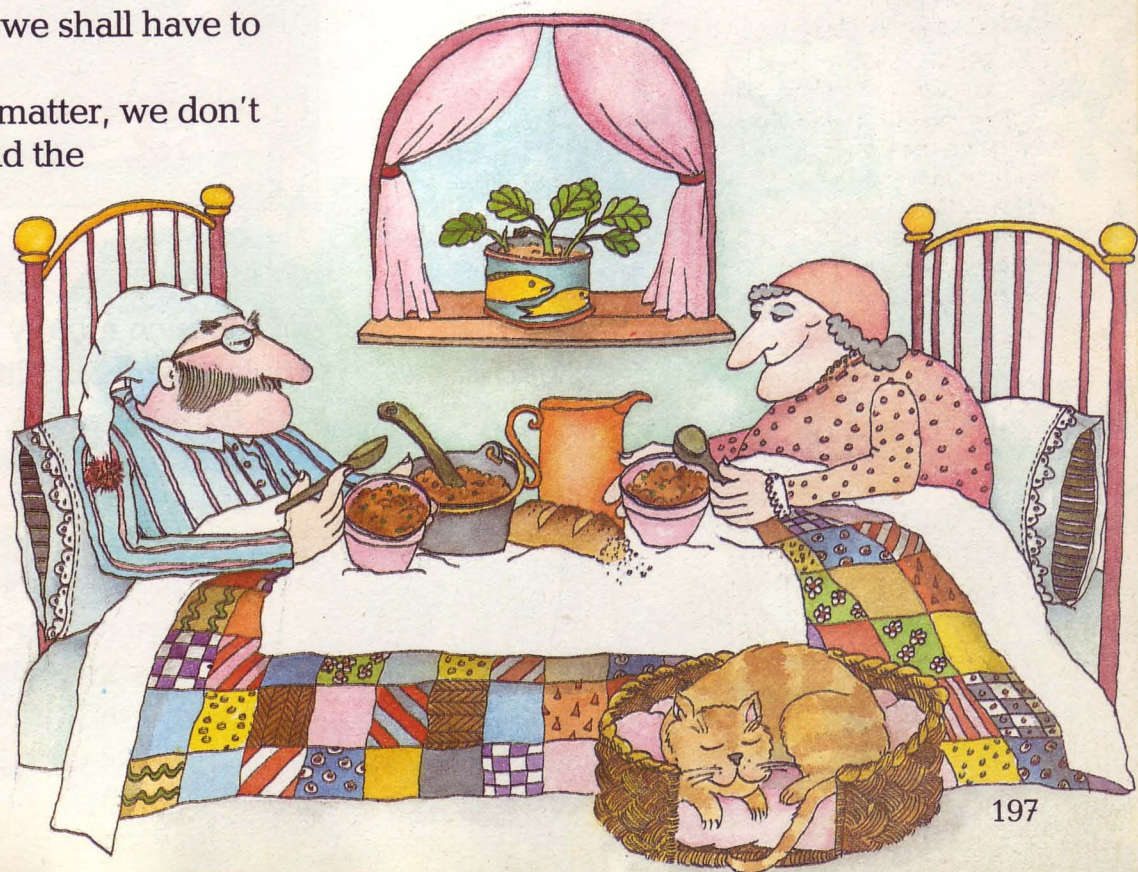
"Ah this is all we need," said the woman contentedly. "Anything else would be a burden to us." And she put one of the chairs outside in the sun and sat down with the cat on her lap.

But one day the man said, "We have no money left, I think we shall have to sell our chairs."

"Oh that doesn't matter, we don't really need them," said the woman. "We can use the bed to sit on. It's softer than the chairs anyway." And she pushed the table in front of the bed. "We're quite comfortable this way," she said.

But soon their money had been spent again and they had to sell the table.

"Well, why did we ever bother with a table in the first place?" said the old woman. "We might just as well set the table on the bedspread since we're sitting in the bed anyway. And look at all the extra room we have now!" She danced through the room with the cat in her arms. A week went by, and then they were without money once again.







"I can't find a job anywhere," said the old man, "and we have no money."

"Oh, never mind," said the woman. "We'll sell the bed. We're better off sleeping on the floor. It's healthier, and it'll keep our old backs straight." And with the cat in her arms she went to the field, where she braided a cover of green grass with white daisies to protect them from the draught on the floor. It was a beautiful cover.

But the man was really too old to work any more, and when the money from the bed was gone, there was



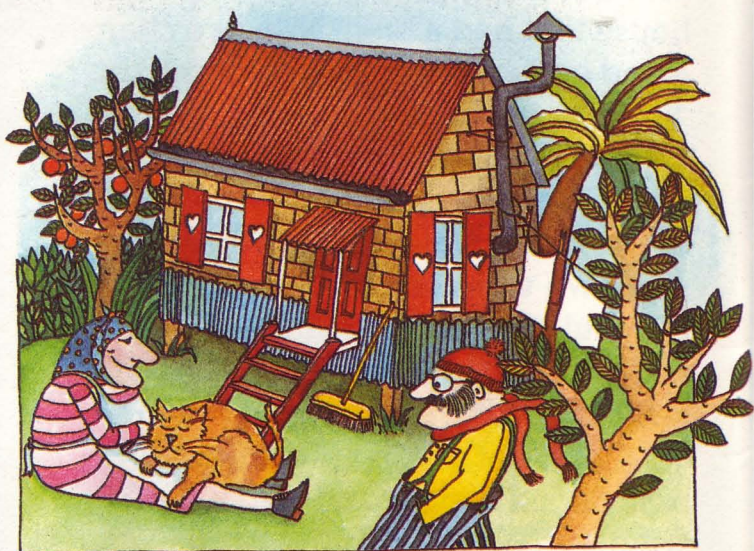
nothing left to sell, except the cat's basket.

"I'd just as soon get rid of that basket," said the woman. "The cat can sleep between the two of us, and keep us warm."

But the basket only sold for a few pence, and it did not take long for those to be spent.

"Look here, wife," said the man. "We shall have to sell the cat."

"No," said the woman, "we're not going to sell the cat. We'll sell the house! It's much too big now anyway without the furniture. Why don't we move into a little hut?"



So they sold their house, and they got so much money that they lived for a whole year in the little hut and were very happy.

"Isn't this wonderful!" cried the woman. "It's so — small. So handy, much less housework." And she went outdoors to sun herself with the cat on her lap.

But after a year they had to sell the hut, and this time they had no roof over their heads.



"I'll fix that," said the woman. "I'll make a house from paper."

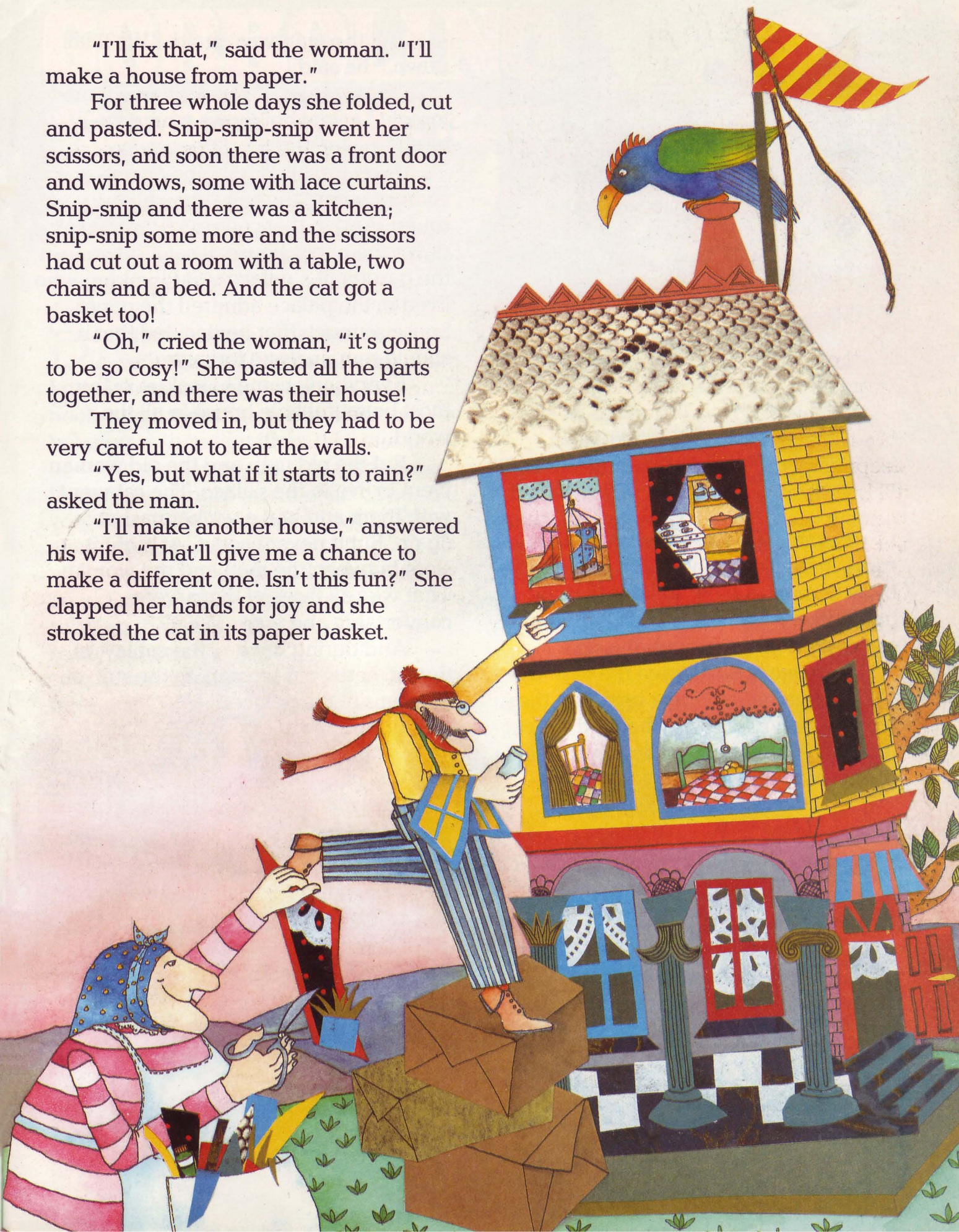
For three whole days she folded, cut and pasted. Snip-snip-snip went her scissors, and soon there was a front door and windows, some with lace curtains. Snip-snip and there was a kitchen; snip-snip some more and the scissors had cut out a room with a table, two chairs and a bed. And the cat got a basket too!

"Oh," cried the woman, "it's going to be so cosy!" She pasted all the parts together, and there was their house!

They moved in, but they had to be very careful not to tear the walls.

"Yes, but what if it starts to rain?" asked the man.

"I'll make another house," answered his wife. "That'll give me a chance to make a different one. Isn't this fun?" She clapped her hands for joy and she stroked the cat in its paper basket.







But the rain never came. Something came in its place. The wind. It began to blow. Finally, it blew so hard that the paper house was lifted from the ground and went sailing through the sky.

"Oh, what *fun*!" cried the woman. "We're flying! Look how beautiful the world is down below!" She held the cat in front of the paper window so it also could enjoy the view.

But the man was afraid. "We'll fall down," he said.

"Yes, we will!" the woman shouted for joy. "And who knows where we'll land?"

They travelled until they came to a country where the sun shone all the year round. And in that country the wind set down the paper house. It set it down in the garden of a palace. And the king who lived in the palace admired the paper house so much that he decided that it should remain there for ever.

Everybody came to look at it: the most beautiful little house in all the world.

But the old man and the old woman went to live in the palace. The cat went with them and had a wicker basket again. But it never used it. At night it slept between the man and the woman. That way all three of them were comfortable and warm.

