

The Adventures of the Motts

Part 4

The Wizard Has the Last Laugh

Foreword

“Cock-a-doodle-meooow! Cock-a-doodle-meooow!” Magu stuck her muzzle out of the wardrobe where she slept, and she goggled at Sillyhead.

Her ringing voice filled the modds’ hushed cave.

“Oh, no! She’s awake!” Sillyhead moaned and rose on his elbows.

“Cock-a-doodle-meooow! Cock-a-doodle-meooow!” Magu kept jumping around, her eyes glittering playfully in the dark.

“Shut up already!” Dunderhead yelled from his corner. “It’s not 12 o’clock yet! I’m sick and tired of you waking me up at the first cockcrow!”

“Cock-a-doodle-meooow!” Magu shouted, jumped up and down, and landed on Dunderhead’s belly, where she started bouncing.

“Get-off-of-me-be-cause-I-will-eat-you-u-u!” he tried to say, but with all the bouncing going on, his words sounded rather funny and not intimidating at all, which exhilarated Magu.

“It’s your turn to take care of her this morning,” Dunderhead mumbled. “I told her a fairy tale yesterday.”

“A fairy tale indeed!” Sillyhead teased him.

“But you fell asleep, didn’t you?” Dunderhead got angry. “My fairy tales are always so much nicer than his, aren’t they, Magu?”

“Dunder-head! Dunder-head! Dunder-head!” Magu shouted whole-heartedly and kept bouncing on the modd’s belly.

“You see?” He boasted. “She’s shouting out my name. So I am better at telling stories than you!”

“Is that true, Magu?” Sillyhead looked at her. “Are Dunderhead’s fairy tales funnier than mine?”

“No, both yours and his are... strange,” Magu determined relentlessly. “I am hungry! I am hun-gry! I am hun-gry! I AM HUN-GRY!” She shouted in Sillyhead’s ear.

The two modds exchanged glances and rose from the hard floor. There were huge sweaty spots left where they had slept.

“I do love to sweat, but this heat is just too much!” Sillyhead was indignant. “I might lose weight and then everyone will make fun of me.”

"It's your fault!" Dunderhead turned to Magu. "If we hadn't captured you, we wouldn't have to take care of you, entertain you, tell you fairy tales, or sleep with the door closed by a rock. This heat is unbearable! I don't understand how you can bear it!"

"And this food of yours! We're like a pair of bees buzzing around, gathering fresh berries, edible moss, and all sorts of other nasty stuff for you." Sillyhead added.

Magu wasn't even listening to them. She had found a tiny worm in the corner of the cave and she was building him a house of twigs. She was just about to cover him with a leaf when Dunderhead reached for the worm, held him with two fingers and sucked him in like a spaghetti. Sillyhead stared at him and his eyes were saying "What do you think you're doing? Are you crazy? Here's the volcano eruption coming!"

He was right. Magu gave a howl that shook the modds' cave. If there had been any glass, it would have broken into pieces. The worst of all, however, was that her bitter cry woke someone up. It was someone the two modds didn't want to have anything to do with. Grumpy, whose bedroom was at the deepest part of the cave, heard the cries and opened an eye.

Before you ask yourself "How come Magu is at the modds'?", we have to go back to when she was a tiny baby, and Mux managed to find a cure for her hiccups. Years had passed since that adventure. Magu grew up and turned into a curious troublesome little mott, and everything was going well. Her curiosity was the reason why motts and modds faced each other in one final great battle.

Chapter 1 The Calm Before the Storm

The sky was dark with clouds. The air was so heavy that it felt like it was going to crash into the modds' army any minute now.

"Ready to attack!" A rough voice split the silence in the valley.

"Stink! Stink! Stink!" Thousands of voices started shouting and the earth shook.

The sun that was going to sleep peeped over the horizon, but quickly turned his eyes away.

It had been quite a long time since the last battle between the motts and the modds – 30 mott years, to be precise (or 5 human years). The Ancient Mott Book says that if something hasn't been heard or seen at least 30 years, then it does not exist. That was enough for the "Eternal Battle" and the modds to be declared a mystic legend again, and the memories of the battles – to be hidden away in the dustiest corners of motts' memory. People and motts lived in perfect harmony.

However, it was going to be stinky again. The legend was soon to remind people of its existence. It didn't really matter that spring had hardly woken up, the trees and flowers had just started to bloom, and motts and kids were enjoying it as best they could.

Crash! The window smashed into thousands of tiny pieces.

"I will pull your ears, you urchins!" A deep voice came from inside and the children dispersed in all directions like scared chicks.

"It's been the third time this month!" The voice kept shouting from inside.

"I saw you, Zdravko! I will tell your mom..."

Zdravko, Bobo and their friends ran like the wind, as if a pack of mad dogs was on their heels. They ran for a long time after the voice faded away in the distance. When Zdravko caught up with the rest, he could still hear uncle Gosho's words from the shop.

"I will not get away with it this time!" The boy puffed.

"There's our pocket money gone once again... The window is about 2 metres long and 2 metres wide – that makes 4 square metres. 1 square metre costs 20 lev... plus installation.

"But it's not my fault!" Zdravko said, panting. "The ball twisted a bit."

"Your legs twisted – not a bit!" – Catherine scolded him. She played football with the boys and was every bit as good as them.

"Add 15 lev for a new ball because ours remained in the shop." Angel kept calculating.

"I told you to play princesses!" Emily said.

"We play knights and princesses on Thursdays." Krissy interrupted. It's our football day today. We'll play with the motts at Bobo's tomorrow, and Friday's our computer games day.

"Knights?! Look at Zdravko! I don't think he can fight a monster with this belly of his..." Bobo grinned and patted his friend's belly.

"I can eat him though!" Zdravko laughed. "Yum-yummy and the monster's gone..."

"Hahaha!" Children's laughter filled the meadow behind their block of flats.

That's how the children's afternoons passed in the city. Laughter, mischief, and then some punishment. They would also play eeny-meeny-miny-moe and thus choose the "lucky boy" who would take uncle Gosho the money that would pay for just another broken window. Emily was the best at this. She could put such a sad look on her face that she would always come back with treats for everyone. The parents had hardly any idea what the children did with their pocket money and why it was never enough. There were also chafed knees, a few bruised bottoms, and Zdravko's split brow.

Motts and children gathered at Bobo's on Wednesdays and played hide and seek. Doddie, his grandfather, observed his tidy house which in less than an hour started to look like something that had been hit by a tornado. The old man shook his head, smiled, made some tea, and went out onto the balcony to get some fresh air and silence. One day Mux and Pagu took Magu with them. The little mott just loved the game. There was just one trouble – she quickly became good at it, way too good. Once Doddie's house was not enough to play the game, so she switched to the wardrobe. Mux and Pagu felt it was getting increasingly difficult to find her. She always managed to fool them and jump out of a sleeve or a polo shirt, or even a shoe box. One day Magu decided to make things even more fun and made up a

game called “Magu hides outside and you look for her.” The rules were easy – once she pointed at you with her tiny claw, you had to start counting and later find her. If one was too slow to find her, one risked making her angry, and that was punishable.. She could give you such a good shock that no fewer than tree your hairs grew white immediately.

The more she grew up, the more creative she got as to the hiding places. At first she would only use the garden. But that was not enough. So she would hide in the park when they went out for a walk. She would hide in the vegetable stalls in the shop. She would even hide in other motts’ homes when they went visiting. Thus, one morning when the whole family went on a picnic in the woods, Magu decided to try “the big hiding game”.

It was that same game that lead to the events this chapter opened with.

Chapter 2

Somewhere Deep in the Woods

“Maguuuuu! Where are you, sweetie!” Pagu’s troubled voice was travelling across the meadow, she looked where the flowers were, she picked up every stone, brushed every single bush, but, alas, there was no sign of Magu.

“She was here just a minute ago – we were playing hide-and-seek.” Pinky justified himself and looked anxiously behind his back. He was most affected by Magu’s pickabooooos.

“Oh, she’s getting better and better at this game...” Pagu murmured and went on looking around.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find her,” said Mux, but there was anxiety in his voice.

“I’ll ask the birds on that tree to help us.” Suggested Pagu and waved her paw to a branch where a neat little nest had perched.

Magu was hiding behind a dry old tree trunk at the other end of the meadow and was getting bored. After all, TWO minutes had passes and Pinky had not found her yet. So, instead of scaring him, she decided that this time she would go a bit further ahead into the forest. There were a lot of trees and bushes there and she would be able to find a better hiding place. That was all very well, but ... that tree was too thin, that bush was too little, the pine-tree was too dark green. Maybe she should go a bit further on into the forest? Wait a second – that tree over there seemed like a good choice...oh, no. Well, a bit further on and on, and on...

This is how a person gets lost. This is how a mott gets lost as well - even though she’s got so many animal friends.

“Maguuuuu! Where are youuuu?” The nuthatch chirped while flying over the forest, looking for the little princess. Alas, there was no sign of her.

Actually, even Magu had no clue where Magu was. At one point she stopped looking for the perfect hiding place, so she started playing tag with a colourful butterfly. She then tickled a snail, she stuck out her tongue to the clouds, she gathered some cones, she scattered them, she put them in a pile, she scattered them again... She never knew how and when she found herself at the other end of the forest.

“Hey, that’s interesting – I’ve never been here.” Magu thought. That was when a tiny light shone into her head and she said: “Uh-oh. I think I’ve lost my way.”

She was not scared at first. Maybe just a little. But she was back on her feet again and she decided to head back. But how? There was no path and the trees, like soldiers in line, seemed identical now.

“Maybe if I go this way... or that way...”

So Magu went this and that way the whole afternoon and tired and hungry, quite scared at that, she sat down for repose. The warm wind quickly put her to sleep and she became deaf for the cries of the forest birds. She felt as if someone was rocking her to sleep in her cradle. She smiled in her sleep. She remembered her mother’s songs, back when she was a baby, when Pagu carried her in her arms. She snuggled in somebody’s warm hairy arms that were taking her somewhere far, far away...

Chapter 3

The Note

The news travelled across Mottland by word of mouth in a few minutes’ time. “Magu is missing!” Soon motts started rushing from the whole city to the royal wardrobe. Everyone wanted to help in the search and was ready to cooperate in any way they could. But where should they look? Mux and Pagu had been searching the western part of the forest since noon while Pinky and Goula had gone to the eastern part. The four of them met just before sunset. They had roamed about all day long but there was no sign of Magu. Mux had a premonition. His fur turned dark grey just like the darkness that was coming upon them. The day was at its end and was giving way to night. Everyone had to go home. What a terrible night was there ahead of the anxious parents. With no sleep at all, they awaited the first sunrays and took off to the forest. All birds, bees and butterflies took part in the search. The ants came out of the anthill and dispersed in all directions. Bobo and the other children came from the city too. Every bit of the forest was searched, they even got to the far off west end beyond the pine trees. Everybody knew that they were not to go there because the most villainous creatures looked out for prey there. There was no sign of Magu.

“Magu cannot have gone so far!” cried Pagu. “The terrible smell there would have stopped her. Mux, what if she got there? Oh, my little girl! What are we going to do, Mux? I’m going there! I’m going to them! That’s the only place we haven’t searched!”

“Please, don’t you even let that thought cross your mind! Have you forgotten that modds don’t exist anymore! If the Ancient Book says so, then all that is just a legend. Magu is alright! She just got lost and we’ll find her. The moles haven’t come back yet. They’ll bring good news, you’ll see.” Mux kept hugging Pagu and repeating like a robot “She’s alright, she’s alright, “But deep inside, he was afraid of the same

thing... Could it really be possible that the modds were still here....could they have captured his daughter?

There was a loud knock on the door. Mux rushed to open, before him stood the mole's leader Blindie.

"Here, quickly, come in!" Mux drew back from the door but Blindie bumped into the wardrobe noisily.

"Ughhhh... Turn off that wretched lamp – I can't see anything unless it's dark." He rubbed the injured spot and stamped his foot.

Pagu instantly turned off the lamp, Blindie came in followed by raucous clamour, a pile of hangers fell like rain on the three heads.

"Oh, oh, ouch!" Cries were uttered here and there.

"Blindie, I thought you could see in the dark!" Pagu scolded him.

"That was me, "Pinky's voice came from the darkness. "Didn't you see me coming right behind you, I am loaded with bananas. I was bringing them to you because I know you haven't had a bite since yesterday. Four or five of them are for me, but now look what happened...everything is on the floor."

"SILENCE!" Mux shouted and everyone jumped. "Pinky, nobody's interested in your bananas right now. Sit somewhere and be quiet while Blindie tells us what he's found out."

"Well, the thing is... my moles have come back empty nosed – that is with no familiar scents or news. Nothing, niente, null!"

"But..." Pagu's voice trembled.

"However," Blindie interrupted her. "I've found a note. Just in front of your door."

"A note? What does it say?" Mux jumped.

"Hey, let's not be rude. You know very well what people say: "As blind as a bat... I'm not a bat, but I'm as blind as that... Here it is." He gave Mux the note.

Mux stretched out his hand and while he was trying to get hold of the note in the dark, he brought down two more pieces of clothing from the hanger, he pinched Pagu, and involuntarily hit Pinky.

There were cries again and turmoil until Pagu took control of the situation. She turned on the lamp and ordered all the boys to sit somewhere and touch nothing. Then she opened the note and read:

"We wil giv you bak the princes when you giv your kindom to us! You now who we ar! We ar coming, so get away from the sity! Send the man to the tree in the forrest which is split in too. They must bring cabage, poop beatles and snails – nom nom. The litle one wil be waitin for you there in tree days.

P.Z. Juzt in casse: we ar the modz – your hatfull cosins!

Hahahooohooooheheeeeyyy”

There was no doubt – modds still existed and Magu was captured by them! Pagu went pale and dropped the note.

“There’s no getting rid of them!” Goula sighed heavily.

“Where did you come from?” Pinky turned around.

“What do you mean? I was just next to Blindie when you turned off the lamp and shut the door in my face. Then I opened, there was a draught, and some clothes fell from the hangers.”

“Ah, so I wasn’t the one to push them,” Pinky jumped.

“You’re deviating from the topic again!” Pagu snapped at them.

“Oh, I will never believe the Ancient Book and its wisdom again. Who knows how many times we’ve been misled by it!” Mux muttered.

“Well, at least it was right about the Healing Flower with a capital letter “H”,” Pinky defended the book. “Otherwise Magu would probably still be hiccupping.”

“My little girl!” Pagu grew sad again.

“I suggest we beat them up real hard this time and forget about them once and for all!” Goula got all edgy.

“Then we can air the cave and turn it into” Pinky paused. “A fridge!”

