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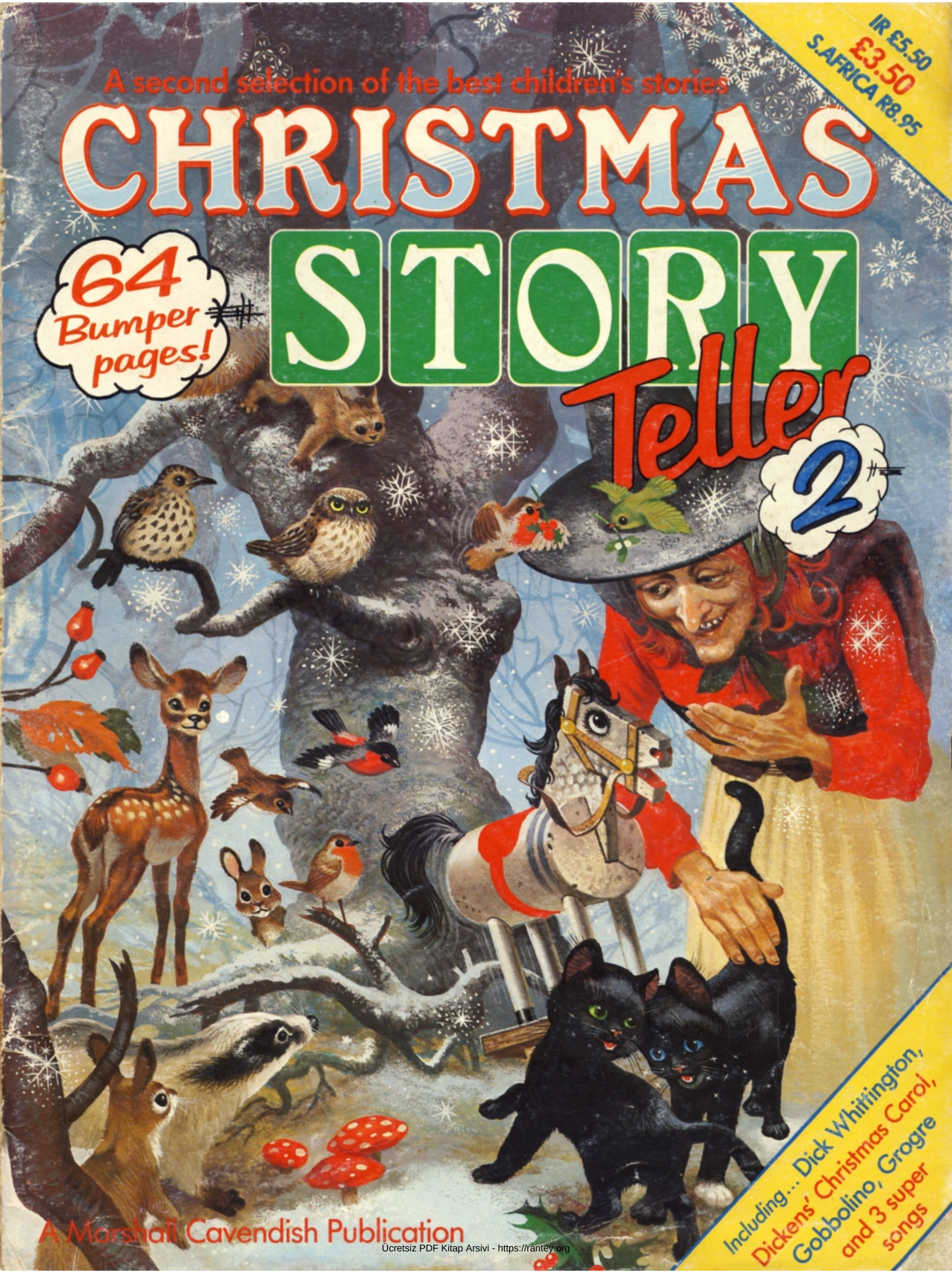
CHRISTMAS

64
Bumper
pages!

STORY

Teller

2



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Including... Dick Whittington,
Dickens' Christmas Carol,
Gobolino, Grogre
and 3 super
songs

CHRISTMAS STORY Teller 2

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THE BOOK

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courtesy of The Sudden Singers

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A Creative Radio Production

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Dick Whittington and his Cat: Richard Briers

The Tale of the Little Pine Tree:

Miriam Margolyes

The Fairies' Cake: Miriam Margolyes

Grogre and the Giant Nasher: Nigel Lambert

A Christmas Carol: Joss Ackland



*Says Story Teller,
(Funny fella),
"I don't want you to miss a thing.
I'll ring my bell, so you can tell
When one page ends-and the next begins!"*

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DECK THE HALLS

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
'Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Don we now our gay apparel,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,
Fa la la la la la la la la.



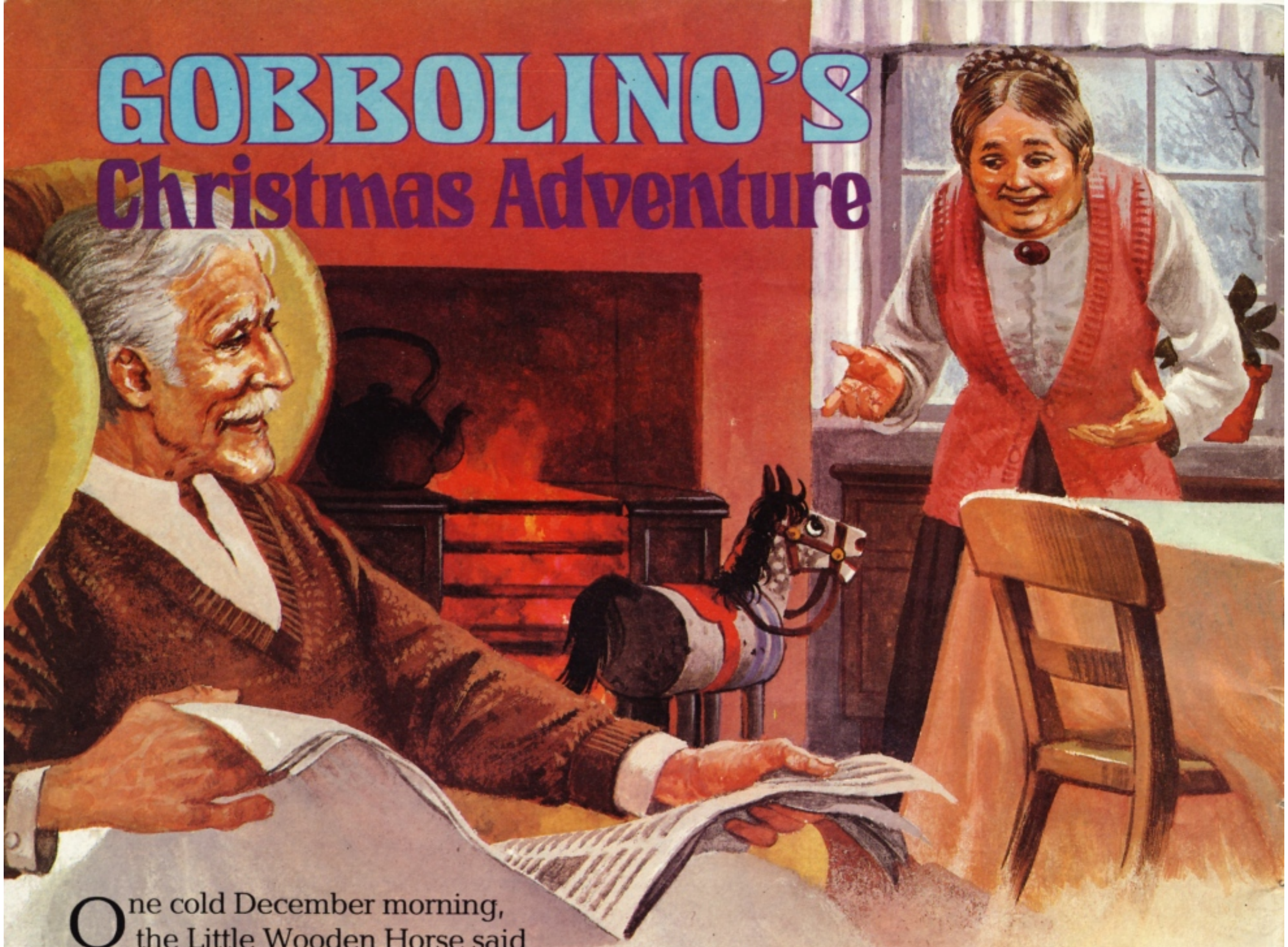
See the blazing Yule before us,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Strike the harp and join the chorus,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Follow me in merry measure,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
While I tell of Yuletide treasure,
Fa la la la la la la la la.



Fast away the old year passes,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Hail the new ye lads and lasses,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Sing we joyous all together,
Fa la la la la la la la la.
Heedless of the wind and weather,
Fa la la la la la la la la.



GOBBOLINO'S Christmas Adventure



One cold December morning, the Little Wooden Horse said to Uncle Peder, "Please may I invite Gobbolino to stay with us here in the forest for Christmas Eve?"

"Of course you may, my dear!" answered Uncle Peder's wife. "I've baked a whole cupboardful of goodies, and they're just waiting to be gobbled up. But it's Christmas Eve *today*! How are you going to let him know?"

"I thought I might go to fetch him. Then if it's snowing, he can ride home on my back."

"That's an excellent idea!" said Uncle Peder. "You'd better start at once, and come back as quickly as you can!"

While his kind friends prepared the table, the Little Wooden Horse ran through the forest to the farmhouse where Gobbolino had made his new

home. Snow was falling, and the forest was vast and dark. His little heart beat faster as his wooden wheels bounded along the snowy track.

The farm children were already tucked up in their beds by the time he arrived, and the farmer's wife was quite astonished to find the Little Wooden Horse on her doorstep, his mane and tail glistening with snowflakes.

"Of course Gobbolino can go with you," she said kindly. "But aren't you afraid — just the two of you alone in the forest? You might get lost."

"I'll run very fast, and Gobbolino can ride on my back, and I won't stop galloping until we get there."

"Well, in that case, all right. But mind how you go."

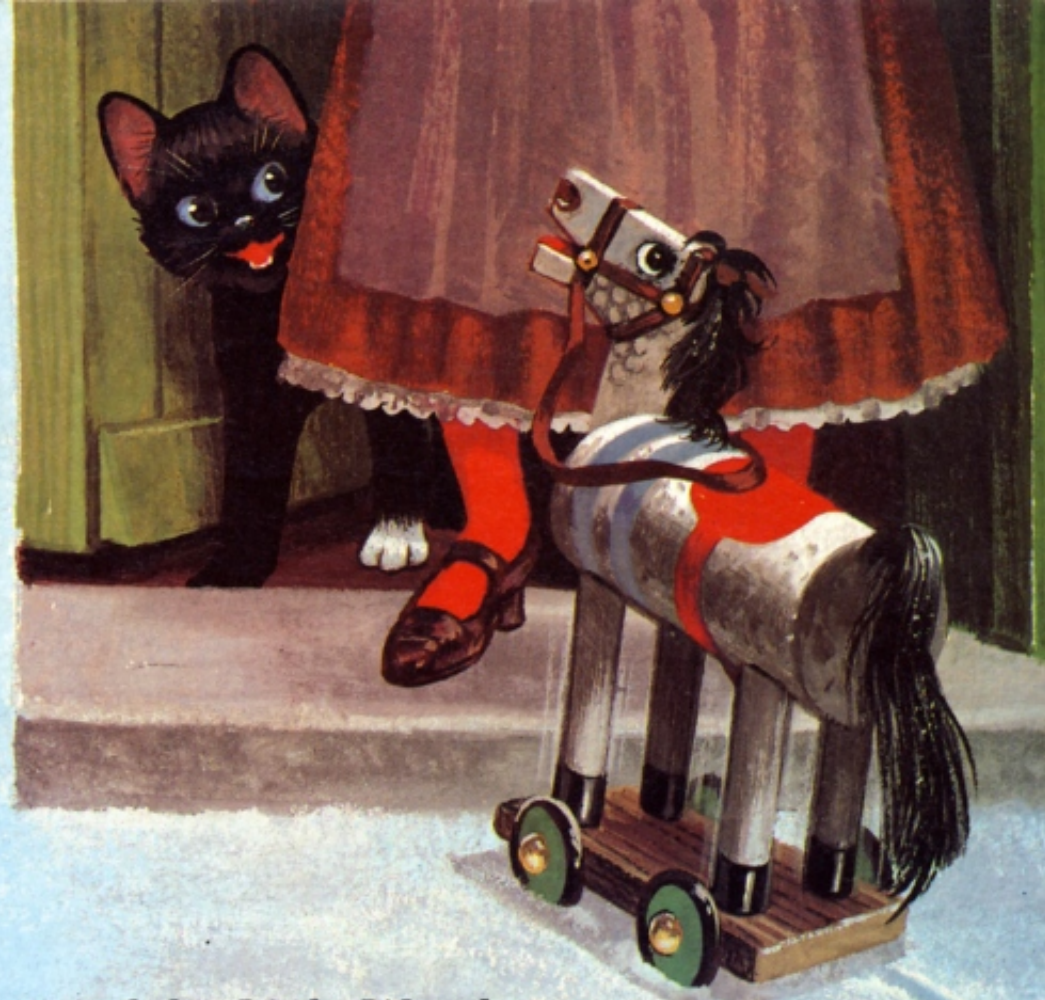
My husband and children will fetch Gobbolino home in the morning."

So the two friends galloped away into the dark forest. They were so happy to be together again that they very soon slowed to a walk, and they told each other all that had happened since they last met. Gobbolino was just telling his friend all the funny things the farm children had said when, suddenly, he gave such a start that his claws dug right into the Little Wooden Horse. "Oh, what's that? What's that sound?"

"Be careful! You're hurting me,"

cried the Little Wooden Horse. "Your claws are sharp. I can't hear anything except my wheels turning."

"Run! Run!" cried Gobbolino. "I can hear voices! Somebody's following us along the track!"





Now the Little Wooden Horse could hear the voices, too. Safe at home, by the fireside, he would have had no fears. But out in the cold, dark forest on Christmas Eve, it was quite a different thing. Who could it be? He began to gallop for all he was worth.

Even in the snow, his wooden wheels clattered, and behind them a faint cry arose, then some excited mewling. Gobbolino looked back.

"It's . . . it's the witch of Hurricane Mountain and my twin sister Sootica!" shrieked Gobbolino. All his old fears returned. "Hurry, or they'll catch us before we get to your home! Shall I get off and run? Oh, hurry, do!"

"No, no, Gobbolino. It's quicker this way. Besides, if it really is your mistress the witch and Sootica, they only have to

mount their broomsticks and they'll catch us anyway!"

But as they ran, the cries behind them grew fainter. The two friends were just beginning to feel safer — when one of the Little Wooden Horse's wheels flew off and spun away among the trees!

"Don't stop! Don't stop! I can manage on three!" and he galloped on, but with a thud at every third step and much slower than before.

Worse still, within half a mile, a second wheel came off! And the sound of voices behind them was getting louder and clearer!

Their pursuers were running now. They had seen Gobbolino and the Little Wooden Horse and their cries were getting louder and louder. Slipping down



to the ground, Gobbolino ran alongside his friend, whose two remaining wheels turned more and more slowly.

At that moment, another wheel broke in half, while shrieks of triumph told them that the witch and her cat were gaining on them with every step.

The last wheel crumpled up and broke away. Now the Little Wooden Horse had no wheels at all to run with, and before he and Gobbolino had shuffled ten more steps, the two chasing figures had hurled themselves upon

them with shouts of triumph and glee.

It was indeed the witch from Hurricane Mountain and her cat, Gobbolino's sister Sootica.

Gobbolino spread his claws and bared his teeth and prepared to fight them both. The Little Wooden Horse was ready to strike out with his four wooden legs to prevent his friend from being taken prisoner.



But to their surprise, the witch and Sootica were shedding tears of joy.

"We've found you, brother!" cried Sootica, rubbing noses with Gobbolino. "It's wonderful to see you again," said the witch, patting the Little Wooden Horse and stroking Gobbolino over and over again. "We've come all this way to wish you both a happy Christmas!"