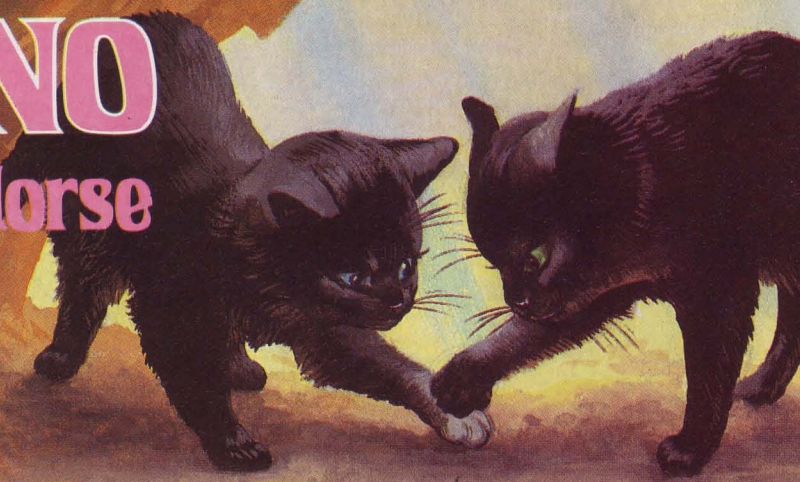
And during the day the cat lay on the lap of the old woman, in the sun, on the steps of the palace.





# GOBBOLINO

## and the Little Wooden Horse



Daylight was streaming into the cave when Gobbolino and the Little Wooden Horse woke and saw Sootica in the entrance. She was bursting with indignation.

"Ah. So you're still here," she cried, flashing her bright green eyes. "You said you'd come and save me and you've already left me to my fate!"

"Oh no, sister! Indeed I haven't!" cried Gobbolino springing up and rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. "I'm ready! I'm ready!"

"Then give me your one white paw, brother!"

Gobbolino held out his paw and Sootica rubbed it with dirt. In a minute or two, Gobbolino's paws were all as black as one another.

"Now you have four black paws just like mine," said Sootica. "Remember, the witch is almost blind. If you keep your eyes half-shut she'll never notice that they're blue rather than green. She'll probably never see you at all because she always sleeps until sunset."

Sootica and Gobbolino ran out of the cave and together they galloped up the steep path to the summit of Hurricane Mountain. The Little Wooden Horse was not far behind them. Suddenly Sootica turned to him and hissed, "Go back. Go back. Your wooden wheels make such a noise my mistress will wake up and hear you coming."







Very crestfallen, the Little Wooden Horse stopped. Then he carefully turned round and slowly went back down the path. It seemed to him that the two little cats had been gone for hours when suddenly Sootica shot past him.

"I'm off," she cried with a wild laugh of triumph. "And my brother has taken my place. With luck, he'll join you at midday in the cave below, and you can both follow me to the stream. Be very careful. Goodbye, goodbye!"



If it seemed a long time to the Little Wooden Horse it seemed ten times as long to Gobbolino, curled up in a dark corner of the witch's cave beside the ugly old woman. He shrank into the shadows among the cobwebs and dust, hoping she would not notice him if she woke up.

Sootica had assured him that the witch would sleep until sunset. But it was not even midday when her snoring became lighter and quicker and then suddenly stopped altogether. Gobbolino froze with terror as he heard her shuffle her feet. She was getting up!

"Sootica," she muttered.  
"Sootica. Where are you?"

She walked round and round the cave grumbling and calling for her cat. At last she found her stick and went tap-tap-tap across the floor, prodding and poking in the corners.





Suddenly, as she passed Gobbolino for the third time, she gave him a painful prod in the ribs.

"So there you are!" she cried.

"You lazy, good-for-nothing creature. Why didn't you answer when I called you? Feel if the water in the cauldron is getting hot. I want it ready and boiling by nightfall."

Gobbolino thought it best to obey her. He crept up to the cauldron and nervously put a paw on the rim.

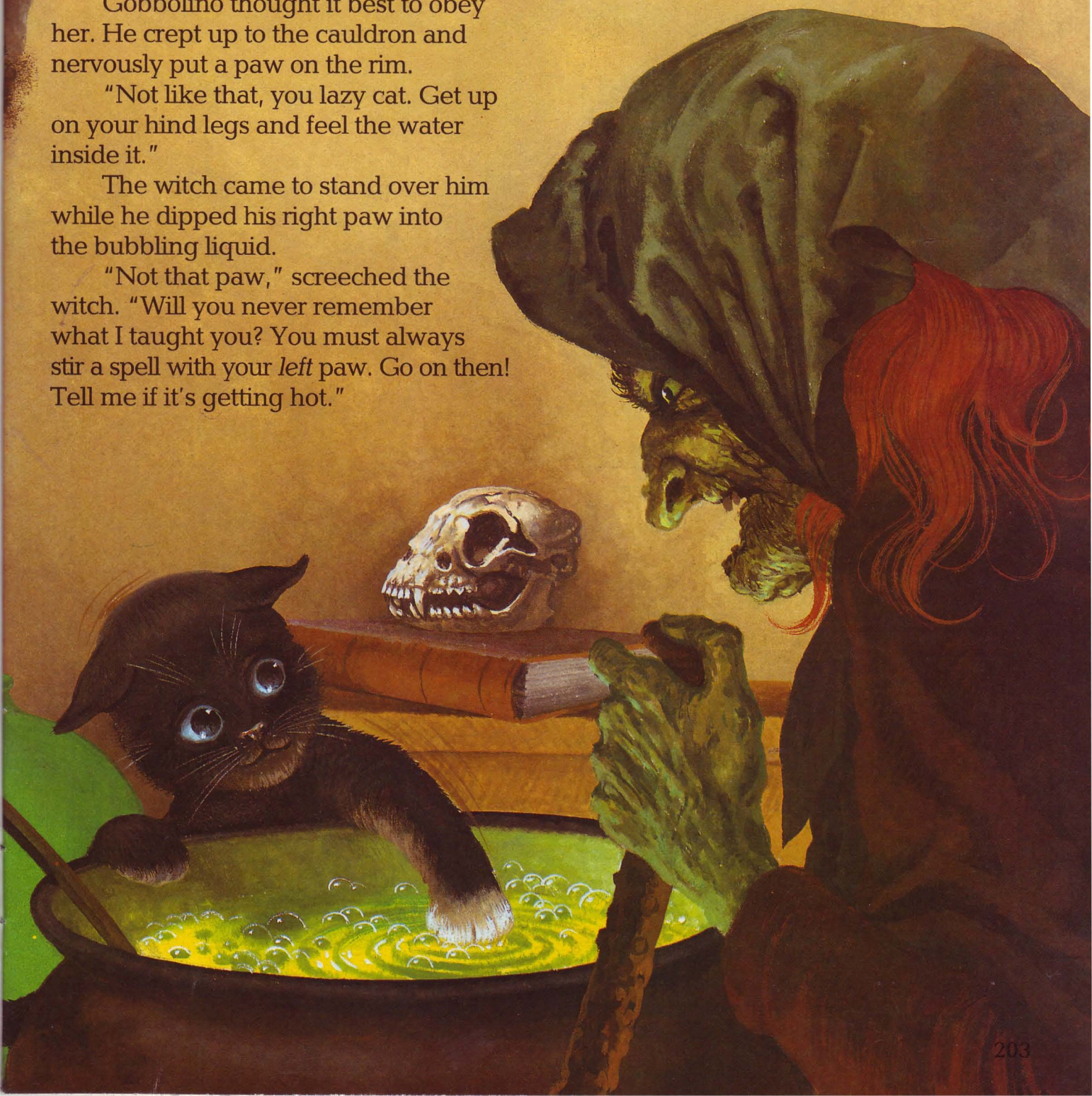
"Not like that, you lazy cat. Get up on your hind legs and feel the water inside it."

The witch came to stand over him while he dipped his right paw into the bubbling liquid.

"Not that paw," screeched the witch. "Will you never remember what I taught you? You must always stir a spell with your *left* paw. Go on then! Tell me if it's getting hot."

Gobbolino was forced to do as she said and almost immediately the dirt was washed off his paw. It gleamed pure white in the murky cave.

The witch stared at it and gasped with horror. "Sootica. Sootica? Why, you wretched little imposter. You're not my cat at all."





"I'm sorry, ma'am!" gasped Gobbolino, expecting to be hurled down Hurricane Mountain at any moment. But the witch was gazing at him thoughtfully.

"White paw, blue eyes," she muttered. "Why, I do believe you are the brother of my own good-for-nothing cat, and once, long ago, you were both

together in my cavern. Am I right, cat?"

"Yes, if you please, ma'am!" said Gobbolino, lowering his beautiful blue eyes to the floor.

"Then what are you doing here now? And where is Sootica?" thundered the witch. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes. Yes, I've seen her," confessed Gobbolino.

"And *where* is she now?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am. She's gone."



"I see it all," raged the witch. "My cat has deserted me. And she has put you in her place to deceive me while she escaped. Isn't that true?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Gobbolino, trembling and expecting to be destroyed at any minute.

But the witch sat down on her chair and rocked herself to and fro with grief.



"Why did she leave me? Oh why?" she moaned.

"I trained her to become the best witch's cat in the world. Why should she want to leave me here alone now that I'm old and getting helpless? Wasn't I wicked enough for her?"

The witch sobbed and cried so bitterly that Gobbolino began to feel sorry for her. "I think my sister got tired of being a witch's cat and wants to be good for a change."

"Good?" screeched the witch, startled. "How could she be good? She was born and bred a witch's cat! What shall I do? Oh what shall I do?" she sobbed over and over again. "How could she break my old heart?"

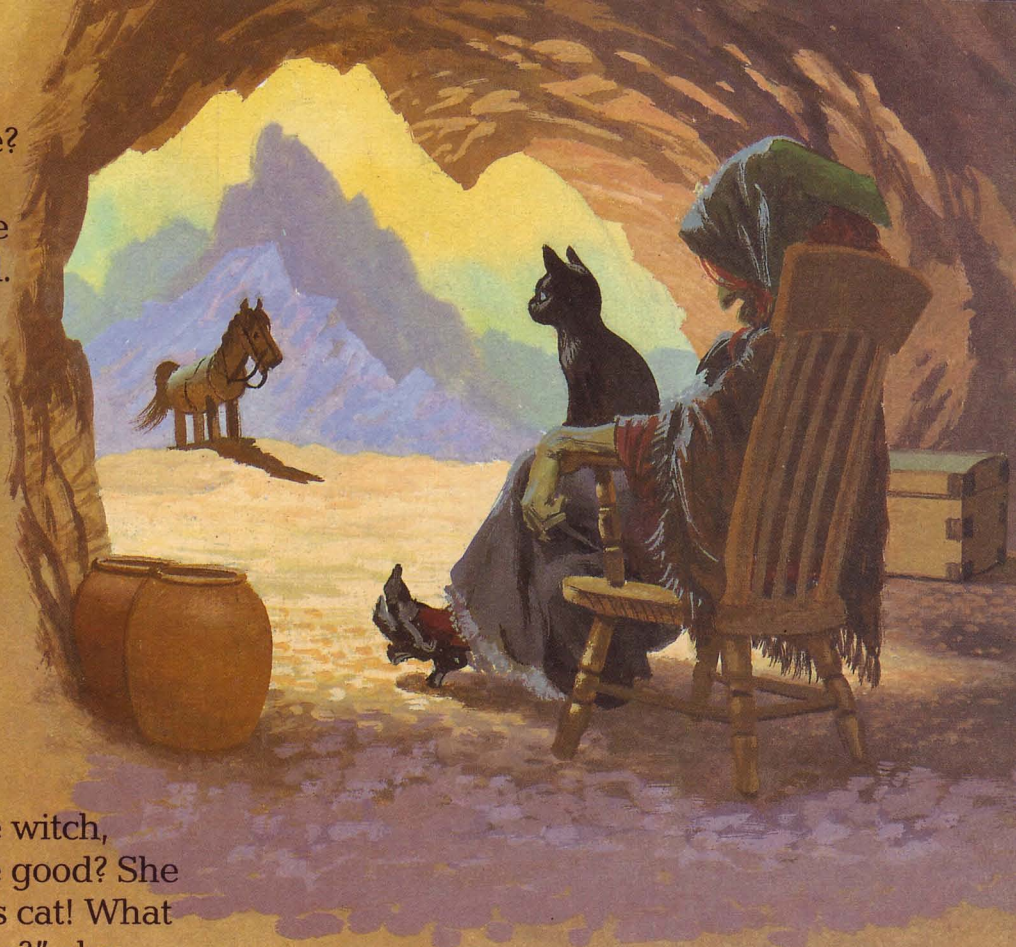
Gobbolino was so overcome with pity that he crept on to her lap.