“A fridge?” Goula was surprised.

“Well, yes, it’s cold in there the whole year round. So there’ll never be spoiled fruit!” Pinky was getting all dreamy.

Mux and Pagu didn’t answer. They were deep in their own thoughts. Leaving the city and going to the split tree was no solution. The modds would instantly occupy their homes. They were clearly trying to deceive them. However, they couldn’t leave Pagu with them a minute longer. Their cousins’ army was big and strong. Motts would be an easy catch/prey in the forest. There was no time to lose. They had to make a plan.

Chapter 4

What Happened to Magu?

Sillyhead and Dunderhead were strolling about the meadow collecting snails for Jelly’s moddovilea.

They needed at least one cauldron, so that they could get a cup each. Not knowing it, they had gone quite far from the cave. A colourful fluff in the distance caught their attention. The wind playfully disarranged its fur and the setting sunrays were chasing the shadows of the leaves on it.

"Hey, what's that child?" Sillyhead knit his brows and pointed to where the colourful fluff was lying.

"She's not one of ours," Dunderhead replied. "She's very..."

"CLEAAAAAANNNN!" they both shouted at once.

"Do you think she saw us?" Sillyhead wondered.

"Let's capture her!" Dunderhead scratched his head. "Let's eat her!"

"Ugh, what are you saying - look how skinny she is! She won't even do for a soup.

"If we add two wild boars, we'll make a great stew." Dunderhead stroked his belly.

"What stew!? Did you forget that Grumpy put us on a diet? 'Cause we're fat and clumsy." Sillyhead frowned and looked at his belly with sadness.

"Alright, alright... what are we to do with this child?" Dunderhead asked.

While they were scratching and wondering, they had reached Magu and were now looking at her with curiosity while she was sleeping. Dunderhead bent down and carefully picked her up.

"What're ya doin'?" Sillyhead hissed.

"I dunno. It just came to me. Something like a maternal instinct. Just a hug. Look how tiny she is!" Dunderhead replied and started shifting from foot to the other as if he were dancing. Magu smiled in her sleep.

"What are you - a mom?" Sillyhead poked him in the ribs and Magu moved a little. She opened one eye, then stretched one leg, and yawned. Her tummy was making funny noises: it rumbled so much that it could easily muffle the noise of Sillyhead's snoring.

"Oh, no!" The two modds shouted together.

"We woke her up!" Dunderhead was startled.

"You woke her up with your maternal silliness." Sillyhead snapped.

"Hey, you two, could you help me?" Magu cheeped.

"Weeeeell..." Dunderhead snarled.

"Hmmm," Sillyhead sighed.

"What? Can't you speak?" The little mott wondered.

"Sure, we can!" But we can also eat you!" Sillyhead bristled up at her??.

"Mmmm, food - a splendid idea!" Magu jumped up. "I haven't eaten for a decade."

The two of them looked at each other. Dunderhead scratched his right ear, Sillyhead looked at his claw as if he saw it for the first time. Clearly none of them knew what to do.

“Sooooo, you know, where did you say you come from?”

“Hey, I’m hungry!” Magu shouted. “I won’t tell you anything until you give me food!”

“Well, we can take her to the headquarters.” Sillyhead mumbled.

“Well, I don’t know, you know, I guess... alright.” His friend answered hesitatingly.

“The head-what? Is there a phone there? Mommy and daddy must be wondering where I am...”

“The boss has a phone.” At the mention of the boss both modds stood like soldiers.

“Then forward march!” Magu gave the order and the three of them walked further into the forest.

An interesting night was ahead of them, a night that could make them the heroes of the day. However, it was more probable that they would be left behind empty-handed.

Chapter 5

Pagu’s Plan

“We can’t waste any time. We must go now! Pinky, Goula, come on!” Mux raised his voice.

“Where do you think you’re going, just like that – no plan, no preparation?” Pagu asked in a muffled voice. “Do you want to be captured too?”

Mux let out a heavy sigh, but his fist remained clenched. His claw rattled nervously.

“I think I have a plan.” The princess went on. “Mux, how much time do you need to gather the army?”

Everyone in the room held their breath.

“I suspect they will gather by their own will when I tell them where Magu is.” Mux answered. “It won’t take more than an hour to round them up. What is your plan?”

“Baaaaaaattle!” Goula jumped up and down and Pinky’s nose fell. He didn’t feel like meeting his toothy cousins, not in the least.

“No, there won’t be a battle.” Pagu interrupted them. “While our army is fooling around with Grumpy, I will sneak into the cave and save Magu. Then all of us will come back to the city. We’ll be safe here.”

“What do you mean?” Mux jumped. “You, ALONE, in the cave! It’s dangerous! I will go!”

“It is dangerous for every mott! But Grumpy will be expecting you. So if you’re with the army, I will be able to get into the cave unnoticed.” Pagu was determined.

“Well, don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t trust you,” Pinky interrupted. “But when you say “fooling around” with the modd army, you’re aware of the fact that they will make sweaters of us faster than I can eat half a watermelon, right?”

Pagu winked. She tried to remember if she had ever seen Pinky eat watermelon and how long it had taken. She continued:

“I know it’s dangerous. You will be fully armed. You will position yourselves at a spot where you can repulse their attacks more easily. I won’t take too much time. There might not be a battle at all. So let’s revise what we’ve got so far.” Pagu said and everyone surrounded her.

The modds’ cave was the biggest challenge. First of all, nobody knew where it was. There were a lot of tall shrubs in the valley and the cave entrance was hidden there like a cookie in Pinky’s mouth. Second of all, even if they found it, there would be guards at the entrance – the biggest and filthiest modds, armed to the teeth... some of them had such big teeth that they didn’t even need another weapon. Third of all, the cave was like a labyrinth where everyone could vanish without a trace. Modds had a very good sense of smell and they could easily find their way in this labyrinth of tunnels. The smell of spoiled food took them to the kitchen, the sour smell led them to the bedrooms, the musty smell showed them the way to the larder. The most terrible stench was surely coming from Grumpy’s chamber. Every modd dreamed of living in that room. A new portion of dirty socks and blue cheese was delivered there every morning. The smell was so strong that the air felt sticky in the nostrils. Mux and Pagu, however, were interested in another part of the cave – the dungeon which was ironically called “a guestroom” by the modds.

“She must be there!” Goula started gesticulating.

“So we will definitely need help from someone inside.” Mux said.

“Yes, and I know whom I will ask. Princess Jelly helped me once, so I hope she’ll do it again.” Pagu answered.

Chapter 6

Everything is Just a Game for Magu

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!” Dunderhead was running around the bathroom. That was actually a humid passage with clean water dripping from the ceiling. Modds hated going there.

“Come here AT ONCE!” Magu cried after him while she was waving the soap shouting with laughter.

“I’m done!” Dunderhead could barely breathe. Sillyhead was crouching in the corner, he was repeating something to himself, something like a spell: “Oh, please don’t soap me, please don’t...”

“Grumpy punished us quite harshly this time.” Sillyhead mumbled under his nose and opened one eye a little, but he was sorry because a wet soapy sponge flew to him and slapped his face.

“Ha-ha-ha!” Magu and Dunderhead burst out laughing.

"You, you... Wait and see what's coming to you!" Sillyhead snarled and jumped as if stung by a bee.

Sillyhead and Dunderhead were punished AGAIN because they had appeared in Grumpy's presence with...

"A mott! A mott child! Here! In our caaaaaaaaaave!" Grumpy shouted and everyone around shuddered. One cockroach was so stressed out that it willingly jumped into a rat's mouth.

"Well, she... came alone... we... it's not my fault!" Dunderhead tried to justify himself.

"Well then... it's not my fault either." Sillyhead was quick to say. His claw was pointing at Dunderhead, hinting at the culprit.

"Really? So you were walking and she followed you just like that? She shadowed you, eh?" Grumpy **bristled/got angry**.

"That's right!" Both modds lied simultaneously.

"Great! So thanks to you, even a child, ON ITS OWN, can now find the secret entrance to our fortress?"

"Ohhh ..." The two modds answered simultaneously again.

"What are we to do with this child now? She's not even good enough for soup!" Grumpy snapped.

"Maybe we can add two wild boars and make a stew..." Sillyhead faltered.

"I will put YOU in the stew!" Grumpy yelled.

"I wouldn't want to interrupt you," Magu said. It's impolite, but since we were talking about food... Do you happen to have some fresh fruit?"

Grumpy cast an angry look at her.

"Besides, I'm not JUST a child! I'm a princess! Magu, the mott princess!" She made a gracious curtsy, just like the wise mott advisers Hush and Shush had shown to her.

Grumpy's eyes popped out. That little, fluffy, innocent... he couldn't finish his thought because Magu went on:

"It's not polite to shout when there are children present! In fact, it's generally impolite to shout!" The little princess spoke emphatically.

"Shut..." Grumpy snapped but he was interrupted again.

"Ohhhh, you mustn't shut people up!" The little mott looked at him sternly.

"Whaaaat?" Grumpy's eyes were wide open.

"Whoever shuts people up, is a silly ass!" Magu grinned.

“Uh?” Grumpy’s eyes were now open even wider – they were like two pancakes. Sillyhead and Dunderhead could hardly hold their laughter. After all, someone had just called their Boss an ass, and that wasn’t a thing that happened every day...

“Ah, you, youuuuu...” Grumpy pulled himself up from his throne, a dirty old toilet seat. He was just about to say something when Magu ran out of patience and broke out: “Ass or no ass, Magu wants to eat! I AM HUNG-RY! I want to eeeeeeat!” She cried out. Nobody knew why this little creature had such a strong voice, but the whole cave shook, the bats flew in all directions, the cockroaches rushed to hide in the cracks of the walls, the rats decided to emigrate to another cave and started packing. Even the Hugging Monster that lived at the other end of the tunnel was startled and hid under a pink blanket.

“My, oh my!” Princess Jelly was startled too. She rushed off to see what the rumpus was all about. Grumpy, Sillyhead, Dunderhead, all the other modds in the cave as well, realized that having a hungry captive, be it a tiny mott, was just like letting an angry scorpion under Sillyhead’s blanket while he was asleep. Dunderhead had done it once... it turned out to be a bad idea and he had to walk around with a black eye for two weeks. A few modds were sent out of the cave urgently to look for fresh fruit. After Magu ate, she calmed down a bit, she looked out of one of the holes in the ceiling. There was a feeble light coming in through the hole. She said “It’s time for bed. Who is going to read e fairy tale to me?”

Grumpy looked at Sillyhead and Dunderhead, then he ordered: “Take the captive to the guestroom until we decide what we’re going to eat her... I mean do with her.” He corrected himself.

“Oh, is the room pink? Magu asked excitedly.

She didn’t get an answer because Grumpy turned pink, then red, then Dunderhead grabbed the little princess and took her to the “guestroom”. Sillyhead stayed with the boss and tried to comfort him by pouring some more moddovilea in his glass.

Chapter 7

Grumpy is Looking for a Solution and Has an Idea

“Off with you!” Grumpy yelled at Sillyhead and knocked the glass violently. “Out!”

The glass was knocked, the moddovilea splashed on the floor, and Sillyhead bristled up around the ears. That showed how scared he was. He was ashamed of it even more than Dunderhead was that time when he was caught putting on Jelly’s lipstick. When Grumpy was left alone, he dropped his head in his claws and started saying quietly over and over again “Mott child, mott child, mott child, MOTT CHILD!”

“What’s the matter, my nasty Grump?” Jelly peeped into the room.

Grumpy lifted his eyes, looked at his wife, poured immense rudeness regarding his two subordinates who had brought upon him not just a mott child, but the mott princess herself. Jelly was astonished.

“Well then, let’s send her back at once?” She jumped. “Pag...uh, that fluffy ugly female – her mother, must be dead worried by now.”

“Nonsense! I’d rather send her to the hyenas to tear her apart!” Grumpy threatened.

“But, Grump, my nasty smelly one,” Jelly started gently. “She’s just a child. I doubt she has seen or remembered much. After all, it was early in the evening, and you know that when the sun is setting, the forest looks different. Come on, let’s send her ba...”

“NO!” Grumpy shouted. “I will never give her back to my hateful cousins, especially that tiny miserable neat clover-smelling mott!”

“Clovers don’t smell, my dear stinky modd. Not even the four-leaf ones. However, they mix nicely in the moddovilea, but are rarely found, you know. There was this one time when I had to barter a whole barrel of my fetid bath elixir for a single clover.”

“TO BARTER?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, I know I simply had to steal it, but the other female was strong, so...”

“NO, NO, NO! You said BARTER! This somehow makes me think of ransom...that’s just what we’ll do. That perfumed nobody can PAY RANSOM for his precious fluffy ball, but he’ll pay the highest price!” Grumpy’s eye flashed in poisonous yellow. Malicious laughter gurgled deep in his throat. “Ha-ha-ha-HA-HA-HA! I’ll lay my hands his kingdom! I’ll burn it and wreck it! I’ll make it stink! I’ll crush them! Mottland never more! MOTTLAND shall die. That’s the end of Mottland. Finito! Stink! But first... First I’ll set the conditions, so that it sound as if I have the best of intentions. HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!”

Then he went on calmly: “Tell those block-heads to write a note saying the following:

“There is a mott child with us. Send the men to take her back. They must bring three cauldrons full of spoiled sauerkraut with them, two drums of snails, three sacks full of dung beetles – if possible, fattened, and a bottle of cheese-making brine. The little one will be waiting for you at sunset near the split-in-half tree in the middle of the forest. “

“Do you see what my plan is? The men will go out and we... WE’LL ATTACK! Hahahahahhahha”

Jelly went out of the room and hurriedly scurried into the darkness. Grumpy’s laughter followed her. By the time she reached the lower end of the cave, she had already come up with an idea. Sillyhead was rolling his eyes in an attempt to make up a fairy tale, but he was running out of time. Two tearful eyes opposite him were threatening to start crying any minute now, and that would lead to a tiny Armageddon in the cave.

“Ohhh, leave it to me,” Dunderhead smacked Sillyhead’s neck and cuddled with the little mott, then started telling a story:

“Once upon a time there was a horrible fat ugly and smelly... billy goat.”

“A billy goat?” Magu stared in surprise.

“That’s right – a billy goat! Now are you going to listen or shall I make some stew out of you?!”

Magu nodded energetically and Dunderhead went on with his story. Sillyhead rubbed his smacked neck and put an ear to Sillyhead's fairy tale. Indeed, it seemed that despite the fat ugly greasy thing that he was, he had some sort of maternal instinct. It was then that Jelly dashed into the room. The two of them stood straight up. Sillyhead's ears bristled up and Dunderhead reddened. He hadn't found an excuse for his painted lips yet.

