

IN A FLASH, everybody was up on top.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!" they cried.

"What a marvelous feeling!"

"Good-by, sharks!"

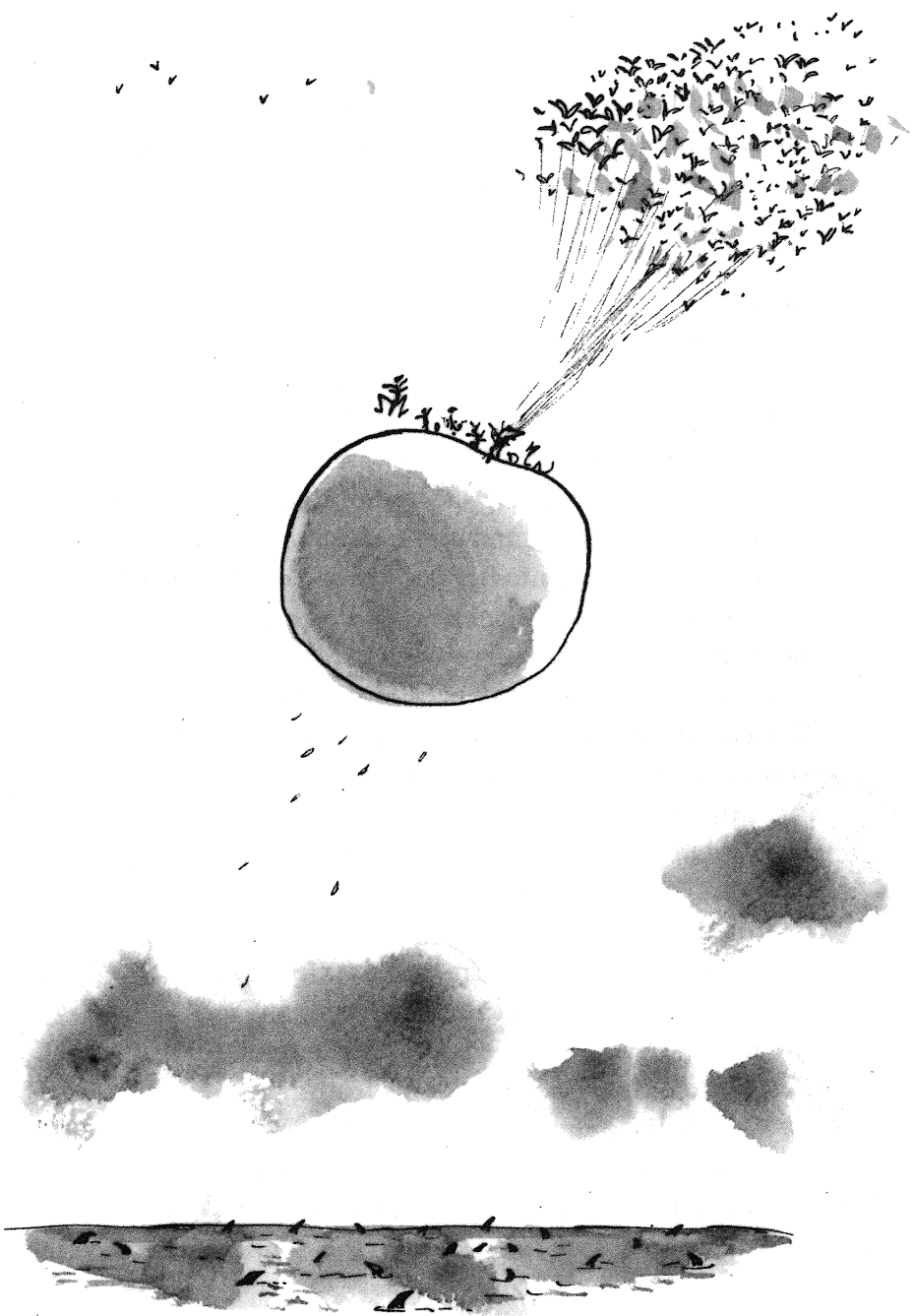
"Oh, boy, this is the way to travel!"

Miss Spider, who was literally squealing with excitement, grabbed the Centipede by the waist and the two of them started dancing around and around the peach stem together. The Earthworm stood up on his tail and did a sort of wriggle of joy all by himself. The Old-Green-Grasshopper kept hopping higher and higher in the air. The Ladybug rushed over and shook James warmly by the hand. The Glow-worm, who at the best of times was a very shy and silent creature, sat glowing with pleasure near the tunnel entrance. Even the Silkworm, looking white and thin and completely exhausted, came creeping out of the tunnel to watch this miraculous ascent.

Up and up they went, and soon they were as high as the top of a church steeple above the ocean.

"I'm a bit worried about the peach," James said to the others as soon as all the dancing and the shouting had stopped. "I wonder how much damage those sharks have done to it underneath. It's quite impossible to tell from up here."