Slowly the sun crossed the sky and moved across the rocks. Gobbolino knew that it was long past midday and that Sootica must now be safely on the other side of the stream. But his fur was still damp with the witch's tears and he could not find it in his heart to leave her just yet.

Gobbolino dozed off and slept for a couple of hours. When he awoke, the cave entrance was golden with afternoon sunshine and he could hear someone coming up the hill. It was the Little Wooden Horse.

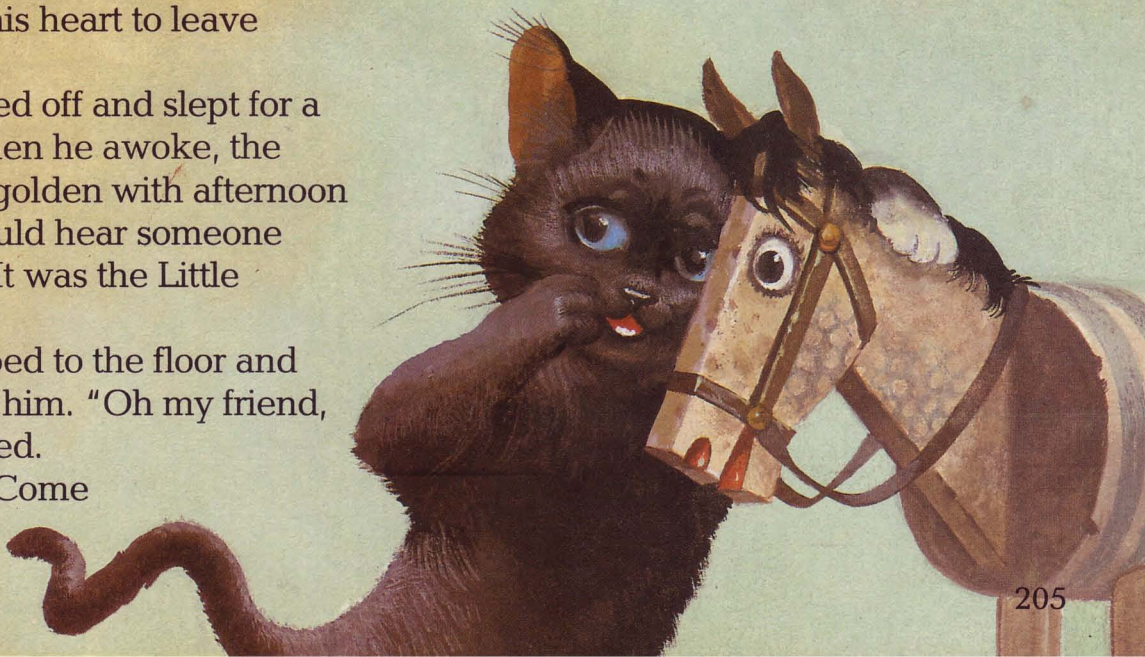
Gobbolino leaped to the floor and joyfully ran to meet him. "Oh my friend, my friend," he purred.

"Come along! Come this instant!" said

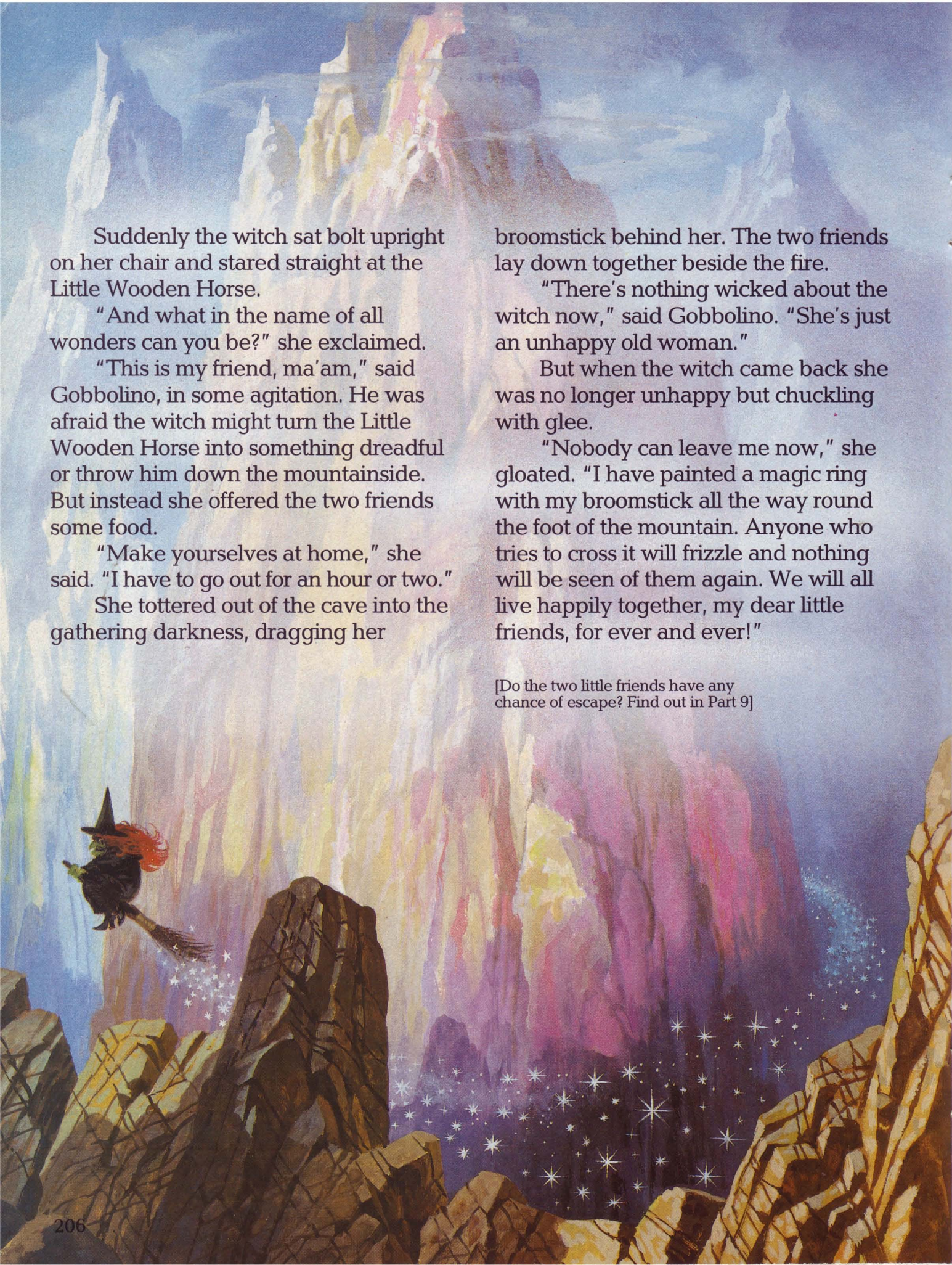


the Little Wooden Horse. "We must leave immediately while the witch is still asleep."

"No, no," said Gobbolino. "You don't understand. The poor old lady is breaking her heart at the loss of Sootica. I can't possibly run away and leave her all alone. You go back, my friend, and tell my family that I will return in a few days."





The background of the page is a full-page illustration. It depicts a towering, jagged mountain peak in the distance, its slopes covered in snow and patches of yellow and pink, possibly from flowers or light reflecting off the snow. In the foreground, dark, craggy rock formations are visible. A witch with a black pointed hat and a red veil is flying on a broomstick from the left side of the frame. She is leaving a trail of small, white, star-like sparks behind her. The sky is a deep blue with some lighter, wispy clouds near the mountain peak.

Suddenly the witch sat bolt upright on her chair and stared straight at the Little Wooden Horse.

"And what in the name of all wonders can you be?" she exclaimed.

"This is my friend, ma'am," said Gobbolino, in some agitation. He was afraid the witch might turn the Little Wooden Horse into something dreadful or throw him down the mountainside. But instead she offered the two friends some food.

"Make yourselves at home," she said. "I have to go out for an hour or two."

She tottered out of the cave into the gathering darkness, dragging her

broomstick behind her. The two friends lay down together beside the fire.

"There's nothing wicked about the witch now," said Gobbolino. "She's just an unhappy old woman."

But when the witch came back she was no longer unhappy but chuckling with glee.

"Nobody can leave me now," she gloated. "I have painted a magic ring with my broomstick all the way round the foot of the mountain. Anyone who tries to cross it will frizzle and nothing will be seen of them again. We will all live happily together, my dear little friends, for ever and ever!"

[Do the two little friends have any chance of escape? Find out in Part 9]



# The Orchestra That Lost Its Voice



In the heart of a large city, in a round building, in a room with chandeliers and a thousand folding red seats, a famous orchestra plays every night.

*Boom-boom-boom-BOOM!*

Sometimes it plays music by Strauss:

*Dum-dum-dum-DUM!*

And sometimes it is by Glenn Miller:

*Da-dididdy-daa-aa-diddy!*

But most often, it was by Beethoven:

*Boom-boom-boom-BOOM!*

The musicians of the Royal Symphonic have been playing in the concert hall since they were young, and most of them are old now, with thinning hair and knobbly fingers. But every evening they play, and every night

they pack away their instruments in the big cupboard under the stage. It is dark and quiet, though sometimes the great double bass snores, and the flute talks in her sleep.