"We aren't witches any more," said Sootica.

"My mistress never makes bad spells. She's been good for a whole year now, so the old priest blessed her and she was able to leave Hurricane Mountain and cross the stream to come and find

you. And I'm good, too, Gobbolino! I'm the goodest cat in the whole world! I'm even gooder than you are, my dear, dear brother!"

A delighted Gobbolino and the Little Wooden Horse led their friends home to Uncle Peder's cottage. There they were welcomed with great warmth and kindness, and after a delicious feast of Christmas food, the six of them sat round the fire singing carols and cracking nuts.

The Little Wooden Horse snuggled up to Gobbolino in the firelight.

Uncle Peder had given him a complete set of new wheels and four more as spares, and he was now feeling happy and content.



He had even got used to the witch who, after all, was really just a little old lady who would not think of harming anybody now.

As for Sootica, she was getting quite fat and jolly. "It comes of catching mice instead of casting spells," she explained, with a deep purr.

That night the four friends slept

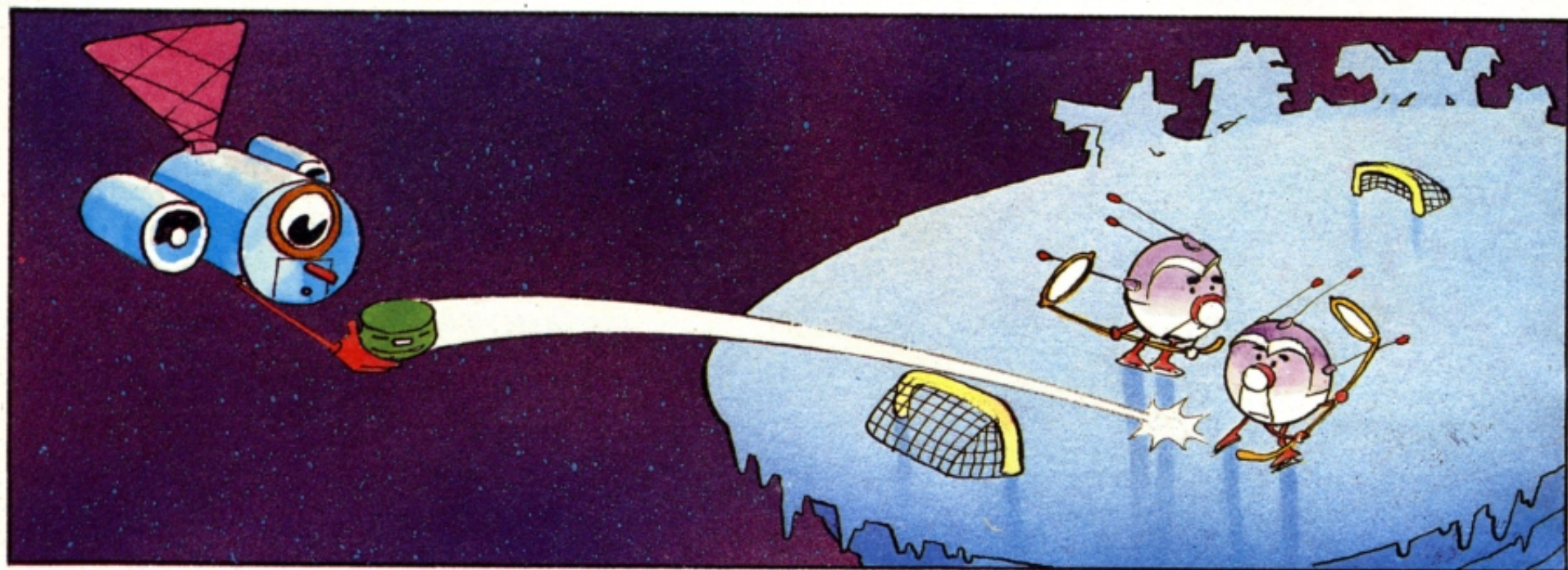
comfortable and safe. And on Christmas morning the farmer and his children came through the forest to take Gobbolino home.

As they parted, Gobbolino looked at the Little Wooden Horse, and his friend looked back at him. They smiled at one another without saying a word. It was the happiest Christmas they had ever spent.



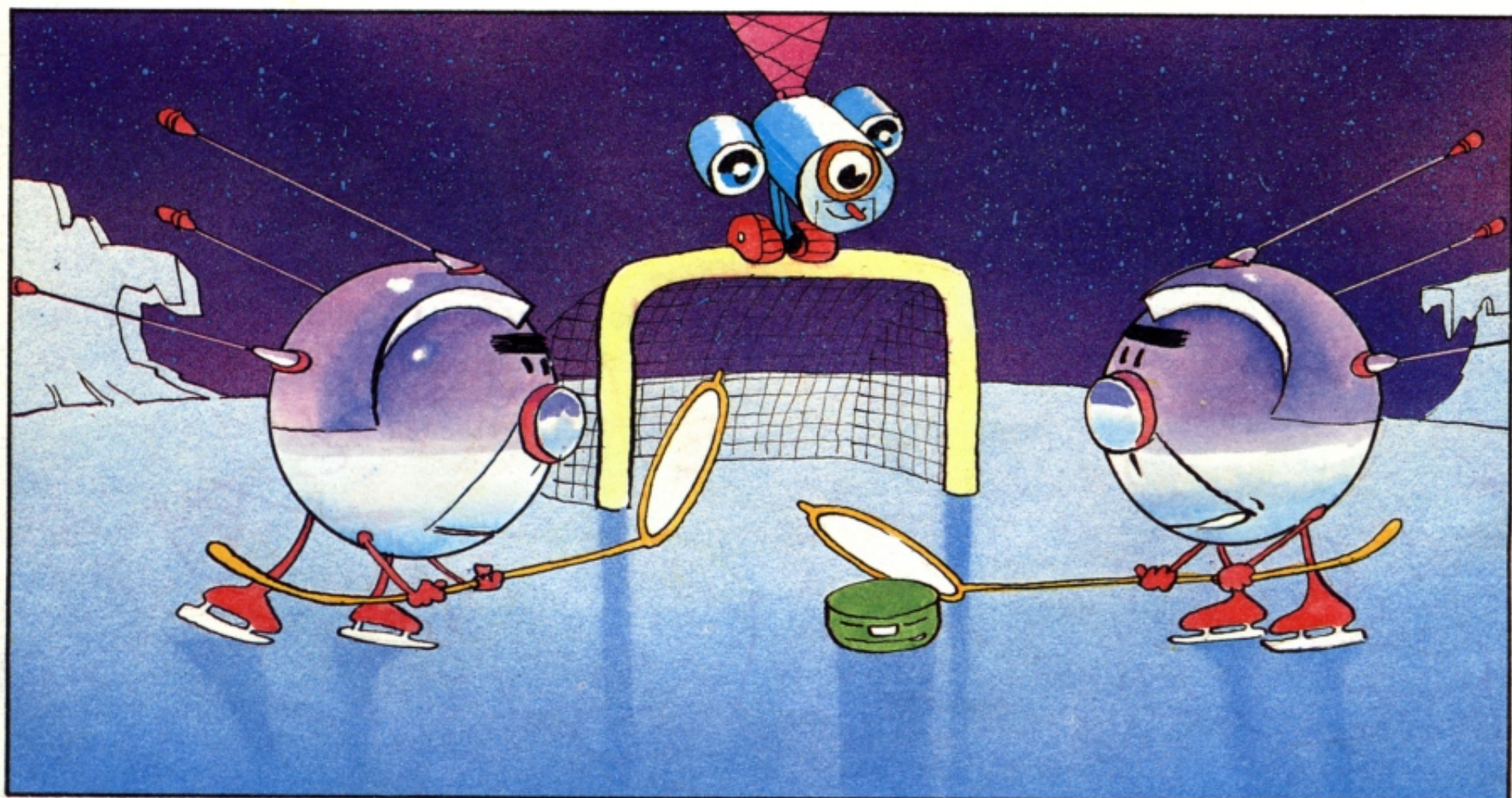
SHORTY

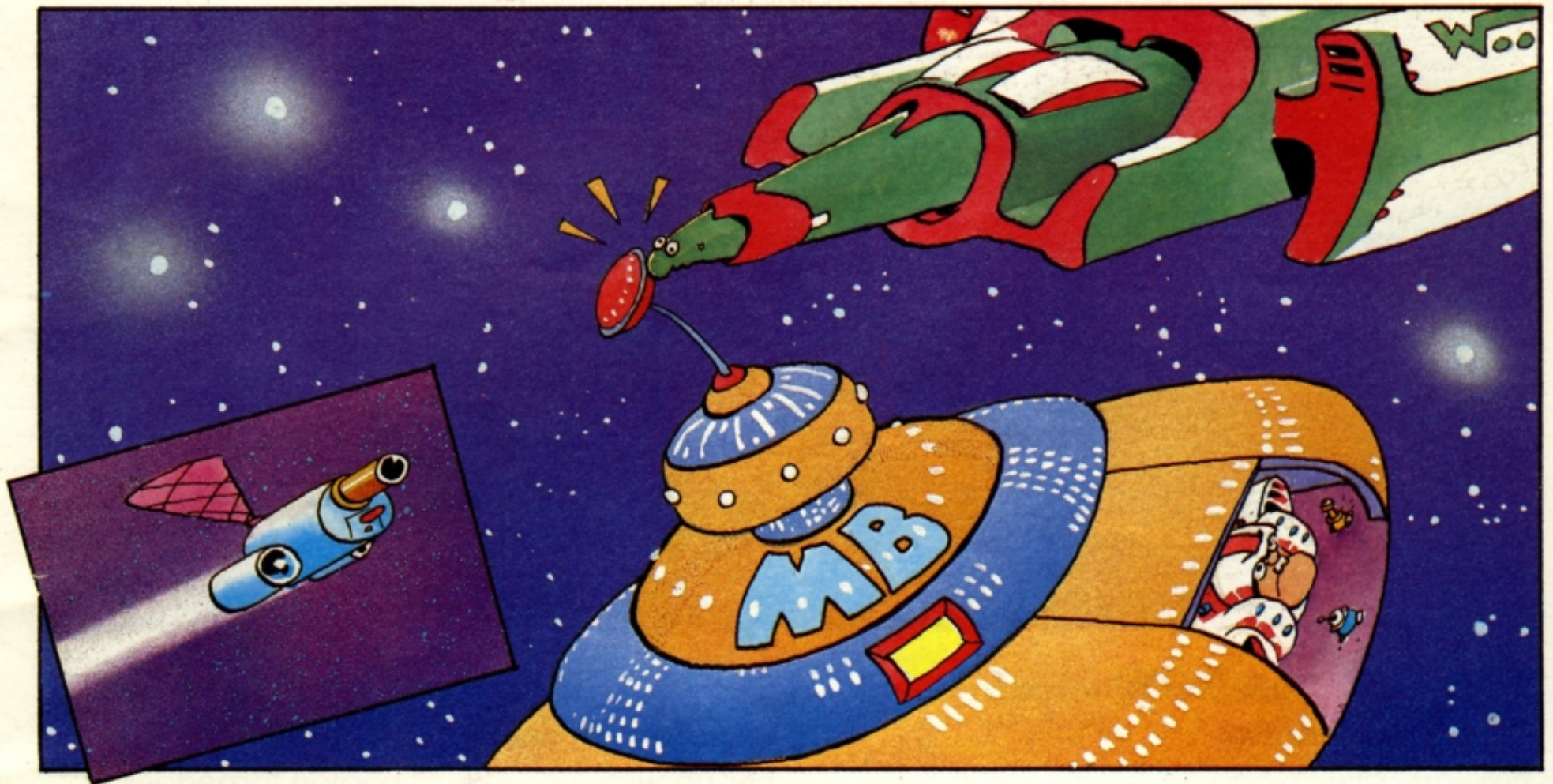
AND THE STARSHIP



Shorty the Satellite was flying over the frozen asteroid when two voices shouted, "Look outski!" A small metal disc shot past Shorty. He caught it in his robo-arm. "Hey! Let go!" cried the disc. "Who are you?" asked Shorty. "I'm Ike, a robotic puck used in the game of ice-hockey, and I speak all known languages."

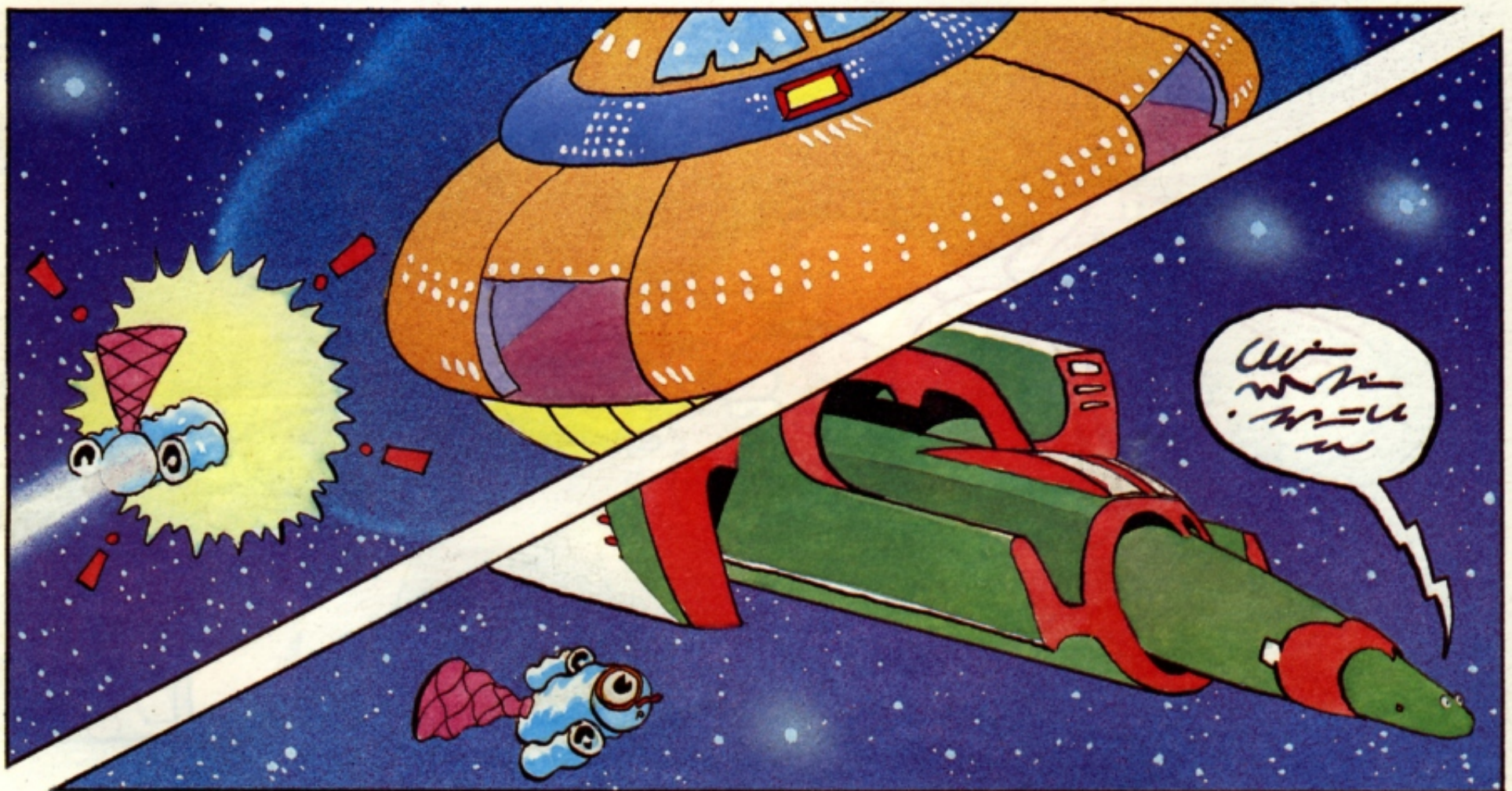
Shorty flew down to the frozen asteroid and saw Yuri and Nikita, the Sputnik twins. "Hello, twins, what are you doing with those bits of glass and metal?" "We found them floating in space," said Yuri. "And we're using them to play our favourite gameski," said Nikita, hitting Ike and sending him flying across the ice.