"Why don't I go over the side and make an inspection?" Miss Spider said. "It'll be no trouble at all, I assure you." And without waiting for an answer, she quickly produced a length of silk thread and attached the end of it to



the peach stem. "I'll be back in a jiffy," she said, and then she walked calmly over to the edge of the peach and jumped off, paying out the thread behind her as she fell.

The others crowded anxiously around the place where she had gone over.

"Wouldn't it be dreadful if the thread broke," the Ladybug said.

There was a rather long silence.

"Are you all right, Miss Spider?" shouted the Old-Green-Grasshopper.

"Yes, thank you!" her voice answered from below. "I'm coming up now!" And up she came, climbing foot over foot up the silk thread, and at the same time tucking the thread back cleverly into her body as she climbed past it.

"Is it *awful*?" they asked her. "Is it all eaten away? Are there great holes in it everywhere?"

Miss Spider clambered back onto the deck with a pleased but also rather puzzled look on her face. "You won't believe this," she said, "but actually there's hardly any damage down there at all! The peach is almost untouched! There are just a few tiny pieces out of it here and there, but nothing more."

"You must be mistaken," James told her.

"Of course she's mistaken!" the Centipede said.

"I promise you I'm not," Miss Spider answered.

"But there were hundreds of sharks around us!"

"They churned the water into a froth!"

"We saw their great mouths opening and shutting!"

"I don't care what you saw," Miss Spider answered.

"They certainly didn't do much damage to the peach."

"Then why did we start sinking?" the Centipede asked.

"Perhaps we *didn't* start sinking," the Old-Green-Grass-hopper suggested. "Perhaps we were all so frightened that we simply imagined it."

This, in point of fact, was closer to the truth than any of them knew. A shark, you see, has an extremely long sharp nose, and its mouth is set very awkwardly underneath its face and a long way back. This makes it more or less impossible for it to get its teeth into a vast smooth curving surface such as the side of a peach. Even if the creature turns onto its back it still can't do it, because the nose always gets in the way. If you have ever seen a small dog trying to get its teeth into an enormous ball, then you will be able to imagine roughly how it was with the sharks and the peach.

"It must have been some kind of magic," the Ladybug said. "The holes must have healed up by themselves."

"Oh, look! There's a ship below *us*!" shouted James.

Everybody rushed to the side and peered over. None of them had ever seen a ship before.

"It looks like a big one."

"It's got three funnels."

"You can even see the people on the decks!"

"Let's wave to them. Do you think they can see us?"

Neither James nor any of the others knew it, but the ship that was now passing beneath them was actually the Queen Mary sailing out of the English Channel on her way to America. And on the bridge of the Queen Mary, the astonished Captain was standing with a group of his officers, all of them gaping at the great round ball hovering overhead.

"I don't like it," the Captain said.



"Nor do I," said the First Officer.

"Do you think it's following us?" said the Second Officer.

"I tell you I don't like it," muttered the Captain.

"It could be dangerous," the First Officer said.

"That's it!" cried the Captain. "It's a secret weapon! Holy cats! Send a message to the Queen at once! The country must be warned! And give me my telescope."

The First Officer handed the telescope to the Captain. The Captain put it to his eye.

"There's birds everywhere!" he cried. "The whole sky is teeming with birds! What in the world are *they* doing? And wait! Wait a second! There are *people* on it! I can see them moving! There's a—a—do I have this darned thing focused right? It looks like a little boy in short trousers!



Yes, I can distinctly see a little boy in short trousers standing up there! And there's a—there's a—there's a—a—a—a sort of *giant ladybug*!”

“Now just a minute, Captain!” the First Officer said.

“And a *colossal green grasshopper*!”

“Captain!” the First Officer said sharply. “Captain, please!”

“And a *mammoth spider*!”

“Oh dear, he's been at the whisky again,” whispered the Second Officer.

“And an *enormous—a simply enormous centipede*!” screamed the Captain.

“Call the Ship's Doctor,” the First Officer said. “Our Captain is not well.”

A moment later, the great round ball disappeared into a cloud, and the people on the ship never saw it again.

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BUT UP ON the peach itself, everyone was still happy and excited.

“I wonder where we'll finish up this time,” the Earthworm said.

“Who cares?” they answered. “Seagulls always go back to the land sooner or later.”

Up and up they went, high above the highest clouds, the peach swaying gently from side to side as it floated along.

"Wouldn't this be a perfect time for a little music?" the ladybug asked. "How about it, Old Grasshopper?"

"With pleasure, dear lady," the Old-Green-Grasshopper answered, bowing from the waist.

"Oh, hooray! He's going to play for us!" they cried, and immediately the whole company sat themselves down in a circle around the Old Green Musician—and the concert began.

From the moment that the first note was struck, the audience became completely spellbound. And as for James, never had he heard such beautiful music as this! In the garden at home on summer evenings, he had listened many times to the sound of grasshoppers chirping in the grass, and he had always liked the noise that they made. But this was a different kind of noise altogether. This was real music—chords, harmonies, tunes, and all the rest of it.

And what a wonderful instrument the Old-Green-Grasshopper was playing on. It was like a violin! It was almost exactly as though he were playing upon a violin!

