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Opening extract from  
**The Amazing  
Adventures of Curd  
the Lion (and Us!) in  
the Land at the Back  
of Beyond**

Written by  
**Alan Gilliland**

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*"I never had brother nor sister to incite such romps as make children  
familiar with nook and cranny,"* George MacDonald – Lilith

CHAPTER ONE. St. George and the Dragon.

Up St. George!” yelled Henry.

Up flew Curd the Lion, leaving his tummy behind.

SWISH! Henry’s sword whistled past Curd’s ear.

Henry and Henrietta were playing St. George and the Dragon. Henry was St. George, Curd the yellow bean-bag Lion was the Dragon, and Henrietta was the Fair Damsel-in-Distress to be saved from the Dragon.

Down came Curd, landing on his tummy, THUMP!

“My Quest is done, Milady,” shouted Henry. “I have slain yon Dragon and saved you, my Damsel-in-Distress!”

“Horray! Now it’s my turn. I’m going to be St. George!” shouted Henrietta, louder, throwing off Mum’s nightie that had been her cloak.

“And you can be the Damsel-in-Distress,” she laughed.

“Of course I can’t,” said Henry, “I’m a boy. I can’t be a Damsel-in-Distress.”

“Then you can be the Damson-in-Distress, then,” cried Henrietta, “and I can be St. Georgette.”

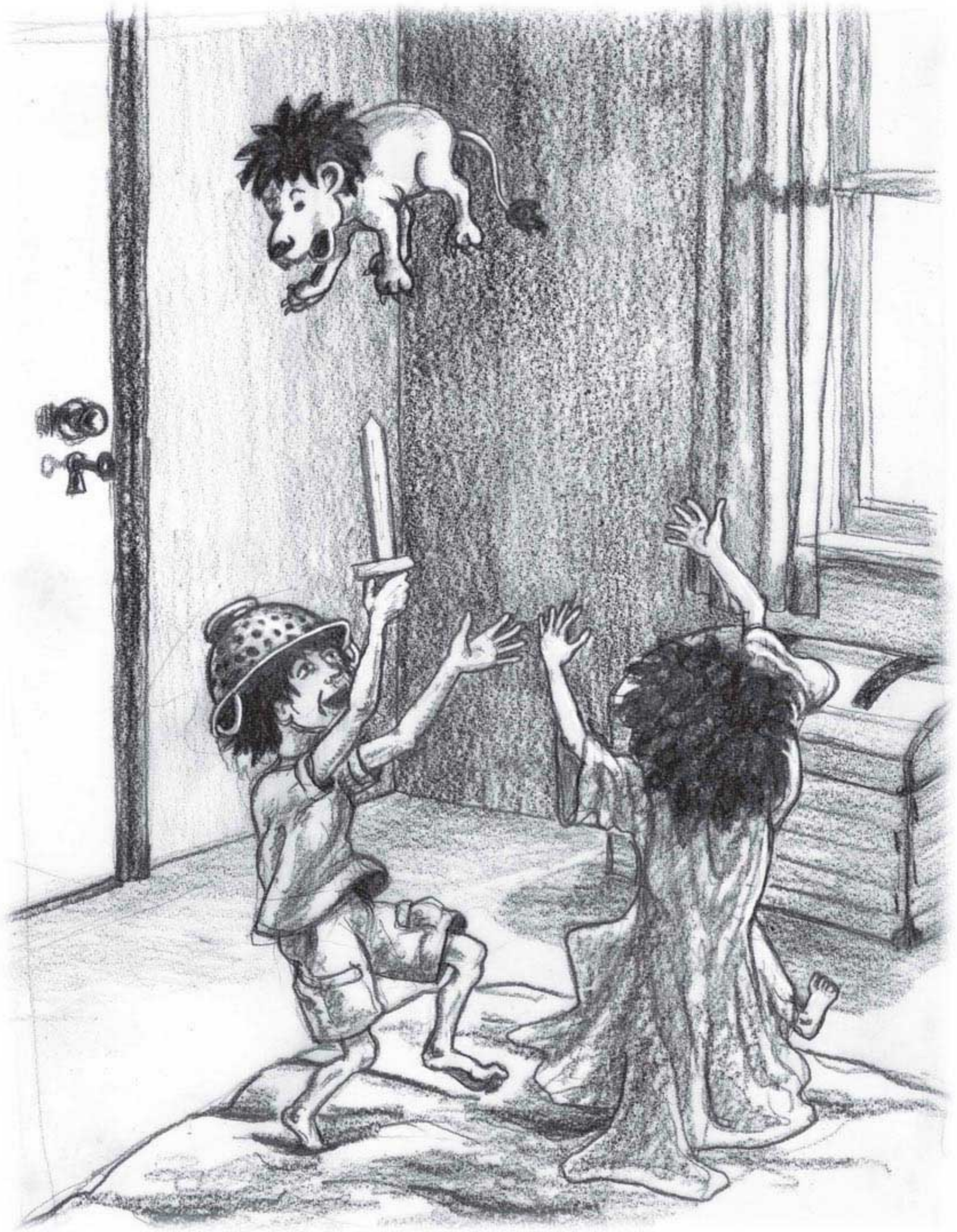
She grabbed his sword and helmet and shield and threw Mum’s nightie over his head.