"Hey, you, fatties!" Jelly shouted. "I've got a message for you from Grumpy. You'd better do well this time! Your great leader and most hateful modd among the lazy modds said that you must write a note to the perfumed motts. Come over here!"

The two of them came closer and she whispered so that the mott princess wouldn't hear her.

"You will write that we have captured the mott princess. We want ransom and we will take over their kingdom. But you must be subtle so that they don't suspect what our actual plan is. We must tell them to come here to the split tree and exchange the princess for the following delicacies: cabbage, snails, fattened dung-beetles. While they are here, however, we'll attack their kingdom. Did you understand me? I know you will handle this because otherwise Grumpy would not have chosen you for this important task, would he?"

"Yes, boss!" The two of them shouted at once.

Jelly smiled. She knew she had managed to puzzle Sillyhead and Dunderhead. She knew they were going to write something totally different from what Grumpy had ordered. That was what really mattered. She couldn't think of a better way to warn Pagu about Grumpy's plan to destroy Mottland. Magu was staring at her when she came out of the dungeon. Before she walked away, the modd princess turned around and stuck out her tongue at Magu.

Chapter 8 Good Night, Magu!

When Jelly slammed the door behind her back, Sillyhead and Dunderhead looked at each other.

"Let's start writing then, eh?" Dunderhead asked.

"I will write, you go ahead with the fairy tale!" Sillyhead snarled.

Dunderhead nodded and went on:

"Alright, so a crocodile was sitting in the river when he saw a tiny fluffy bunny on the riverbank and approached him quietly..."

"Aaaaaaaaaa!" Magu screamed.

"Aaaaaaaaa – the bunny shouted too!" Dunderhead continued.

"But this is a scary fairy tale!" The little mott cried out. "What happened to the billy goat?"

"Ummmmm, alright, alright!" Dunderhead stammered. "The bunny shouted...ummm... "Hi there!"

“Hi there? Hi there to whom?” Magu wondered. “And what happened to the billy goat?”

“The bunny shouted “Hi, there!” to the crocodile who was actually a friend of his. His name was...Dragon!” Dunderhead interrupted her.

“What an interesting name for a crocodile,” Sillyhead said.

“I want my billy goat!” Magu said firmly.

“You keep quiet - Dragon might be friends with the bunny, but he can surely eat a fat modd like you for breakie!” Dunderhead answered angrily. “How are you getting on with the note?”

“Hey, who’re you calling fat?” Sillyhead snapped.

“Hey, “ Magu shouted, “ I want to know what happens next. What’s the bunny’s name?”

“Probably Daredevil!” Sillyhead grinned.

“That’s right!” Dunderhead agreed and grinned back at Sillyhead. “Dragon and Daredevil met at school. One was short and green, the other – thin and fluffy; all children made fun of them. “Hey, look at him – how slow he is! – they pointed at the crocodile and went on with “What ugly teeth he’s got! That green is so out of fashion!” “And the rabbit – how funny and timid he is!” The children laughed. No-one wanted to sit next to the crocodile and the bunny in the classroom, the others always chose them last when they formed teams for a game of dodgeball. They often stepped on the crocodile’s tale in the school canteen – on purpose or by chance. The bunny was always left hungry. When he stood in the queue, all animals pushed him, jumped the queue, so there was usually no food left by the time his turn came.”

“Oh, poor things!” Magu felt sad.

“But one day the bunny was standing at the end of the queue and the crocodile stood behind him. A perky rooster, climbed the crocodile’s back and pushed the bunny, so that he could take his place in the queue. The crocodile got angry, opened his mouth and... GULP! The rooster was gone!” Dunderhead made a dramatic pause.

“Ohhhhh!” Sillyhead cried out. He had completely forgotten that he was supposed to write a note for the motts. He had cuddled with Magu and the two of them were listening deeply interested.

“Billy goat principal saw what was going on and went to scold the crocodile...”

“There’s the billy goat!” Magu squeaked.

“Yes, but... GULP!” Dunderhead continued. “He found himself in the crocodile’s belly as well.

“Ohhhhhhhh...” The rest of the animals were scared and started shouting: “A dragon, a dragon ate the principaaaaaaaal!” They ran up and down the canteen, broke glasses, tables and plates. Utter chaos. The rabbit was the only one that stayed calm because he was the only one that knew that a good soul. was hidden behind the crocodile’s big scary teeth. The bunny smiled and said “Let the principal and the rooster go, you’re vegetarian now, aren’t you?” The crocodile agreed and spit the rooster and billy goat

out but that's when he got the nickname "Dragon". Everyone started calling the bunny "Daredevil" because he was the only one who dared to approach the angry crocodile. "

"Woooooow, so that's how they became friends!" Magu exclaimed.

"Yes. They became inseparable after that. They used to go to the river to wash, but since the bunny couldn't swim, he climbed the crocodiles back. They walked on the riverbank, played hide and seek and some other games. Alas, their friendship didn't last long because it is very hard to be a crocodile and vegetarian at the same time," Dunderhead continued. "So one day the rabbit was lying under a tree near the river when a hungry anaconda approached him and GULP! Bunny was gone. Daredevil or not, he was eaten up! The crocodile saw what happened and told himself "I've had enough of this diet of mine!" and he ate the greedy anaconda. End of the story!

"But what's the moral?!" Magu snapped. "Besides, all fairy tales just have a happy ending."

"Well, this one has a happy ending – the bad anaconda gets eaten up!" Dunderhead justified himself.

"And the moral is that Daredevil or not, you mustn't hang around in dangerous places.

"So, technically, the crocodile ate the bunny?" Sillyhead concluded.

"What d'ya mean?" Dunderhead stared at him.

"Well, yeah, the snake gulped the rabbit, the crocodile ate the anaconda, so both of them ended up in Dragon's belly." Sillyhead went on with his arguments.

"Oh, you think you're a great thinker, is that it?" Dunderhead got angry.

"I want another fairy tale!" Magu cried out.

"We must write a note to your parents first."

"Send my love to them and tell them to buy me a fluffy crocodile. I will call him Dragon!" Magu said.

"Hey, d'ya remember what we had to write?" Sillyhead scratched his head.

"Something about the captive... tell them she's here with us and... ummmm.... call them here while our army, you know... Oh, the delicacies too." Dunderhead tried to retell Jelly's words without Magu suspecting whatsoever.

"I didn't understand anything, - Sillyhead frowned.

"Alright, get on with the fairy tale and when the little one falls asleep, the two of us will write a quick note." Dunderhead suggested.

"It's a deal." Sillyhead agreed at once. Apparently he felt more like telling stories than writing letters to the enemy. "Once upon a time my grandfather climbed the North Pole..."

"Climbed the North Pole? It's not a mountain to climb." Dunderhead interrupted him.

"No, no! He started off to the North Pole, but he climbed Everest on his way. Just like that... just to get used to the cold.... But before that, on his way, he met a girl who looked very much like a sandwich. It was actually an ordinary girl, at least at first. But she ate only sandwiches. Sandwiches for breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, sometimes even at night! Children at school started making fun of her. They called her the "sandwich girl".

"I got hungry just listening to this tale." Dunderhead interrupted him.

"So did I, I guess." Sillyhead said and patted his big belly.

"Hey, look! I think it's worked!" Dunderhead pointed at the little mott who had laid her head on a pile of moss and was dreaming of Dragon and Daredevil playing leapfrog with Sillyhead and Dunderhead.

Chapter 9

Girls' Night Out

A stooping figure was creeping up the slope near the end of the forest, exactly where a big lonely tree trunk was sticking up and was introducing a lovely view of the valley. There was a sheer cliff in front of the trunk, beech trees in orderly rows were rising up behind it. It was the perfect spot for Pagu and Jelly's important meeting. The two princesses hadn't met in years. There was no time for small talk now. So after they hugged, Pagu went straight to the question:

"How is she?" She was hollow-eyed, the pink locks of her fringe hung lifelessly on her face.

"She's alright. You've no idea how she bosses Sillyhead and Dunderhead around. They even tell her stories, hard as it is to believe!" Jelly tried to cheer her up.

"Yes, she never goes to bed without a fairy tale... " Pagu's eyes filled with tears.

"Hey, hey, hey! She's alright! Trust me! I won't let anything happen to her!" Jelly shook her and held her tight. "You have to trust me! Now tell me about the note. Did you get it?"

"They want to lure us into the forest and attack Mottland, right?" Pagu spoke her suspicions out loud.

"That's right. Grumpy wanted to fool you with another note, but I put Sillyhead and Dunderhead up to writing about the real plan. Apparently, they did well. So out with it! What are we going to do?" Jelly asked.

"I have an idea, but it's risky for you..." Pagu started.

"Don't worry about me. If you only knew what terrible things I say about you," Jelly laughed. "Grumpy would never suspect me. Sometimes I am even ruder than him.

"Oh, so you insult me, do you?" Pagu gently pinched her friend's shoulder.

"I'm extremely good at that!" Jelly giggled and made Pagu laugh as well – she hadn't laughed for some time now. "Come on, I'm all ears!"

Pagu told Jelly what the plan was in a hurry. Their time was running out. The enemies had to meet at sunset in two days because the moon was going to be full then, and that would help Pagu see where the entrance to the cave was. At the same time, the creeping twilight was going to hide her and her army just like a veil. Inside the cave Jelly was going to help her find the way out and take Magu outside. Then – straight to the palace. The two of them separated with a secret squeeze of each other's claws and now each of them was to stick to her part of the plan. Pagu had to tell Mux where exactly to be so that they could meet Grumpy and the motts on their way to the city. Jelly had to hold Grumpy up a little, so that the motts had time to go to the upper part of the valley and get ready. The two armies were going to be one opposite the other. Pagu had a plan in case of battle. However, we'll come to this later. Because, to tell you the truth, Jelly barely had a plan. Things were not going to happen the way she had wanted. Not in the least!

Chapter 10 All At War

There was a ring at the door. Bobo ran to meet Zdravko who was late as always on Wednesdays.

"Oh, I took the wrong bus." He started making excuses. He always had an excuse: he couldn't find his backpack or he was making a sandwich to go, or there was a traffic jam, or he was stuck in the elevator.

"Hm, which bus did you take?" Angel teased him. "52 instead of 25? You got the numbers wrong, didn't you?"

"Exactly!" Zdravko nodded without hesitation.

"Oh, yeah? How about that?" Krissy called out. "52 doesn't drive through your neighbourhood!"

Zdravko's head dropped.

"Look, we're just joking. Besides, the motts are late too," Bobo nudged him.

"Is that so? Now that is strange!" Zdravko was surprised.

"Oh, yes, I hope nothing has happened to them." Emily looked scared.

"If anyone dares to do something to them..., - Catherine got a bit edgy and clenched her fists. " They'll have to deal with me!"

It was just then that they heard some noise coming from the wardrobe. Goula, Mux, Pagu, Pinky, and Izzy rolled down.

"At last!" Bobo clapped his hands.

"Hey, what about Magu? Why haven't you taken her with you?" Emily sulked.

Pagu, her eyes filled with tears, looked at her and the children instantly knew that something was wrong.

"Hey, hey, what is going on!" Krissy jumped.

"She's been kidnapped." Mux said in a hollow voice and looked at the ground.

"The modds!" Goula continued. "They're back again! They were supposed to have disappeared! Can you imagine? Our little princess is with these, these... these...."

"Monsters?" Catherine asked. "I really feel like fighting monsters. I would gladly have one and ride it like a horse. It's a deal! I'm coming with you to save her!"

"Kids, you know that you cannot interfere with our battles." Mux interrupted them. "The law of nature forbids that. Besides, Pagu has an idea about how to take Magu out of the cave while we're keeping the modds outside.

"You're going to need weapons then!" Bobo said.

"First we must calculate carefully." Angel lifted his index finger. "How many of you are there?"

"The males who can fight are 700," Pagu replied.

"Alright. How about the modds?"

"They are more and bigger than us." Pinky looked disheartened. "They must be about 1000."

"That makes at least a weapon and a half per mott so that you can be equal, but they are three times bigger than you, so we multiply 1.5 by 1.3 which makes 1.95. Thus, every one of you must have 2 weapons so as to be 0.5 times stronger than every modd and one-third. Are you following my train of thoughts?" Angel knitted his eyebrows. The motts and the children exchanged significant glances and nodded timidly. However, they didn't understand a thing.

„So two weapons each?" Goula tried to sum up the complicated calculation.

"Exactly! Now let's think about what kind of weapons we need!" Angel smiled. "That's more like Catherine's field."

"I've got 4 crackers, a whole bag of bouncing balls, a blow pipe, a sling that shoots away walnuts. I'll give them all to you!"

"That's not enough." Pinky mumbled.

"I can give you my perfume." Emily said. "It'll be enough for all your army and you will smell all the way to the end of the forest."

"I'm sure that my grandpa has a whole pack of wooden skewers for grilled meat – they look like toothpicks, but they are ten times bigger and stronger!" Bobo was exhilarated.

“We’ll need jar lids and use them as helmets.” Goula added.

“I will get some from the shop.” Zdravko promised.

“Uncle Gosho will never give you any! He’s got an eye on us anyway.” Catherine looked at him mistrustfully.

“I will take some from uncle Pesho. I buy beer for dad and chewing gum from there.”

“Then I will go to uncle Gosho!” Krissy joined in.

“We can use chewing gum! We can just throw it all over the field so that the modds get stuck in the sticky trap.” Pagu suggested.

“On no account should we do that. How are we going to clean up afterwards? Do you know how hard it is to remove chewing gum? It once took me three days to scrape it off my sneaker. If it gets into the soil, that’ll be a catastrophe.” Emily shook her head. “I don’t want this to weigh on my conscience – polluting nature, I mean.”

“Alright, what about soap bubbles?” Bobo came up with an idea.

“That’s quite complicated. There’s no one to blow the bubbles; besides, they will keep the modds away only for a short time. One more thing – the wind will have to blow in their direction.” Mux explained.

“Alright...enough is enough. Let’s go gather the weapons and meet here same time tomorrow, so that you can give them to us and we can distribute them to our motts.” Ordered Pagu, then turned towards Zdravko: “The meeting is half an hour earlier for you!”

“Yes, boss!” He saluted.

Then everyone rushed out of the room so quickly that Doddie almost dropped his glasses. He peeked in Bobo’s room and was surprised to find out that there was no mess and everything was untouched. He shrugged his shoulders and relaxed in his armchair with the newspaper. Children’s voices were music to his ears, but silence is golden. He soon dozed off. However, the motts and the children had no time for sleep. The kids were running around the city, collecting weapons. That was the least they could do to help. When they were seeing off the motts the next day, they said their long goodbyes and hugged them a lot.