The bow of the violin, the part that moved, was his back leg. The strings of the violin, the part that made the sound, was the edge of his wing.

He was using only the top of his back leg (the thigh), and he was stroking this up and down against the edge of his wing with incredible skill, sometimes slowly, sometimes fast, but always with the same easy flowing action. It was precisely the way a clever violinist would have used his bow; and the music came pouring out and filled the whole blue sky around them with magic melodies.

When the first part was finished, everyone clapped madly, and Miss Spider stood up and shouted, "Bravo!

Encore! Give us some more!"

"Did you like that, James?" the Old-Green-Grasshopper asked, smiling at the small boy.

"Oh, I loved it!" James answered. "It was beautiful! It was as though you had a real violin in your hands!"

"A *real* violin!" the Old-Green-Grasshopper cried. "Good heavens, I like that! My dear boy, I *am* a real violin! It is part of my own body!"

"But do *all* grasshoppers play their music on violins, the same way as you do?" James asked him.

"No," he answered, "not all. If you want to know, I happen to be a 'short-horned' grasshopper. I have two short feelers coming out of my head. Can you see them? There they are. They are quite short, aren't they? That's why they call me a 'short-horn.' And we 'short-horns' are the only ones who play our music in the violin style, using a bow. My 'long-horned' relatives, the ones who have long curvy feelers coming out of their heads, make their music simply by rubbing the edges of their two top wings together. They are not violinists, they are wing-rubbers. And a rather inferior noise these wing-rubbers produce, too, if I may say so. It sounds more like a banjo than a fiddle."

"How fascinating this all is!" cried James. "And to think that up until now I had never even *wondered* how a grasshopper made his sounds."

"My dear young fellow," the Old-Green-Grasshopper said gently, "there are a whole lot of things in this world of ours that you haven't started wondering about yet. Where, for example, do you think that I keep my ears?"

"Your ears? Why, in your head, of course."

Everyone burst out laughing.

"You mean you don't even know *that*?" cried the Centipede.

"Try again," said the Old-Green-Grasshopper, smiling at James.

"You can't possibly keep them anywhere else?"

"Oh, can't I?"

"Well—I give up. Where *do* you keep them?"

"Right here," the Old-Green-Grasshopper said. "One on each side of my tummy."

"It's not true!"

"Of course it's true. What's so peculiar about that? You ought to see where my cousins the crickets and the katydids keep theirs."

"Where do they keep them?"

"In their legs. One in each front leg, just below the knee."

"You mean you didn't know that either?" the Centipede said scornfully.

"You're joking," James said. "Nobody could possibly have his ears in his legs."

"Why not?"

"Because . . . because it's ridiculous, that's why."

"You know what I think is ridiculous?" the Centipede said, grinning away as usual. "I don't mean to be rude, but *I* think it is ridiculous to have ears on the sides of one's head. It certainly *looks* ridiculous. You ought to take a peek in the mirror some day and see for yourself."

"Pest!" cried the Earthworm. "Why must you always be so rude and rambunctious to everyone? You ought to apologize to James at once."

JAMES DIDN'T WANT the Earthworm and the Centipede to get into another argument, so he said quickly to the Earthworm, "Tell me, do *you* play any kind of music?"

"No, but I do *other* things, some of which are really quite *extraordinary*," the Earthworm said, brightening.

"Such as what?" asked James.

"Well," the Earthworm said. "Next time you stand in a field or in a garden and look around you, then just remember this: that every grain of soil upon the surface of the land, every tiny little bit of soil that you can see, has actually passed through the body of an Earthworm during the last few years! Isn't that wonderful?"

"It's not possible!" said James.

"My dear boy, it's a fact."

"You mean you actually *swallow* soil?"

"Like mad," the Earthworm said proudly. "*In* one end and *out* the other."

"But what's the point?"

"What do you mean, what's the point?"

"Why do you do it?"

"We do it for the farmers. It makes the soil nice and light and crumbly so that things will grow well in it. If you really want to know, the farmers couldn't do without us. We are essential. We are vital. So it is only natural that the farmer should love us. He loves us even more, I believe, than he loves the Ladybug."

"The Ladybug!" said James, turning to look at her. "Do they love you, too?"

"I am told that they do," the Ladybug answered modestly, blushing all over. "In fact, I understand that in some places the farmers love us so much that they go out and buy live Ladybugs by the sackful and take them home and set them free in their fields. They are very pleased when they have lots of Ladybugs in their fields."

"But why?" James asked.

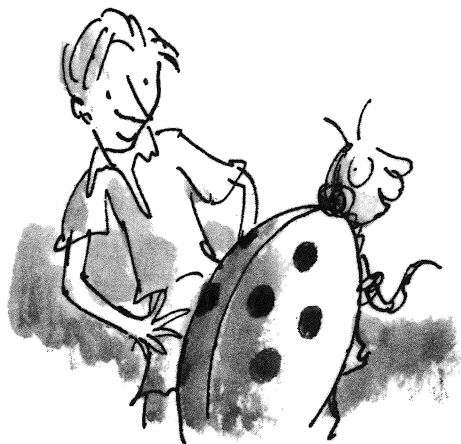
"Because we gobble up all the nasty little insects that are gobbling up all the farmer's crops. It helps enormously, and we ourselves don't charge a penny for our services."