“Ugh!” groaned Henry, catching sight of himself in the mirror.

“No... Help! You’ve got to cry, Help!” said Henrietta. “Ok? Off we go!”

“Help!”

“I, the Questing knight, St.Georgette, will save you, fair Damson, from this beastly Dragon.”



Up went Curd again, thinking that he had had enough of flying for today. "Die, Dragon, Die!" yelled Henrietta as she let fly with her sword.

## St. George and the Dragon

WHACK! Henrietta's sword caught Curd in the middle of his thought and down he spun, clipping the dressing table.

CRASH! The talcum-powder jar and jewellery box tumbled to the floor with him, scattering Mum's jewellery all over the floor.

As a white cloud of talcum settled in every corner of the bedroom, Curd the Albino Lion lay staring up at the ghosts of Henrietta and Henry.

"Henry! Henrietta! What's all the racket about? What are you doing up there?" A shrill voice came up the stairs, followed closely by their mother.

The door to the bedroom opened and there stood the tall, slight, stooped figure of Mother staring down her long, beak-like, nose at them, her black hair a wild shock against the light on the landing behind.

"What on earth are you doing in my bedroom?" she screeched.

For a moment there was silence. Mother looked at Curd, lying frozen in the snowy waste that had been the bedroom carpet. She looked at Henrietta, the White Knight, waving her wooden sword in the air, foot planted firmly on Curd's back. She looked aghast. She didn't see Henry, who had disappeared into a little heap under her nightie.

"Look at the mess you've made, Henrietta!" Mum sat down on the bed and sprung back up again. "Henry! What are you doing in my bed – in my nightie, too? Get out, the pair of you. Go right outside immediately, with this hairbrush and Henry, brush Henrietta down until there's not a spot of white on her. NOW!"

The Twins ran straight downstairs, forgetting in their excitement to take Curd with them.