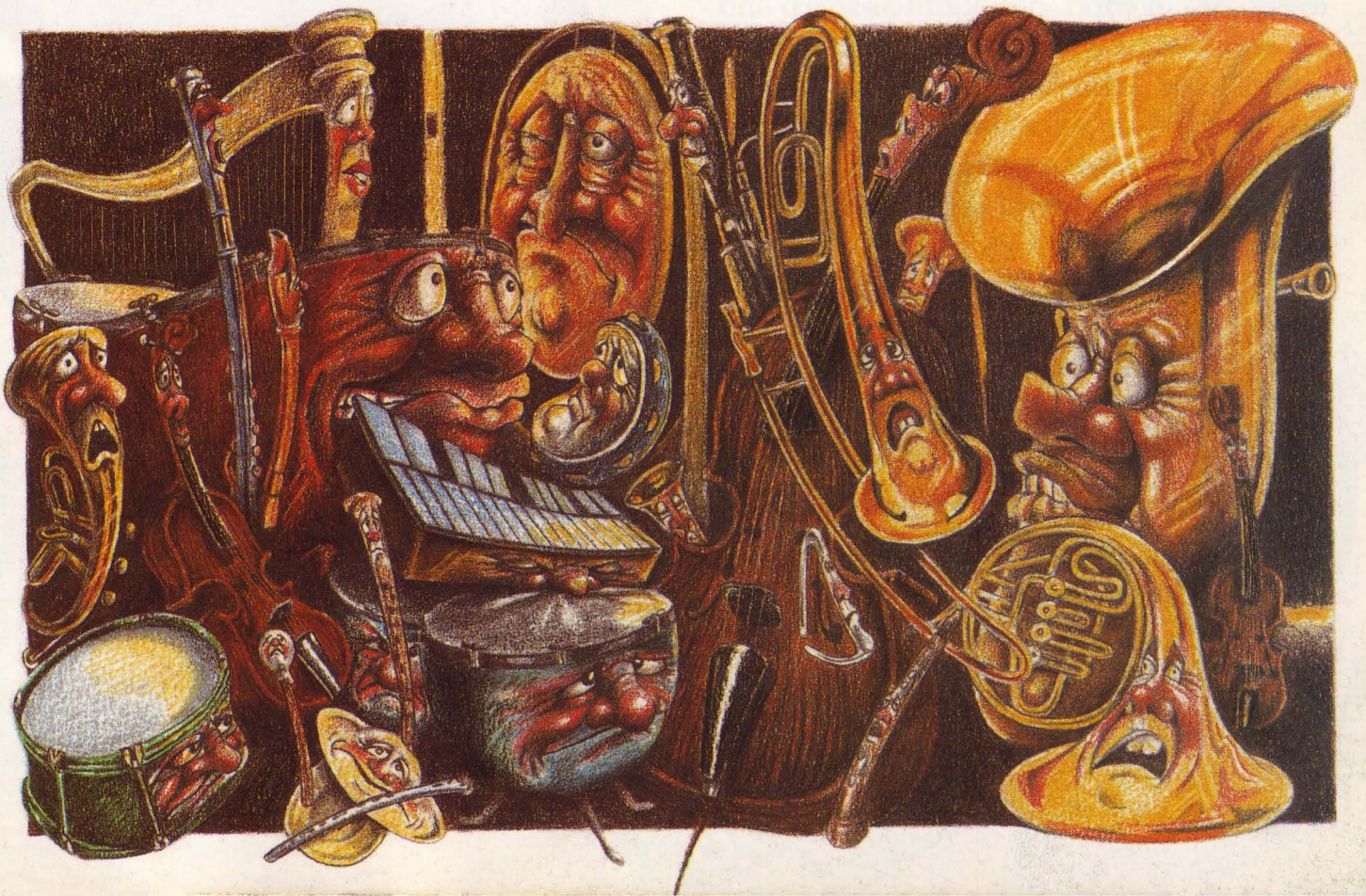
But it was very different on the night of the storm! Shortly after midnight, the orchestra was woken by tinkling, rattling and banging.

"There's another orchestra out there!" cried the snare drum. "I can hear banging!"

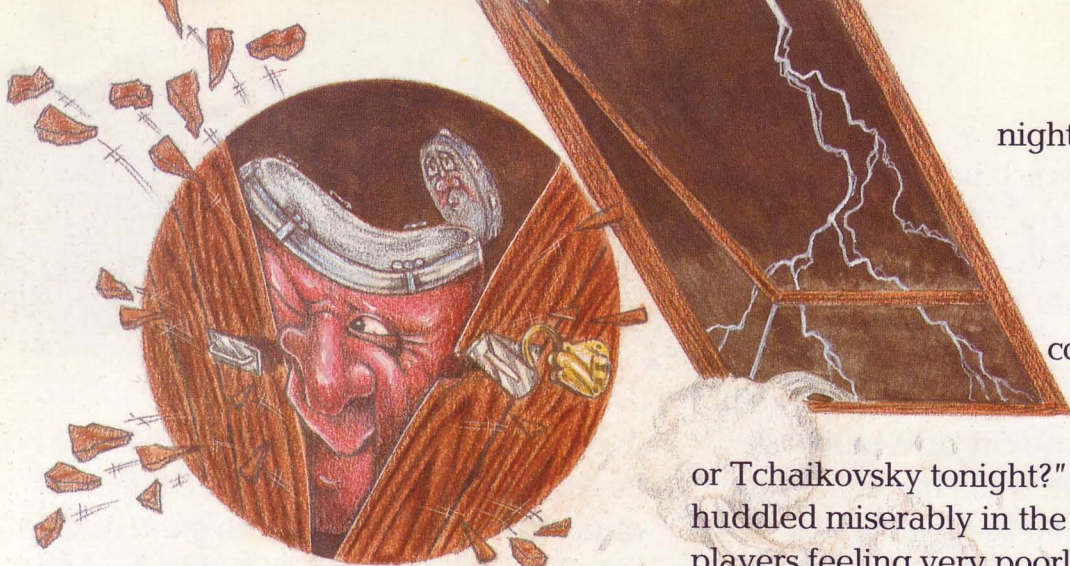
The triangle chimed in, "And I can hear another triangle!"

"Other instruments are doing our job!" screamed the first violin.

"We'll soon see about *that*!" said the kettle-drum.







night long cold draughts  
fretted round them.

Next day, the  
audience began to  
arrive as usual. The  
conductor whispered  
to his musicians,  
"Is it Glenn Miller

or Tchaikovsky tonight?" The instruments  
huddled miserably in the arms of their  
players feeling very poorly indeed.

The conductor tapped the rostrum with  
his baton and announced, "Beethoven!"  
The musicians raised their bows, elbows,  
drumsticks and reeds. The baton dropped.

But nothing happened.

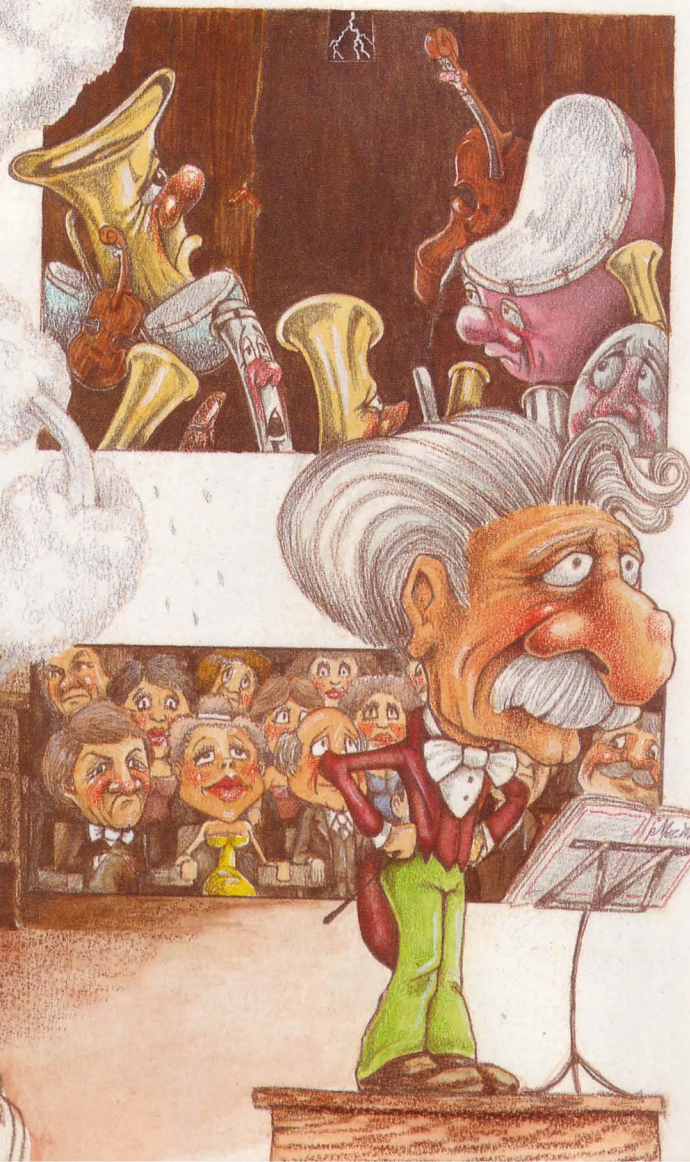
The first violin croaked a hoarse note,  
and was silent. The gong shivered. The

He rolled his great weight against the  
doors of the cupboard, and they burst open  
with a splintering of wood. The tambourine  
rolled over to the wall switches, and the  
concert hall was flooded with light.

But there was no other orchestra. There  
was not an instrument in sight. The concert  
hall was playing a music of its own.

The windows were rattling in their  
frames, while raindrops plinked on the glass.  
The chandeliers trembled, and the great  
doors at the back of the hall banged with  
every gust of wind. A draught as sharp and  
icy as a note on a piccolo whipped along the  
corridor and under the seats. The radiators  
were off, so it was very cold. And, worst of  
all, a skylight had been left open and rain  
was driving through on to the unhappy  
instruments below.

Shivering with horror and cold, they  
turned back to cower in their cupboard. But  
they could not close the doors again, and all





clarinets sighed. Then they too wheezed and lost their voices completely.

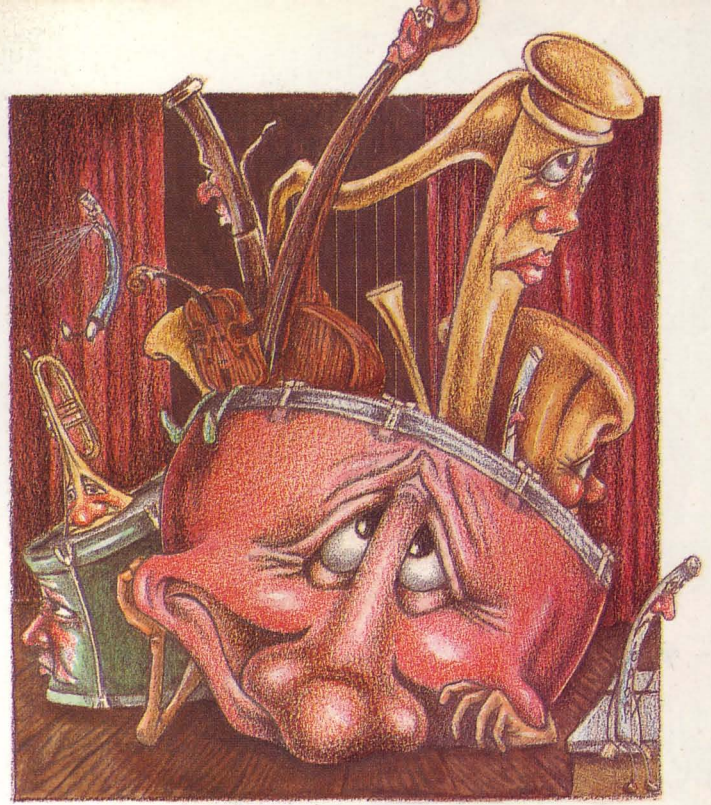
However hard the brass players blew, the string players bowed or the drummers banged, the orchestra only groaned and rattled unhappily to itself.

Soon the audience got cross and began to leave. The manager apologised and promised to give them their money back. The musicians cuddled their instruments and wept into them — big salt tears that made matters rather worse.

"I thought mine felt cold this evening," sobbed the French horn player, polishing the chilly brass.

"I saw water spots on the snare-drums," sniffed the drummer, "but I took no notice!"

"It must have been the storm last night.



They're all chilled to the chord!"