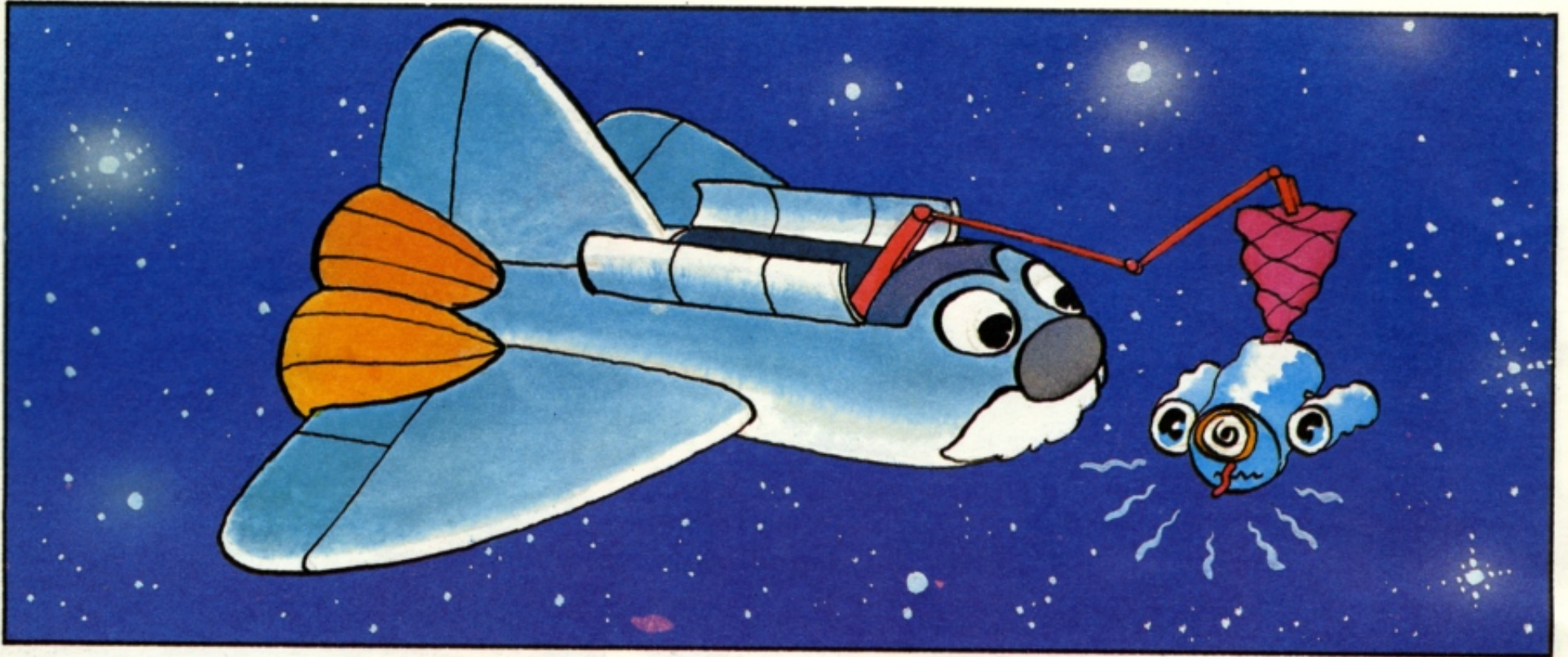




They were interrupted by a radio call from Grandma Computer at Mombase space station. "Grandma to Shorty, emergency, report to . . ." The radio went dead. "Grandma's been cut off. I'd better find out what's happened. See you later, twins." At Mombase, lights were flashing and sirens blaring. A great Starship was circling around.

"Mombase is under attack. I must hurry." Shorty put his jets on full boost. *Crash!* He jerked to a halt, his fuses blew and his light went out. "I've been shot," he moaned. The Starship approached. Shorty's engines would not start. "Help! I can't escape!" Shorty waited for the Starship to fire, but she rumbled past, speaking a strange language.





Old Zeke the Space Shuttle arrived.

"Zeke, I've been shot."

"No you haven't, Shorty. You flew into the invisible forcefield around Mombase. Grandma couldn't warn you about it because the radio was damaged." Zeke lifted Shorty into his hold and flew to Mombase. The Doc-droids repaired him and he went to see Grandma. Brigadier Battle Cruiser was talking to her.

"Let me blast her to smithereens, ma'am.

She's rammed a space bus, smashed our radio aerals and attacked Shorty. I'll blow her up with a couple of photon torpedoes."

"No, Brigadier," said Grandma. "She hasn't fired a shot yet. We must find out what she's doing here. Hello, Shorty."

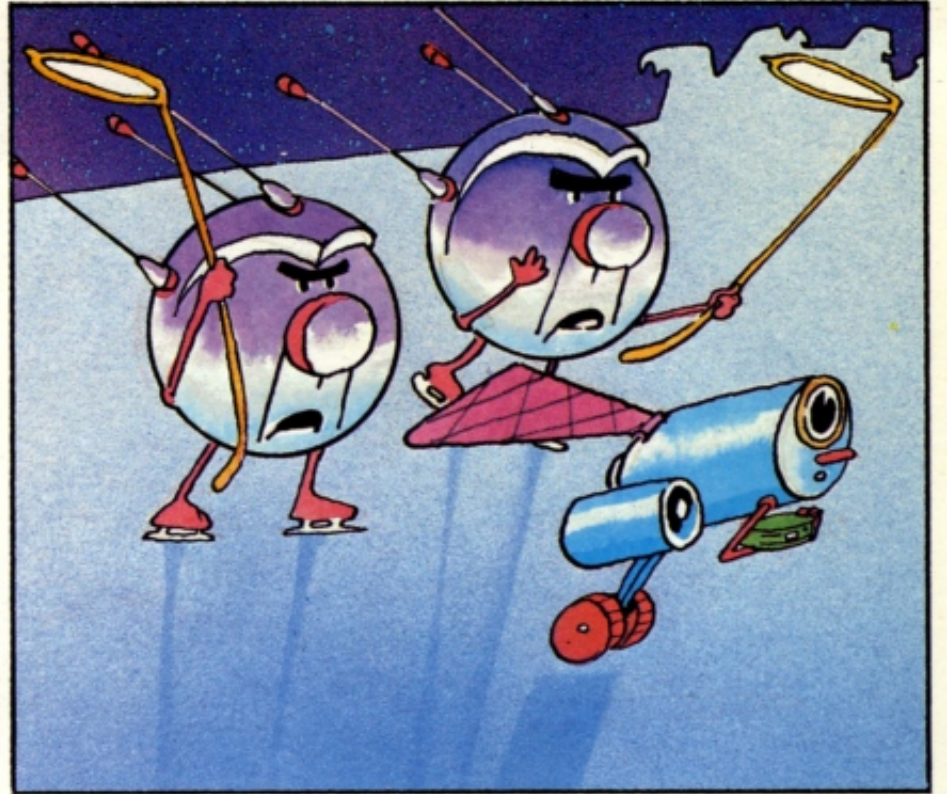
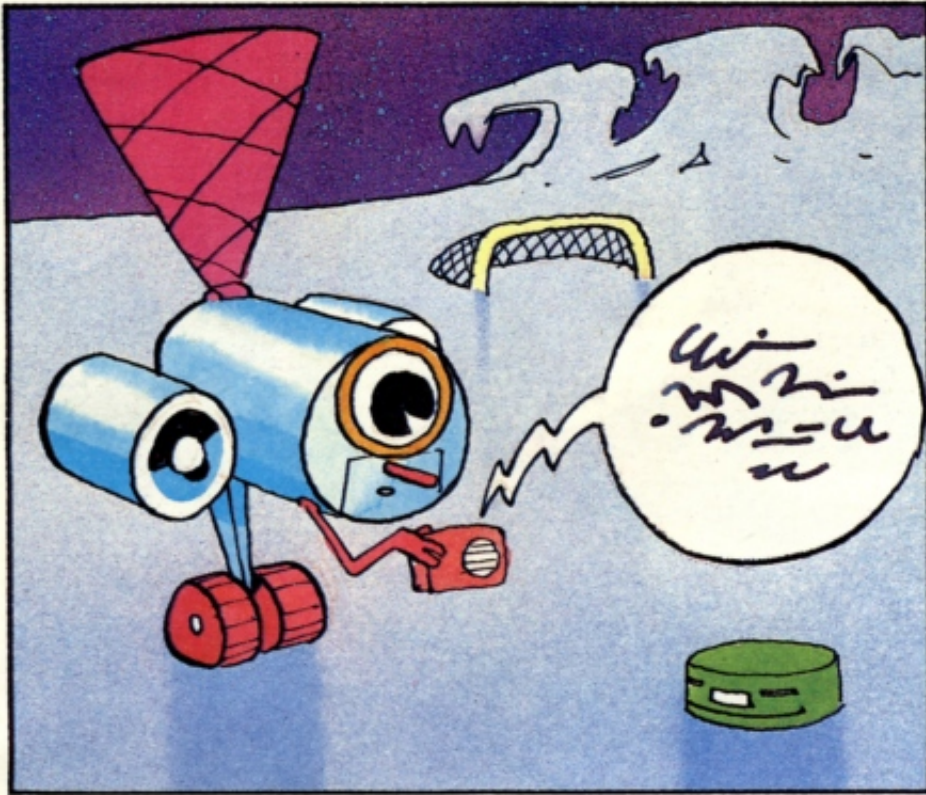
"I taped the Starship's voice. Listen."

"Jodrells gerfunk, meeney, miney pylorix splunx."

"That language isn't in my memory banks. Oh, if only we knew what she was saying."

Shorty remembered Ike. "I know who'd help."





Shorty flew to the frozen asteroid. It was half-time in the ice-hockey game, and he played the tape to Ike.

"She's speaking Spangalese. She said, 'What's happened to them? They must be somewhere.' She's probably lost her ice-skates."

"It doesn't sound like she wants to destroy Mombase," said Shorty. "Ike, will you come and translate what she's saying for us?"

"Of course, Shorty." But Nikita looked angry. "We haven't finished our Big Matchski."

"You can borrow Ikeski next weekski," muttered Yuri.

"Sorry twins, this is an emergency."

Shorty grabbed Ike and flew into space.

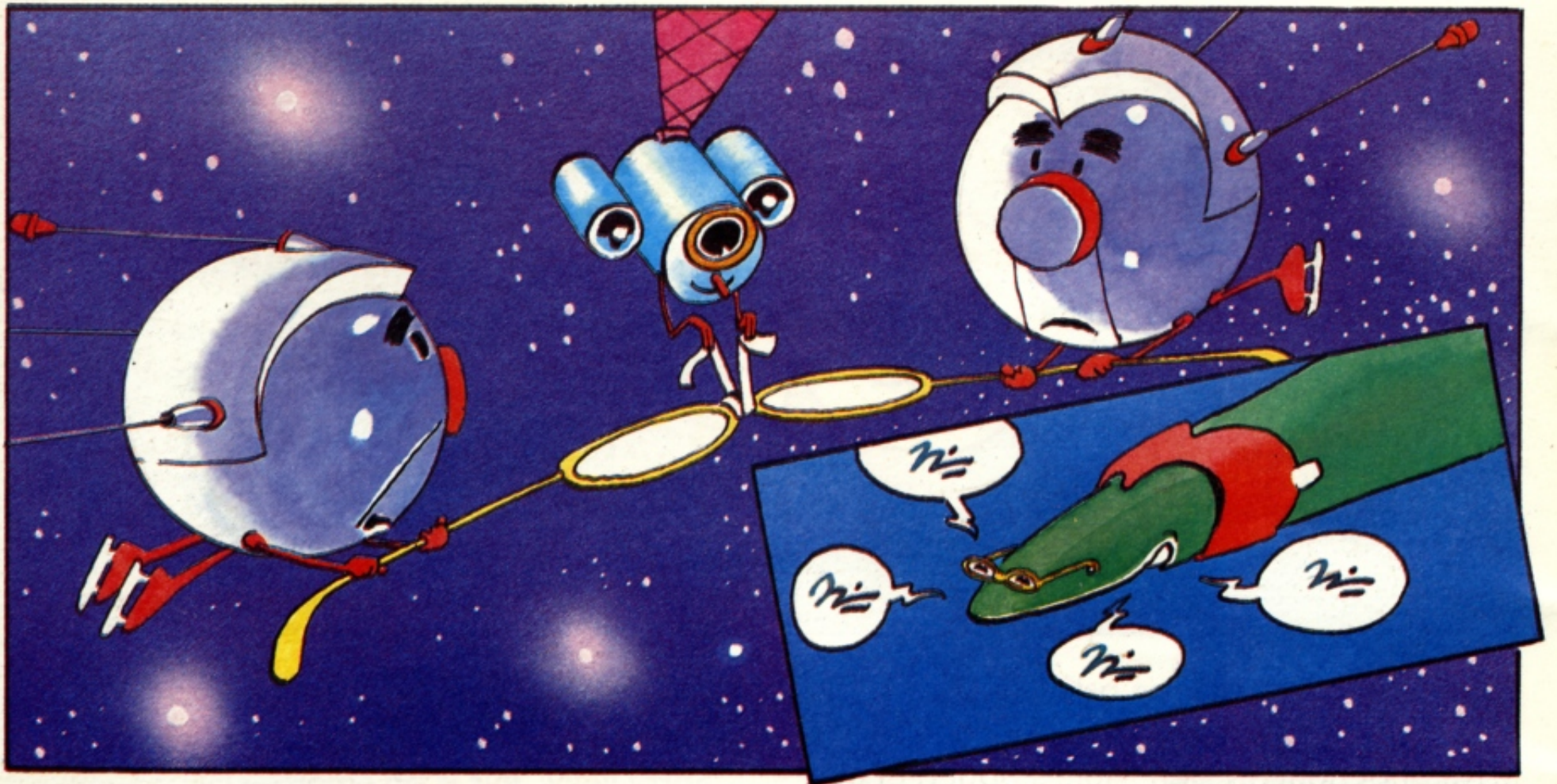
"After him, quickski!" yelled Yuri.

The Starship was flying towards Mombase.

Shorty flew alongside her and Ike spoke to her. "She's lost her glasses," he told Shorty.

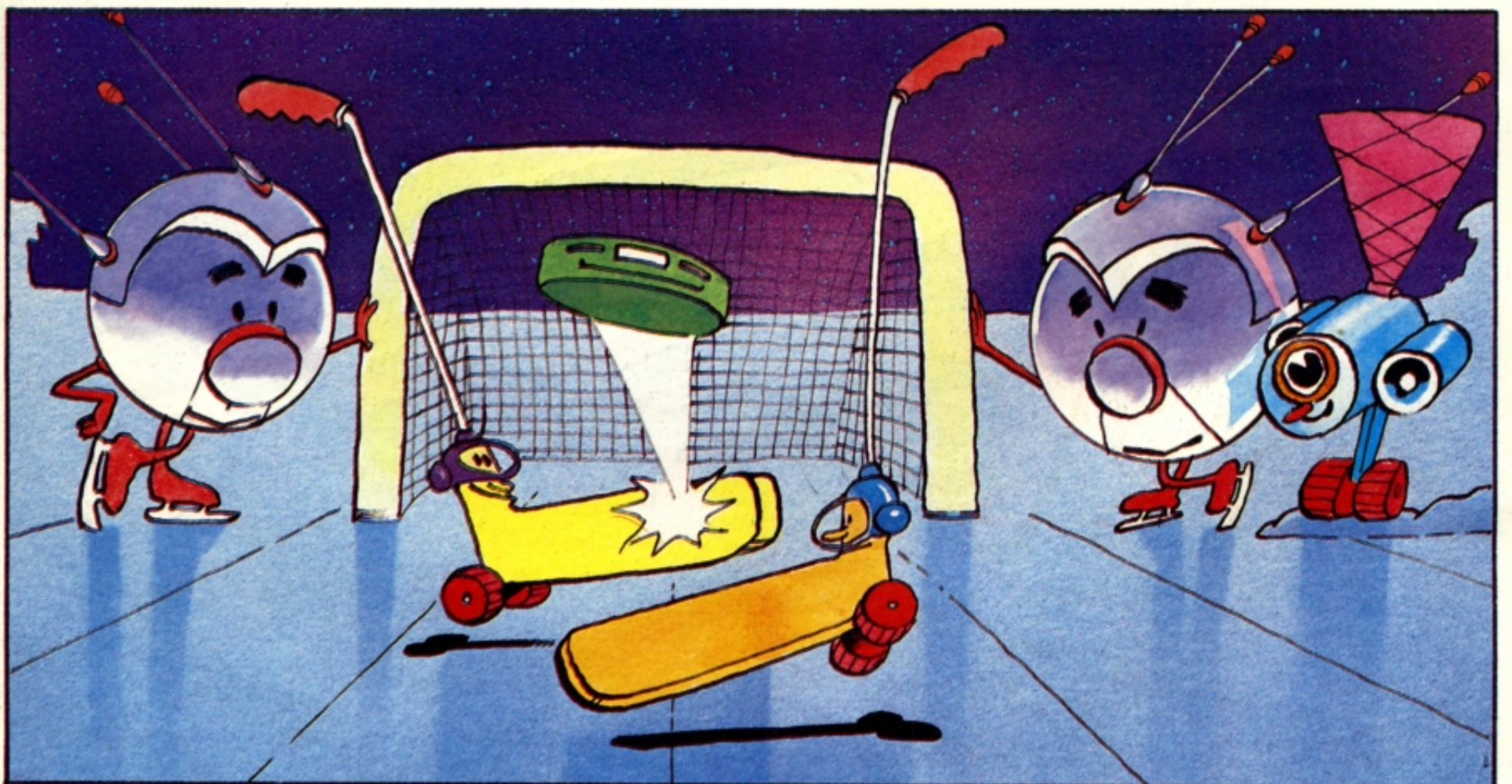
"They were broken by a meteorite. She's sorry about the damage but she's short-sighted and can't see where she's going."