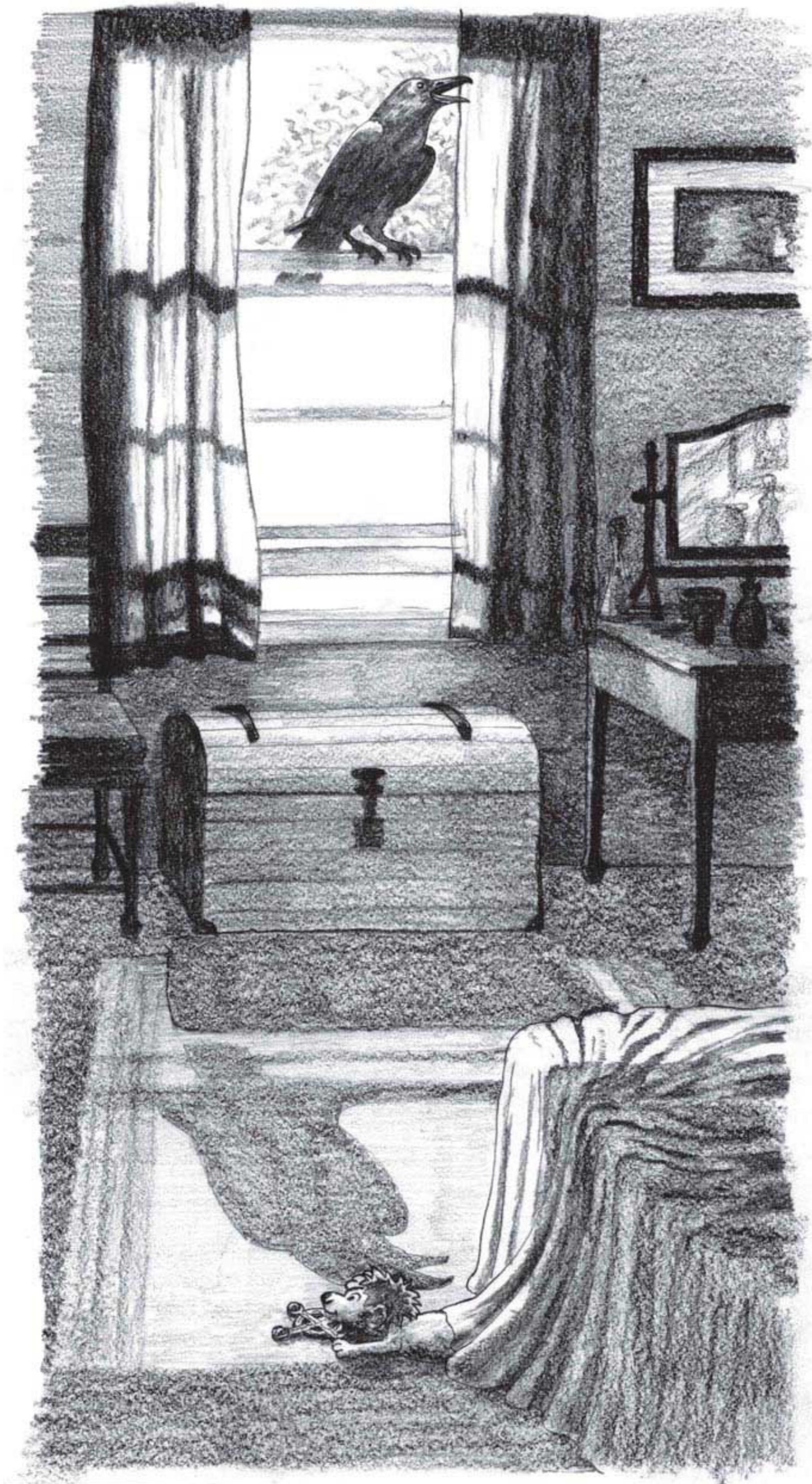
Curd the Lion was alone.

The winter winds howled viciously through the ghostly half-drawn lace curtains, rattling his thoughts like broken crockery. He could hardly hear himself think for shivering. Mother had opened the window wide to clear the air after clearing up the jewels and vacuuming up the talcum powder. She had accidentally kicked Curd so that he lay half under the bed, his nose and forepaws sticking out from under the candlewick counterpane's tickly tassles.

Slowly his thoughts began to glue themselves together. He reflected on the rough treatment meted out to Dragons. His ruminations (thoughts one thinks when all alone in a room) were rudely interrupted by a loud flapping noise and the startling appearance on the carpet in front of him of a deep black shadow that was neither that of the Twins nor their Mother.

He looked up to see the huge dark and sharply ragged shape of a monstrous winged creature standing on the window-sill. A DRAGON!?

Curd looked at the Dragon. The Dragon looked at Curd.



## St. George and the Dragon

Curd was just wondering how to strike up a polite conversation with this distinctly unfriendly-looking Dragon, who didn't even say, "Hello," when the Dragon, without so much as a "May I come in and join you?" hopped down to join its shadow on the carpet.

The pair of them, black on black, strutted stiffly towards him.

The shadow smothered Curd with fright as the Dragon towered over him, cocking its swarthy long-beaked head first to one side, then to the other, its black beady eyes staring directly into Curd's shiny button-eyes. Summoning up all his courage, Curd opened up his mouth to roar.