“You know that I always come back, don’t you, pal?” Mux pinched his friend, Bobo – they had been inseparable for years now. Pagu gave Krissy a warm hug, then held the sauerkraut jar carefully – the one that the girl had taken from her grandma’s balcony. It had been kept there, waiting to be thrown into the garbage, because it had gone bad. Krissy had helpfully offered to do the job. That was going to be the perfect cover for the princess when she approached the cave. Catherine and Izzy fist bumped. Zdravko handed Pinky a bite of a sandwich to go; it was wrapped in a handkerchief. Angel reminded Goula for the last time what the battle plan was.формацията за атака? Emily, who was Magu’s closest friend, hugged all the motts, one by one, and saw them off with the words: “Please bring the little one safe back home.”

The five brave motts took off and behind them there was a winding line of motts, armed and perfumed from head to toes. Just before they reached the appointed spot in the field, Pagu and Izzy turned aside and sank in the thick grass. The two friends hugged tightly and Pagu went ahead on her own on her way to the mountain. She hid behind a bush and waited to see where the cousins would come from.

Chapter 11 Pagu in the Modds' Cave

Heat. Silence. Endless wait. Sweat broke out on Pagu's forehead.

"When are the modds going to show up?" She looked around anxiously. The mott princess was hiding in a bush near the spot where the modds' cave supposedly was. It had been such a long wait and yet, there was no trace of them. And just then... horrible teeth jumped out of the nearby bush. There was a face too, but the teeth were so big and scary that the nose and eyes of the creature were barely noticeable. And the smell... "Even the bad sauerkraut smells better..." Pagu thought and held her nose. The teeth were attached to the huge torso of a modd who was making his way through the wood like a hooligan on a playground. The bushes seemed to bend so as not to touch the creature.

"Well, at least there's no way I could take the wrong way – that modd leaves a whole path behind himself." Pagu murmured. She froze because Grumpy followed behind the teeth. He was not so big, but he was evil and strong in a way that made you shudder. Pagu's fur bristled up and she farted uneasily. Grumpy went on walking behind the teeth that were crushing everything in their way like a steamroller. Just when he was passing by the mott princess...

"Hmm... It smells funny here!" Grumpy hissed sniffing the air. Pagu didn't dare to take a breath. She held her jar tight, ready to throw it at anyone who approached.

"Ughh, it's annoying! Right, boss?" The teeth answered. "There are flowers everywhere!"

"It's horrible! Let's walk on. Walk closer to the marsh. These flowers make me dizzy!" Grumpy snarled and ordered the teeth to walk ahead.

The minutes were barely rolling while the whole modd army was passing by Pagu. She waited a little bit longer so as to be sure that everyone had passed and went further on. Then she jumped out of her hiding place. She started walking down the path formed by the teeth and in a minute she found herself in front of a big rock hidden under the shadow of tall trees. It would have been very difficult to find it on her own. But there was no trace of an entrance. Pagu looked around worriedly. She tried moving some of the big stones around the rock, but she didn't manage. She peeked behind a few bushes, but saw no entrance there. Finally, she thumped angrily on the rock and was surprised at what she heard:

"Who's there?" The rock spoke.

"Ah!" Pagu was startled, but came to her senses at once. "It's I!"

"I who?" The rock asked.

"I... I...I..." Pagu thought for a moment, then said: "Delivery for you!"

"FOR ME?" The rock was surprised.

"Yes, for you!" Pagu confirmed.

"Hmmm, I don't remember ordering anything." The rock answered. Something shuffled and a huge rock moved. There was a dark tunnel behind it. A huge modd came out coughing.

"What have you got for me?"

"Weeeell..." Pagu started uncertainly. "I've got spoiled sauerkraut for the kitchen – a special delivery for His Majesty Grumpy.

"Oh, for the boss!" The modd looked Pagu all over, peeked into the jar and eagerly breathed in the scent of spoiled sauerkraut.

"Ah, what a life... It's great to be a boss!" The modd sighed and made a gesture to Pagu to come in.

"Walk that way, that's where the kitchen is. Pagu came in cautiously and she was just about to think that was too easy, when...

"Hey, what about the password?!" The modd roared.

"Oops! Pagu was startled.

"'Oops' was last week's password!" The modd stiffened and looked at her with a threat in his eyes. He approached the princess.

"Ummm.... Long live Grumpy?" Pagu stared.

"Long live Grumpy!" The modd frowned. "Everyone forgets their password all the time!" Go on!" He waved at Pagu to leave him alone.

The princess stepped lightly. There was a rumble behind her and the huge stone was back in its place, closing the cave entrance. The modd stood at his post, deep in thought about sauerkraut and wealthy life. It was damp and dim inside. Here and there you could see a jar full of fireflies on the wall. They slightly lit the tunnels. "Poor things!" Pagu thought. The fireflies moved and the princess heard a tiny quiet voice.

"Do not fear! We will show you the way! Princess Jelly warned us you would come."

"Thank you, dear fireflies! I promise that I will try to help you and set you free."

"Princess Jelly takes care of us. She often lets us fly free. But, alas, the modds manage to capture us again." Another voice added. "Come, do not waste time, follow the light. We know where Magu is."

There was a buzzing sound and a jar shone brightly, then a second and a third one. Pagu went on in the lit tunnel. It was getting damper and colder there...

"Aaaaaaaaaa!" A rough voice cut through the darkness. "I will eat you!"

“Noooooooooo!” The clear voice of a child replied.

Pagu was numb. She knew that voice.

“Magu!” The princess shouted. She dropped the jar and rushed forward.

“Yes, yes! I feel like eating a chiiiiiiiiiiiiild! Ha-ha-ha-ha!” The voice continued.

Pagu was running with all her might. She swerved into the corner and burst into a room. There was a huge modd inside, holding his fork menacingly lifted in one hand. A hand? No, that was an enormous limb and the fork looked like a pitchfork.

“YUM! I will eat the tiny princess!” The whole room shook with the modd’s powerful voice. Pagu spotted her – Magu was hiding a meter further from him.

CHAPTER 12 Stink, Stink, Stink

The sun started yawning and little by little he set, laying his head on his pillow, letting night take over. The two armies stood face to face in the field in the valley. Grumpy and the modds were surprised when they found themselves facing the motts.

“Weren’t they supposed to be elsewhere?” The teeth whispered in Grumpy’s ear.

“I mean on the other side of the forest, so that we could enter the city and conquer it. You know...”

“I know that I will punish you later!” Grumpy bellowed and his eyes blazed.

“I changed the plan, okay? No more questions! I don’t have to explain myself to you!”

Then he turned around and gazed at the mott crowd. There was something wrong. Apparently someone had made a mess of the note. And he knew quite well WHOM he had ordered to write it. He was going to deal with them later. Now he had to defeat his cousins, then reach the city and conquer it. At least that part of the plan was unchanged. A few minutes passed and everyone wondered what was going to happen. The motts didn’t want to attack. The modds, however, were annoyed by the setting sunrays, the deafening chirping of the birds, and the grass that was tickling their feet. Therefore, Grumpy decided to wait for nightfall. Mux anxiously shifted from one foot to the other, staring somewhere over there, beyond the modd army.

“Calm down, she’ll be alright,” Goula tried to reassure him.

“Yes, Mux, Pagu is quite a thing!” Pinky added. “Besides, Krissy brought the sauerkraut, remember? My, oh myyyyy, how it smells...”

“Izzy brought her a cloak that she had soaked in the swamp,” Goula continued. “Dressed like that, surrounded by such a horrid smell, she would never arouse suspicion.”

“I wish Izzy were in the cave with Pagu.” Mux sighed.

"She'd better be alone!" She'd attract less attention that way."Goula explained. "Apart from that..."

Goula didn't finish his sentence because there was some movement on the meadow. There was something going on. The modds seemed to be commanded to stand in line, ready to attack.

"Oh, what do we do now?" Pinky moaned.

"What on earth is that smell?" Mux wrinkled his face. The smell was sticky and suffocating. It was coming from the factory at the lower end of the city. The wind had changed its direction and the unbearable stink was now floating straight to the meadow. That stink was like elixir to the modds.

"Ready to attack!" A rough voice broke the silence in the valley.

"Stink! Stink! Stink!" Thousands of voices began to chant and the ground shook. The motts shuddered and the modds edged up. The battle began. The modds were advancing quickly and were sweeping everything on their way just like a wave splashes into a sandcastle and destroys it. The motts defended themselves bravely. Goula was waving a fork with such swiftness that if you looked at the fork, you might feel dizzy. Pinky had taken the "Pink dream" perfume from Izzy's room and was spraying it on every modd who dared approach him. Mux was at the front like a true leader. He was giving orders:

"Protect the flank, don't retreat!" He was shouting and waving a jar lid that served him as a shield. But soon enough the mott lines began to give way under the pressure of the smelly attack.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha!" Grumpy's laughter was coming from everywhere. The modd leader could almost taste victory. "I will have hostages!" He kept shouting, with all his might. "Come on, attack, my stinky dears!"

The motts' defense was cracked. More and more of them fell in the hands of the modds. Defeat was coming to them just like a storm in a summer night. A flash of lightning cut through the sky.

Chapter 13 Back to the Cave Where All the Fun Is.

"Nom, nom, nom... where are you, tiny beast.. come, come, I am hungryyyyyyy!" The modd kept saying, waving his huge fork in all directions. The mott was just a step away from him, so tiny and defenceless...

"Cock-a-doodle-meooow! Cock-a-doodle-meooow!" Magu jumped out of her hiding place with a cry and Sillyhead was startled with surprise.

"Ahhh, there you are!" The modd grinned and showed all his yellowish teeth. "Hahahaha! Alright, alright, you scared me. You won this game, but the result is still five-four to me. "

"Nonsense! We drew four-four." Magu mumbled and gave the look that melted Mux.

"Oh, alright!" Sillyhead murmured and added: "Now all we have to do is find Dunderhead – that scarecrow."

"Who're you calling a scarecrow, eh?" A voice came from the wardrobe.

"Oh, there you are!" Sillyhead whispered and told Magu to be quiet. Then he looked around, saw a bat drowsing on the ceiling. He reached for it, took it carefully, quietly set the wardrobe door ajar, shook the bat rather hard, dropped it inside, and slammed the door. What followed was an uproar that grew into a hullabaloo.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, oh!" Dunderhead was crying out loud. He jumped out of the wardrobe together with the door and the hinges.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Magu and Sillyhead burst out laughing. It was then that Dunderhead saw her.

"Ummmm... who are you?" He frowned at Pagu.

"Mommyyyyyyy!" Magu gave such a loud cry that the bat in the wardrobe decided that it was high time he bought earplugs. Pagu hugged her daughter and a teardrop rolled down her muzzle.

"Here's trouble for us!" Dunderhead frowned.

"It's not our fault this time!" Sillyhead snarled.

"That's right!" Dunderhead agreed and gave this a thought. "You haven't followed us, have you?" He added in a little bit of a frightened voice.

"I haven't, don't you worry." Pagu replied. "Magu, how are you, my dear? They haven't been teasing you, have they?"

"Who? Us ... her?" The two modds asked. "She ordered us about: I want this, I want that, I want to play, this fairy tale is boring..." Dunderhead frowned.

"Do you know how hard it is to be a pony when you're that heavy?" Sillyhead said and pointed at Dunderhead.

"Hey, what do you mean to say?" His friend frowned. "I was a very graceful pony."

"Yeah, right! You were more of a clumsy dinosaur with arthritis." Sillyhead answered and the whole room laughed. Even Pagu felt more at ease.

"What's all that fuss?" A rough voice came from outside.

"Umm, everything's alright, mate." Dunderhead shouted and looked at Pagu in a frightened manner. She started to shout as if following orders:

"You nasty modds, let me gooooooooooooo, stop tormenting me, pleeeeeeaseeee!"

"No, we're going to torment you for a long time - that's what the Boss ordered!" Sillyhead shouted and made a gesture at Pagu which meant she had to hide somewhere.

The modd who guarded the cave entrance came into the room just then.

"Hmm, what a mess. Why's that wardrobe door broken?" He asked. "The boss won't be pleased that you're failing again."

"Well, we..." Sillyhead mumbled.

"Or maybe you would like to play with me?" Magu shot a glance at him. "You can even tell me a fairy tale... Do you play with dolls? What about hide and seek? Can you play pony... but a pink one, not the silly kind of pink, but..."

"Aaaaaaa! Don't get me involved! I'm headed to the kitchen for some sauerkraut." The modd snapped and hurried back to the door.

"Oh, that was close!" Everyone sighed with relief.

"Now what?" Magu asked.

"I must take you back home, little one." Pagu replied.

"Mhmm, that's not an easy job... I mean, you know... the boss... when he sees his hostage is gone..." Sillyhead scratched himself and poked something on the floor – something of obscure origin. The thing was not happy with that, so it crept towards the wardrobe. Dunderhead pressed his lips and only shook his head.

"We can't let you take her! That's no good. You want trick us into doing this and then we'll get punished again. The little one stays with us!" The modd stuck his chest out and pushed Magu behind his back. Then he crossed his arms and gave her mother a nasty look/dirty?

Chapter 14 Pit-a-Pat,Who'll Be in Trouble??

Lightning cut through the sky. Thunder shook the night. A circle of bright light and dust burst into the center of the meadow. The battle stopped at once and all looks turned to the same direction. Even Grumpy held his breath and gaped. And when the cloud of dust cleared up, there in the moonlight appeared...

"Ha-haha-ha! What are you?" Grumpy laughed.

"Look at it – so tiny, but the glasses are huge." A modd called.

"What about the funny hat and stick?" Another added.

"It's not a stick, it's a scepter! A donkey and a pig!" The creature answered angrily. He then thumped the stick onto the ground and the two modds turned into a donkey and a pig.

"O-o..." Grumpy moaned. "I don't think that's a good sign..."

"I'm a mott wizard, heir to the most ancient wizards." The creature called out. "I've just left the beach although it wasn't cold, I've come especially to scold, and I will punish you all." Then he pointed his scepter with an air of menace at the mott army.

“Ummmm, wizard, point the other way.” Mux pointed, he recognized the creature. Goula and Pinky remembered that was the old mott from the city who had guided them with a riddle to the Ancient Mott Book.

“Ooops! My mistake!” The wizard mumbled and turned the other way.

“Catch him!” Grumpy thundered and a number of modds rushed forward.

“Oh, no, no, no!” The scepter turned around, made a parabola, the spell crashed onto the fresh grass. “Pit-a-pat, first I’ll shut your mouths, you’ll be quiet just like trouts.” There was rumble, then a bright light came, and the next moment... Everyone, motts and modds, spoon in hand, started sipping soup.