"I think you're wonderful," James told her. "Can I ask you one special question?"

"Please do."

"Well, is it really true that I can tell how old a Ladybug is by counting her spots?"

"Oh no, that's just a children's story," the Ladybug said. "We never change our spots. Some of us, of course, are



born with more spots than others, but we never change them. The number of spots that a Ladybug has is simply a way of showing which branch of the family she belongs to. I, for example, as you can see for yourself, am a Nine-Spotted Ladybug. I am very lucky. It is a fine thing to be."

"It is, indeed," said James, gazing at the beautiful scarlet shell with the nine black spots on it.

"On the other hand," the Ladybug went on, "some of my less fortunate relatives have no more than two spots altogether on their shells! Can you imagine that? They are called Two-Spotted Ladybugs, and very common and ill-mannered they are, I regret to say. And then, of course, you have the Five-Spotted Ladybugs as well. They are much nicer than the Two-Spotted ones, although I myself find them a trifle too saucy for my taste."

"But they are all of them loved?" said James.

"Yes," the Ladybug answered quietly. "They are all of them loved."

"It seems that almost *everyone* around here is loved!" said James. "How nice this is!"

"Not me!" cried the Centipede happily. "I am a pest and I'm proud of it! Oh, I am such a shocking dreadful pest!"

"Hear, hear," the Earthworm said.

"But what about you, Miss Spider?" asked James. "Aren't you also much loved in the world?"

"Alas, no," Miss Spider answered, sighing long and loud. "I am not loved at all. And yet I do nothing but good. All day long I catch flies and mosquitoes in my webs. I am a decent person."

"I know you are," said James.



"It is very unfair the way we Spiders are treated," Miss Spider went on. "Why, only last week your own horrible Aunt Sponge flushed my poor dear father down the plug-hole in the bathtub."

"Oh, how awful!" cried James.

"I watched the whole thing from a corner up in the ceiling," Miss Spider murmured. "It was ghastly. We never saw him again." A large tear rolled down her cheek and fell with a splash on the floor.



"But is it not very unlucky to kill a spider?" James inquired, looking around at the others.

"Of course it's unlucky to kill a spider!" shouted the Centipede. "It's about the unluckiest thing anyone can do. Look what happened to Aunt Sponge after she'd done that! *Bump!* We all felt it, didn't we, as the peach went over her? Oh, what a lovely bump that must have been for you, Miss Spider!"

"It was very satisfactory," Miss Spider answered. "Will you sing us a song about it, please?"

So the Centipede did.

*"Aunt Sponge was terrifically fat,  
And tremendously flabby at that.  
Her tummy and waist  
Were as soggy as paste—  
It was worse on the place where she sat!"*

*So she said, 'I must make myself flat.  
I must make myself sleek as a cat.  
I shall do without dinner  
To make myself thinner'  
But along came the peach!  
Oh, the beautiful peach!  
And made her far thinner than that!"*

"That was very nice," Miss Spider said. "Now sing one about Aunt Spiker."

"With pleasure," the Centipede answered, grinning:

*"Aunt Spiker was thin as a wire,  
And as dry as a bone, only drier.  
She was so long and thin  
If you carried her in  
You could use her for poking the fire!"*

*'I must do something quickly,' she frowned.  
'I want FAT. I want pound upon pound!  
I must eat lots and lots  
Of marshmallows and chocs  
Till I start bulging out all around.'*

*'Ah, yes,' she announced, 'I have sworn  
That I'll alter my figure by dawn!'  
Cried the peach with a snigger,  
'I'll alter your figure—'  
And ironed her out on the lawn!'"*

Everybody clapped and called out for more songs from the Centipede, who at once launched into his favorite song of all:

*"Once upon a time  
When pigs were swine  
And monkeys chewed tobacco  
And hens took snuff  
To make themselves tough  
And the ducks said quack-quack-quacko,  
And porcupines  
Drank fiery wines  
And goats ate tapioca  
And Old Mother Hubbard  
Got stuck in the c—"*

"Look out, Centipede!" cried James. "Look out!"

THE CENTIPEDE, who had begun dancing wildly around the deck during the song, had suddenly gone too close to the downward curving edge of the peach, and for three awful seconds he had stood teetering on the brink, swinging his legs frantically in circles in an effort to stop himself from falling over backward into space. But before anyone could reach him—down he went! He gave a shriek of terror as he fell, and the others, rushing to the side and peering over, saw his poor long body tumbling over and over through the air, getting smaller and smaller until it was out of sight.

“Silkworm!” yelled James. “Quick! Start spinning!”

The Silkworm sighed, for she was still very tired from spinning all that silk for the seagulls, but she did as she was told.