Suddenly Curd realised this was no Dragon, but the Great Black Raven! He had heard the story about the Great Black Raven from their mother, who had told Henry and Henrietta how it came to fetch naughty children, and how it pecked out their eyes...

Perhaps it was the cold air from the open window, perhaps it was the prickling tightness of a cough coming on, but that terrifying ROAR seemed to stick somewhere deep in his throat.

Before he had time to work it out, the swarthy Raven leaned down over Curd and stabbed with its great black beak, snatching from right under his nose a glittering jewelled brooch. The sharp-eyed Raven must have seen it glinting in the winter sun through the open window. It was a brooch that Mother had accidentally kicked, together with Curd, under the edge of the bed as she cleaned the bedroom.

Curd was still speechless as the Raven flapped clumsily up to the window-sill with the brooch in its beak and with a raucous "Ta-raah!" was gone.



CHAPTER TWO.      Curd de Lion.

**H**enry? HENRIETTA!” The Twin’s mother burst through the door into the playroom like a great gale, flinging Curd onto the floor where Henry, Henrietta and their Animals were sitting.

“My brooch has gone. The precious emerald and diamond silver brooch that Grandmother gave me. It was in my jewellery box before you upset it. Now it’s not there. Where is it?” she demanded.

“I don’t know,” replied Henry, lowering his eyes.

“I didn’t take it,” added Henrietta.

“This is serious. No one else has been in there,” said Mother, “You must know where it is. Unless you find it before your birthday, I’m going to confiscate all your Animals. I’m going to give them to the Charity Shop for children in need. You’ll never see them again. And you’ll get no presents. No presents! Do you hear?”

“But we didn’t hide it, we didn’t.” they cried.

“You don’t care about them anyway,” shouted Mother, “look at the way you were treating Curd the Lion just now. Beating him to rags, you were.”

“We weren’t. He was a dragon,” began Henry.

“It was a game,” added Henrietta.

“Well, it just isn’t good enough,” said Mother, “you’ve got four days to find my brooch, – or ELSE!”

Mother swept out of the room like a vacuum cleaner, sucking the protesting Twins out after her.

As the door closed with a bang, the Animals slowly gathered in shocked



silence around the heap that was Curd.

“Stand back and give him some air,” said Pilgrim Crow, a black crow with a tall hat who was Henry’s other Animal and Curd’s best friend. “The poor fellow will be suffocated.”

He leaned over and flapped his wings in Curd’s face.

“I surrender, I surrender,” squeaked Curd, woken by the sudden gust.

“Surrender?” asked Sweeney the Heenie, a spotted hyena. Sweeney was Henrietta’s favourite Animal, along with O’Flattery the Snake, a green Snake with a red zig-zagged back who was nearly always wrapped around Sweeney’s neck like a scarf. The two were inseparable.

Sitting up, Curd rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn’t dreaming. Yes, he was here, with his Friends, and had not been carried off by that wicked Black Raven.

“I... I mean... I remember!” stuttered Curd.

“What happened?” said Pilgrim Crow.

“Well... well, it was the Black Raven,” gasped Curd, “the Black Raven who stole... I thought he was a Dragon, but he wasn’t... and the jewelled Brooch, he took it, you know, and he nearly took me... but I escaped... just!”

“He must be a terrible class of fellow, dis Raven,” said Sweeney the Heenie, “to frighten our man like dat. He looks quite de...”

“Yella fella,” said O’Flattery, Sweeney’s sly and scheming friend, the Snake, “and isn’t dat a fine ting? Yella, like de cowardy custard dat he is. To be sure, dat’s where he must have gotten his name, Curdy Custard.”

An awful hush hovered over the animals, like a great black bird.

“It is not! My name comes from my famous ancestor, Richard Curd-de-Lion, King of England. Put em up, you Worm, you...” Curd growled, fists flailing the air.

“Purremup!” he roared, narrowly missing Pilgrim with a left hook.

“I was ony joking, Sor,” cried O’Flattery the Snake, slithering behind Sweeney the Heenie. “T’was merely a jest, honest it was, your honour,” he whimpered, struggling with Sweeney, who was trying to prevent himself tripping over the quaking snake wriggling between his legs.