“It’s not that bad,” Pinky thought. “It needs just a little bit of salt.”

“Aaaaaa! What a mess! What should I do with that soup for the best!” the wizard said, his eyes wide open. “Enough of the soup, rain will now swoop and bite the eyes, your feet will dance, there’s no surprise, as if there’s music, but no, there’s not.” Once again he waved the sceptre. Once again there was light in the sky and onions started falling down on both armies’ heads. As if ordered by someone, both motts and modds stepped here and there – it looked like they were dancing on the onion heads that were crunching beneath their feet. Tears rolled down everyone’s cheeks.

“Oh, I messed up completely!” The wizard cried. “But I do remember now what I am supposed to do, and how. Those of you who’re bad, I should ban without a plan. Drive you away I shall.” He closed his eyes and passed his hand through his grizzled beard. He tried again, with a simpler spell:

“Pit-a-pat, go ahead!” He tapped with the wooden stick and the next minute everyone disappeared.

“But what shall I do with that soup!” The wizard told himself. “I truly messed up like a dupe!” A shallot head rolled next to his foot in anticipation. He kicked it and sent it to the other end of the meadow.

“Yuppee... Goal! He jumped like a little child. He came up with an idea. “Hey, come back, you lot!”

Motts and Modds came back to the meadow. They looked quite dazed and confused. The old mott looked at them with a superior smile. Then he finished them off with his final spell.

“Well, what else is there to say, but that the soup is full of magic anyway!” The wizard cried and once again waved the wand in all directions. Bright light embraced the two armies. When it disappeared, things started to change. The motts grew grey, dirty spots came through their fur, and an unpleasant smell covered them like a warm blanket in winter. The modds, on the other hand, became clean, as if an invisible hand had combed their clotted fur. A lovely fragrance spread through all the army. They smelled like lilac and freshly cut grass, ripe strawberries, and crocuses.

“Hey, you! Are you a modd or a mott?” A voice asked.

“A modd... but why do I smell like lily of the valley? Ghrrrr...”

There was chaos all over the meadow. Who was who? Grumpy stepped up a rock so that everyone could see him and shouted:

“Retreat! All modds – back to the cave! Hey, you’re not a modd, you can’t come in here. “

“I’m a modd, boss.” Grumpy heard the answer.

“You look like a mott. Halt! Everyone stand still! Nobody is going into the cave!”

At the other end of the cave the motts were in retreat too. Mux, too, had trouble recognizing who was a mott or a modd.

“Nobody leave the meadow!” He commanded and looked at the wizard. “Fix this now!”

“I know it seems like a mess, but there’s one thing I must confess. Do not you fear, just eat your soup, dear. Now, do shake hands and make amends!” the old mott said curtly.

“Make things right or we’ll eat YOU in a bite!” Grumpy bellowed.

“I will say this only once and look you in the eyes, and then I’ll vaporize. This trouble knocked on your door because you need to learn your lesson, so don’t be a bore! The wizard ended the conversation, thumped his stick onto the ground, and disappeared into thin air, surrounded by smoke.

What a chaos! The modds were rolling in the nearby swamp hoping they would stink again. The motts were washing themselves desperately in the clear waters of the stream, but as much as they tried to clean themselves, the smell of rotten food was all over them and it was spreading around them just like a chewing gum stuck on one’s sole. So... now what?

Chapter 15 The Exchange

Back in the modds’ cave, Pagu was not giving up. She had gone that far and she didn’t have the least intention of leaving without her daughter.

“What if you tell Grumpy that your hostage was giving you great trouble and you ate her for dinner?” She suggested casually.

“Dinner? The little one isn’t good enough for dessert, let alone dinner!” Dunderhead mumbled.

“Besides I found an old fairy tale book yesterday.” Sillyhead added. “I’ve just learned a few new tales. Magu might like them...”

“Well, I’ve come up with a new game. It’s called Guess Where I’ve Hidden the Worm.” Dunderhead continued and hurried to add: “I’m not going to eat it this time, I promise!”

“Ah, you, fatties! I think you’re going to miss me!” Magu shouted and tried to hug them. However, it didn’t work out, she was too little and she only managed to bump into Dunderhead’s leg.

"Oh, no, no, no, there's no such thing. We are following orders." Sillyhead justified himself. "The boss told us that was such an important mission that he even went at war without us."

"What if you told him that you had sent the hostage to the hugging monster?"

Pagu kept coming up with ideas feverishly.

"GHrrrr...." Sillyhead shivered. "The Hugging monster kidnaps a modd from time to time. He keeps the modd hostage for a few days, gives him a bath, combs him, strokes him. Horrible, isn't it..."

"Well...what about making a clever exchange... let's say a jar of the smelliest sauerkraut may be involved?" Pagu became hopeful.

"He, the boss, loves sauerkraut very much... But it's hard to find." Sillyhead mumbled.

"I have the perfect jar. I've dropped it somewhere near here..."

"You've dropped it? "Dunderhead was startled. "Such a treasure! Take us to it."

Pagu didn't wait to be asked twice. She rushed to the exit and turned around the corner where she had come from. There it was: the jar was lying on the ground while a rat was trying to tackle it.

"Oh, open, Sesame!" The rat kept saying while trying to open the lid with all his might.

"Shoo, shoo!" Pagu cried and hurried to take the jar under the cruel eye of the rat.

"Now what?" Dunderhead asked breathlessly.

"Now it's time for exchange." Pagu smiled and gave Sillyhead the jar. The modds looked at each other. There was something fishy about all that. After all, the motts were the bad ones. However, the sauerkraut deal was not bad.

"It might do..." Dunderhead mumbled.

"He, the boss, might even give us some sauerkraut as a reward." Sillyhead said with hope in his voice.

"If you add two wild pigs to that, it will make a delicious stew!" Dunderhead licked his lips.

"You and your wild pigs!" Sillyhead got angry and slapped his friend's neck.

"Let's not waste time then." Pagu looked at her daughter and was dumbfounded. The little mott was standing there, tears in her eyes.

"I really hate that!" She sobbed. "I've just started playing with them and now we have to go!" She tried to hug the two slobbs once again. This time they came close to her for a big hug. Dunderhead turned his head sideways so that no-one saw that his eyes were full of tears too.

"Hey, wild pig, you aren't crying, are you?!" Sillyhead scolded him.

"Who, me? You're a wild pig yourself! I've got some moss in my eye." Dunderhead explained nervously.

"A mouse in the eye? How did that happen?" His friend grinned and everybody laughed. A mouse nearby heard them and decided he'd better stay put because one never knows what might happen..

"Hold the jar tight because if you break it, Grumpy will make stew out of you." Dunderhead got a bit edgy.

"It's time to go!" Pagu interrupted them. Will you show us which way to go?"

"That way - take the darkest tunnel. No-one dares walk there." Dunderhead pointed to the tunnel.

"Only someone who has had a bit too much of Jelly's modovilea might try that." Sillyhead added.

"Or some perky youngster who wants to impress a girl. But when he comes back all clean and tidy a few days later, he turns into a laughing stock." Dunderhead laughed.

"Or if Grumpy punishes someone..." Sillyhead went on.

"Turn right at the end of the corridor. There's the exit. The cooing thing is on the left....ghhrrr..." Dunderhead roared.

Pagu nodded with gratitude, took her daughter's hand, and started down the tunnel. Magu followed her unwillingly. Just before they disappeared, the little mott looked back and gave the modds the biggest smile in the world.

Sob, sob...

A dark tunnel, two big modds, tiny teardrops on their cheeks, a jar full of sauerkraut. It's not the best way to start a new friendship, but it worked.

Chapter 16 Who is in Charge Now?

In a few minutes Pagu and Magu found their way out. The moon met them with relief. There was a light breeze. Somewhere near them they could hear hundreds of voices that merged into a never-ending flow of words. The whole wood was trembling.

"The battle must have begun!" Pagu was frightened.

"What battle?" The little princess asked.

"The two armies faced each other. However, the motts were supposed to go back to Mottland before nightfall." Pagu was worried. "Something went wrong!"

"Let's check." Magu was ready for the battle.

"You will check what's going on in your room!" Pagu answered in a stern voice. "Come on. Izzy must be near here."

Magu tried to object and explain to her mom that she was old enough now. But her eyelids were getting heavy and she didn't mind snuggling in her cosy bed. Besides she had so much to tell Emily. Motts were good at following the stars, so Pagu hurried to the place where Izzy was supposed to wait for them.

"Oh, at last!" Izzy cried out and ran towards for a hug.

"What is going on on the meadow?" Pagu asked.

"I have no idea, but there's all that hubbub there." Izzy replied.

"I'll go and check. Please take Magu home. She's tired and it's bedtime."

"It's bedtime storytime as well!" Magu said. She could hardly keep her little eyes open. "Two fairy tales, please."

"Good night, my dear." Pagu kissed her and followed Izzy with her eyes. Izzy picked Magu up in her arms and silently carried her along the path to Mottland.

"Now, off to the meadow." The mott princess thought and hurried away. She ran along a brook, crossed the old wooden bridge, went into the wood, and in a minute found herself at one end of the meadow, just opposite the two armies. Pagu was definitely not prepared for what what she was to see. Motts and modds were all mixed up like a pack of cards and it was impossible to figure out who was who! She heard familiar voices.

"Hey, slob, get out of here!" Gula shouted and stood in a threatening manner.

"But I am a mott. I washed three times in the stream - it doesn't help. I still stink..." A sad answer came.

"You smell too, Gula." Pinky added. He was licking an empty bowl of soup.

"It's no good!" Gula growled. "It's such a chaos that I don't know whose head to thwack with this fork"

You're not going to hit anyone and no-one is to leave the meadow." Pagu joined the conversation.

"Where's Mux and what's happened?"

"Pagu" Pinky jumped up and tried to hug her, but the princess pinched her nose and made a sign to him to stay away.

"Why do you smell so bad?"

Pinky farted out of embarrassment and began his story.

"Well, first, that wizard made us eat soup, then we danced stepping on onions. The soup was not bad and I didn't taste the onions, but it's a good thing he came because we were just about to lose the battle, but then..."

Pagu frowned.

"The thing is," Gula interrupted him, "The old mott from the city showed up out of nowhere in a circle of light and made some sort of spell. The modds became clean, and we became dirty and stinky. That's the long story short."

Pagu realized that things didn't come out as planned. She looked around and saw dirty Mux and Grumpy whose fur was... tidy. They were at one end of the meadow and they were having a violent dispute. She started towards them, making her way through the confused soldiers.

"It's your fault!" Grumpy shouted. "You and your crazy wizard!"

"I haven't summoned him! You don't think I want to be dirty and smelly, do you?" Mux was trying to outshout him.

"What's wrong with being dirty?" Grumpy got angry.

"What do you mean, what's wrong!? I stink so much that even a hungry mosquito doesn't want to come near me..."

"Well, at least they won't bite you. Now look at me, with that clean and tidy fur! I look like a stuffed toy in a toy shop." Grumpy snapped.

"Actually, you don't look bad at all, my dear stinky modd." A voice said and the modd boss recognized his wife, Jelly.

"Ummm.... My ugly dearest, why are you here? Go back to the safe cave." Grumpy asked her.

"Do you think I'd leave my husband alone in this... ummm... soapy battle!" Jelly smiled and her eyes fell on a figure that was approaching them quickly. It was Pagu.

The mott princess came near the three of them. She stroked Mux and said:

"I see there's great confusion. Princess Jelly and I left you for just an hour or so, and you've made such a mess of it all."

"It's not our fault!" Grumpy bellowed. "The short ones and their wizard did it!"

"Who're you calling short, eh?!" Mux started up. "If you hadn't kidnapped my daughter..."

"We haven't kidnapped her. She herself came to our cave." Grumpy justified himself. "I don't know how you can stand the little one. She ate up all the fruit in the forest. You must be grateful to me for taking care of her, instead of..."

"I'll show my gratitude when I kick your..." Mux said. He turned red with anger.

"Stop it! Both of you! Enough is enough!" Jelly scolded them.

The soldiers on the meadow could feel the rising pressure. They started pushing each other. Some of them were waving their weapons menacingly in the air without even knowing whom to hit or where to hit them.

"I think it's time we took over here!" Pagu shouted so loudly that silence spread on the meadow. "You two, - she pointed at Mux and Grumpy. It's a good idea to go find the old mott and bring him back here, so that he can put things right."

"What about my army?" Grumpy frowned. "I can't leave my soldiers."

"Everything will be alright." Jelly interfered. "I'll take care of them."

"Both armies will stay here until you come back." Pagu continued.

"I'll go alone!" Mux objected. "He'll only be in my way."

"How about my fist standing in the way of your face, eh?" Grumpy bellowed and shook his fist threateningly, but Jelly stopped him just in time.

"You're going together, that's the right thing to do." Pagu interrupted.

"No fighting!" Jelly added.

Mux and Grumpy exchanged murderous looks.

"Come on, I know where the wizard lives." Mux sighed and waved to Grumpy to follow him.

Night had softly spread across the meadow and the soldiers started looking for a comfortable spot for the night. They were going to sleep under the stars for nights in a row...

Chaper 17 How Did the Wizard Join the Battle?

The little bird perched onto the open window near a little colourful vase.

"Aaaaaaaa, the vase I must safe! Shoo, you bird with wings!" The old mott cried from inside and started waving his hands.

"Hey, don't you shoo me!" The bird frowned.

"Ooooo, so you can speak, can you? Alright, but don't you break the vase, I'm asking you!" The mott shook a warning finger.

"I bring news from Mottland..." The little nuthatch said. "Princess Pagu sent me."

"The princess! How is she?" The mott asked.

"She's alright, but Magu isn't." The bird answered sadly. "She disappeared in the forest one day ago. The modds have captured her."

"Oooooo, a captive mott child, this is quite serious or else I would have smiled..."

"Princess Pagu's asking you for help. Advise her on how to put an end to the battle between motts and modds. Thursday eve, on the big meadow in the forest." The nuthatch continued.

"A difficult task it will be." The old mott pondered. "Magic she will need, I see. It's a good thing I've got The Ancient Mott Book." He adjusted his big glasses and started looking around feverishly.

His eye fell upon the old wooden cabinet in the corner. It was locked with a big padlock.

He tried to open it, but he didn't manage, so he looked around for the key. He looked here and there, but he didn't find it anywhere.

"Where did I put it, I always forget..." He wondered and stared at the keyhole as if he thought it would open on its own. Alas, it didn't work. He kicked the cabinet – nothing. He walked around it three times – nothing. The mott started stroking his beard nervously.