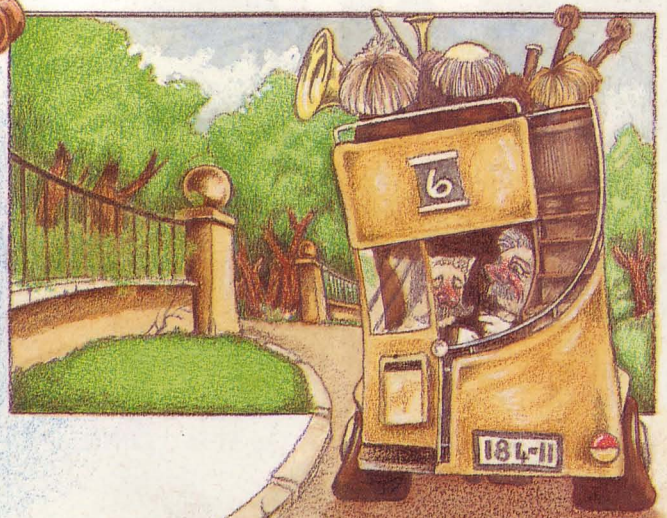
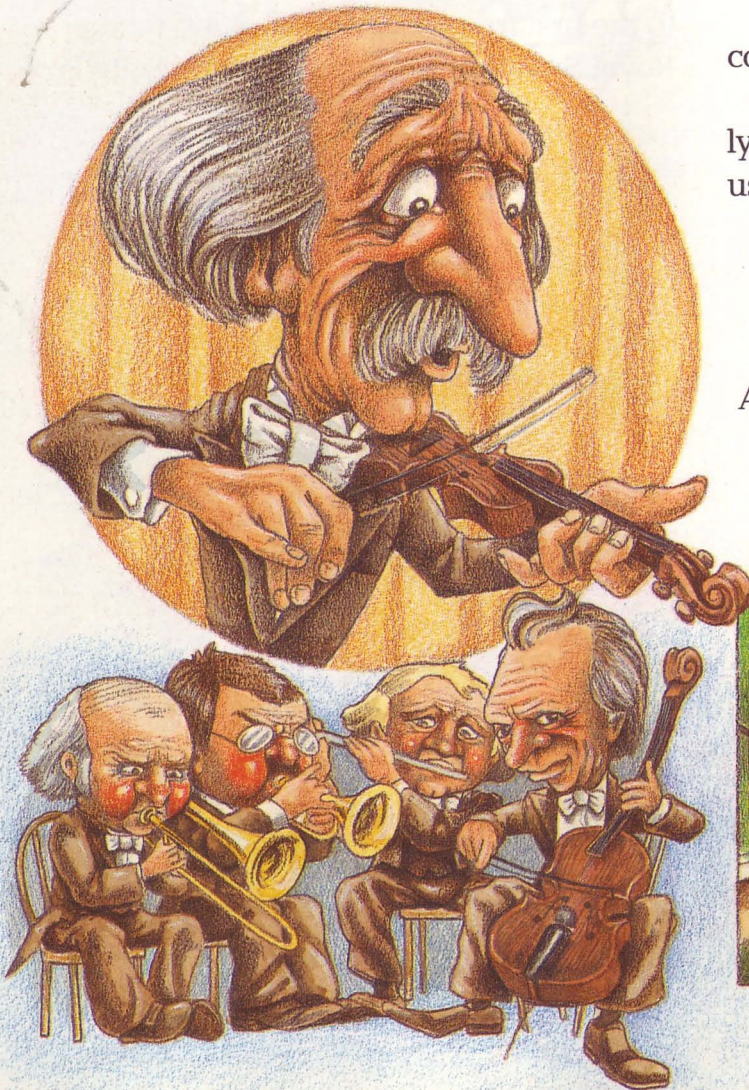
"They may never play again!" cried the conductor. "Oh, my poor orchestra!"

That night, the instruments were left lying on the stage. "What will become of us?" squeaked the piccolo.

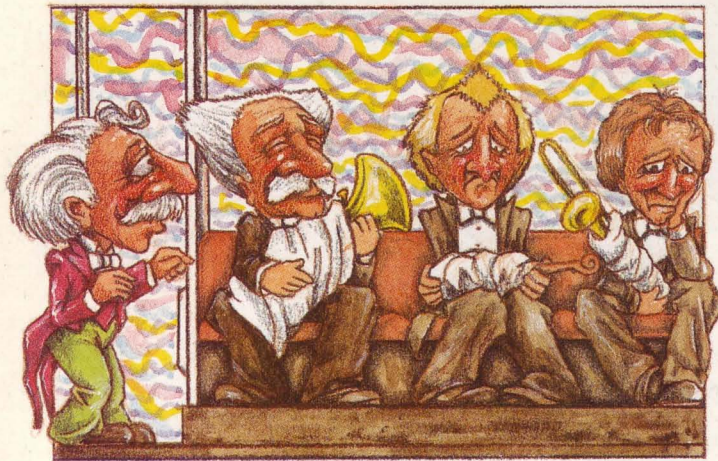
"Will we be replaced?" croaked the cello.

"Will others take our place under the stage?" snuffled the tuba.

The next day was bright and sunny. A bus arrived at the concert hall at twelve o'clock and all the sickly instruments, wrapped in blankets and rugs, were gently carried out-of-doors by the musicians.







Many had not been out of the concert hall for years. The sun dazzled on the silver section. The bassoon blinked its chrome keys. Outside the bus window, a symphony of colours flashed by.

"Are we going to be sold?" groaned the cello.

"Or scrapped?" wheezed the concert concertina tearfully.

"Or burned?" screamed the violins.

"Buried!" guessed the bassoon.

"Here will do," said the conductor, who was driving the bus. "Here will do nicely."

He had stopped in the middle of the City Park between an ice-cream van and a pile of deck-chairs. Everyone got out.

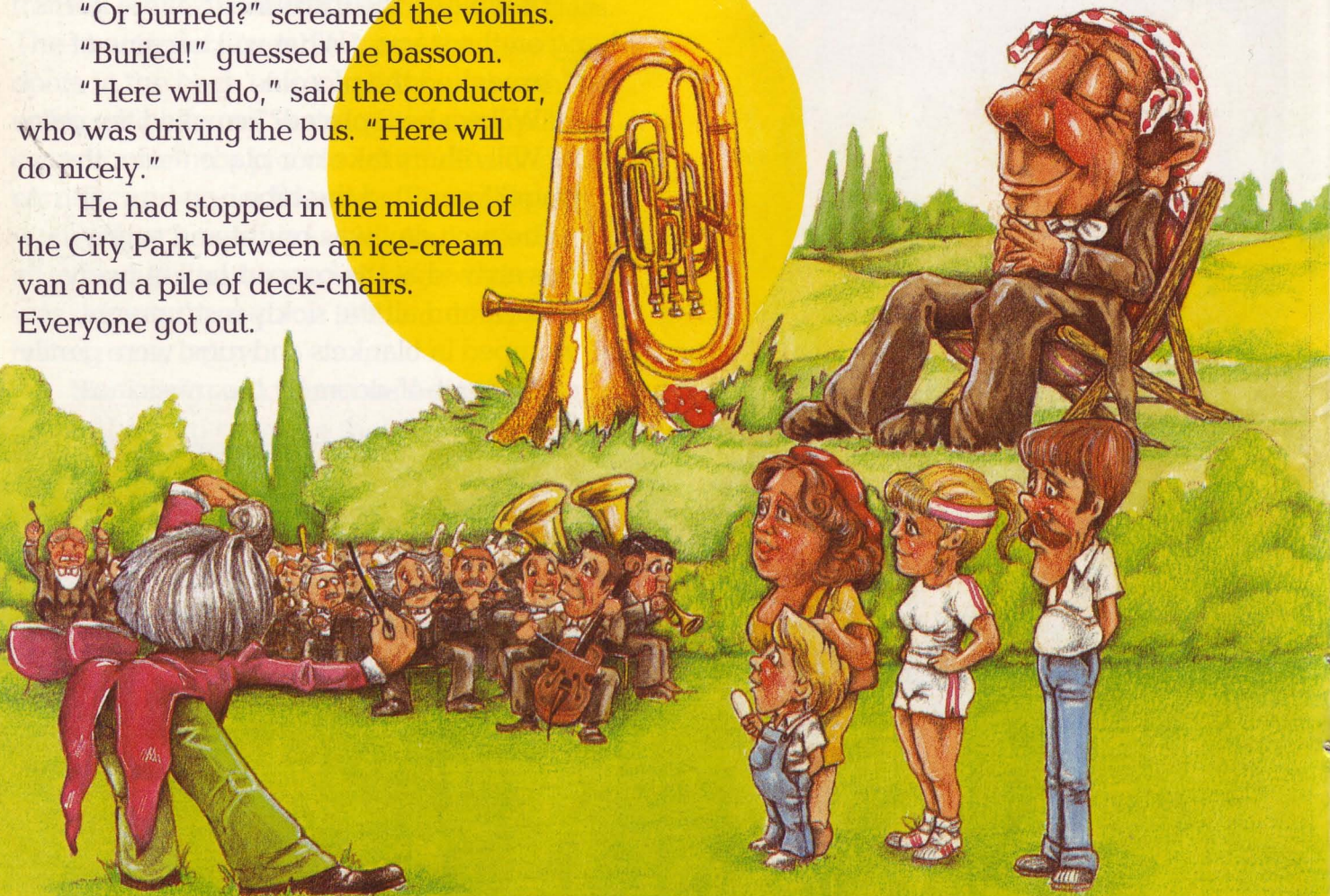
The sun dappled through the trees. Birds sunbathed sleepily on the railings. People slept, with handkerchiefs over their faces. Everywhere was warm and sweet-smelling.

The musicians all sat down in deck-chairs and let the sunlight dry out the drums, violins and the xylophone, the cello, clarinets and horn, the cymbals, tambourine and rusty triangle. The instruments steamed in the hot sun.

Then the conductor tapped his baton and whispered, "Ladies? Gentlemen? Beethoven?" The musicians raised their bows, elbows, drumsticks and reeds . . .