“That’s enough,” said Pilgrim Crow. In his stiff Puritan hat, he was taller



## CHAPTER 2

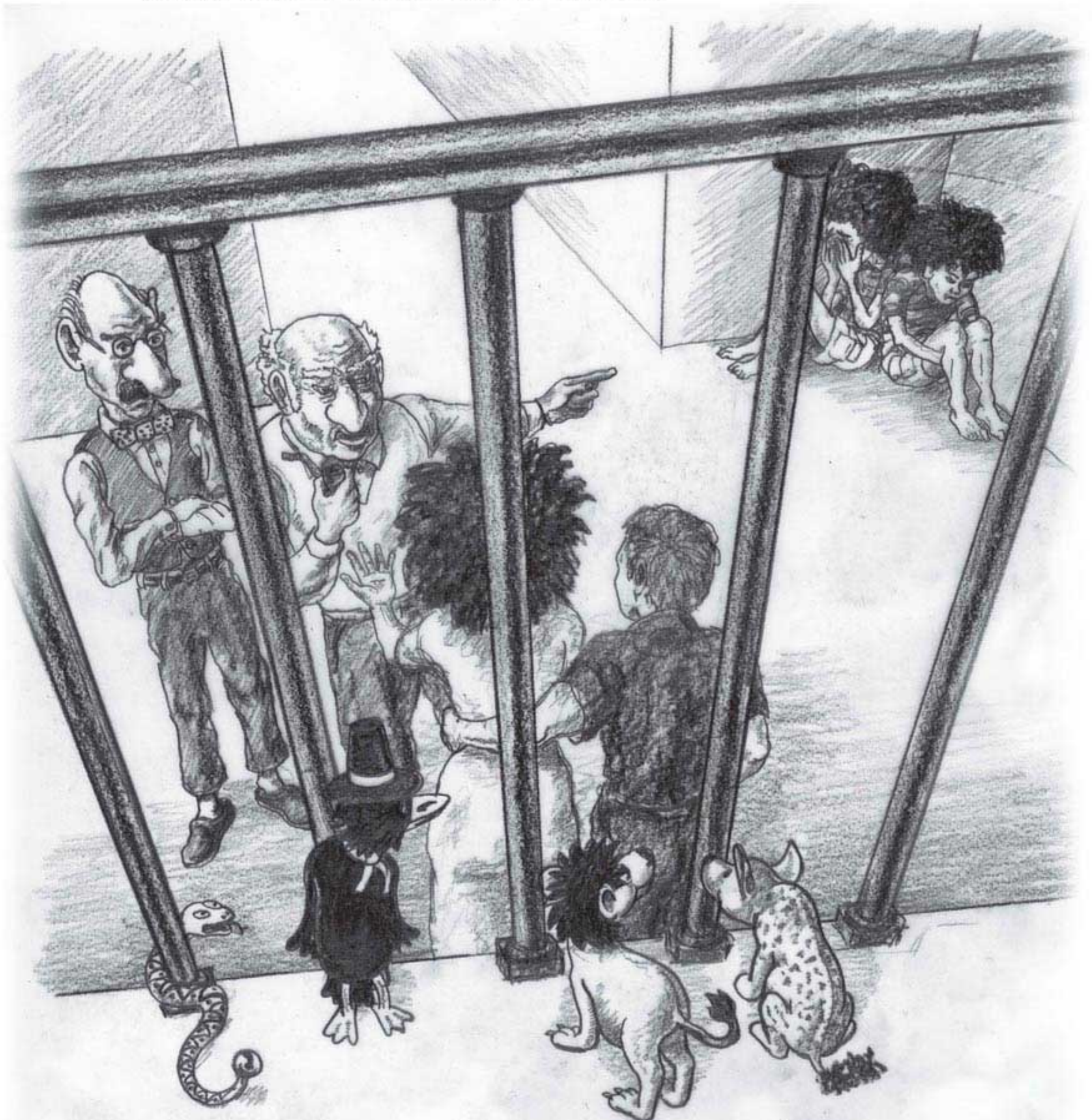
than the others, so when he spoke, they listened.

“It is time we addressed ourselves to the problem at hand.” He paused, adjusting his tie importantly.

“What problem?” Three voices said as one.