“I’m going down after him!” cried James, grabbing the silk string as it started coming out of the Silkworm and tying the end of it around his waist. “The rest of you hold on to Silkworm so I don’t pull her over with me, and later on, if you feel three tugs on the string, start hauling me up again!”

He jumped, and he went tumbling down after the Centipede, down, down, down, toward the sea below, and you can imagine how quickly the Silkworm had to spin to keep up with the speed of his fall.

“We’ll never see either of them again!” cried the Ladybug. “Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Just when we were all so happy, too!”

Miss Spider, the Glow-worm, and the Ladybug all began to cry. So did the Earthworm. "I don't care a bit about the Centipede," the Earthworm sobbed. "But I really did love that little boy."

Very softly, the Old-Green-Grasshopper started to play the Funeral March on his violin, and by the time he had finished, everyone, including himself, was in a flood of tears.

Suddenly, there came three sharp tugs on the rope. "Pull!" shouted the Old-Green-Grasshopper. "Everyone get behind me and pull!"



There was about a mile of string to be hauled in, but they all worked like mad, and in the end, over the side of the peach, there appeared a dripping-wet James with a dripping-wet Centipede clinging to him tightly with all forty-two of his legs.

"He saved me!" gasped the Centipede. "He swam around in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean until he found me!"

"My dear boy," the Old-Green-Grasshopper said, patting James on the back. "I do congratulate you."

"My boots!" cried the Centipede. "Just look at my precious boots! They are ruined by the water!"

"Be quiet!" the Earthworm said. "You are lucky to be alive."

"Are we still going up and up?" asked James.

"We certainly are," answered the Old-Green-Grasshopper. "And it's beginning to get dark."

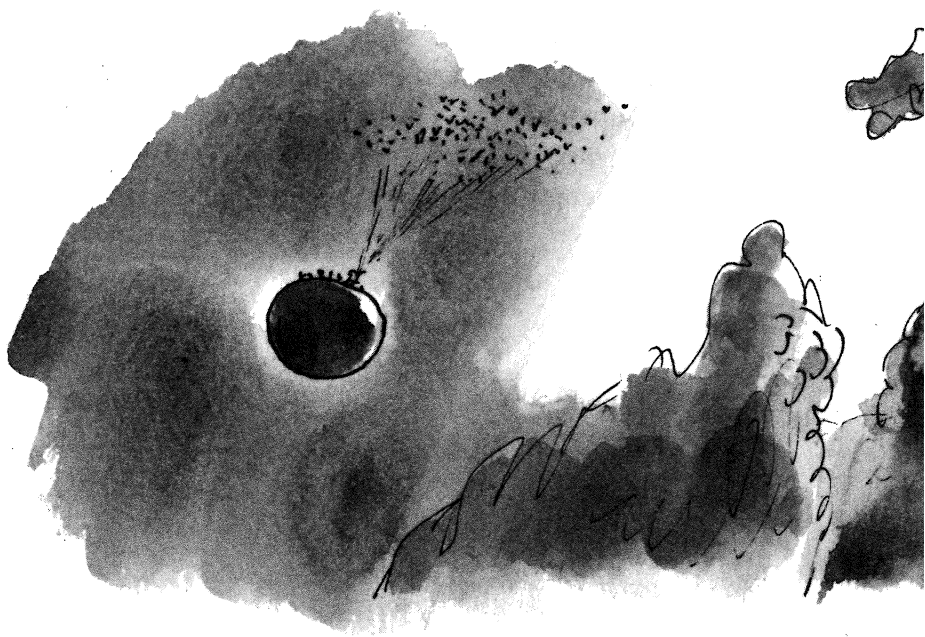
"I know. It'll soon be night."

"Why don't we all go down below and keep warm until tomorrow morning?" Miss Spider suggested.

"No," the Old-Green-Grasshopper said. "I think that would be very unwise. It will be safer if we all stay up here through the night and keep watch. Then, if anything happens, we shall anyway be ready for it."

JAMES HENRY TROTTER and his companions crouched close together on top of the peach as the night began closing in around them. Clouds like mountains towered high above their heads on all sides, mysterious, menacing, overwhelming. Gradually it grew darker and darker, and then a pale three-quarter moon came up over the tops of the clouds and cast an eerie light over the whole scene. The giant peach swayed gently from side to side as it floated along, and the hundreds of silky white strings going upward from its stem were beautiful in the moonlight. So also was the great flock of seagulls overhead.