The twins arrived. Shorty took their hockey sticks and joined them up with metal tape. They were the two halves of the Starship's glasses! The Starship was so happy that Ike could hardly keep up translating all the 'thank you's'. The Starship flew home, and Ike and the twins went back to the frozen asteroid, looking rather miserable.

A week later, Shorty delivered a parcel from the Starship. Two hockey sticks jumped out. "Hi, we're Molly and Bill, robotic hockey sticks." As the twins watched, they whizzed on to the ice and started playing hockey. "The machines are taking overski," said Nikita. Shorty laughed. "Don't worry," he said, "you can join in too!"



Mole's Winter Welcome

Mole and Rat were returning home across country after a long day's hunting with Otter.

They plodded along steadily and silently, Rat walking a little way ahead. So he did not notice when Mole stopped dead in his tracks, as though he had been given an electric shock. Mole's nose searched hither and thither — and again caught the smell that had so strongly moved him. And now he knew what it meant.

Home! His old home that he had hardly thought of since the day he first found the

river and met Rat! Now, how clearly it stood before him, telling him sorrowfully that it wanted him back.

"Ratty!" called Mole joyfully. "Come back! It's my home, my old home! I've just smelled it close by here, really quite close. And I *must* go to it. I must, I must!"

But Rat was too far away to hear Mole clearly. "Mole, we mustn't stop now, really!" Rat called back. "It's late, and the snow's coming on again, and I'm not sure of the way! Come on quick, there's a good fellow!" And he pressed on without waiting for a reply.





Poor Mole stood alone on the path, his heart torn asunder, and a big sob gathered somewhere low down inside him. But never for a moment did he dream of abandoning Rat. The smells from his old home pleaded and whispered, but he dared not stay any longer within their magic circle. So he followed in the track of the unsuspecting Rat.

After some time, Rat stopped and said kindly, "Look here, Mole, old chap, you seem dead tired. We'll sit down here for a minute."

Mole sank down forlornly on a tree stump, and the sob he had fought with so long rose up and up and forced its way out — and then another, and another, and others thick and fast, until he was crying freely and openly. Rat was astonished and dismayed at Mole's grief, and said very quietly and sympathetically, "What is it, old fellow? What's the matter?"

Eventually, Mole sobbed brokenly, "I know it's a shabby, dingy little place — not like your cosy quarters at River Bank — but





it was my own little home. And I went away and forgot all about it. And then suddenly I smelled it. And I wanted it! And when you *wouldn't* turn back, Ratty — and I had to leave it — I . . . I thought my heart would break. Oh dear, oh dear!"

Rat said nothing, but patted Mole gently on the shoulder, waiting for his sobs to die down. Then he remarked carelessly, "Well now, we'd better go and find that home of yours, old fellow!" And he set off back the way they had come.

"Oh come back, Ratty, do!" cried Mole, hurrying after him. "It's too dark and the snow's coming! And . . . I never meant to let you know I was feeling that way about it! And think of River Bank and your supper!"

"Hang River Bank, and supper too!" said Rat. Taking Mole's arm he marched him back to the part of the path where

his friend had scented signals from home.

Mole stood a moment, rigid, while his uplifted nose felt the air. The signals were coming through again! Like a sleep-walker, he crossed a dry ditch, scrambled through a hedge and nosed his way over a field. Suddenly he dived down a tunnel, Rat still following close behind. It seemed a long time to Rat before the passage ended and he could stand up and shake himself.

Mole struck a match, and by its light they saw that they were standing in an open space opposite Mole's little front door, with 'Mole End' painted over the bell-pull. Along one side of the clearing was a skittle-alley, and in the middle a small round pond containing goldfish. From the centre of the pond rose a fanciful creation topped by a large silvered glass ball which reflected everything all wrong, and had a very pleasing effect.



Mole's face beamed at the sight of these objects so dear to him, and he hurried Rat through the door of his home, lit a lamp and looked around. Dust lay thick on everything, and the neglected house looked altogether cheerless and deserted. Mole collapsed on a chair, his nose in his paws.

"Oh Ratty! Why did I bring you to this poor, cold little place when you might have been at River Bank by a blazing fire?"

But Rat took no notice. He was running here and there inspecting rooms and cupboards, lighting lamps and candles and sticking them up everywhere. "What an *excellent* little house this is! So compact! So well planned! We'll make a jolly night of it, you'll see! The first thing we want is a good fire. I'll see to that. You get a duster, Mole, and try and smarten things up a bit."

Mole roused himself and dusted and polished away heartily, while Rat soon had a cheerful blaze roaring in the fireplace. "Now come with me and let's see what we can find for supper." After hunting through every cupboard and drawer they found a tin of sardines, a box of ship's biscuits — nearly

full — a sausage and four bottles of beer.

"There's a banquet for you!" observed Rat, as he arranged the table. "I know some animals who'd give their ears to be sitting down to supper with us tonight."

He had just got to work with the tin opener when they heard noises like the scuffling of small feet in the gravel outside, and a confused murmur of tiny voices.

"Now, all in a line — hold the lantern up a bit, Tommy — no coughing after I say *one, two, three.*"

"It must be the field-mice," said Mole.





"They go round carol-singing every year before Christmas, and they used to come to Mole End last of all for hot drinks and supper."

"Let's have a look at them!" cried Rat, jumping up and flinging open the door.

There stood about eight or ten mice, sniggering a little and sniffing and wiping their noses on their coat-sleeves. Then their shrill little voices rose up, singing one of the carols they had learned from their fathers.

When the singers had finished, they glanced shyly at each other, bashful but smiling. "Very well sung, boys!" cried Rat eagerly. "Now come along in by the fire all of you and have something hot."

"Yes, come along, field-mice," cried Mole. "This is quite like old times!" Then he suddenly plumped down on a seat, near to tears. "Oh Ratty, we've nothing to give them!"

"You leave all that to me. Here, you with the lantern, come here! Tell me, er, are there any shops open at this time of night?"

"Why, certainly, sir," replied the field-mouse respectfully. "At this time of year

our shops keep open till all sorts of hours."

"Then off you go at once, and, er, get me, er, now let me see..." Much muttered conversation followed and finally there was a chink of coins passing from paw to paw. The field-mouse hurried off with his lantern.





The rest of the field-mice all perched in a row on the bench and toasted their chilblains in front of the fire, while Mole made each of them recite the names of younger brothers and sisters who were as yet too young to go out carol-singing.

Rat, meanwhile, busied himself with brewing mulled ale, and soon every field-mouse was sipping and coughing and choking somewhat on the warming mixture. At last the field-mouse with the lantern appeared, staggering under the weight of a loaded basket. In a few minutes supper was ready, and Mole took the head of the table, watching his little friends' beaming faces. As they ate, the field-mice told him all the local news and answered the hundreds of questions asked.

Then, at last, they clattered off, showering Christmas wishes as they went, their pockets stuffed with treats for their little brothers and sisters at home. Then Rat said, with a tremendous yawn, "Mole old chap, I'm ready to drop. Is that your bunk on that side? Very well then, I'll take this. What a fine little house this is! Everything so handy!"

He clambered on to his bunk, rolled himself in the blankets and fell fast asleep.

The weary Mole soon had his head on his pillow, too. But before he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room, resting on familiar and friendly things that glowed in the firelight.

He did not for a moment want to abandon his new life in the world outside, but it was good that he had come back to his own little home which had given him such a splendid Christmas welcome.



SANTA'S SUNNY CHRISTMAS

Rudolph put his head on one side and scowled. "We never needed one before," he said doubtfully.

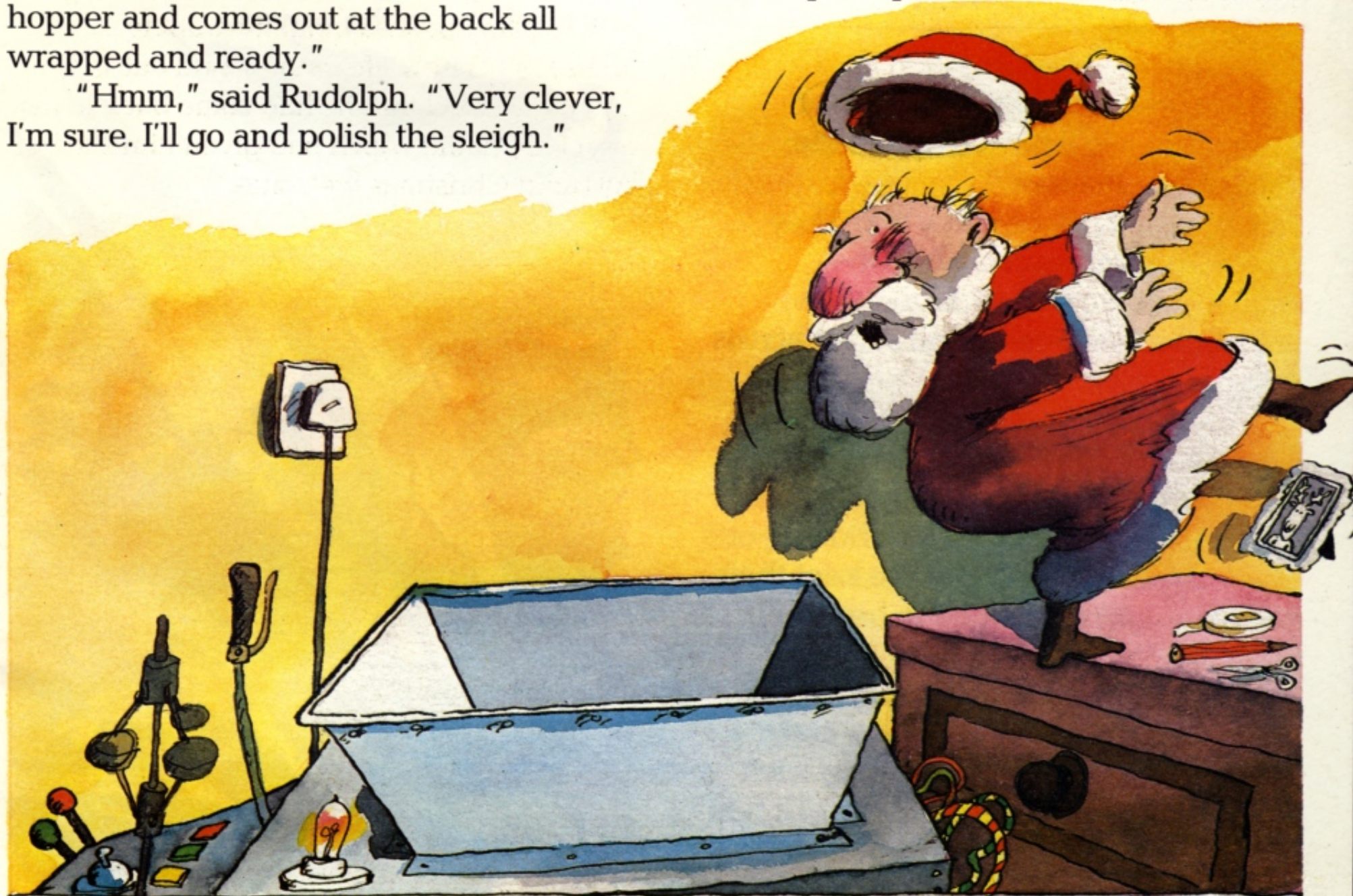
"We have to move with the times," said Santa as he tightened the last screw. His new parcelling machine was finished. "You see, the wrapping paper goes in here . . . the ribbon goes in here . . . and the present goes in this hopper and comes out at the back all wrapped and ready."

"Hmm," said Rudolph. "Very clever, I'm sure. I'll go and polish the sleigh."

On Christmas Eve, Santa was delighted that he had installed the parcelling machine. All the presents were wrapped. There was no last-minute rush. The sleigh was loaded, the reindeer were raring to go. Santa pulled on his boots and stood on the sideboard to check his suit in the mirror.

From the sideboard he could see down into the hopper of the parcelling machine. "That's funny!" Something was glittering in the bottom of the hopper. "What's that?" He looked down to try and see what it was.

"Ooh . . . aah . . . nearly . . . errh . . . ooow!" Santa toppled off the sideboard and into the hopper. The machine shook, whirred and swallowed him; wrapped, ribboned and parcelled him. Out came a neat, square packet at the other end.



"Santa? Time to go!" Rudolph put his head round the door. "Oh *now* where's he gone?"

The reindeer searched the house, the stables and the garden. They looked on the roof and under the sleigh. They looked behind the Northern Lights and under the polar ice-cap. But there was no sign of Santa.

Rudolph took charge. "This is an emergency, boys! It's already ten o'clock



and the whole world is waiting for Christmas. We'll have to make the deliveries ourselves!"

And that is what they did. They loaded the last parcels aboard — including the one they found in the parcelling machine — and set off across the snowy sky.

That year the noise was terrible in the chimneys. Stamping and grunting was heard on roofs. Sooty hoof-prints were found on fireside mats. But anyone who was woken by the noise kept their eyes shut and pretended to be asleep, for fear they got no presents.

Rudolph delivered each parcel to the address on the label. Sooty and sneezing, tired and tetchy, he was left with just one parcel on the sleigh. It had no label on it. "Just have to take pot luck!" he said, and hurled it off the sleigh.



The parcel spun dizzily down through the sky — missed the chimneys of Sydney, Australia, and landed — *splash!* — in the rollers off Bondi Beach. It rolled and tumbled in the surf.

A family of surfers came down to the beach to work up an appetite for Christmas breakfast. They spotted the box tumbling in the waves.





"Look! A free picnic! Cold turkey and cranberry sauce! Iced beer and Christmas cake!" They paddled out to the parcel on their surfboards.

But when they opened it, Santa poked his head out. "Oh! At last! Oh!" he spluttered. "Oh, phew, oh it's hot! What a relief! Thank you, thank . . ."

"Crikey, it's only a boring old Santa. No turkey! No beer! No cake!" and with angry hands they pushed Santa back into the box and tied the ribbons in a knot. The children were sad to see him disappear.

"He probably wants to go back to the North Pole," cried one.

"Yeah, let's take him round to the post office."

So they bundled him off to the post office and dumped him on the steps.

The postmen were exhausted after Christmas. They sat about on sacks of letters, yawning and rubbing their feet, but they were really rather sad that Christmas was over.

"Ah look at this, *another* parcel with no address on it," said the Postmaster-General when he found the package on the steps of the post office. "And late, too. Oh well, open it up, Bruce, and let's see if anyone wrote a name on the present inside."