Just then they heard shouting from downstairs, lots of shouting. The Animals crept through the door onto the landing and peered over the edge between the bannisters.

There in the hall stood Mother, wringing her hands together, with Father standing at her shoulder, both arguing with Grandpa and Uncle, who had just arrived from Ireland on his annual visit.



“But you can’t take away their Animals,” said Grandpa, that’s not fair. Look, you can see they’re upset.”

The Animals looked where he was pointing. There, in the corner, sat Henry and Henrietta, holding each other tight, crying quietly.

“And I don’t matter?” shouted Mother. “They can lose my precious brooch, my only family heirloom from my mother’s side, and, oh, yes, that doesn’t matter? The gift your own wife, rest her soul, gave me when we got engaged. That doesn’t matter?”

“Of course it matters,” said Grandpa, “but they have told you they don’t have the brooch.”

“We can all search for it, but you can’t go accusing them or punishing them without proof,” added Uncle.

“No one else has been in there. The brooch is gone.” Mother stamped her foot loudly on the wooden floor and raised her voice even higher.

“They must have taken it. And I mean it. Those Animals will go to the charity shop unless they give me back my brooch.”

“Wow!” cried Curd.

“Did you hear dat?” said Sweeney, “she really means it. Dat’s us she’s talkin about. She’s goin to give us all away to be sold in a shop!”

“I thought she was joking,” said Pilgrim, “but she wouldn’t dare argue with Grandpa unless she really meant it.”

“We’d be alright den, wouldn’t we, Sweeney?” said O’Flattery, “I mean, we’re togedder, like, you know.”

“Ha!” cried Pilgrim. “She’d wrench you apart just for spite. Look at her! She’s really mad.”

“In dat case, we’ve got to do someting, quick,” said O’Flattery, “afore she does.”

“What?” asked Curd.

“Find it – the brooch – and get it back,” said Pilgrim, “before their birthday.”

“When’s dat?” asked Sweeney.

“Monday. I heard Dad telling Uncle,” said Curd.

“What’s today?” asked Pilgrim.

“Tuesday, I tink,” said O’Flattery, “cos it’s Mum’s baking day.”

“That only leaves four days to get it back from the Great Raven.” said Pilgrim.

“Henry and Henrietta – I mean, St. George and St. Georgette – were conquering the Beast, the Dragon,” explained Curd, “to save the poor Damsel-in-Distress.”

“That’s it!” cried Pilgrim Crow, clapping Curd hard on the back, “we’ll go on an Adventure, like the brave knights of old, in search of this Great

## CHAPTER 2

Raven Dragon Beastie. We'll seek out his lair, conquer him and wrest..."

"Why rest, just when we've found him?" asked Curd.

"Not rest. Wrest. Wrestle from him the jewelled Brooch he has hoarded in his den," said Pilgrim. "But first, we must find where he has gone."

"Home?" suggested Curd, helpfully, "Where he lives."

"An I don't suppose you t'ought to ask him where dat is?" said Sweeney the Heenie, "when you was chattin', like?"

"Er, no," said Curd, "that is, we never quite got around to it..."

"So, no invitations, den," scoffed O'Flattery. "No, 'Come round to my place, why don't you, to see my collection of jewels and stuff?'"

"No, not that, neither," said Curd, "I don't think. Did he say that?"

"Never mind about that," said Pilgrim, "because I know where ravens live. They live up on the moors behind the woods, where the big rocks are. I saw it in Henry's book of Natural History. And we are going to launch our own Great Adventure to rescue Mum's Brooch and save Henry and Henrietta from losing their Best Toys, US!"

"Hooray!" they shouted.

"But we have got no time to lose. We must leave immediately: tonight, after everyone is asleep. And you, Curd the Lion, will be leader of our Adventure, like your famous ancestor, King Curd de Lion."

"Why him?" said O'Flattery the Snake, "Why not Sweeney, here?"

"Because Curd," said Pilgrim Crow, "is the only one who has met the Great Raven, face to face."

"Me, the leader?" asked Curd, trembling with excitement, "Of my own Dragon-hunt? Yippee!"

Even O'Flattery the Snake could not think of argument against this, and he hissed sulkily into a corner.