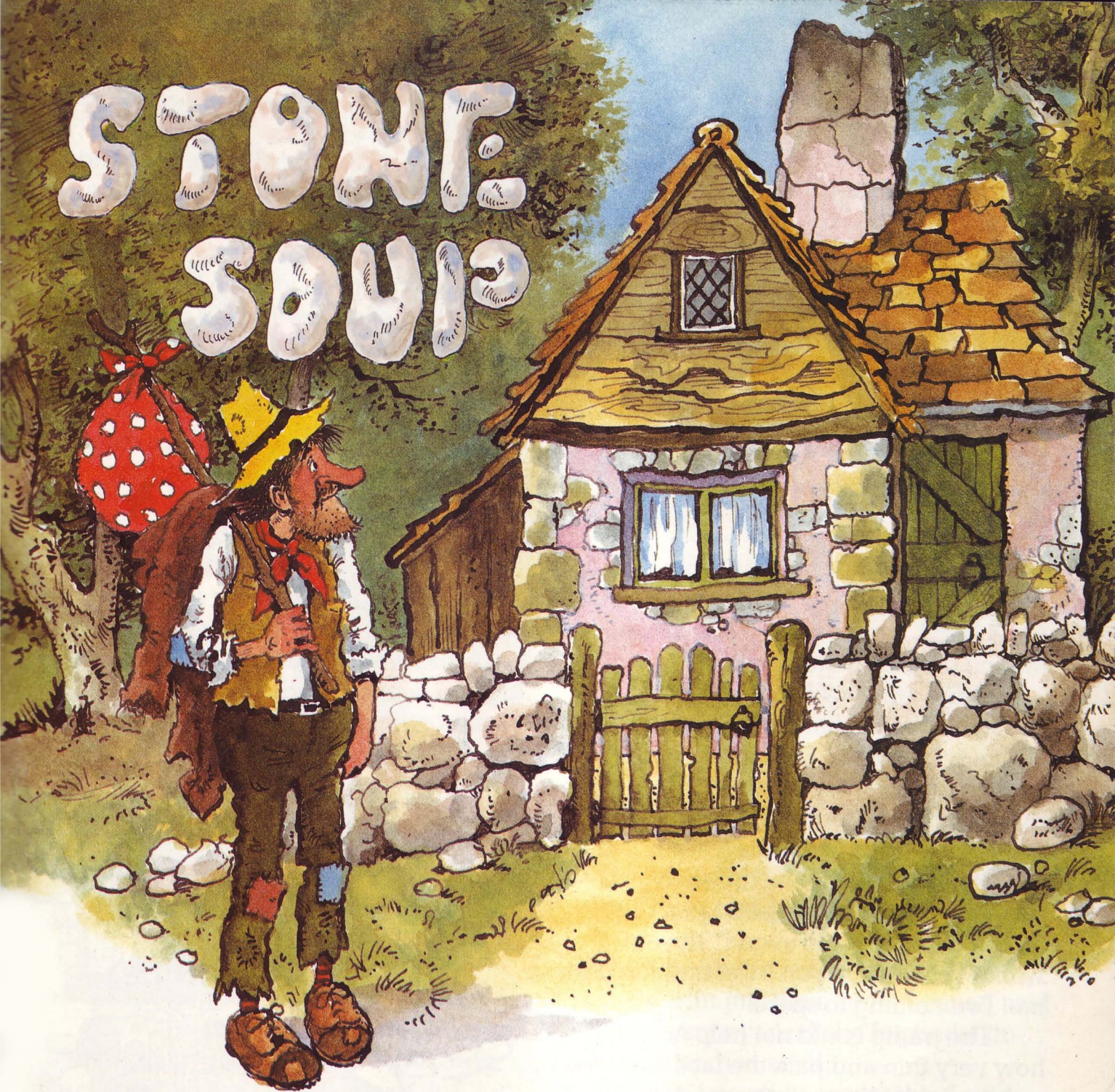
*Boom-boom-boom-BOOM!*

A lazy flock of pigeons flew out of the trees. And a happy crowd gathered to listen to the first free concert ever given by the Royal Symphonic Orchestra in the City Park.





# STONE SOUP



**T**he poor tramp was very, very hungry. "I've been walking through these woods for days and I haven't eaten a thing," he said to himself as he came to a little cottage in the clearing. "Whoever lives here is bound to give me something to eat."

But the tramp had chosen the worst possible place to ask for food. This was the cottage of Miss Parsimony — the

meanest woman in the whole forest. Her larder was always full, but her dishes were always empty. She never invited people home to tea, and she never ate any of the good things that grew in her garden. "You have to *save*," she used to say. "You never know when friends are going to call." But to tell the truth, Miss Parsimony was so mean, that she had no friends at all.





magic stone. I only need some water."

"Wait there!" she snapped. And a moment later she came back with a pot of water.

"How kind," said the tramp. "Won't you join me? I don't want to boast, but they do say my stone soup's the best in the world."

"Never heard of it!" said the woman, as he unpacked an old tin and began to make a small fire outside the garden gate.

Miss Parsimony went indoors again, but she watched him from behind the curtains.

The tramp picked up a big stone and put it into the pan of water. Then he sat back and watched it boil. Suddenly, the kitchen door opened and Miss Parsimony came and peered over the wall.

*Knock, knock, knock.* The tramp rapped on the kitchen door.

"Who are you? What do you want?" shouted Miss Parsimony. "Something for nothing, I suppose. Everybody wants something for nothing these days!"

Behind her shoulder, the tramp could see strings of onions hanging on the kitchen wall, and on the shelves row upon row of tins, bottles and jars. His mouth watered. "Go away!" the old woman shouted. "You'll get nothing from me! I've nothing to spare!"

The tramp could not help noticing how very thin and pale the face was watching him through the crack in the door. Miss Parsimony looked in need of a good meal, too. "Time for the Stone Soup Trick," he said to himself.

"I was only going to, um, ask for some water, dear lady," he said smiling. "I was about to cook myself a pot of delicious stone soup."

The crack in the door widened. "Did you say, *stone soup*?"

"Yes," said the tramp. "I've got the







"Are you going to eat *that*?" she said, making a face.

"You're quite right," said the tramp. "Stone soup is always better with an onion. But I'll just have to make do."

A moment later, a hand came over the wall holding a small onion. "Here," said Miss Parsimony sourly.

"Thank you madam," he said, adding the onion, then tasting the soup. "Mmm it's delicious." Miss Parsimony watched with wider and wider eyes.

"I can see what you're thinking. Real stone soup is always better with onions *and* a tin of beans. But I'll just have to

make do with the onions and the water."

"I might just have some beans," said Miss Parsimony. And she fetched a tin from the kitchen shelf.

"I can't possibly accept this," said the tramp emptying the beans into the water, "unless you agree to share the soup with me."

Miss Parsimony scowled down at the bubbling soup and wrinkled up her nose.

"Ah, I know what you're thinking," said the tramp. "You ladies always like lots of mushrooms as well as onions and beans in your stone soup. But, I suppose we'll just have to make do."





"Does it need any salt?"

The thick soup heaved and plopped in the pan — onions and beans and mushrooms and beef and turnip and potato and salt — not to mention the tramp's stone. The smell was mouth-watering. Together they carried the pan into the cottage and Miss Parsimony laid the table for two.

He suggested cheese to go with the

"I've got some mushrooms!" exclaimed Miss Parsimony. And she rushed round to the back of the house to pick some. And into the pot they went.

"Oh of course, it's a, a funny colour," apologised the tramp. "It's er, it's the beef that gives stone soup its wonderful colour, as well as the onion, beans and mushrooms."

"Beef! Beef!" exclaimed Miss Parsimony, by now quite carried away with the thought of eating real stone soup. So she fetched a tin of beef stew from the cupboard and added it to the soup. The tramp tasted it again.

"A turnip or a potato would make this fit for a king to eat!"

"Both! Both!" cried Miss Parsimony, and she dug furiously in the vegetable patch for a sweet white potato and a purply turnip.







soup. *She* suggested wine. *He* thought a crusty roll would be nice. *She* fetched out an apple pie for pudding.

"Oh, that was the best meal I've eaten in my life!" said Miss Parsimony afterwards. "That stone of yours is really wonderful."

"It's yours, dear lady, take it," said the tramp.

"What? Are you really giving the magic stone to me?" she said, her eyes brimming with tears. "Nobody has ever given me such a wonderful present. Just think! I can invite people round to tea and cook them stone soup like this every single day. And it won't cost me a penny!"

"Of course, of course," said the tramp pulling on his coat. "But do remember to add a little salt for flavouring."

"No, I won't forget!"

"And onion and beans and mushrooms and some beef."

"No, I mustn't forget them."

"And a potato and a turnip, of course."

"I'll follow your recipe exactly."

"I do find people like their stone soup best with a few little extras," said the tramp, waving goodbye from the gate.





# The Man Who Knew Better.



A man once said to his wife, "I don't know what you find to do all day. You only have to tidy up, watch the baby and cook a bite to eat."

"Oh, there's the cow and the pig to look after, and the butter to churn," said his wife.

But her husband snorted, "Hah! that's nothing. I'm the only person in this house who does any work — out in the fields in the hot sun. I wish I was a housewife and could stay home all day!"

"Well, why not have a rest, tomorrow?" said his wife, smiling sweetly. "I'll go and cut the corn, and

you can do my few jobs around the house."

The man grinned the smuggest of grins. "An excellent idea! Then I can show you how a house *should* be kept — and you'll realise how hard I work!"

So, next morning, before the sun was up, the wife had taken the scythe and gone into the fields to cut corn.

"First I'll churn some butter," said the man, and he filled the churn in the kitchen with fresh cream.

Then he thought how good a mug of cider would taste. So he went down to the cellar, set a jug under the barrel, and turned on the tap.

Suddenly he remembered the pig! Forgetting the cider, he raced upstairs again.







Too late! The pig had wandered in through the open back door and tipped over the churn. He had to drive out the pig, wipe up the mess and fill the churn all over again. The baby gurgled and crawled around his feet.



Suddenly he remembered the cider! Forgetting the baby, he raced downstairs again.

Too late! Every drop of cider had emptied itself out across the cellar floor. He had to mop it all up and empty it on to the vegetable garden. "While I'm here," he thought, "I'll pick some vegetables for the soup."

Suddenly he remembered the baby! Forgetting the vegetables and the open gate, he raced indoors again.

Too late! The baby had climbed up the milk churn and tipped it over. There was cream on the floor. There was cream on the baby. There was cream everywhere. He mopped it up, and put the baby in the sun to dry.

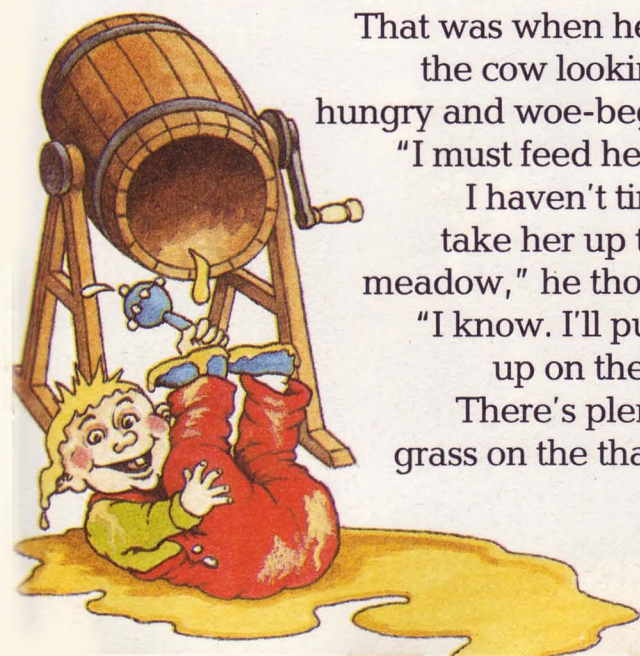
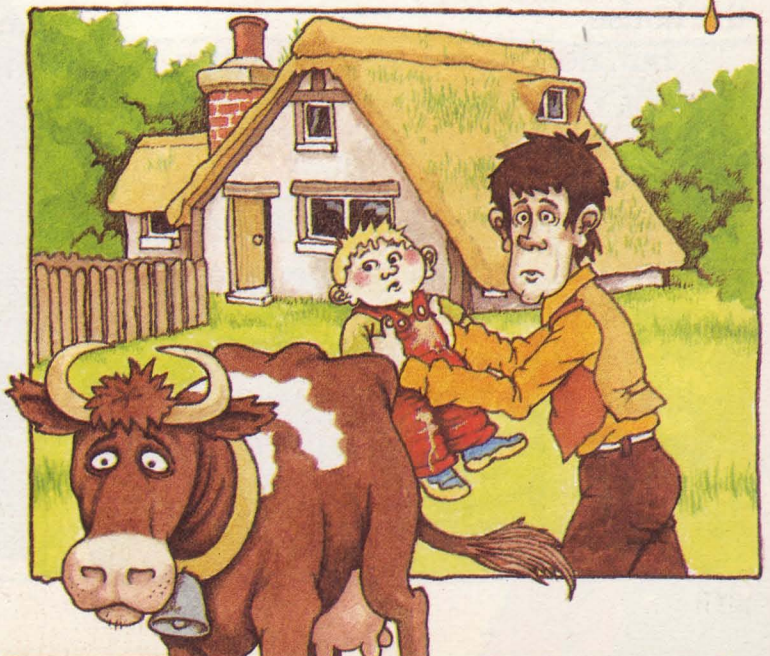


That was when he saw the cow looking all hungry and woe-begone.