So they opened it up, and out popped Santa saying, "Helpit'smelook-pleasedon'tputmebackinsideagain!"

The Postmaster-General was so astonished that he fell into a sack of letters and was almost posted to Walleroo.

In the corner of the post office were all the things that had fallen out of other parcels in the post: a jumped-on jelly, a crumbled cake, a squashed sack of sausage rolls. They did not look very nice, but they would still taste delicious!

"If we've got a Santa in the post office," cried the Postmaster-General, "we must have a Christmas party . . . well, a Day-After-Christmas party, anyway. Down to the beach!" And off they all went, taking their picnic in a mail-bag.

It just so happened that the glitter Santa had seen in the bottom of the parcelling machine was a kazoo. And the Postmaster-General was an amateur championship player of the kazoo. So he played, and the postmen danced on the sand, and so did Santa, and all in all everybody thought it was the best Day-After-Christmas party they had ever had.

"This is all very well," Santa thought, "but what kind of a Christmas is it when Santa and his reindeer aren't together?"

"What's the matter, mate?" enquired the Postmaster-General politely.

"Well, I'm having a wonderful time," said Santa, "but I must admit I do rather miss Rudolph and the other reindeer."

"Then send a telegram!" cried the Postmaster-General.





Back at the North Pole the reindeer were still searching frantically for Santa. "If we don't find him soon," said Rudolph, "I won't be able to stand the strain. Look at my fur. It's going grey with worry already."

Suddenly the doorbell rang.

"Telegram for you, Rudolph," said a small reindeer with a peaked cap.

"Don't go, postman," said Rudolph grandly. "Gather round, all you other reindeer. We have been sent a telegram."

Opening the envelope, Rudolph read aloud,

ON BONDI BEACH. PLEASE COME. BRING BATHING COSTUME. LOVE SANTA.

Pausing only to find Santa's red and white bathing suit, the reindeer set course for Australia.

"Hello, reindeer! Ha ha!" said Santa jovially when they arrived. "Brought my swimming costume, have you?"

"It was behind your new parcelling machine," said Rudolph quietly.

"Well, if it weren't for that machine, none of us would be here," said Santa.

The postmen thought that the reindeer's sleigh would make a very good surfboard, and in no time Santa was skimming along the waves, crying joyfully, "Isn't Christmas lovely? Isn't Christmas *fun*?"



Good King Wenceslas

It was midnight on Christmas Eve and Wenceslas was, as usual, very busy wrapping presents for everyone in the castle. There were silk stockings and silver skates for his dear Queen, a very difficult jigsaw for Albert, his page; pen-knives, nuts and marzipan for the footmen, and china ornaments and talcum powder for the cooks and under-cooks. And everyone had a tangerine each.

When he had finished, the King barely had enough time to tip-toe around the castle hanging a stocking at the end of each bed, before the whole castle was suddenly awake. So, as soon as Wenceslas had tumbled into bed, the Queen, page, footmen, cooks and under-cooks tore open their parcels, scattering string and paper everywhere, trying on stockings, munching marzipan and arranging ornaments.

What a to-do there was in the kitchen — a banging and chopping and scraping and basting; of spinach and roast potatoes, plum pudding, crème caramel and lime jelly, guinea-fowl, turkey and swordfish. Albert the page, having nothing much to do while the King slept, was busy tasting each dish and looking forward to his Christmas dinner. Meanwhile Wenceslas snored on and on. He was so exhausted with the night's work.

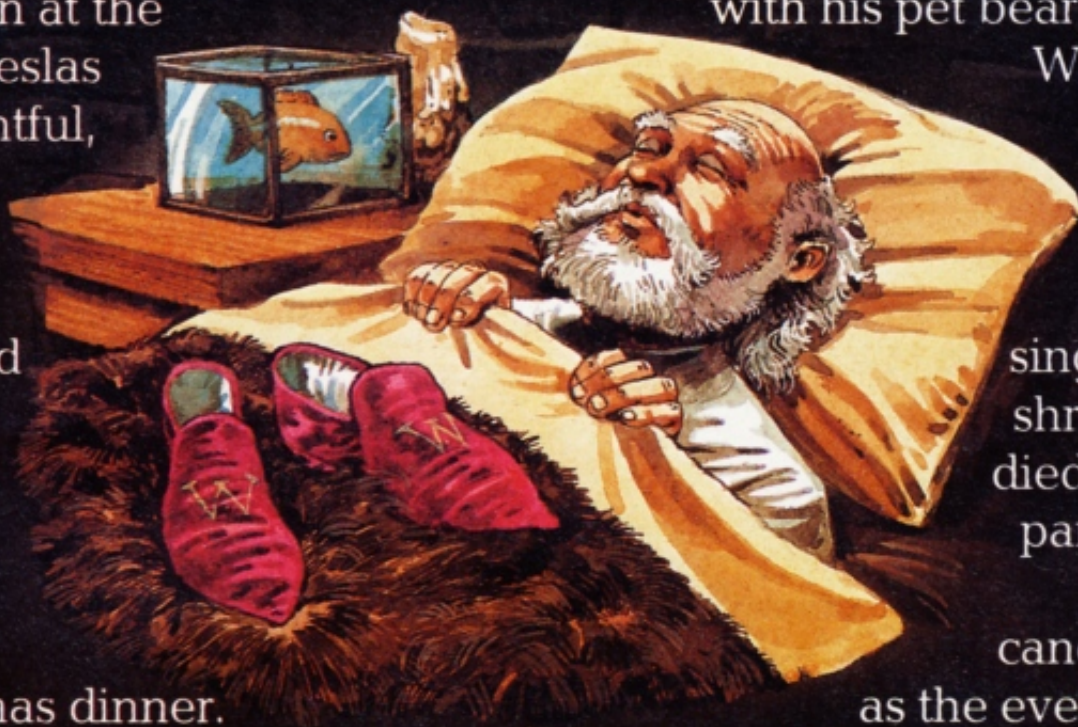
The Queen came in, kissed him, and gave him a pair of slippers embroidered with his initials. The King mumbled, "Charming my dear," and went back to sleep again. Albert, tiring of his hard work in the kitchen, came in and gave him a goldfish he had won at the summer fair. Wenceslas murmured, "Delightful, my boy," and went back to sleep again.

He slept on and on, while the Queen, the page, the Court and guests from far and wide ate their sumptuous Christmas dinner. Glasses were filled and refilled, crackers pulled and balloons popped. Then the

court orchestra struck up and the entertainment started.

Six important guests from Italy performed a juggling act while standing in a human pyramid, the King of France rather unexpectedly danced the tango with his pet bear, and a Druid from

Wales recited a long poem. This made everyone feel suddenly very weary, and the singing, laughter and shrieks of excitement died away. The whole party nodded quietly in their seats, the candles flickering low as the evening went on and darkness fell outside, where silent snow had already fallen.



Wenceslas, meanwhile, woke up refreshed and full of energy. He stretched, jumped out of bed and pushed his feet into his new slippers. Walking over to his bedroom window, he leaned out, sniffing the frosty air with pleasure. Down below he spied an old man collecting firewood.

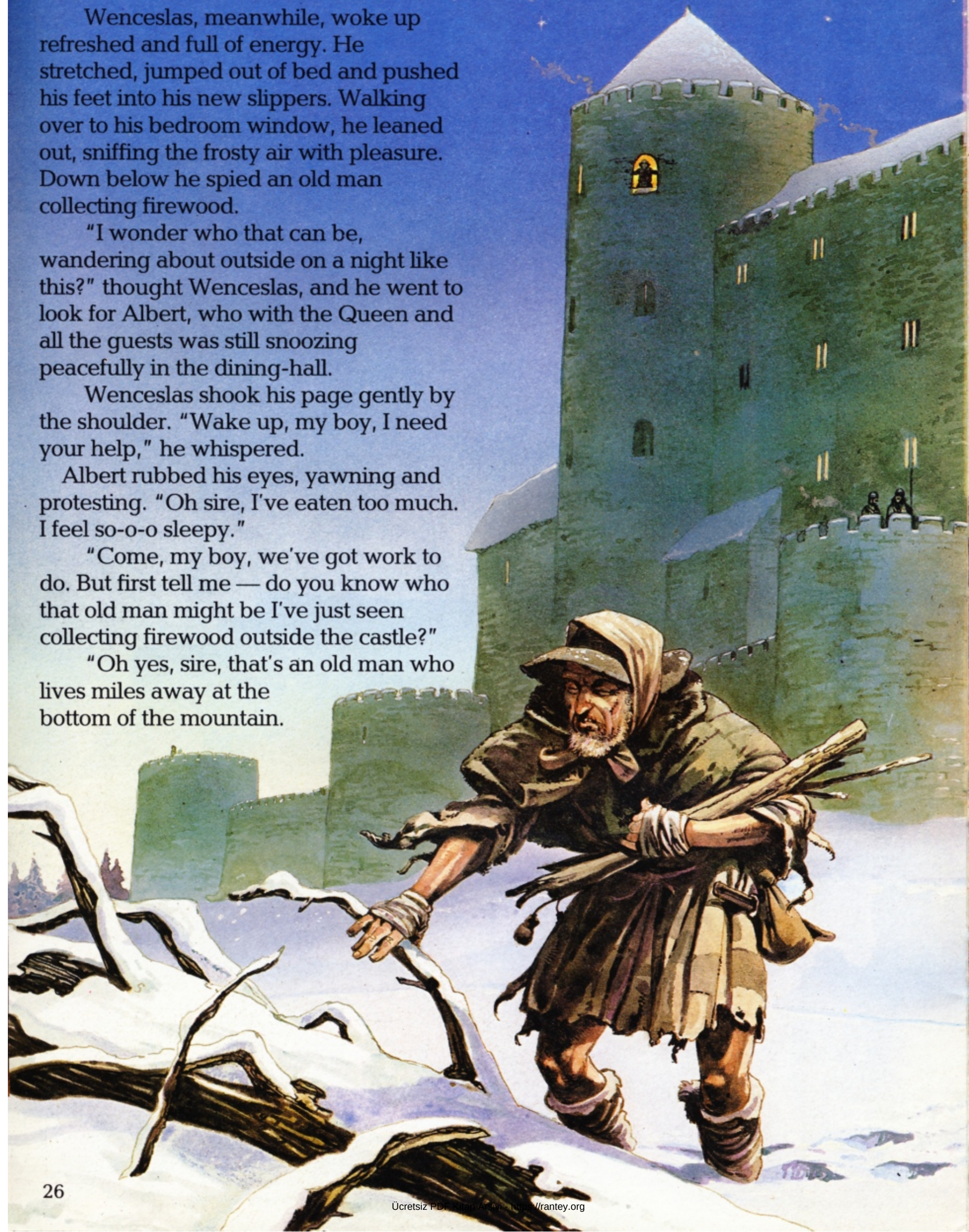
"I wonder who that can be, wandering about outside on a night like this?" thought Wenceslas, and he went to look for Albert, who with the Queen and all the guests was still snoozing peacefully in the dining-hall.

Wenceslas shook his page gently by the shoulder. "Wake up, my boy, I need your help," he whispered.

Albert rubbed his eyes, yawning and protesting. "Oh sire, I've eaten too much. I feel so-o-o sleepy."

"Come, my boy, we've got work to do. But first tell me — do you know who that old man might be I've just seen collecting firewood outside the castle?"

"Oh yes, sire, that's an old man who lives miles away at the bottom of the mountain.





He often comes over here collecting firewood."

"Hmm. Well now, fetch me as many pine logs as you can carry." Albert disappeared and Wenceslas went round the table, filling a basket with chunks of meat and decanters of wine.

When the page returned, staggering under a pile of logs, Wenceslas said, "Now, put on your warmest cloak. We're off to visit our friend at the bottom of the mountain and give him a surprise."

"But, sire, it's *freezing* outside!"

Wenceslas silenced him with a mild frown. "Just remember, not everyone has had the splendid Christmas that *you* have, or has a warm castle to live in."

And off they tramped in the snow. Wenceslas carried the logs, and Albert followed behind with the basket of food. They put it all down at the old man's door. "There," said Wenceslas. "Now at least he'll have a bit of Christmas dinner, and enough wood to last a few days."



Then they retraced their footsteps to the castle, Albert still following behind. As he walked, he felt the strangest thing — he did not know if it was because of all the food and wine he had had, but as he followed in his master's footsteps, his body tingled all over with warmth as though it was the finest summer's day.

"I wonder if anyone would believe me if I told them. No, they'd probably laugh at me. I think I'll just keep it to myself." And Albert snuggled up contentedly inside his cloak as the lights of the castle came into view.



Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"

"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither;
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."

"Mark my footsteps, good my page,
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.

DICK WHITTINGTON

and his CAT

Dick Whittington woke one morning with a hankering for adventure. He bounded out of the house and on to the village green.

"Hey!" an old farmer called to the boy, "you ought to take yourself off to London. It's too quiet round here for the likes of you. They do say that the streets there be paved with gold."

Dick was amazed. "Gold! Then just one cobblestone would make me rich!"

"But then again, I never believe what town folk say," added the farmer, laughing. But he was too late to stop Dick. The



young man had two words ringing in his ears:

'London' and 'gold'. "And now to the city," he cried, "to make my fortune!"

The first signpost outside the village said 'London'. "Good," thought Dick, "it must be just over the hill." But London was not just over the hill; nor over the next, nor the next. Exhausted, Dick lay down to sleep in the shelter of an old oak tree.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by a tickling on his cheek. Sitting up, he saw a marmalade cat smiling at him. "Excuse me, sir," said the cat, "but have you got a saucer of milk to spare?"

"I'm sorry," said Dick. "All the food and drink I set off with has gone, and I've no money to buy more".

"Never mind," said the cat. "If we curl up together at least we'll be warm."





of London. The roads were suddenly busy. Everybody seemed to be shouting and hurrying, pushing and quarrelling. But the streets were not paved with gold — they were running with mud.

Dick and Tom ducked out of the way of the thronging crowds, and ran through an arch and into a courtyard. Dick knocked on the basement door of a grand-looking house. "Er, have you got a job for a hard-working country boy?" he shouted.

A fearsome face as white as dough and crowned with fiery red hair appeared round

And that is how Dick made friends with his cat, who very soon told him that his name was Tom. In the morning they travelled on together towards London. On and on they walked until at last Dick said, "I'm going back, Tom. I've had enough. There can't be anything in London that's worth all this walking." And he turned his back on London and began trudging home.

At that very moment the sound of bells began to ring across the fields. They were the church bells of the City of London and they seemed to be singing:

"Turn again Whittington,
Lord Mayor of London!"

Over and over again they chimed, until the words jangled in Dick's head.

"You can't give up now!" cried Tom.
"Onwards to London!"

And there it lay, round the next corner, the gleaming, smoking, ramshackle chaos



the door. "Come in 'ere, boy, and scrape the pots. I'm cook in this house. If you work hard, I might let you eat the scrapings!"

And that was how Dick came to work in the house of Captain Fitzwarren. He worked so hard scraping and polishing that by evening he wanted only to sleep. But the mice that infested his attic bedroom kept him awake — until one night he said to Tom, "Go get 'em, boy!" And the mice ran for their lives. Dick's cat was a great comfort to him.

So, too, was Captain Fitzwarren's young daughter, Alice. She would often come down to the kitchen to sit and talk with Dick.



And she loved to stroke Tom as he lay by the fire.

"If I were Lord Mayor of London," Dick used to say laughingly, "I'd marry you, Alice Fitzwarren." And Alice would smile and say, "If you did become Lord Mayor of London, of course I'd marry you." And the cat would purr and say, "Who knows? Who knows?"





One day, Captain Fitzwarren announced that he was setting sail on a voyage. He gathered together his family and servants, and said goodbye to them all. When he noticed Dick standing beside the cook, his cat in his arms, he said, "Now that's just what I need. Here's a silver shilling, boy, for your cat. He's a ship's cat now."