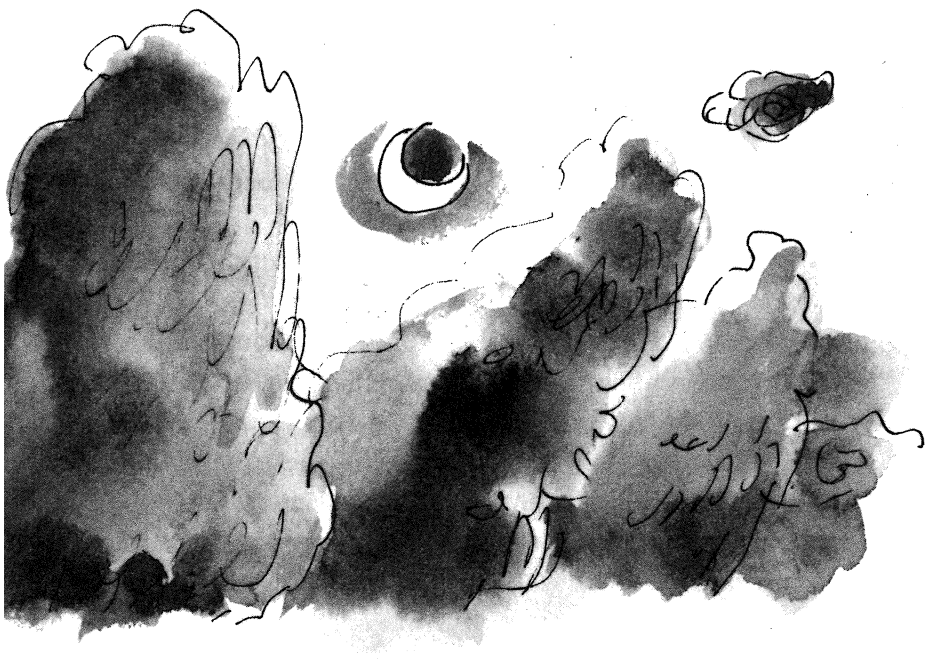
There was not a sound anywhere. Traveling upon the peach was not in the least like traveling in an airplane.



The airplane comes clattering and roaring through the sky, and whatever might be lurking secretly up there in the great cloud-mountains goes running for cover at its approach. That is why people who travel in airplanes never see anything.

But the peach . . . ah, yes . . . the peach was a soft, stealthy traveler, making no noise at all as it floated along. And several times during that long silent night ride high up over the middle of the ocean in the moonlight, James and his friends saw things that no one had ever seen before.

Once, as they drifted silently past a massive white cloud, they saw on the top of it a group of strange, tall, wispy-looking things that were about twice the height of ordinary men. They were not easy to see at first because they were almost as white as the cloud itself, but as the





peach sailed closer, it became obvious that these “things” were actually living creatures—tall, wispy, wraithlike, shadowy white creatures who looked as though they were made out of a mixture of cotton-wool and candy-floss and thin white hairs.

“Ooooooooooooooh!” the Ladybug said. “I don’t like this at all!”

“Sssh!” James whispered back. “Don’t let them hear you! They must be Cloud-Men!”

“*Cloud-Men!*” they murmured, huddling closer together for comfort. “Oh dear, oh dear!”

“I’m glad I’m blind and can’t see them,” the Earthworm said, “or I would probably scream.”

“I hope they don’t turn around and see *us*,” Miss Spider stammered.

“Do you think they would eat us?” the Earthworm asked.

“They would eat *you*,” the Centipede answered, grinning. “They would cut you up like a salami and eat you in thin slices.”

The poor Earthworm began to quiver all over with fright.

“But what are they *doing*?” the Old-Green-Grasshopper whispered.

“I don’t know,” James answered softly. “Let’s watch and see.”

The Cloud-Men were all standing in a group, and they were doing something peculiar with their hands. First, they would reach out (all of them at once) and grab handfuls of cloud. Then they would roll these handfuls of cloud in their fingers until they turned into what looked like large white marbles. Then they would toss the mar-

bles to one side and quickly grab more bits of cloud and start over again.

It was all very silent and mysterious. The pile of marbles beside them kept growing larger and larger. Soon there was a truckload of them there at least.

"They must be absolutely mad!" the Centipede said. "There's nothing to be afraid of here!"

"Be quiet, you pest!" the Earthworm whispered. "We shall all be eaten if they see us!"

But the Cloud-Men were much too busy with what they were doing to have noticed the great peach floating silently up behind them.

Then the watchers on the peach saw one of the Cloud-Men raising his long wispy arms above his head and they heard him shouting, "All right, boys! That's enough! Get the shovels!" And all the other Cloud-Men immediately let out a strange high-pitched whoop of joy and started jumping up and down and waving their arms in the air. Then they picked up enormous shovels and rushed over to the pile of marbles and began shoveling them as fast as they could over the side of the cloud, into space. "*Down they go!*" they chanted as they worked.

*"Down they go!*

*Hail and snow!*

*Freezes and sneezes and noses will blow!"*

"It's *hailstones!*" whispered James excitedly. "They've been making hailstones and now they are showering them down onto the people in the world below!"

"Hailstones?" the Centipede said. "That's ridiculous!

This is summertime. You don't have hailstones in summertime."

"They are practicing for the winter," James told him.

"I don't believe it!" shouted the Centipede, raising his voice.



"Ssshh!" the others whispered. And James said softly, "For heaven's sake, Centipede, don't make so much noise."

The Centipede roared with laughter. "Those imbeciles couldn't hear anything!" he cried. "They're deaf as door-knobs! You watch!" And before anyone could stop him, he had cupped his front feet to his mouth and was yelling at the Cloud-Men as loud as he could. "Idiots!" he yelled. "Nincompoops! Half-wits! Blunderheads! Asses! What on earth do you think you're doing over there!"