"I must feed her, but I haven't time to take her up to the meadow," he thought.

"I know. I'll put her up on the roof.

There's plenty of grass on the thatch."

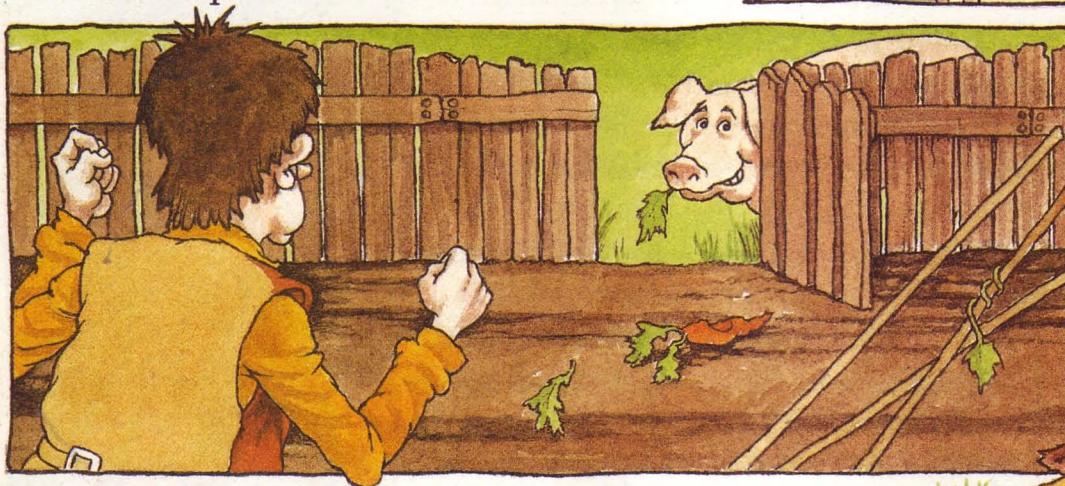




Now the roof reached almost down to the ground, so with a bit of pushing and pulling, he managed to get the cow on to the roof. And once she was up, she was happy to eat the grass that grew on the thatch.

Suddenly he remembered the open gate! Forgetting the cow and the creamy baby, he raced down to the vegetable garden.

Too late! The pig had got in already and eaten every vegetable in it. He had to drive her out and set about mending all the beanpoles.



Suddenly he remembered the cow! Supposing she had fallen off the roof on to the baby while his back was turned? Dropping everything, he raced back to the house.

But, no, the cow was still up on the roof, chewing on the grass. But to make her even safer, he tied a rope round her neck, dropped the end down the chimney, went down to the kitchen and tied the other end of the rope round his waist.

"That'll keep her safe while I make the soup," he thought, and set a cooking pot of water over the fire.

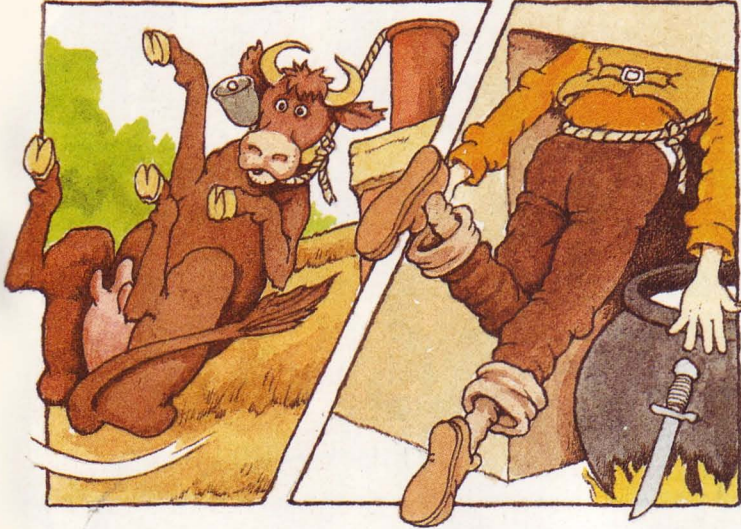
Suddenly, the cow fell off the roof.





Down went the cow on one end of the rope. Up went the man on the other end. He flew up the chimney like a squirrel up a tree and wedged near the top.

Not long afterwards, his wife came home. "I'm back, dear! The corn's all cut.



Where are you? Dear!"

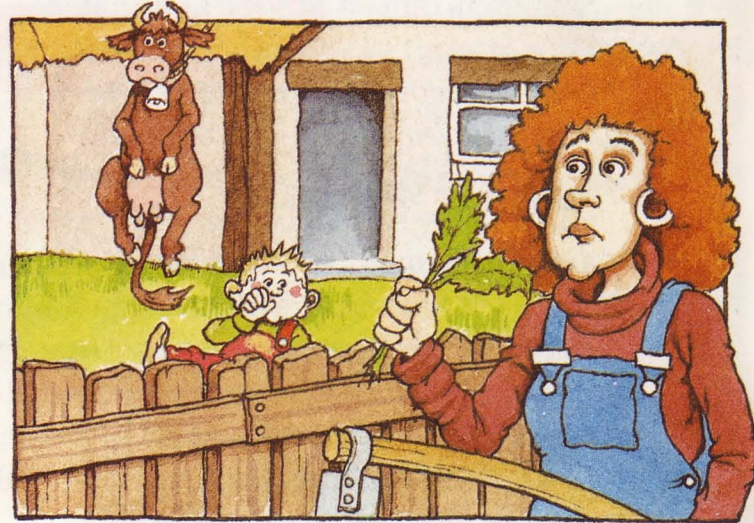
She found the baby sitting in the sun — all stiff and spikey where the cream had dried. She found the empty garden. She found the cow dangling from the roof. "Dear, dear, what has your father been doing?" she said to the baby as she cut the rope with her scythe.

Down came the cow on her end of the rope, with a bellow of indignation. Down came the husband on his end of



the rope — *splash* — into the cooking pot. His wife found him sitting there, with a carrot in his ear, wailing, "Oh! What a day I've had! What a day!"

"Never mind," said his wife. "You may have better luck tomorrow —



although there's the washing to do, and fresh bread to bake. Myself, I think I'll mow the top meadow, tomorrow."

"Oh no you don't!" cried her husband leaping out of the cooking pot. "I mean . . . I wouldn't *dream* of letting you do all that work. You stay home tomorrow — *I'll* mow the meadow."

"Very well, dear," said his wife, smiling to herself as she started to prepare dinner. "Whatever you say."







# How The Polar Bear Became

When the animals had been on earth for some time they grew tired of admiring the trees, the flowers and the sun. They began to admire each other. Every animal was eager to be admired, and spent a part of each day making itself look more beautiful.

Soon, they began to hold beauty contests. Sometimes Tiger won the prize, sometimes Eagle, and sometimes Ladybird. Every animal tried hard. One animal in particular won the prize almost every time. This was Polar Bear.

Polar Bear was white. Not quite snowy white, but much whiter than any of the other creatures. Everyone admired her. In secret, too, everyone was envious of her. But however much they wished that she was not quite so beautiful, they could not help giving her the prize.

"Polar Bear," they said, "with your white fur, you are almost *too* beautiful."

All this went to Polar Bear's head. In fact she became vain. She was always washing and polishing her fur, trying to make it still whiter. After a while she was winning the prize every time. The only times any other creature got a chance to win was when it rained. On those days Polar Bear would say, "I shall not go out in the wet. The other creatures will be muddy, and my white fur may get splashed."





Then, perhaps, Frog or Duck would win for a change.

She had a crowd of young admirers who were always hanging around her cave. They were mainly Seals, all very giddy. Whenever she came out they made a loud shrieking roar. "Ooooooh! How beautiful she is!"

Before long, her white fur was more important to Polar Bear than anything. Whenever a single speck of dust landed on

the tip of one hair of it she was furious.

"How can I be expected to keep beautiful in this country!" she cried then. "None of you have ever seen me at my best, because of the dirt here. I am really much whiter than any of you have ever seen me. I think I shall have to go into another country. A country where there is none of this dust. Which country would be best?"


She used to talk in this way because then the Seals would cry, "Oh, please don't leave us. Please don't take your beauty away from us. We will do anything for you."

And she loved to hear this.

Soon, animals were coming from all over the world to look at her. They stared and stared as Polar Bear stretched out on her rock in the sun. Then they went off home and tried to make themselves look like her.







But it was no use. They were all the wrong colour. They were black, or brown, or yellow, or ginger, or fawn, or speckled, but not one of them was white. Soon most of them gave up trying to look beautiful. But they still came every day to gaze enviously at Polar Bear. Some brought picnics. They sat in a vast crowd among the trees in front of her cave.

"Just look at her," said Mother Hippo to her children. "Now see that you grow up like that."

But nothing pleased Polar Bear.

"The dust these crowds raise!" she sighed. "Why can't I ever get away from them? If only there were some spotless, shining country, all for me . . ."

Now pretty well all the creatures were tired of her being so much more admired than they were. But one creature more so than the rest. He was Peregrine Falcon.

He was a beautiful bird, all right. But he was not white. Time and again, in the beauty contests he was runner-up to Polar Bear.

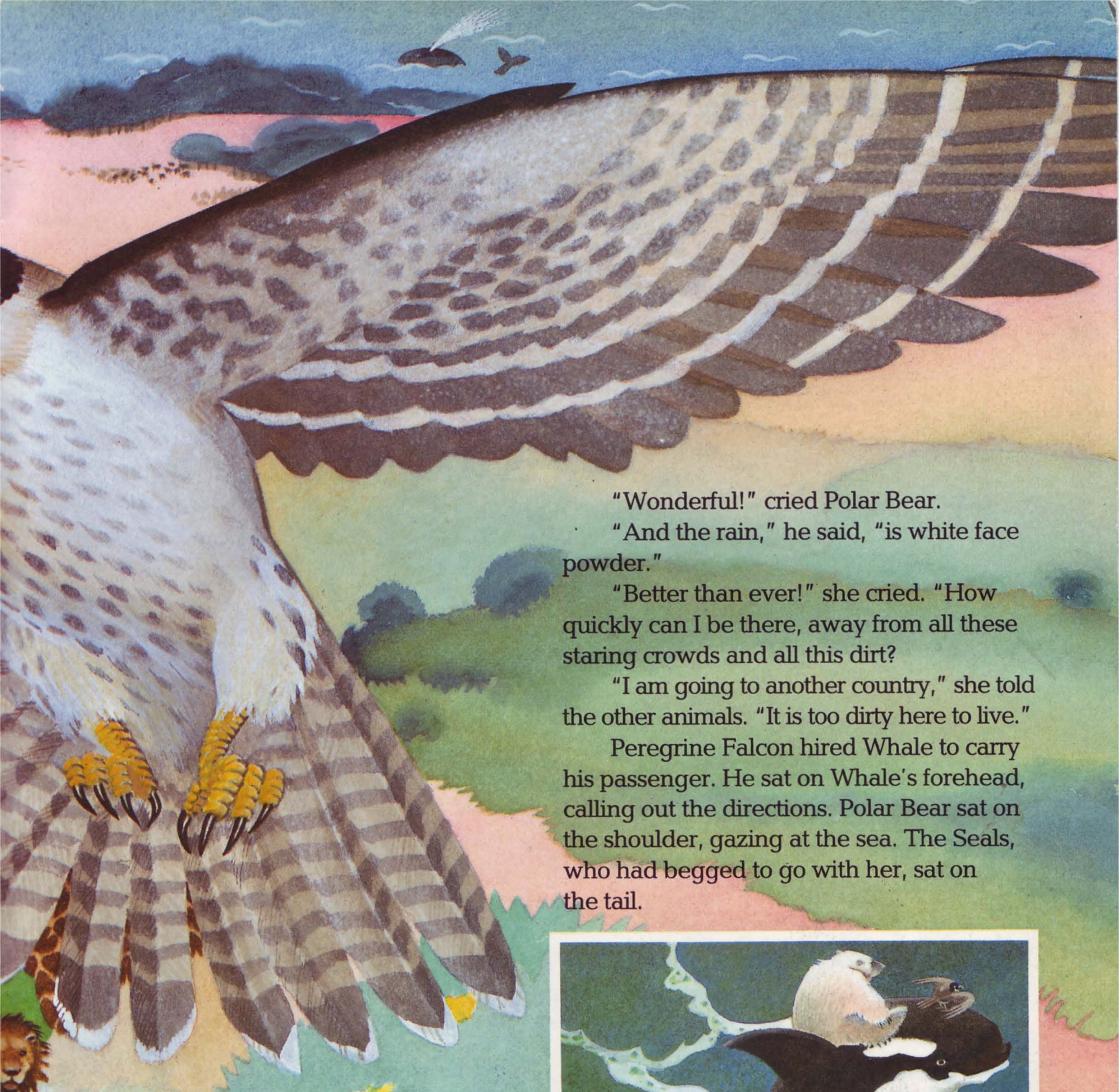
"If it were not for her," he raged to himself, "I should be first every time."