Dick tried to protest, but the cook smacked

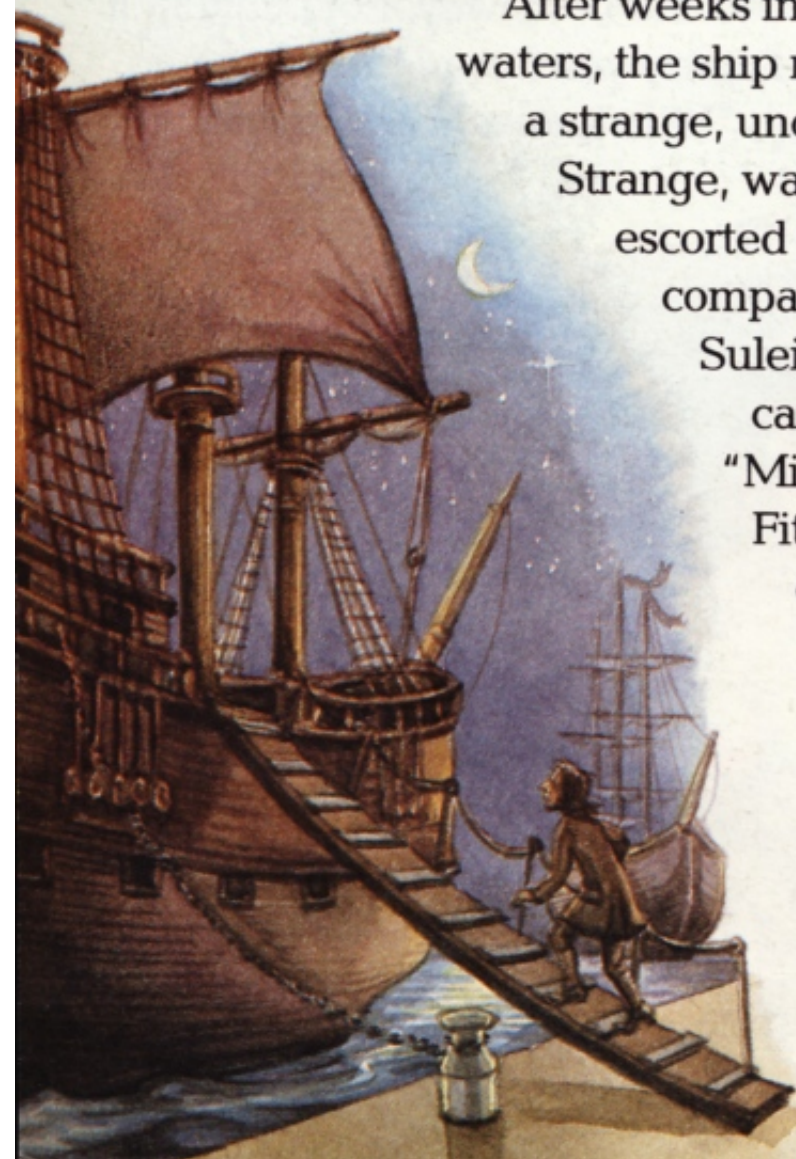
him sharply. "Do as you're told, and don't argue with the master!" Dick returned sadly to his chilly attic, but it was so lonely without Tom that he decided to go and fetch him back. Just before dawn, he crept up the gangplank of the ship, little knowing that it was just about to sail.

And *that* is how Dick came to be cabin boy aboard Captain Fitzwarren's ship, and to sail to the mysterious lands of the East.

After weeks in storm-tossed waters, the ship ran aground on a strange, uncharted shore.

Strange, warlike soldiers escorted the ship's company to the Sultan Suleiman's palace — cargo, cat and all.

"Mighty Suleiman!" said Fitzwarren spreading the entire ship's cargo before him, "I bring a few humble possessions in the hope of pleasing your Eminence." "Hmm," said the Sultan. "I have every possession a man could desire. What need have I of these trinkets?"



As the Sultan spoke, Dick could not help but notice that the whole palace was overrun with mice and rats. Tom wriggled restlessly in Dick's arms. "Rrrow! rrow! I can't bear it another minute!"

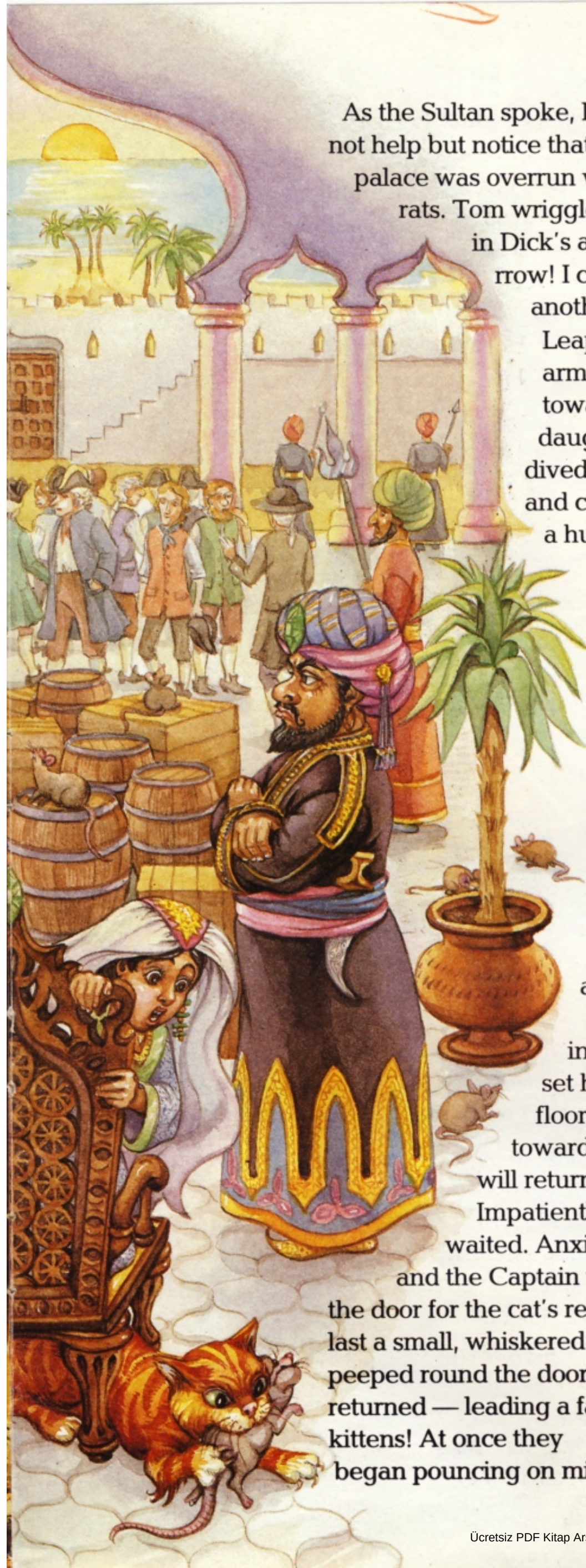
Leaping out of Dick's arms, he pounced towards the Sultan's daughter, the Sultana, dived under her throne, and came out dragging a huge rat in his jaws!

"O Sun and Moon!" shrieked the Sultana. "What wonderful beast is this?"

Tom ran round the palace, scattering mice and rats, and swallowing a dozen or more. "O marvellous beast!" cried the Sultan. "During my reign and the reign of my father, this country has been plagued with rats. But this creature is a veritable slayer of rats! Name your price, Captain! For this creature I will pay a sack of diamonds!"

Dick caught Tom up in his arms. "Oh, but he's my friend, sir. I couldn't leave him behind in a foreign land!"

The cat whispered in Dick's ear. Dick set him down on the floor and off he ran towards the ship. "He will return," said Dick. Impatiently the Sultan waited. Anxiously Dick and the Captain watched the door for the cat's return. At last a small, whiskered face peeped round the door, and Tom returned — leading a family of kittens! At once they began pouncing on mice.





"You have always had cats in your country," said Tom. "But they were frightened by your warlike ways. These six would be most proud and honoured to serve you and your son, and your son's sons — as long as you put away your swords. And now, if it please your Excellency, I'd like to go home with my friend Dick."

The Sultan clapped his hands with delight. "O Earth and Sky! but this is wonderful! I have six rat-slayers instead of one! Great must be the reward for those who brought me these cat-beasts! To the boy Dick I offer my daughter — yes, my own daughter — for a wife. You aren't married, are you boy?"

Dick bowed very low. "No, your Gloriousness, but I have sworn to marry none other than the beautiful Alice Fitzwarren, daughter of this worthy sea-captain." The Sultan was disappointed, and the Sultana was very disappointed. But they comforted themselves by giving Dick three sacks of diamonds and a turban.

"O most generous Suleiman!" said Dick. "Our boat is grounded on your beautiful shores, and without help we can never return home."

"Not another word!" cried the Sultan. "Here are two flying carpets woven by my own magician — one for the ship's crew and another for my humble gift of treasure."





And *that* is how Dick Whittington came home to London. As the two carpets swooped over the roof of the house, Alice looked out of her window and waved.

"Dick!" cried the Captain, climbing off the carpet, "now that you've made your fortune, you're as good a husband as I could wish for my Alice. And what's more, I do believe she's in love with you. Why not run and ask her?"

"Do you remember my promise?" said Alice. "I vowed to marry you if ever you became Lord Mayor of London."

Such was his love for Alice that Dick immediately set to work. Using the treasure given him by the Sultan he soon became a rich and successful merchant. He was hard-working, popular and fair; and before two years had passed he was elected Lord Mayor of London.

On the day of the wedding the streets were filled with people, all agog to see the new Lord Mayor and his beautiful bride.

Tom sat beside Dick and Alice in their golden coach, wearing a new ribbon with a bright silver bell.

But no-one could hear it ringing above the huge pealing chimes of the bells of the City of London, as they rang out:

"Hail Richard Whittington
Lord Mayor of London."



THE TALE OF THE LITTLE PINE TREE



It was the week before Christmas, and the forest of pine trees was covered in a crisp, white blanket of snow.



Morinda, a proud young pine, peered up at the older trees towering over her. "One day, I'll be as tall as them!" she thought.



Suddenly the silence was shattered by a high-pitched buzzing, and an agonising creak. A voice boomed, "Timber!"



A pine tree crashed down in the snow. "Oh no!" said Morinda. "It's those terrible lumberjacks with their chainsaws."



All day the awful din filled the forest. "I'm too young to be chopped up," muttered Morinda, watching the big trees fall.



But the young trees were being chopped down too, and poor Morinda felt the chainsaw tearing into her trunk.



The noise was deafening. Her branches shuddered and shook, and in a second she was tumbling down in the snow.

The young trees were loaded into a truck. "Now I'll become toothpicks," wailed Morinda bitterly, "or worse — *matchsticks!*"



That night the trees were delivered to the market. "Jingle Bells, jingle bells," sang Morinda, "we're to be Christmas Trees!"



Next morning Morinda fluffed out her branches and stood proud and tall. She was the most beautiful tree there.



People queued at Mr Spruce's stall to buy Morinda. But she was not for sale. Mr Spruce used her to attract his customers.



Soon all the trees were sold, and on Christmas Eve Mr Spruce took Morinda home for his family. She felt very special.



The Spruce children were very excited to see Morinda, and decorated her with baubles and tinsel. On her top they hung

a star, and strung fairy lights all over her. "What a lovely tree!" they exclaimed. "Christmas is a happy time," said Morinda.



The Spruces' friends came to sing carols. "Let's sing in front of our beautiful tree," said Mrs Spruce. Morinda felt proud.



That night, when everyone was asleep, Santa Claus crept down the chimney. "Ho-ho-ho, best tree I've seen in years."



On Christmas Day, the Spruces opened their gifts and had dinner. Mr Spruce made a toast: "To the best Christmas tree ever!"

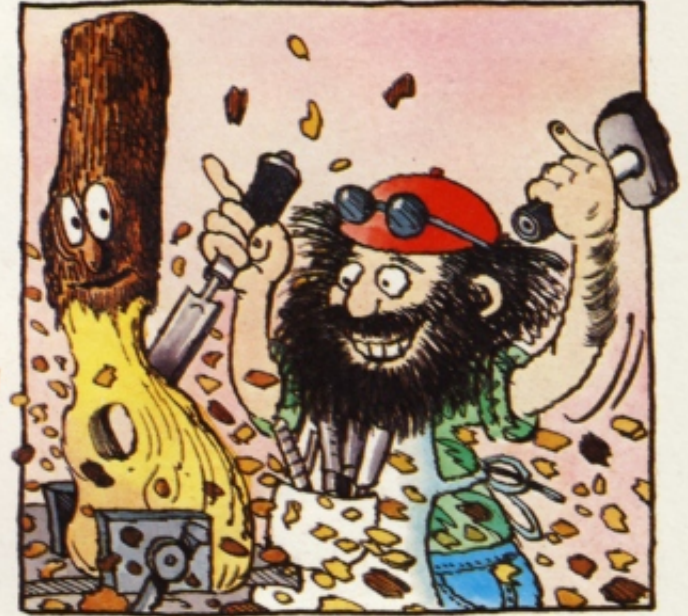


But, as the days went by, Morinda felt exhausted. "Oh no! My leaves are falling and my branches are sagging..."



On the twelfth day after Christmas, Morinda was stripped of her decorations and dumped on the rubbish pile.

She felt very depressed. "My life is finished," she sobbed. "Worms will eat me or I'll get wet and soggy and rot."



But Henri the sculptor spotted Morinda. "Oh ho ho! What a magnificent piece of pine!" he exclaimed and took her home.

He sawed off her branches, and for months he carved and chiselled her trunk. "What's to become of me now?" she sobbed.



At the Art Gallery, Henri unveiled his sculpture. Cries of "Oh magnificent!" and "Beautiful!" went up from the crowd.

Morinda glowed with pride, "I've become a famous work of art. Now I'll never be thrown away again!"

The Fairies' Cake

"Oh, we'll turn you into a tree."

"I don't want to turn into a tree," thought Lucy. So she said to the fairies, "How can I make a cake without flour? You'd better fly to my kitchen and fetch me a bag of flour."

So the fairies flitted over to the croft where Lucy lived, and flitted back with a bag of flour.

Lucy shook her head. "How can I make a cake without eggs? You'd better fly to my hen-house and fetch me half a dozen eggs."

So the fairies flew over to the hen-house, and flew back with half a dozen eggs.

"But how can I make a cake without sugar?" said Lucy to the fairies.

"You'd better hurry to my cupboard and fetch a bag of sugar."

So the fairies fluttered over to the croft and found in the cupboard a bag of sugar, and

There was once a young lady called Lucy who baked the best cakes in the whole world. One day she was stolen away by the fairies, who locked her up in the kitchen in Fairyland. "Make us a cake!" they all demanded. "A big, gooey, crumbly, creamy cake with icing!"

"And what will become of me when I've done baking?" asked Lucy.





between them carried it back to Fairyland. "Och, but you forgot the baking powder!" cried Lucy. "Do you want a cake as flat as a dinner plate?" And she sent the fairies back for the baking powder.

She sent them for the icing sugar, the cherries, the cream and a bowl. And with every trip the fairies grew more and more tired, until their wings drooped.

"There! I'm ready!" said Lucy, putting all the ingredients into the bowl. "But oh dear, I'm too worried about my poor wee baby to think about cake-making. You must go and fetch him for me to watch over while I cook."

"Oh, all right," said the fairies grudgingly. They did not want to go — they were worn out. But how else could they get their cake?

They were no sooner back, carrying the baby in his crib, than Lucy looked at her watch. "Oh goodness gracious! It's time for my husband's tea. I must go home and cook him something."

"Oh no you don't!" said the fairies. "Let him make his own tea!"

But Lucy fell into such fits of giggles that she could neither whisk nor stir. "Make his own tea? Why, he couldn't butter a slice of bread! Oh, no, you must fetch him so I can explain why his tea's late."



a cake more than ever. So they folded their wings across their backs and walked all the way over to Lucy's croft, and carried back the cat and the dog.

"Now. At last I'm ready to bake the cake," said Lucy. "But where's the oven?"

"Oven?" The fairies began to grizzle. "Do you need an oven?"

Lucy laughed and her husband laughed, too. "Of course I need an oven!"

So the fairies crawled over to the croft and staggered back under the gigantic weight of the cast-iron kitchen range.

While they were gone, Lucy said to her husband, "Sing!" And she said to the cat, "Yowl!" And she said to the dog,

So the fairies flapped over to the croft — and flapped back with Lucy's husband. Then they sat back to back on the floor to catch their breath.