"Ah, here it is!" He gladly took the key out of his beard knots. "It must have been clever of me to hide it from everyone, including myself."

The little bird looked at him in surprise - she was getting quite worried whether she hadn't got the wrong address. She cast a look at the number on the door – 14. "That's the address." She reassured herself. However, she was in doubt about the old mott's abilities. He finally managed to unlock the cabinet and took a big dusty book out of there. The book was visibly old, but very beautiful, with a heavy metal plate. The mott started turning the pages, his eyes squeezed while the bird was looking at the numerous vases with curiosity. They were scattered all over the room. Actually there wasn't much else in there. There was a little wooden coffee table in one corner. An orange carpet lay down in front of it. The other corner was mostly taken by a big grandfather clock - one of those that have a cuckoo bird coming out, calling every hour. Then the nuthatch thought that it was not at all nice to be locked in a clock. Therefore she decided that since the message had been delivered, it was high time she left.

"A magic spell for good luck it must be - not a kidnap, trust me." The mott was mumbling and was nervously tapping his foot. "Let's have a look in here... hmm ... That's interesting. Just hear: you can make an elephant sting."

"Ummm... I really don't want to interrupt you... wizard?" The nuthatch quietly said. "But there is a long way ahead of me... can I tell princess Pagu that you will help?"

"Wizard?" The mott was startled. "A wizard sounds much better than a lizard, so from now on, you can call me one. As for the battle, don't you worry. Go home, you'd better hurry.""

The bird smiled. She thought she had never seen such a strange creature, and just as she was getting ready to fly away...

"Send princess Pagu my answer!" The mott started importantly. "AAaaaghhh... ummmm.... Ohhh... I forgot what the answer was..." The wizard felt embarrassed.

“You’ll be there at the mentioned day and hour?” The bird helped him remember.

“Yes, yes... quite true...” The mott nodded. “By the way, when’s that, again?”

“Thursday evening.” The nuthatch reminded him. “On the meadow.”

“Ah, yes, the spell will be ready for Thursday.” The mott stamped his foot and made a gesture to the bird – she was free to fly away.

That is how and that is why the mysterious wizard appeared in the heat of the battle, and instead of helping, he turned everything upside down.

Chapter 18 On the Way to the City

Two figures were creeping in the dark forest. Mysterious sounds were were chasing them. Their imagination turned these into various shapes, forms, and scary monsters.

“I don’t like darkness at all.” Mux whispered really quietly lest some of the sounds would hear him and follow him.

“Did you say something?” Grumpy shouted, turning around. He wasn’t showing any signs of fear and he was definitely not keeping quiet.

“Can’t you just speak more quietly!” Mux hissed.

“What? You’re not afraid someone might attack and eat us, are you?” Grumpy teased him and changed his own voice imitating a ghost. “Boo! Here I come to eat a mott! That one there, the brave and fearless mott who never thinks twice before he gets into a battle, but he’s afraid of tiny crickets and owls... HA-HA-HAH-HA! What a joke!”

Mux gnashed his teeth.

“I’m not scared!” He snapped. “It’s just that I don’t see a thing and I won’t be able to protect myself if something attacks us. Don’t think that I would help you if a monster jumped in front of us. I’ll let him eat you up... I will get rid of you alright!”

But deep inside, Mux was glad that he was not alone in the dark forest. Its shadows were crawling at their feet. “Dawn will come soon.” Mux thought. “And then all scary sounds will fall asleep.”

“Hey, did you hear that!” Grumpy was suddenly startled, he froze on the spot.

“Very funny! You won’t pull my leg!” Mux answered, but he was all ears. He didn’t hear anything unusual.

“No, no, you can hear it! There somewhere... listen! It goes “Roarrrr roarrrr Whishhhhh....” It sounds as if something is moving extremely fast. There it goes again!”

“Aaaaaaa!” Mux grinned. “We’re coming closer to the city, that’s all. This is the ring road. People are off to work which means that day will break any time soon. Come on, we’re almost there!”

Mux ran ahead having completely forgotten the fear of the dark and the mysterious forest sounds. The big city with its lights and familiar noises didn’t scare him. There were no scary animals, monsters and ghosts there. Besides, the oldest mott lived there and he was supposed to fix the mess easily. Mux could hardly wait to get back to his family. There it was – the first lamppost! There was another one over there... And the sky... you could see it through the branches of the trees. The thick vegetation was now behind them.

“Come on, Grumpy! We’re almost there!” Mux got ahead of Grumpy who covered his eyes with his hand and squeezed his eyes shut.”

“Too much light!” He slowed down.

“Come ooooooon! Once we get to the city, I know where we can stop and get some rest and sleep.” Mux pulled him by the hand.

“Alright, alright....” Grumpy went on unwillingly, but the lights and sound of the passing cars made him dizzy.

“What’s wrong?” Mux teased him. “You’re scared of the street lamps, are you? You must shiver at the light of a candle? Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Mux laughed at his own joke. He got back at Grumpy for his mockery earlier. Grumpy grunted and caught up with Mux who was already climbing the vertical slope after which the road began. He even got ahead of him so that he could lead again. Once he climbed, he stuck out his chest, turned around and looked behind where the mott was. He even stuck out his tongue at Mux, then he showed all his crooked teeth and snarled:

“Come on, you scared little mott! You’re lagging behind aga... “

Mux , who was just making his final step on the slope and was about to come out into the flat open space, didn’t react to the malignant words. Instead of that, he shrieked, caught Grumpy by the leg and pulled him as hard as he could. The two of them tumbled down followed by a nearby “Whisshhhhh!” When they dropped down on the wet grass again, Grumpy, his eyes wide open, was opposite Mux. The mott was breathing heavily and his heart was almost beating louder than the cars that were passing by.

“ Did... did... did you save me by any chance?” That was the only thing Grumpy could think of saying.

“Let’s go.” Mux stood up, cleaned himself from the dirt, and started climbing once again. “This time follow me closely because you obviously don’t know how to cross a street.”

Grumpy cleared his throat and nodded. He followed the mott. The two of them crossed the road successfully and sank into the awakening city. Their steps were so fast and noiseless that only stray cats could hear them.

They moved an ear, opened their eyes, saw nothing wrong, so they snoozed off again. Mux and Grumpy slipped into an abandoned house at the edge of the city. This is where he had slept with Pinky and Goula the previous time. Now they needed just a few hours' rest before they could take the long road to the park. The road weaved through the whole city, residential districts and streets, the underground, and crowds of people in a hurry. Two whole days were about to be spent in the usual arguments and insults that can be exchanged only by deadly enemies.

Chapter 19 The Wizard's Riddle

"Finally! There it is!" Mux pointed to the tree house. The two of them looked exhausted. They were covered in dust, chafed and bruised. The city was full of obstacles: people kicked them around or stepped on their feet: after all, the two creatures were invisible. When they had to avoid a passing car or a cyclist, they jumped, bounced, staggered, fell, hit the rough plaster walls. The city had changed - it was bigger, noisier and busier than Mux remembered. He thought of Mottland and the peaceful town where it lay. He felt sad. Although they were tired, Grumpy and Mux found themselves at the door of the tree house at the blink of an eye. The front of the house was clean, the door had been painted recently, a few vases adorned the entrance. The modd was the first to notice the note hanging next to the doorbell. Mux took it, squeezed his eyes trying to read the handwriting, and recited out loud:

I have undertaken an important mission:

To save our forest from extinction.

You may wonder where-

Where the polluted waters are, beware.

If you want to help,

Come and find me with a yelp.

Follow the first sunrays,

Walk bravely to the west, always.

Walk along the river, my dear hound

Even when it flows underground.

Follow in my footsteps, my dear

The python won't harm you unless you go too near.

However, if you've got bad thoughts in your head,

You must be looking for trouble, so just go ahead.

Go, go, go across the forest,

Or I will keep you here, keep you for the longest...

"Oh, noooo! I can't stand a minute longer in this city! And that one here wants us to go somewhere!" Grumpy snarled. "He's completely off his rockers!"

Apart from having to go to the west in the morning, I didn't understand a thing." Mux mumbled turning the note in his hands.

"Anyway, we're tired. Let's go to sleep now, and we'll think about it in the morning." Grumpy frowned.

"Down there, under the tree... it looks alright. There's fresh grass... ah, there on one side I can see a muddy puddle. If you want you can ...ummm.. roll in it." Mux suggested.

"Hey, I'm not a pig. I don't roll in muddy puddles!" Grumpy snapped. "I'll lie down next to you and make sure you don't leave alone in the morning. I don't trust motts!"

The two of them climbed down the tree. Mux found a spot near a big bush and wrapped himself in a few leaves. A light breeze came and he felt the scent of flowers. Memories of Mottland floated in his head. Grumpy approached a recycle bin and after he checked to see that it was full of all sorts of garbage, he settled in it. There was an unfinished hotdog there. "Nom-nom, it's perfect with mustard," He mumbled and munched with delight. The park grew quiet in the night.

"Hey, it's time to get up!" Grumpy snarled into Mux's ear.

"Have I overslept?" Mux was startled.

"You haven't. It's just that this little recycle bin is uncomfortable, so I rose early." Grumpy replied. Come on, we have to get going ... to the west, was it?"

"Yes, to the west, along the river."

"Let's go then." Grumpy commanded and not wasting more time, he walked ahead under the first sunrays.

Mux was still rubbing his eyes sleepily, but he quickly pulled himself together and caught up with the modd. They were both walking along the river that was weaving through the park. Little bridges crossed the river and it was flowing below them, calmy, no hurry at all. It stroke the stones, it gave water generously to the thirsty birds and invited the frogs to plop into its cool waters. At least there were no people, cars, car horns. At the end of the park, the water was rushing down forming a picturesque waterfall.

"It's dangerous." Mux observed. "We must go round."

"Chicken" Growled Grumpy and folding his elbows, pretended to be a hen: "Cluck-cluck-cluck"

"Hey!" Mux bristled up. "I'm not afraid, I just observed that it's too high."

"I'm not going to waste time going the long way just because you're scared!" Grumpy was still annoying him.

"Well, then get going!" The mott got angry.

"Ooooo, so you're REALLY scared... cluck-cluck!" Grumpy grinned.

"Nonsense!" Mux was getting quite tense. "Just watch me, you slob!"

The mott approached the edge of the slope towards the valley, looked around and started descending confidently. Grumpy waited for a while and followed him. The slope was quite steep. The earth was sandy and crumbling. Mux used every stone, every root that was sticking from the ground, to hold to. Going down, the noise of the splashing river became louder and louder. A little whirlpool had formed and it eagerly drew in everything that fell there. Mux stopped for a second, looked downwards, and saw a little path near the water.

"That's where we need to go." He tried to shout louder than the noisy river, and pointed the path to Grumpy while holding a root with his claw. The mott nodded. Next thing he knew, the root Mux was holding on to, was plucked out of the ground. The mott staggered backwards, but managed to hold up for a second, he reached out to Grumpy with hope for help...

"Aaaaaaa!" Mux was falling down towards the water. Grumpy didn't even wink. His eyes only followed the enemy falling down to the rough water, and a bit of a smile crossed his face...

Chapter 20 Offside or Not?

"Hey, you're in my way!" The Sun scolded two clouds that had stopped above the meadow just to have a chat.

"Offside!" Someone was shouting down there.

"What do you mean, offside!? He was covered!" Another one screamed.

"100% offside!" The first one replied.

"But why?" A third one argued.

"Attack!" Jelly shouted.

"You can't attack! We've called a time-out!." The first one scolded her.

"Jelly, this is your goal, the goalposts, ... ours are in the opposite direction!" Pagu shouted.

But it was late. Jelly fainted and kicked the ball in her own goal.

"Gooooooooaaaaaallll!" She shouted and started jumping for joy like a little child.

"Women!" A few hundred motts and modds shouted altogether.

"Hey!" Pagu answered. "Mind your language or I will punish you with two rounds of the playground... the meadow!"

"Well, you can at least learn the rules!" Someone said among the crowd.

"Well, you can at least learn the rules!" Pagu imitated the voice making funny faces.

"Alright, alright.. I got a little bit confused." Jelly apologized. "You can teach us instead of making fun of us."

"Ohhhhh..." A group sigh floated above the meadow. There was an awkward silence, but in the end, a mott stepped forward, knelt down and made a playground out of sticks and stones.

"This here is your goal and that – ours. Offside means..." And so the explanation began.

After one night out in the open, the two armies woke up hungry and confused. No one dared leave the meadow, but staying there all day, not doing anything...

"Football!" Jelly shouted. "You all play, right?"

A few hundred heads nodded in confirmation.

"So Pagu and I are captains and we'll divide you into two teams. Now, you, over there, the plump one, you're in my team."

"But that's offensive!" Pinky mumbled. "My belly's a bit bloated after yesterday's soup. Otherwise..."

"You'll make a perfect goalkeeper." Jelly continued, not paying attention to his mumbling.

"You, come here." Pagu ordered, waving her claw. There were motts and modds on both teams. That meant there could possibly be certain pressure among them, but once the game started, everyone was enthusiastic and quite into the game.

"Pass the ball!" The Sun shouted from above and made a gesture to a boring cloud to move away.

"Gooooaaaaal!" Jelly screamed and her teammates gathered round her to congratulate her.

"Goaaaaaal!!" The Sun shouted and though he wanted to watch some more, he had to go on his way further to the west.

"This time you got the write goal!" Pagu smiled and hurried to scold her players.

"Hey, is this how you play? You, don't let them feint on your left. And you, why were you roaming about like that?"

How the game ended is of no importance even though it was a topic of discussion all evening. Neither is it important how the water polo game which was held in the nearby swamp ended (the frogs weren't at all happy with all the excitement in the water). The same goes for the blackberry eating contest. There

was also a who-can-let-out-the-noisiest-fart competition. (The smelliest fart event was cancelled on Magu's insistence.)

Actually, the most important thing at the end of the day was that there were no soldiers on the meadow. There were exhausted modds and motts who could hardly wait for the new day to come, so that "We can show them how to play the game." Of course, it didn't all go without a few misunderstandings. About a dozen insults were exchanged between the two teams, but the presence of Jelly and Pagu made everyone behave themselves and be better and more considerate. After all, who would like to deal with an angry princess!

Chapter 21 Water, Water, and Water Again

'Aaaaaaaa....' Mux cried out. Then he found himself into the water. The whirlpool was so strong that it eagerly drew the little mott in. For a few seconds Mux was in something like a powerful washing machine. He was spinning around and lost track of where he was. He was struggling for every breath of fresh air he could get. Despite all his effort, the water was pulling him deeper down. His sight grew dim. Thump! Something rushed past Mux. He could see a large piece of wood in the foamy water. It plunged to the river-bed and then shot up just like a powerful rocket. "It must have fallen from somewhere," The mott thought and gathered all his strength to try to hold on to the tree. It shot past him like a fast train. At the very last minute, Mux's claw stuck into the bark of the tree.