The effect was immediate. The Cloud-Men jumped around as if they had been stung by wasps. And when they saw the great golden peach floating past them not fifty yards away in the sky, they gave a yelp of surprise and dropped their shovels to the ground. And there they stood with the moonlight streaming down all over them, absolutely motionless, like a group of tall white hairy statues, staring and staring at the gigantic fruit as it went sailing by.

The passengers on the peach (all except the Centipede) sat frozen with terror, looking back at the Cloud-Men and wondering what was going to happen next.

"Now you've done it, you loathsome pest!" whispered the Earthworm to the Centipede.

"I'm not frightened of *them*!" shouted the Centipede, and to show everybody once again that he wasn't, he stood up to his full height and started dancing about and making insulting signs at the Cloud-Men with all forty-two of his legs.

This evidently infuriated the Cloud-Men beyond belief. All at once, they spun around and grabbed great handfuls of hailstones and rushed to the edge of the cloud and

started throwing them at the peach, shrieking with fury all the time.

"Look out!" cried James. "Quick! Lie down! Lie flat on the deck!"

It was lucky they did! A large hailstone can hurt you as much as a rock or a lump of lead if it is thrown hard enough—and my goodness, how those Cloud-Men could throw! The hailstones came whizzing through the air like bullets from a machine gun, and James could hear them smashing against the sides of the peach and burying themselves in the peach flesh with horrible squelching noises—*plop! plop! plop! plop!* And then *ping! ping! ping!* as they bounced off the poor Ladybug's shell because she couldn't lie as flat as the others. And then *crack!* as one of them hit the Centipede right on the nose and *crack!* again as another one hit him somewhere else.

"Ow!" he cried. "Ow! Stop! Stop! Stop!"

But the Cloud-Men had no intention of stopping. James could see them rushing about on the cloud like a lot of huge hairy ghosts, picking up hailstones from the pile, dashing to the edge of the cloud, hurling the hailstones at the peach, dashing back again to get more, and then, when the pile of stones was all gone, they simply grabbed handfuls of cloud and made as many more as they wanted, and much bigger ones now, some of them as large as cannon balls.

"Quickly!" cried James. "Down the tunnel or we'll all be wiped out!"

There was a rush for the tunnel entrance, and half a minute later everybody was safely downstairs inside the stone of the peach, trembling with fright and listening to

the noise of the hailstones as they came crashing against the side of the peach.

"I'm a wreck!" groaned the Centipede. "I am wounded all over!"

"It serves you right," said the Earthworm.

"Would somebody kindly look and see if my shell is cracked?" the Ladybug said.

"Give us some light!" shouted the Old-Green-Grasshopper.

"I can't!" wailed the Glow-worm. "They've broken my bulb!"

"Then put in another one!" the Centipede said.

"Be quiet a moment," said James. "Listen! I do believe they're not hitting us any more!"

They all stopped talking and listened. Yes—the noise had ceased! The hailstones were no longer smashing against the peach.

"We've left them behind!"

"The seagulls must have pulled us away out of danger!"

"Hooray! Let's go up and see!"

Cautiously, with James going first, they all climbed back up the tunnel. James poked his head out and looked around. "It's all clear!" he called. "I can't see them anywhere!"

ONE BY ONE, the travelers came out again onto the top of the peach and gazed carefully around. The moon was still shining as brightly as ever, and there were still plenty of huge shimmering cloud-mountains on all sides. But there were no Cloud-Men in sight now.

"The peach is leaking!" shouted the Old-Green-Grasshopper, peering over the side. "It's full of holes and the juice is dripping out everywhere!"

"*That* does it!" cried the Earthworm. "If the peach is leaking then we shall surely sink!"

"Don't be an ass!" the Centipede told him. "We're not in the water now!"

"Oh, look!" shouted the Ladybug. "Look, look, look! Over there!"

Everybody swung round to look.

In the distance and directly ahead of them, they now saw a most extraordinary sight. It was a kind of arch, a colossal curvy-shaped thing that reached high up into the sky and came down again at both ends. The ends were resting upon a huge flat cloud that was as big as a desert.

"Now what in the world is that?" asked James.

"It's a bridge!"

"It's an enormous hoop cut in half!"

"It's a giant horseshoe standing upside down!"

"Stop me if I'm wrong," murmured the Centipede, going white in the face, "but might those not be Cloud-Men climbing all over it?"

There was a dreadful silence. The peach floated closer and closer.

"They *are* Cloud-Men!"

"There are hundreds of them!"

"Thousands!"

"Millions!"

"I don't want to hear about it!" shrieked the poor blind Earthworm. "I'd rather be on the end of a fish hook and used as bait than come up against those terrible creatures again!"

"I'd rather be fried alive and eaten by a Mexican!" wailed the Old-Green-Grasshopper.

"Please keep quiet," whispered James. "It's our only hope."