"Did you lock up the cat and dog before you left?" Lucy asked her husband sharply — though she winked an eye as she spoke.

"Er . . . er, no, I-I didn't have time."

"What? The dog and cat not locked up? Why, they'll scratch the house to pieces! You fairies will have to fetch them here — no two ways about it!"

The fairies could hardly bring themselves to get up off the floor. But they were so hungry that they wanted





"Ssh! Oh shush! Stop!" shrieked the fairies, covering their ears. "Go away, *please!*" they cried, pulling their pillows over their heads.

"Very well," said Lucy. "But only if you promise to fetch my oven home tomorrow morning at the latest."

Then her husband picked up the baby in his crib, and Lucy picked up the cat, and the dog followed on behind. They walked home to a meal of cold pork pie and toasted crumpets.

"Bark!" And she said to the baby, "Cry!"

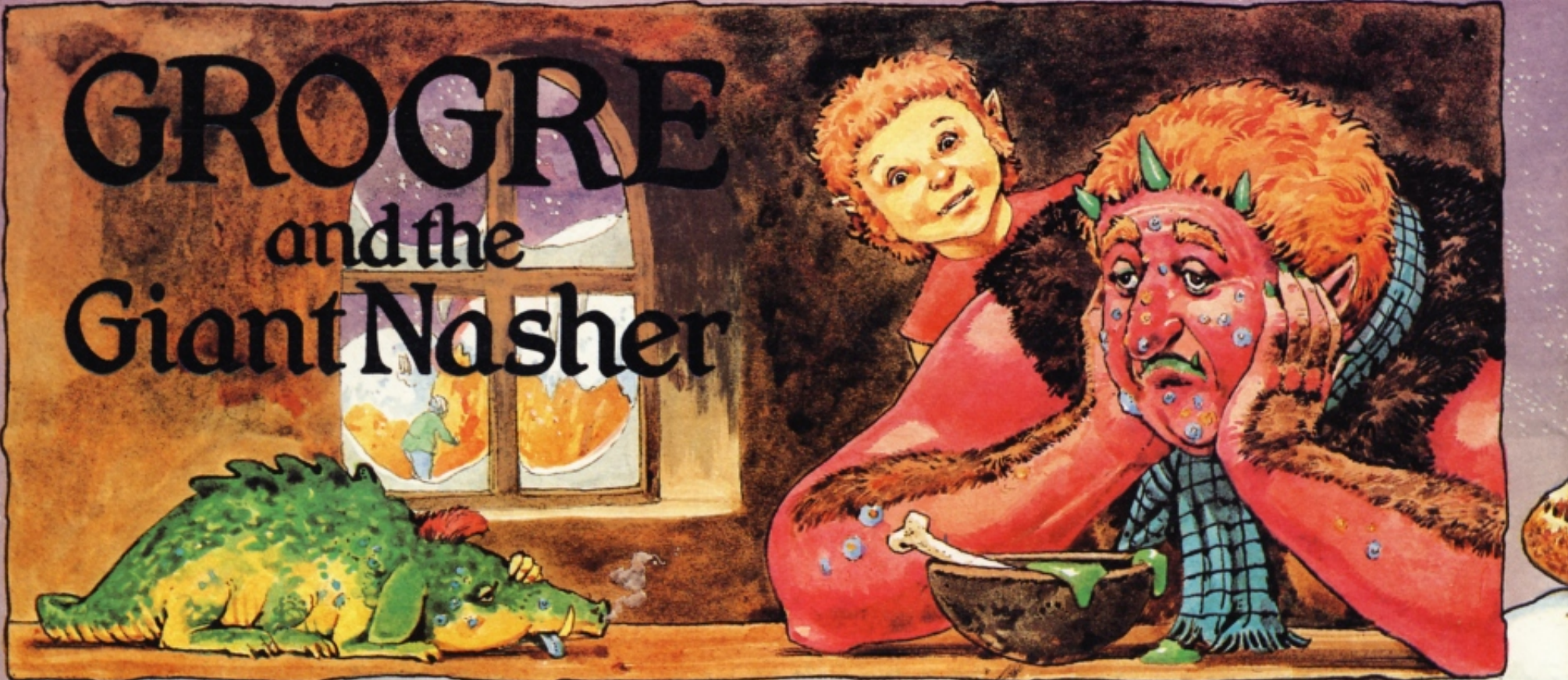
The door flew open, and in came the oven. The fairies set it down, then sprawled on their little fairy beds, exhausted.

But the man was singing.
And the cat was yowling.
And the dog was barking.
And the baby was crying.



But Lucy, though she had narrowly escaped being turned into a tree, felt sorry for the fairies with no-one to bake them cakes. So when they brought back her oven, the first thing she did was to bake a big, gooey, crumbly, creamy cake with icing on top, and she left it outside the door. And do you know what? Next morning it was gone.

GROGRE and the Giant Nasher



In Grogre's village, almost everyone was ill with Red Ogre Dragon-pox. Grogre was not ill because he was a Golden Ogre, but his father was covered in big orange and blue spots. It was winter — snow was everywhere and bonfires

burned all day. Soon there was to be a Red Ogre feast: an enormous meal which went on for two days, and ended with everyone jumping into a huge bowl filled with Red Ogre jelly. But if everyone was ill, there would be no feast at all.

Bogre, the village doctor, was ill too. "Need three scales of a Red Dragon, two teeth of a Giant Nasher and five feathers from a Three-headed Bird," he growled. "Otherwise no medicine, and no feast."

"I'll fly off on Zagon to find all you need for your medicine," said Grogre.

"Take baby Slurm," said Bogre. "Go to Giant Nasher first."

"Why?" asked Grogre. Bogre just growled.



Later that day, Zagon, the baby Slurm and Grogre were flying high above the purple peaks where the Giant Nashers lived. Red and green dust-clouds puffed up from holes in the rock.

"That, my boy, is from the Giant Nashers," explained Zagon. "They grind the rocks to dust and blow it out through the holes."



Zagon landed on a ledge of icy rock. Grogre and the Slurm climbed off him. "Now listen," whispered Zagon, "the Nashers crunch and munch their way through rock very quickly, but you can hear them coming."

Just then, Grogre heard a distant sound. It grew and grew into a thunder of chomping jaws. The rock wall burst apart. An enormous mouth with huge, dirty teeth and a furry pink tongue gulped the baby Slurm and disappeared again.

"Don't worry, Grogre, we'll rescue him," said Zagon. Grogre jumped on to his back and they flew down the tunnel the Nasher had made. He was chomping away and running very fast, and they quickly lost sight of him in the darkness.



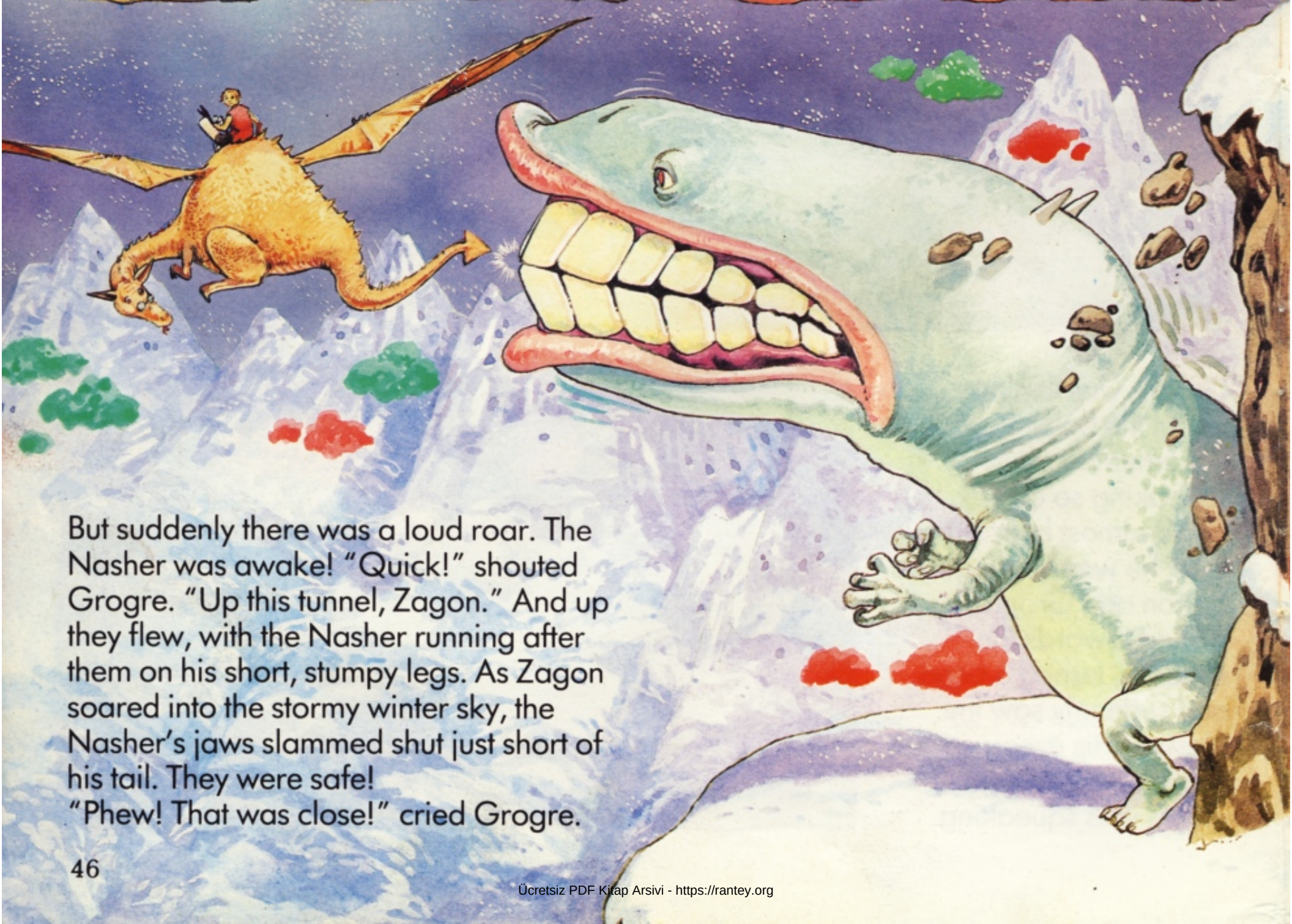
Grogre was thinking about the baby Slurm — he remembered its squeaking so clearly, he could almost hear it. But wait, he was hearing it! Zagon and Grogre rushed towards the squeaks, turned a bend and suddenly saw the Nasher. His eyes were closed and his huge mouth was squeaking.



"Hm, Nashers certainly don't squeak!" said Zagon, peering hard through his spectacles. Suddenly a white tentacle darted out of the Nasher's mouth and pulled the spectacles off.



Zagon laughed. "Silly Slurm!" he said. Out of the Nasher's mouth came the baby Slurm. In its tentacles it held three scales of a Red Dragon, two teeth of a Nasher and five feathers from a Three-headed Bird. "Nashers eat anything!" said Zagon.



But suddenly there was a loud roar. The Nasher was awake! "Quick!" shouted Grogre. "Up this tunnel, Zagon." And up they flew, with the Nasher running after them on his short, stumpy legs. As Zagon soared into the stormy winter sky, the Nasher's jaws slammed shut just short of his tail. They were safe! "Phew! That was close!" cried Grogre.

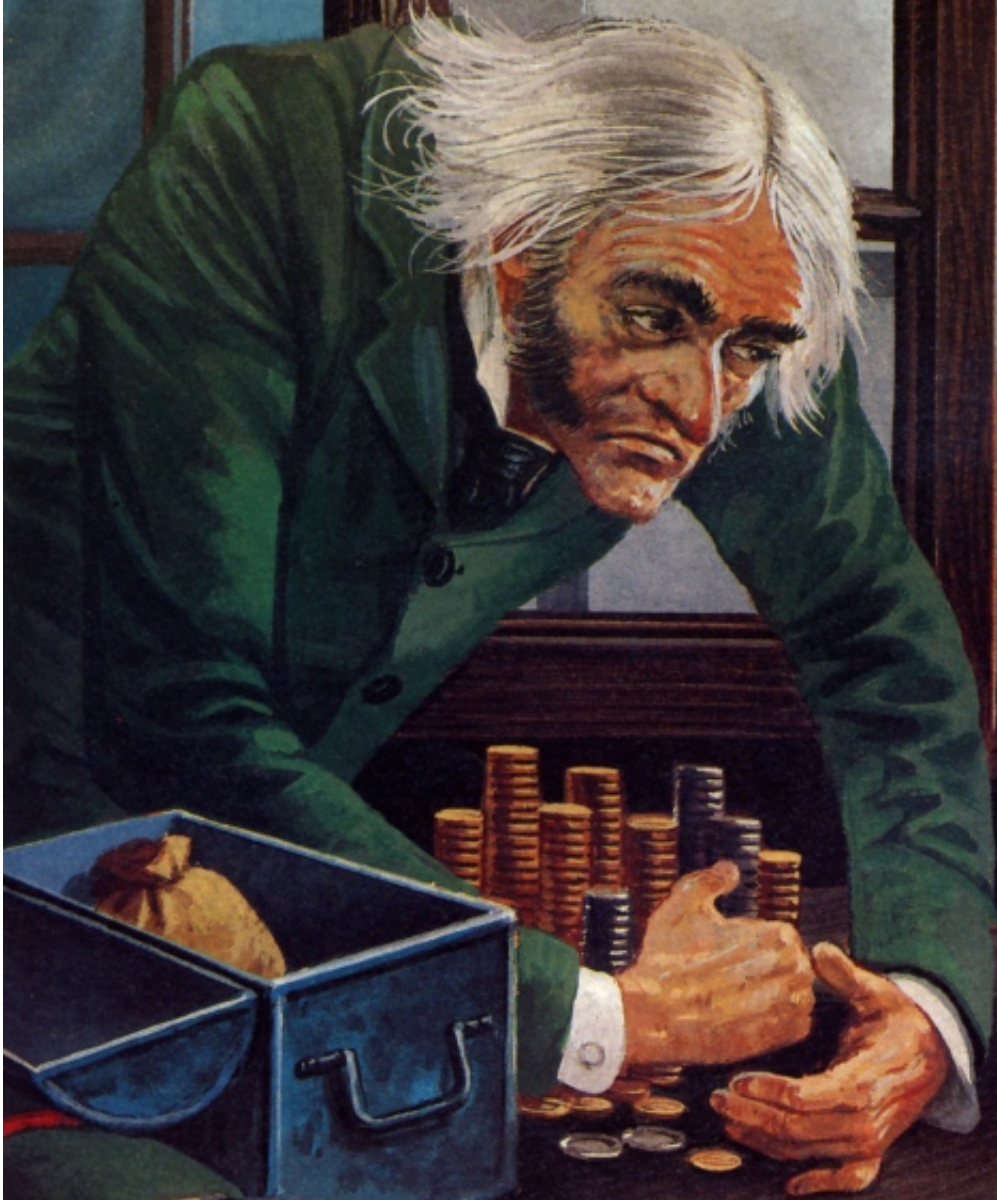
Back at the village, Bogrè explained that the Slurm's sting puts Nashers to sleep. "Don't know much, do you?" he laughed as he mixed a pot of bubbling, treacly, green medicine — enough to cure the whole village.



So the Red Ogres *did* have their feast, and when the time came for the great jelly jump, it was the baby Slurm, squeaking with joy, who jumped in first.



A Christmas Carol



Jacob Marley was dead. As dead as a doornail. Nobody was very sad about it — not even his business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge. The only thing that upset Scrooge was the cost of the funeral.

Oh, he was a tight-fisted, grasping, scraping, clutching old sinner, was Scrooge! The cold meanness inside him made his eyes red and his thin lips blue. Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, "My dear



Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" But Scrooge did not care. He sat in his counting house all day long and counted money. "Ah ha!" he would say. "It's all mine, now that Marley's dead!"

That was where he sat one cold Christmas Eve. His clerk, Bob Cratchit — a thin man wrapped up in a long, threadbare scarf — was perched on a high stool. Just one lump of coal burned in the grate.