"Yeyyyyy!" The mott cried out when he showed up on the surface of the water having mounted the stump as if he were on the back of a galloping bull. A few minutes passed before Mux calmed down. He closed his eyes "for just a second" so as to steady himself after the danger had gone. But that second tricked him. His body rested on the stump. The sunrays stroke his fur, and Mux dozed off. "Aaaaaaaa..." the mott screamed. The water had ruthlessly interrupted his sweet nap. "Plop!"

"Oh, no, back to the water..."

Once he swam to the surface, he looked around. It was cold and dark. The stump was floating a few metres from him. The mott tried to reach it but he couldn't swim to it. The current was strong and thrashed him like a little branch in rapids. "Where am I?" Mux looked around.

"Nooooooo...." He screamed again. "Oh, please, not the sewer!"

Alas, that's exactly where he was! The river was flowing into the underground city sewer. Mux was fighting the current. He was trying with all his might, and even though he was the best swimmer among the motts, he managed to get to the bank of the concrete river-bed.

"Oh my, what a nasty smell! This will be perfect for a modds' home!" Mux snarled and pressed his nose. He remembered the moment before he tumbled into the water, Grumpy's vicious look when he refused to help Mux. The mott got angry. "I knew that I could not trust him!"

After his eyes got used to the scarce light, he started exploring the tunnel.

"Walk along the river, my dear hound"

Even when it flows underground.

Follow in my footsteps, my dear..."

That's what was written in the note at the old mott's door. Mux remembered that part. This gave him courage and he bravely went further on. But he got to an obstacle just a few minutes later. The big pipe where the water flowed, branched into three smaller pipes. Each of them continued in a different direction. Which way should he go?

"Walk along the river.... Follow in my footsteps..." Mux kept repeating to himself and he never stopped looking about. However, there were no traces of anything. Wherever he looked, there was nothing to hint to the right direction. The tunnels were equally big, the water in them – the same amount. There were no placards, no signs, no graffiti on the walls. There was nothing to distinguish one tunnel from the other. They were surprisingly clean. Mux lost a lot of time walking around and checking everything. There was nothing there.

"Ohhh!" The mott moaned while he was looking anxiously around the river bank. In front of him there was a little soft drink metal can. Mux kicked it a few times. He thought he might kick it in the river, but he stopped himself. "Motts don't leave garbage lying around!" He scolded himself. Then he saw a garbage can nearby. "What's that doing here?"

Mux took the can from the ground and went to the garbage can. He stood less than a meter away from it, he aimed carefully like a basketball player, and...

"Point!" He shouted gladly.

"Hey, that h-h-h-hurt." The garbage can answered.

"Wow!" Mux was quite surprised.

"I'm n-n-n-n-ot "Hey", "Came the reply.

"A talking garbage can? So typical of the wizard." Mux murmured quietly. "Dear can, where should I go to reach the final goal?" The mott recited.

"Come h-h-h-h-here and find out." The garbage can lured him.

"Mux came closer and peeped in the garbage. And then...

"H-h-h-h-h-ello!" There was a huge head with two fiery eyes attached to it. "D-d-d-d-d-don't be afraid!" A tongue split in two licked the mott's nose.

"Aa-a-a-a..." Mux stuttered, horror-struck at the sight of the enormous snake.

"You're a little bit ss-s-s-s-mall, but you'll do for breakfast-s-s-s-sst." The snake hissed.

"A s-s-s-s-snake," The word tumbled from the mott's mouth with a stutter.

“Not juss-s-s—st a s-s-s—snake, but a python! You’re trembling. Are you cold? Come here and I’ll warm you up!” The snake started gently coiling around Mux.

“I’m looking for the wizard ...” He mumbled.

“I’m looking for a magic breakfast-s-s-s—st.” The python was slowly weaving around the mott, its tongue was licking Mux’s fur.

“Now jus-s-s-s—s-s-t relax-x-x-x. “

Mux tried to free himself, but he was trapped in the snake’s embrace. He could hardly breathe. He tried to say something, but he was out of breath. He closed his eyes. What he saw last were the sharp teeth twinkling like stars in the dark abyss of the python’s mouth. The mouth was enormous...

Bang, bang, bang. Silence.

“You don’t need to thank me!” A rough voice said.

Mux was still squeezing his eyes shut. Could there possibly be anyone else in the python’s belly? The wizard? Nooooo, that must be someone else.

“Actually, you have to thank me! After all, I saved your skin.” The voice continued.

Mux opened one eye hesitantly, then the other.

“Grumpy!” He cried out.

“Who did you expect?” Grumpy growled opposite him, holding the python’s head tightly in his claw.

Chapter 22 Some Help From a Pet

“But how?! What are you doing here? Where did you come from?” Mux’s questions floated in the air around just like tiny flies.

“Don’t get too conceited! You’re of no importance to me. It’s all just for that tiresome wizard.” Grumpy mumbled. “Besides, the waterfall thing seemed... fun! Like a water slide, but a scary one!” The modd grinned.

“I guess when you found yourself in the smelly sewer, it felt like home, right?” Mux teased him.

“Ooooo, my stinky home...” Grumpy roamed to the memory of his damp cave.

“I don’t want to dissss-s-s-s-s-sturb you, but I’d better go.” The python hissed.

“You’re going straight to my belly!” Mux roared. “I’m hungry!”

“Ooooo, fate! How could you punishhhhh-h-hh- me like that – to let me be eaten far, far away from my home, the place where I was-s-s-s-s born!” The snake cried out.

"Far from your native land? Mux repeated so as to be sure that he had understood correctly.

"I was-s-s-s born in the tropical fores-s-s-s-sts-s-s of Asss-s-s-s—sia. I was a curious little s-s-s-nake. I lived a carefree life until one day they capture me. The people s-s-s-sent me here, to be... " The snake made a long pause. Grumpy loosened his grip a little. "I was s-s-s-sold as-s-s-s a pet to a family. I, the big tiger python, a peeet!" Huge tears rolled down to the ground.

"That sounds quite bad." Grumpy said and let the python go. "But you could have ended as somebody's boots or bag."

"How did you end up in the sewer?" Mux was curious.

"I ran away." The snake answered. "One day the people left the lid of the aquarium ajar. I s-s-s-slid nois-s-s-seless-sss-s-s-sly through the s-s-s-sitting room, crawled in the hall, and went s-s-s-s-traight to the toilet. That's-s-s-s- how I got to the c-c-c-c-city ss-s-s-s-ewer. Well, it's-s-s-s- not ex-x-x-x-actly like home in here, but at leas-s-s-s-t I'm freeeeeeeee! By the way, I was-s-s-s s-s-s-s-tuck in a plas-s-s-stic pipe, and if it hadn't been for one tiny magic wizard ..."

"The wizard!" Grumpy jumped up. "Tell us about him? Where is he?"

"Ohhhh..." A long sigh came from the python. "I hoped that we wouldn't get to thiss-s-s-s."

He closed his eyes and started reciting:

"Is it a magic-c-cian you're looking for in thess-s-s-se dark and dangerous-s-s- waters-s-s-,

Or maybe in the gutters-s-s-s...

If you made friends-s-s-s with the python,

Then your heart is as-s-s-s s-s-s-strong as-s-s-s iron

Hurry down the tunnel,

Come and help me or I'll be in trouble.

I'm fighting a mons-s-s-ter here

It has thousands-s-s-s of plastic mouths-s-s-s that never dis-s-s-appear.

" Those rhymes agaaaaaain!" Grumpy bellowed.

" A monster!" Mux repeated and was secretly happy that Grumpy was with him in this.

"Down this -s-s-s tunnel," The python pointed and continued: "If you want, I'll come with you because-s-s-se it's-s-s-s so boring here. Hardly anyone ever comes-s-s-s by, there's-s-s-s no-one to have a bite with."

“ Ummm... meaning there’s no-one to bite or no-one to have a bite with?” The mott wondered and remembered how he had almost become “a bite” a little while ago.

“What’s the difference” The snake wondered.

“You can have this conversation another time. Let’s go now.” Grumpy commanded and started toward the tunnel in question.

The python followed him. Mux decided it was best to walk at a distance behind them. It was not that he was scared – no. However, it was better to be careful with a hungry snake. They walked for about an hour. Hundreds of pipes connected to the sewage. There were little and big pipes with all sorts of trash and smells. Hundreds of plastic bottles and thousands of plastic straws were swimming in the water. What a colourful mess it was! The mass of garbage was floating further ahead in the tunnel just like a raft. It was then that they heard a familiar voice behind a corner, it was followed by bright light.

“Here it comes, here it goes!

Now it’s plastic,

then it glows.

Magic wonderful this is!

Bang, bang, boom!”

“ Ooooo, thunder and lightning! What a mess I’ll be fighting..”

Chapter 23 On the Road With the Wizard

“That’s our wizard!” Grumpy grinned and hurried towards him.

“There’s no doubt, it’s him!” The python agreed.

“What about the monster?” Mux sighed, but gathered courage, and caught up with the rest.

“Plastic and garbage, disappear!” The wizard kept saying.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Plop.

“Ooo what did I do again!

I flooded everything –

this is something from which I really must refrain!”

The old mott muttered.

“Hey, I don’t know what you are – a mad wizard or maybe something else, but get things right at once, just the way they were before!” Grumpy bellowed, and the mott jumped so high with surprise that his

glasses flew from his face and tumbled to the floor. The wizard looked around startled, but then he recognized Mux. He saw the python as well. Once he adjusted his glasses on his nose, he continued with a bit of sadness in his voice: "Oh, oh, sadness and sorrow! In what a terrible mess the world has to greet tomorrow!"

"Enough of the rhymes!" Grumpy bellowed even louder, and the python huddled in the corner a bit frightened.

"Wizard, we are here to look for help." Mux tried to break the ice.

"I? A wizard?! A failure, an imposter maybe. Alas, magic does definitely not work for me. "The old mott grew sad, and then, for the first time, after a long sigh, the rhymes disappeared. "I am not a wizard at all. I had to protect the Ancient Mott Book. One day, while I was dusting it, I decided to turn the pages. There were recipes for health, various formulas for success, prosperity spells and magic in there. It all seemed interesting to me. I thought I could handle it, so..."

"It seems like you bit off more than you can chew." Grumpy giggled while he was looking about the hall they were in. There were heaps of rubbish everywhere. The plastic bottles were the most numerous. The straws were in a pile in one corner; a pile that touched the ceiling.

"At first I started with teleportation spells." The pretended wizard said. "I've always wanted to visit the pyramids in Egypt, the tower in Paris... and Rome with its narrow streets."

"Alriiiight. We got it. You like to travel!" Grumpy interrupted him rudely.

"Anyway," The old mott continued timidly. "That was relatively easy. Well, it's true that I did arrive in Ribaritsa* instead of Rome and in Popovo** instead of Paris, but in time I learned to be more accurate, and in the end, I reached the Colosseum... I started transforming one object in another. For example, my kitchen chair turned into a vase..." The mott paused and started tapping his foot. "The vase was quite good. Next, I tried with another kitchen chair, then a third one, I moved to the sitting room... It turned out well, but when I got hungry and I wanted to sit down and have a snack, I realized that I had 20 vases and not a single chair."

"Ha-ha-ha!" Everyone laughed.

"The trial-error method." The mott tried to justify himself. "Then I decided I could help the world, and save it from that nasty monster.

"The monster!" Mux shivered.

"The plastic monster with its millions of tentacles – the straws. The monster that suffocates the forest and poisons the river..."

*Ribaritsa is a village located in the Balkan Mountain range in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula.

** Popovo is a town in northeastern Bulgaria.

"I'm fighting a monster here

It has thousands of plastic mouths that never disappear".

Mux remembered this.

"So, how's it going?" Grumpy asked.

"Well, I keep on trying..." The old mott pointed at a pile of new toys: cars, dolls, lego. "The plastic doesn't disappear, but at least I turn it into something that can be used again."

"It's-s-s-s called rec-c-c-c-cycling." The python tried to help.

"Good. We don't want to be in your way, but I'd really like it you FIXED YOUR MEEEEEEEEESS!" Grumpy bellowed and some of the straws got so scared that they turned into toys by their own will.

"Oh, that's what it is, is it... I went there to help. Princess Pagu asked me..." The old mott explained apologetically.

Mux realized that Pagu was behind this when she showed up at the middle of the battle and sent Grumpy and him in a hurry on a joint mission. He wondered if she had planned this from the very beginning..."

"However, I will fix things." The wizard interrupted his thoughts. "The garbage won't disappear... I'll come back to it later. I'll just take my scepter."

"And straight to the meadow, right?" Grumpy said emphatically.

"Yes, yes, we're going there now. Come on, gather around me." He made a sign to everyone to come close.

"I'm coming with you tooooo!" The python hissed.

"Pit-a-pat,

off to the meadow far ahead.

Fix everything I've messed up,

go, run and gallop."

What followed was a bright light....The light disappeared. Mux opened his eyes and...

"Sand?" He wondered.

"And pyramids!" Grumpy added.

“Well... we did talk about them...” The old mott was disconcerted.

“They’re nic-c-c-c-c-e.” The python remarked and simultaneously shouted “Hot, hot, it’s-s-s-s burning, it’s-s-s-s burniiiiiiiiiiiiing...”

“Pit-a-pat, go away!” The scepter hit the boiling hot sand and the company vanished into thin air.

“Phewwwwww, phewwwwww,” The wind was roaring and thousands of snowflakes hit Mux in the face.

“S-s-s—s-s-snow?!” The python grumbled. Wherever you looked, the eyes could see only snow, the wind was as sharp as a razor.

“You said you were hot!” The old mott made another excuse, but once he saw Grumpy’s icy look, he decided to take immediate steps. “Pit-a-pat, bring our home to us, be quick at that!”

A bright light followed and everyone disappeared once again. Plop!

“Waaaaateeeeeer!” Mux shouted. He was getting tired of getting wet all the time.

“Home! My home!” The python cried out, and slid into the water. He quickly recognized the forest he was born in. There were big trees there overhanging the water; everything was green, as far as the eyes could see. Thousands of insects were hovering in the air and it felt as if they were at a busy airport.

“Ha! That worked out well.” The old mott scratched his head.

“Thank you!” The snake cried out. She could not believe that she was back to the tropical forests of Asia.

“It’s time to go,” Grumpy urged him, but this time his voice was quiet and calm.