He thought and thought for a plan to get rid of her. How? How? How? At last he had it.

One day he went up to Polar Bear.

Now Peregrine Falcon had been to every country in the world. He was a great traveller, as all the creatures well knew. "I know a country," he said to Polar Bear, "which is so clean it is even whiter than you are. Yes, yes, I know, you are beautifully white, but this country is even whiter. The rocks are clean glass and the earth is frozen ice-cream. There is no dirt there, no dust, no





"Wonderful!" cried Polar Bear.

"And the rain," he said, "is white face powder."

"Better than ever!" she cried. "How quickly can I be there, away from all these staring crowds and all this dirt?"

"I am going to another country," she told the other animals. "It is too dirty here to live."

Peregrine Falcon hired Whale to carry his passenger. He sat on Whale's forehead, calling out the directions. Polar Bear sat on the shoulder, gazing at the sea. The Seals, who had begged to go with her, sat on the tail.

mud. You would become whiter than ever in that country. And no-one lives there. You could be queen of it."

Polar Bear tried to hide her excitement. "I could be queen of it, you say? This country sounds made for me. No crowds, no dirt? And the rocks, you say, are glass?"

"The rocks," said Peregrine Falcon, "are mirrors."







iceberg to repair her beauty after the long trip.

Every day now, she sat on one iceberg or another, making herself beautiful in the mirror of the ice. Always, near her, sat the Seals. Her fur became whiter and whiter in this new clean country. And as it became whiter, the Seals praised her beauty more and more. When she herself saw the improvement in her looks she said, "I shall never go back to that dirty old country again."

And there she is still, with all her admirers around her.

Peregrine Falcon flew back to the other creatures and told them that Polar Bear had gone for ever. They were all glad, and set about making themselves beautiful at once. Every single one was saying to himself, "Now that Polar Bear is out of the way, perhaps *I* shall have a chance of the prize at the beauty contest."

And Peregrine Falcon was saying to himself, "Surely, now, I am the most beautiful of all creatures."

But the first contest was won by Little Brown Mouse for her pink feet.

After some days, they came to the North Pole, where it is all snow and ice.

"Here you are," cried Peregrine Falcon. "Everything just as I said. No crowds, no dirt, nothing but beautiful clean whiteness."

"And the rocks actually are mirrors!" cried Polar Bear, and she ran to the nearest





# THE MARROG

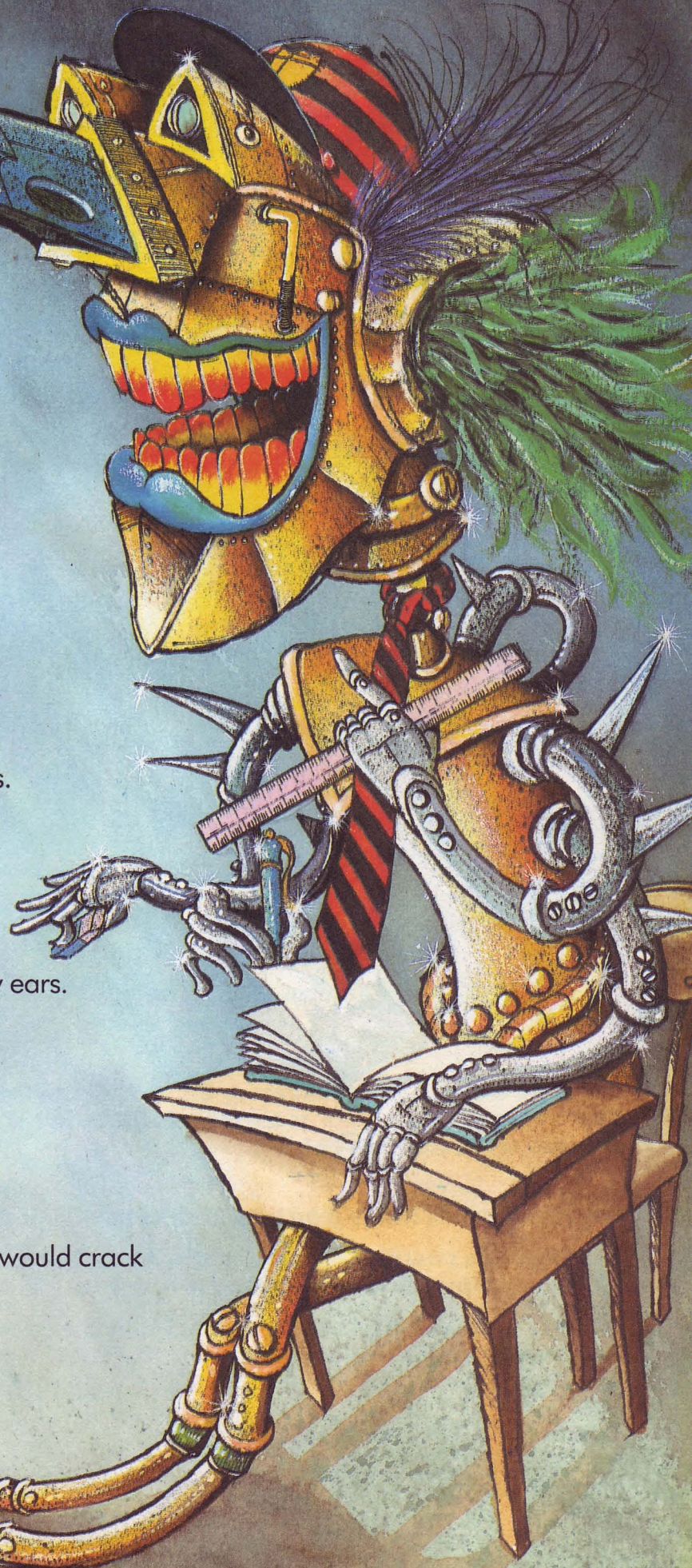
My desk's at the back of the class  
And nobody, nobody knows  
I'm a Marrog from Mars  
With a body of brass  
And seventeen fingers and toes.

Wouldn't they shriek if they knew  
I've three eyes at the back of my head  
And my hair is bright purple  
My nose is deep blue  
And my teeth are half yellow, half-red.

My five arms are silver, and spiked  
With knives on them sharper than spears.  
I could go back right now if I liked —  
And return in a million light-years.

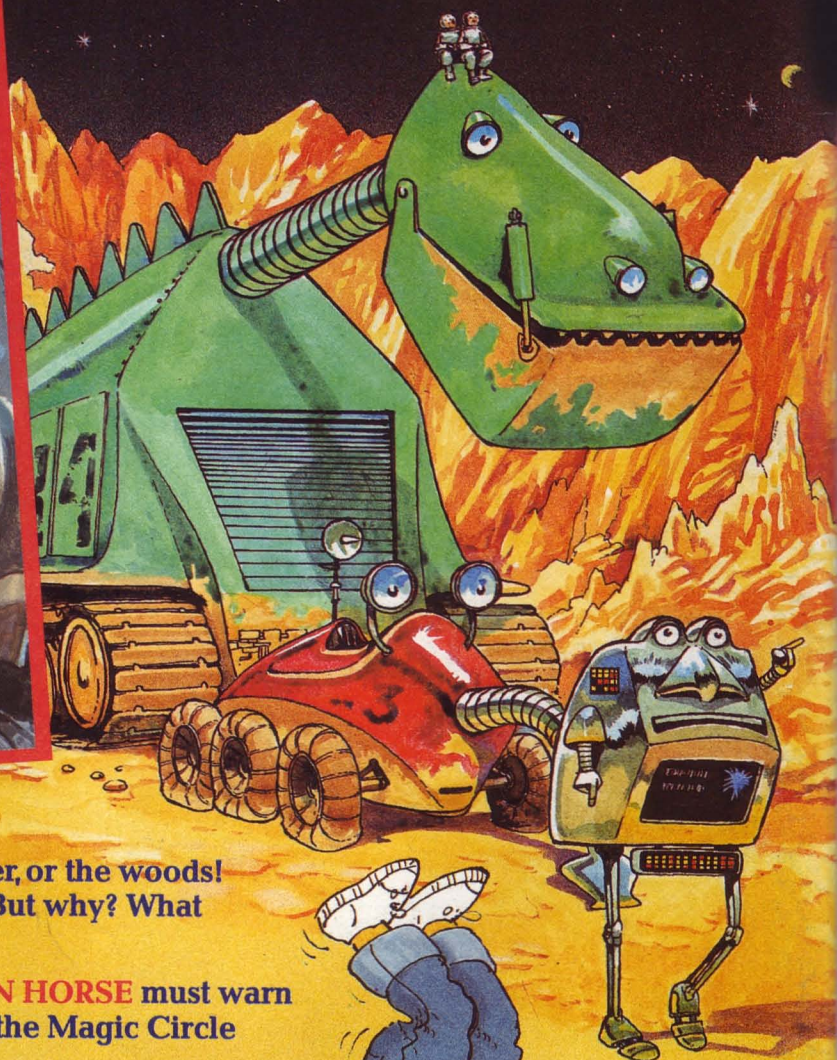
I could gobble them all  
For I'm seven foot tall  
And I'm breathing green flames from my ears.

Wouldn't they yell if they knew,  
If they guessed that a Marrog was here?  
Ha-ha, they haven't a clue —  
Or wouldn't they tremble with fear!  
"Look, look, a Marrog"  
They'd all scream — and SMACK  
The blackboard would fall and the ceiling would crack  
And teacher would faint, I suppose.  
But I grin to myself, sitting right at the back  
And nobody, nobody knows.





# IN PART 9 OF STORY Teller 2



Never go down to the meadows, or the river, or the woods!  
That's what **YOUNG KATE** is always told. But why? What  
happens when she does go?

**GOBBOLINO AND THE LITTLE WOODEN HORSE** must warn  
the priest or he'll frizzle if he tries to cross the Magic Circle

Menaced by a swarm of hungry dactyls, Alpha and Astra find  
there's no better friend in the universe than a **DIGGERSAUR**

Willie can stand on his head for hours. Surely the circus will  
have a place for the one-and-only **UPSIDE - DOWN WILLIE?**

PLUS

**MOLLY WHUPPIE and MEETING**

Stories read by **SHEILA HANCOCK, STEVEN PACEY &  
EVE KARPF**