There was a rap at the window, and a chirpy young voice sang:

*"God rest ye merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dis..."*

"Push off!" bellowed Scrooge, so ferociously that the carol singers fled down the road.

Bob Cratchit sighed. "Ah! Christmas! God bless it!"

"One more word from you, Bob Cratchit, and you'll lose your job!" snapped Scrooge. "Christmas? Bah! Humbug! I suppose you expect a whole day off tomorrow?"

"If it's convenient, sir," said Bob, rubbing his frozen hands together.

"It is *not* convenient. Why should I pay you a day's wages for no work? Eh? Christmas! Bah! Humbug! Humbug, I say!"

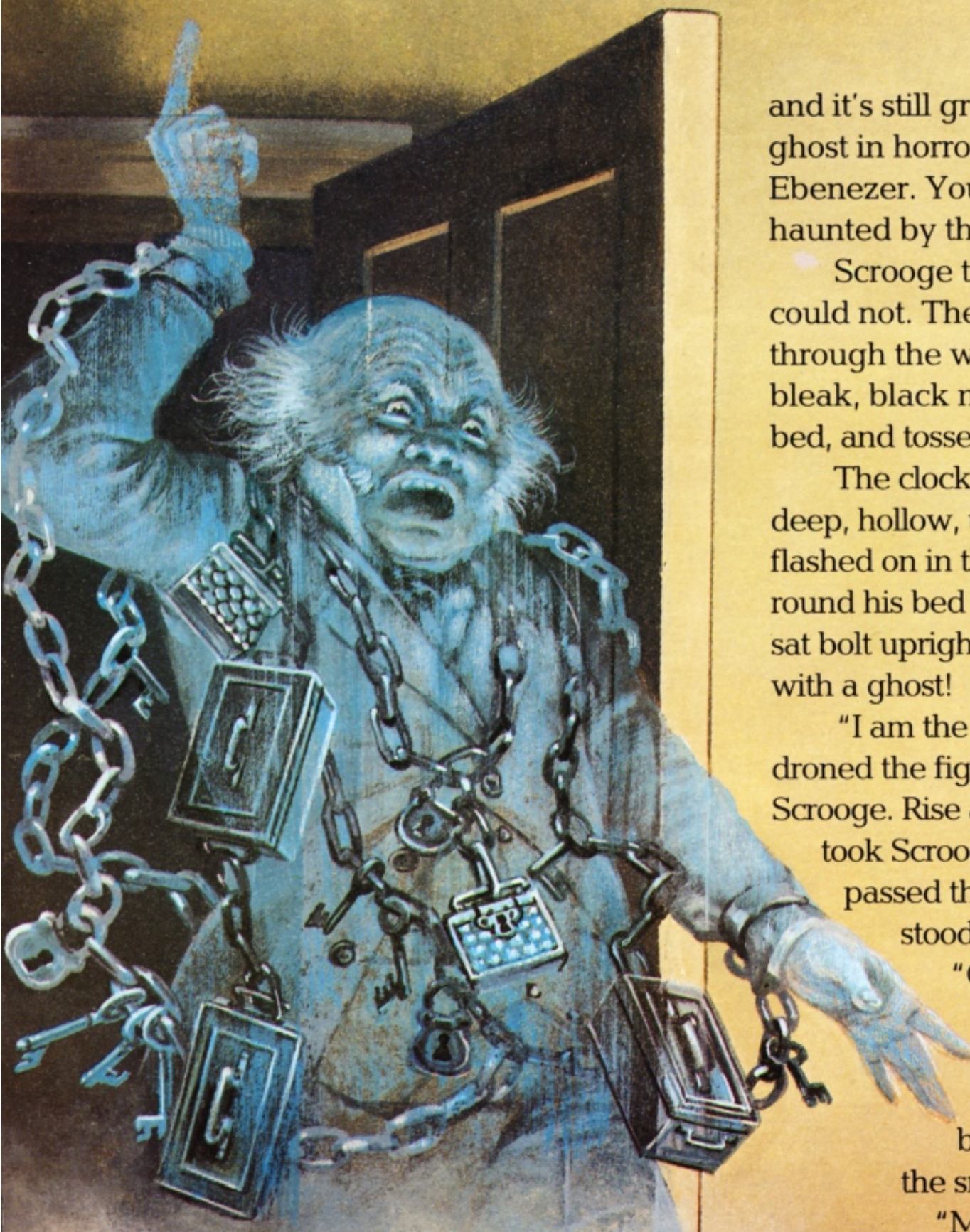
Old Scrooge locked up his office. Bob Cratchit ran all the way home to his wife and children. But Scrooge walked back to the cold dark rooms where he lived all alone.

By the light of a candle, he searched the rooms for robbers — nobody under the table, or under the sofa, or under the bed, or in the wardrobe, or in his dressing gown, where it hung on the door. He put on the dressing gown, his slippers and nightcap, and sat by the meagre fire to eat his bowl of gruel.

As he ate, the bell-pull beside his chair began to swing. The bell rang — softly at first, then louder. Soon every bell in the house was ringing. Scrooge dropped his spoon.

Just as suddenly, the bells stopped. There was a new sound — a clanking noise, as if someone was dragging a heavy chain. That someone was coming up the stairs — straight towards his door. On through the door it came, into the room.





and it's still growing!" Scrooge gazed at the ghost in horror. "I came to warn you, Ebenezer. You are to be haunted — haunted by three spirits."

Scrooge tried to say "*Humbug!*" but he could not. The ghost walked backwards through the window, and floated out into the bleak, black night. Scrooge went straight to bed, and tossed and turned until he fell asleep.

The clock woke him. It chimed a dull, deep, hollow, unhappy *one!* Lights flashed on in the room, and the curtains round his bed were drawn back. Scrooge sat bolt upright — and came face to face with a ghost!

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past," droned the figure. "*Your* past, Ebenezer Scrooge. Rise and walk with me." The ghost took Scrooge's hand. Together they passed through the bedroom wall — and stood at once in a village street.

"Good heavens!" cried Scrooge.

"I know this place!

I lived here as a boy!"

A crowd of happy boys were playing in the snow and calling out, "Merry Christmas!"

It was Jacob Marley!

His body was quite transparent. The clanking chain wound round him was made up of cash boxes, steel purses, keys and padlocks. "How now, Ebenezer!"

Scrooge felt deathly cold. "What do you want with me, Jacob? Why . . . why are you chained?"

Marley's ghost raised a frightful cry and shook its chain. "I wear the chain I made for myself during my life. These are the things I cared about — money, money and more money. Oh, Ebenezer, if you could see the chain that awaits you! It was as long as this one seven years ago,





But when Scrooge peeped in through the window of the school, one little boy was sitting all alone, reading a book.

"Nobody likes him," said the Ghost. "Nobody wants to play with him. All he wants to do in life is make a fortune."

"That small boy is me!" said Scrooge tearfully. "Me, when I was nine years old."

Suddenly they were no longer in the village, but inside a small, poor cottage.

"I've been here before, too!" cried Scrooge. "That girl on the sofa — oh, oh Ghost! Do you see how pretty she is? I was going to marry her once. Her name is Clara."

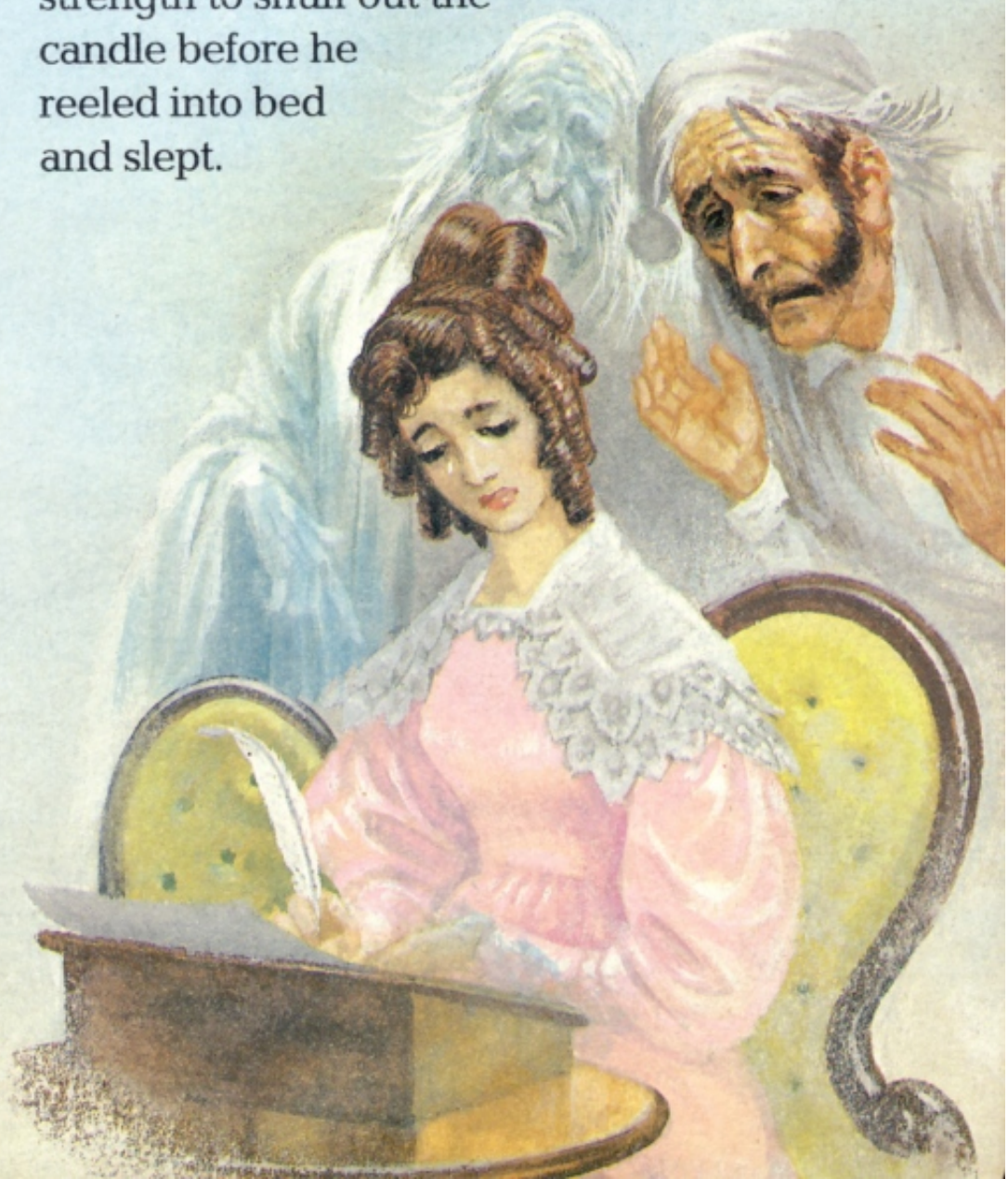
The young lady could see neither Scrooge nor the Ghost. Through her tears, she was trying to write a letter. Scrooge peered over her shoulder.

"... You see, there is something you love more than me — money. So, my dear Ebenezer, I hope you will remember me when you are rich. Goodbye.

Your own sweetheart, Clara."

"Take me home, Ghost!" cried Scrooge. "I can't bear it! I can't change what's past!" No sooner were the words spoken than Scrooge found himself in his own bedroom again. And where the Ghost had stood, a single candle flickered.

Scrooge was exhausted. It took all his strength to snuff out the candle before he reeled into bed and slept.





Waking in the middle of a snore, Scrooge *again* heard the clock strike one. There was a light coming under the door and a voice called, "Come in! Come in, Scrooge!"

In the next room, Scrooge found the jolliest of ghosts, dressed in a green robe trimmed with fur and with a holly crown on his head. "I am the Spirit of Christmas Present. Touch my coat!"

The walls of the room, and the night beyond it, melted away — and they stood in the snowy streets on Christmas morning. All the church bells were ringing, and people in their best clothes streamed out of the houses, greeting each other, and calling "Merry Christmas!"

The Ghost took Scrooge to Bob Cratchit's house where Christmas dinner

was cooking. There was a dish of potatoes and a very small, skinny goose. When Bob arrived home, he was carrying his son, Tiny Tim, on his shoulders.

"Oh, oh Ghost!" whispered Scrooge. "The little lad is crippled!"

"The family is very poor," replied the Ghost. "If Tim doesn't get enough to eat he will die, and Bob's heart will break."

But nobody in the Cratchit family complained about the size of the dinner. Bob raised his glass to drink a toast. "To Ebenezer Scrooge, who pays my wages and so provided this meal!"



"God bless him!" cried Tiny Tim.
But Mrs Cratchit put down her glass.
"Huh! Scrooge, indeed! I won't drink the health of that hard, cold, stingy man!"

Scrooge's face dropped, and he turned to the Spirit. "Take me home," he pleaded.
"Please take me home."

But the Ghost had disappeared.
Somewhere a clock was striking one, and Scrooge saw a hooded phantom moving like a mist along the ground towards him. Its black cloak hid everything but one outstretched, pointing hand.

"You are the Spirit of Christmas Yet-to-Come," said Scrooge. "I fear you!"

It gave no reply, but pointed out some men Scrooge knew. They were laughing and talking. "When did he die?" said one.

"Never thought he would," said another.
"What's he done with his money?" asked a third.

"Don't know. But it'll be a very *cheap* funeral, because nobody wants to go! Ha ha ha!"



Scrooge tugged at the phantom's black sleeve. "Who are they talking about? It's terrible to talk of a dead man like this!"

Instead of answering, the Ghost pointed to the churchyard, and Scrooge crept, trembling, towards a newly filled grave. The cheap headstone had only two words on it:

EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Oh Ghost! Oh! oh no, no!" He clutched at the phantom. "I'll be different! I will, I will, I will!" He clutched at that one, dreadful, pointing hand — clutched and held on to it, although it was hard and cold and as wooden as . . . as a bedpost.



Scrooge woke up clutching the wooden corner-post of his bed. The bedpost was real. The room was his own. And best of all, he was not dead!

"Oh! I don't know what to do first!" said Scrooge to himself, laughing and crying at once.

"I-I don't even know what day it is!" Running to the window, he opened it and called to a boy below, "What, what day is it?"

"Why, it's Christmas Day, of course!"

"Christmas Day! So I haven't missed it!" crowed Scrooge. "Hey, boy! You know the butcher's shop at the corner? H-have they sold the prize turkey that was in the window?"

"What, the one as big as me? No sir."

"Well, go and buy it and take it round to Bob Cratchit's house in a Hackney cab. But mind you don't say who sent it! If you hurry, I'll give you half-a-crown!"

Then he dressed himself all in his best, and walked through the streets calling out, "Merry Christmas, everybody!" And every time he saw someone who owed him money, he said, "Don't worry about that twenty pounds. I don't need the money. Forget all about it. Oh, and Merry Christmas!"



He went to his nephew's house and invited himself to dinner — and had the merriest, most wonderful Christmas he had ever had in his life!

But he was at the office early next day. He wanted to get there before Bob Cratchit. And he did. Bob was two minutes late.

"What do you mean by coming in here at this time of day?" growled Scrooge.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Bob, in terror of losing his job. "I had such a wonderful Christmas yesterday . . . such an amazing thing happened. But I promise this won't happen again, Mr Scrooge, sir."

"I can promise you it won't!" said Scrooge. "I'm not going to stand for this sort of thing any longer. So . . ." He stood up and gave Bob such a dig in the ribs that the clerk almost fell over. "So . . . I'm about to raise your wages and shorten your hours! Merry Christmas, Bob! Stoke up the fire, and then come into my office. I want you to tell me how I can help that splendid family of yours."

So Tiny Tim did not die, and no more ghosts visited Scrooge in the middle of the night. In fact, ever afterwards it was said of

him that he knew how to celebrate Christmas better than any man alive.

And so, as Tiny Tim observed when he saw the turkey arrive by Hackney cab that Christmas morning,

"God bless us, every one!"



We Wish You A Merry Christmas

We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy New Year.

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin.
We wish you a merry Christmas
And a happy New Year.

We all want some figgy pudding,
We all want some figgy pudding,
We all want some figgy pudding,
So bring some out here!

We won't go until we get some,
We won't go until we get some,
We won't go until we get some,
So bring some out here!

We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy New Year.





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