“I’ll miss you!” The wizard added.

“Farewell!” The python hissed and his body gracefully slid into the water.

“Enjoy your freedom!” Mux shouted and waved the snake goodbye. She was now out of sight.

The old mott adjusted his glasses and tried again:

“Pit-a-pat, meadow, come here right away!”

Nothing happened.

“What’s wrong?” Grumpy snarled.

“The scepter must touch the ground.” The wizard answered.

“Hit the ground then!” Mux and Grumpy cried out.

“I can’t, we’re in the water!” The old mott frowned.

Mux couldn't take it anymore. He reached out, grabbed the scepter from the mott's hand, and hit him on the head with it. A bright light lit up the water. When the light disappeared, they heard voices.

"Pass the ball! Don't you see he's there!"

"Watch out on the left!" Another one shouted.

"Stop her!" A third one was screaming.

"Goaaaaaaaal!" A hundred voices burst out. Among them Grumpy recognized princess Jelly's voice.

"Hm, I think we're on the right meadow." The modd noticed gladly while he was scratching his head where Mux had hit him with the sceptre.

Chapter 24 Back to Your Post

"I expected to find havoc here..." Mux was surprised.

"It doesn't look like a battle field at all! No-one is limping, no-one is missing a tooth or two..." Grumpy frowned and looked around.

"No-one's shouting, fighting or insulting anyone..." Mux added.

"They're having fun without us!" Grumpy got angry.

"I have to admit that our wives are doing well!" Mux agreed. "Shall we let them finish the game?"

"It seems interesting..." The "wizard" joined the conversation.

"You! Keep quiet!" Grumpy scolded him. "You made such a mess..."

"What mess?!" The old mott snapped. "Hey, look at that – do you see how nice everything is going!?"

Jelly had just finished the run around enjoying the round of applause when she saw the newcomers.

"Hey, that's the Boss!" Hundreds of eyes stared at Grumpy.

"What are you doing, you lazybones!" The modd bellowed. "Why aren't you fighting and winning?"

"We are, we are winning! 3:2 for us so far in this game!" Someone replied.

"What game are you talking about?" Grumpy stared.

"Hunger games!" Another voice said.

"Huh?" The modd still stared.

"Well, there's no food... so to say... we're starving. But we play and time passes well." Mux recognized Pinky's voice.

“Well, we’re not starving!” Princess Pagu interrupted. “We brought food from the palace, but Pinky can never get enough.”

“Some of the soldiers are in the forest.” Princess Jelly continued. “They’re picking mushrooms and fruit. “

Grumpy couldn’t take it anymore, so he slapped his forehead.

“My army! My army is picking mushrooms and fruit!” His face grew red, his lower lip started shivering, his claw snapped nervously...

“But stinky, my dear,” Jelly spoke gently, “most boring among the boring, dirtiest among the dirty...” She didn’t finish because Grumpy bellowed.

“I’m not dirty and that’s the problem!” His eyes fell upon the “wizard” just as hammer to anvil.

“Oops, that’s for me!” The old mott was embarrassed. He adjusted his glasses, stroked his beard, held the scepter tightly, and began: “Pit-a-pat, let everything go back to the way it used to be!

The scepter touched the ground and light embraced the meadow. Mux opened his eyes. Indeed, everything was the way it used to be. The modds were dirty and stinking once again, and the motts were clean and smelling lovely.

“Ha! Miracles happen! That magic was gripping!” The “wizard” recited, he was obviously surprised at the result.

“I find it hard to believe!” Grumpy said while looking around. His fur was covered all over with dirty spots, he kind of smelled bad...

“There now, everything is as it should be, my dear!” Princess Jelly’s voice came, a bit sad. “Of course, I liked you even the way you were before.”

“I had already got used to him as well. “ Mux added. “I mean that he didn’t annoy me as much as he used to...”

Grumpy made a gesture to everyone to keep silence. It was in the daylight, you could smell the odour/scent of the flowers everywhere, and all those birds were flying about...

“How silly!” He thought, sighed and gave an order: “Let the game continue!”

Hundreds of joyous exclamations filled the meadow.

“I might decide to take a shower someday,” Grumpy scratched his head and his heart jumped a little when he met Jelly’s eyes. The modd princess was uncontrollable. She kept running up and down the field, giving directions, scolding the slower players. Pagu, who was smaller in size, was whizzing with ease among the big clumsy soldiers, she was scoring goal after goal. Goula was a bit envious. Mux didn’t take the smile off his face. He nudged Grumpy from time to time saying: “That’s my wife!”

"I know, you bore!" Grumpy replied and added: "Shut up and let me watch the game."

The football event ended just in time because the sun was going down and night was about to come.

"Don't think that I won't thrash you next time I see you!" Grumpy bellowed. "The battle hasn't ended!"

"Ooo, not at all!" Mux got a bit angry. Then he secretly glanced around to make sure no-one was listening and said: "Next Tuesday, same place, right?"

"Same time!" Grumpy nodded and gave his people a sign to retreat to the cave.

"I guess it's time I went home too." The wizard said.

"Are you still here?!" Grumpy gave him a murderous look.

"Ooooo, I no longer care about you! The old mott snapped, turned around, tapped the scepter, a bright light flashed like lightning.

A second before he disappeared, he added: "Before I have forgotten! Take your onions with you, I'm going to the garbage and I'll be out of view."

It started raining onions on the meadow...

"Better onions than garbage." Mux thought. Then he remembered the tons of plastic garbage in the sewer.

"It's not a bad idea to help him with the garbage..." The mott cried out while Grumpy was walking away to his cave, fighting away the onion heads.

"Whoever loses the game next week will clean the sewer!" The mott leader snapped.

"Whoever wins will help!" Mux added and smiled. Grumpy didn't answer, but it was not necessary. For him staying in the stuffy damp sewer was repose.

That evening everyone went to bed. Some were happy, others suffered the loss of a point; there were those who wished Grumpy and Mux had come back one day later. Sillyhead and Dunderhead were the saddest. After all, they had missed out on all the fun on the meadow. The battle, I mean.

"Hey, scarecrow!" Sillyhead bellowed. "What was that fairy tale?"

"YOU are the scarecrow... which fairy tale?" Dunderhead answered.

"About the rabbit and the crocodile."

"Ohhhh.." Sillyhead let out a sigh of boredom, but started telling the story anyway. "So a crocodile was sitting in the river when he saw a tiny fluffy bunny on the riverbank and approached him quietly..."

Chapter 25 An Important Correction in the Ancient Mott Book

Next Day Bobo called Krissy up on the phone.

“Hey, did you hear about the strange onion rain that fell on the meadow last night... they’ve just announced it on the radio!”

“I suggest we go there and investigate!” Krissy said. “I will gather the girls, and you call up Angel and Zdravko. We can also play hide-and-seek in the forest.”

“That’s a great idea! We can call it the “Big Hiding” “Bobo suggested.

“No way!” Mux rushed out of the wardrobe. “No more hiding or we’ll all turn into onions and soup.”

“I don’t understand what’s there not to like about the soup?” Pinky showed up.

“Oh, I slept like a log!” Izzy peeped out of the wardrobe.

“One can tell – your hair is still bushy.”

“Where’s Emmy!” Magu frowned. She could hardly wait to hug her friend.

“Hey, I completely forgot – It’s Wednesday!” Krissy slapped her forehead on the other side of the telephone line. “Stay where you are.” She ordered. “We’re coming. I’ll pick up the others on the way.”

As we all remember (if we haven’t forgotten), the motts and the children played together every Wednesday. Exactly one week had passed from their last meeting, so they had a lot to talk about: the kidnap, to start with, and the onion rain. Krissy ran with her pyjamas on, she woke Emily up (she lived on the upper floor), they split up to get Zdravko, Catherine and Angel. Soon (though not as soon as the children wished) they rushed into Doddie’s place and hugged their fluffy friends. Then they kept quiet so as to hear all the adventures up to the smallest detail.

Meanwhile, in a faraway house, number 14, on a tree, in a big colourful noisy city, a tiny, very old mott was sitting surrounded by his vases, bending over a thick book with a leather cover and metal plate. He was correcting something. It was the following sentence:

“If something has neither been heard, nor seen for 30 years, then it’s turned to dust. Thus, for example, modds no longer exist.”

The mott scratched his head, spit on the pencil, and scratched out the sentence. He then wrote bellow it:

“The enmity is over now. What we needed was some soup, onions, and vases, so let’s all bow. It’s true, the magic sometimes evades me, but thousands years of experience and a stick can praise me. Thus, call me not an ancient mott, be it a thousand years old. From this day on I’m a wizard, and, oh, that is a wonderful transition! I am the one to end the war, to unite two worlds that were separate before. I am the one who played with magic, so that cleanliness and filth changed places, for those who faced that, was it tragic? Today I write down here a new rule of

law and peace: motts and modds from far and near, should get along and let it be clear that all arguments shall be decided on the football pitch and that is final!”

With these words the most ancient mott, the last of the Council of Elders, the newly pronounced wizard, left the pencil, smiled gladly, and closed the book with a bang. He cleaned the dust off the front cover and saw a sign revealed underneath: “This is the most ancient mott book. Written and created by most celebrated sages and full of wisest words of wisdom, so as to help motts in their wise or not so wise deeds.”

THE END

Epilogue

“I don’t feel like sleeping today!” Magu frowned.

“Don’t you? Alright.” Mux replied. “Then I’ll tell you a long good night fairy tale. Do you know the story of Snow White and the Seven Giants?”

“Nooo, I know the tale and it’s not like that!” Magu turned her head.

“I assure you it’s a different story.” Mux said and sat comfortably in the bed next to her.

“So once upon a time, a long, long time ago, there was a girl – Snow White. One day she went to pick some mushrooms in the forest. However, while she was walking up and down the paths looking for raspberries...

“Wasn’t she picking mushrooms?” Magu reminded him.

“That’s right – mushrooms. I’m only checking if you’re listening to me!” Mux eased out of the question.

“So while she was walking around the forest, she suddenly found herself deep in the forest, and when the sun started to set, our Snow White realized that she had got lost. She didn’t know where she was.

“The way I did?” Magu stared.

“That’s right! She got lost like you! But you didn’t get scared, and she... my, oh my, how scared she was! She sat down on a tree stump and cried silently. Just then she heard a voice behind her: “Hey, are these mushrooms good for stew?” Snow White was startled, she turned around and saw a giant!”

“Oh, dear!” Magu stared with her eyes wide open.

“You guessed it! That was his name! Dear was the eldest of seven brothers. He smiled to the princess...”

“Snow White ...”

“Yes, to Snow White. He explained to her in a very gentle voice that there was nothing to be afraid of, and he even invited her home.”

“Where?” Magu asked.

“In summer Dear and his brothers rented the bear’s den, and in winter, when the bear hibernated, they went down south where it was hot and they didn’t need shelter. That happened in the summer. “It’s scary to walk the forest with a stranger.” Snow White thought, but she had no choice. The bear from the cave was roaming about too. Snow White felt good in the giants’ home. The brothers treated her nicely. However, it was very difficult even to climb the table and sit next to them – that’s how tall they were! Then the youngest brother had an idea: Snow White could go to the nearby circus and pick up some stilts.”

“What are these stilts?” Magu asked.

“Long sticks that you can step on and become tall.” Mux explained and went on. “Snow White liked the idea, and after Dear showed her the way, she took off to the circus. Indeed, she found stilts there, but, surprisingly enough, she fell in love with the clown. They both liked each other at first sight and instead of going back to the brothers, Goldilocks...” Mux paused.

“Snow Snow White white!” Magu cried out.

“Yes, yes, she!” Mux went on. “She decided to travel the world with the circus. The clown’s name was Snowy, she became Snow White once she married him. “

Magu frowned. “I got confused! Wasn’t she Snow White even before that? If she’s just become Snow White, what was her name before that?”

“I’ve already told you – Goldilocks! And that’s the end of the fairy tale!”

Magu sat up in bed. Her eyes glistened with tears.

“Hey, that wasn’t a sad story!” Mux justified himself. “It was even supposed to be funny!”

“I know.” Magu said. “But it was so strange – almost like Sillyhead and Dunderhead’s stories.”

Mux frowned.

“My fairy tales are better!”

“Of course, I just felt a bit sad, that’s all.”

Mux wiped her tears and smiled at her.

“We might invite them over sometime, what do you say to that?” He suggested.

“Yeeeeeeeees!” Magu shouted and gave her father a big hug.

In the meantime, Sillyhead and Dunderhead were also going back to the cheerful evenings with the little mott. Now and then they let out a heavy sigh or two, their fat bellies heaving up and down.

“What are you sighing about so much – I can hear you at the other end of the cave!” Grumpy shouted from behind the wall, his voice echoed throughout the corridor.

Sillyhead and Dunderhead looked at each other.

“Come here at once, you two!” Grumpy’s voice sounded.

“O-oh...I guess he’ll punish us after all.” Sillyhead became gloomy.

“It is high time...”Dunderhead said. “He’s been avoiding us for two days.”

The two shuffled their feet to Grumpy’s chamber. What was it going to be this time? Soaking clothes in mud? Stealing dirty water from the toiler? Push-ups above newly blossomed flowers? Grumpy was especially imaginative when it came to punishments. They stood in front of the door and looked at the ground.

“Princess Jelly wants you.” Grumpy said. “I don’t need you at all!”

“Princess Jelly?” The two modds were all ears.

“Yes, I!” Jelly smiled at them. “There have been rumours... that you can tell great fairy tales...”

“What! Did I hear well? You tell fairy tales!” Grumpy stood up and reddened. “Shall I just transfer you to Cheburashka kindergarten where you can also change diapers, eh? This here is not a nursery school!”

Jelly simply took him by the hand and made a gesture which meant to keep silent.

“Well, is that so?”

“Well...” Sillyhead started. “Dunderhead makes better stories up. He has a good maternal ins-ins-ins-tistinctis...”

“Instinct.” Jelly corrected him.

“Yes, yes, that’s the one.” Sillyhead nodded while Dunderhead was just standing and staring at the ground.

“Lovely!” Jelly clapped her hands, and Grumpy and the two modds looked at her with surprise. “Look for ideas because you will soon be very busy!”

Then she turned to Grumpy who looked at her with eyes wide open and staring, a little bit like walnut shells. He was blinking quickly and was trying to understand whether he had understood correctly.

“Yes, you’re going to be a father.” Jelly confirmed and embraced him while Sillyhead and Dunderhead jumped for joy like little children around the cave.

The news spread throughout the cave in no time. It crossed the forest and reached Mottland where it blew up like fireworks during the next football game – Tuesday afternoon, 5:30 sharp, remember?