They crouched very still on top of the peach, staring at the Cloud-Men. The whole surface of the cloud was literally *swarming* with them, and there were hundreds more up above, climbing about on that monstrous crazy arch.

"But what *is* that thing?" whispered the Ladybug. "And what are they *doing* to it?"

"I don't care what they're doing to it!" the Centipede said, scuttling over to the tunnel entrance. "I'm not staying up here! Good-by!"

But the rest of them were too frightened or too hypnotized by the whole affair to make a move.

"Do you know what?" James whispered.

"*What?*" they said. "*What?*"

"That enormous arch—they seem to be *painting* it! They've got pots of paint and big brushes! You look!"

And he was quite right. The travelers were close



enough now to see that this was exactly what the Cloud-Men were doing. They all had huge brushes in their hands and they were splashing the paint onto the great curvy arch in a frenzy of speed, so fast, in fact, that in a few minutes the whole of the arch became covered with the most glorious colors—reds, blues, greens, yellows, and purples.

“It’s a rainbow!” everyone said at once. “They are making a rainbow!”

“Oh, isn’t it beautiful!”

“Just look at those colors!”

“Centipede!” they shouted. “You *must* come up and see this!” They were so enthralled by the beauty and brilliance of the rainbow that they forgot to keep their voices low any longer. The Centipede poked his head cautiously out of the tunnel entrance.

“Well well well,” he said. “I’ve *always* wondered how those things were made. But why all the ropes? What are they doing with those ropes?”

“Good heavens, they are pushing it off the cloud!” cried James. “There it goes! They are lowering it down to the earth with ropes!”

“And I’ll tell you something else,” the Centipede said sharply. “If I’m not greatly mistaken, we ourselves are going to bump right into it!”

“Bless my soul, he’s right!” the Old-Green-Grasshopper exclaimed.

The rainbow was now dangling in the air below the cloud. The peach was also just below the level of the cloud, and it was heading directly toward the rainbow, traveling rather fast.

"We are lost!" Miss Spider cried, wringing her feet again. "The end has come!"

"I can't stand it!" wailed the Earthworm. "Tell me what's happening!"

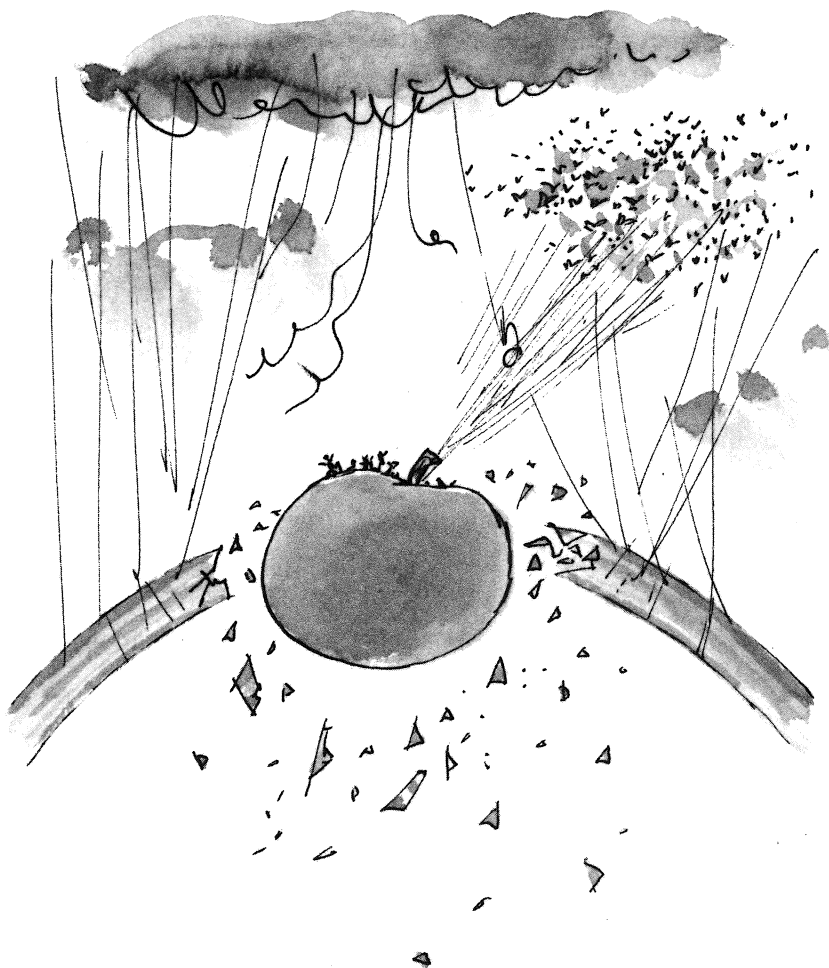
"We're going to miss it!" shouted the Ladybug.

"No, we're not!"

"Yes, we are!"

"Yes!—Yes!—No!—Oh, my heavens!"

"Hold on, everybody!" James called out, and suddenly



there was a tremendous thud as the peach went crashing into the top part of the rainbow. This was followed by an awful splintering noise as the enormous rainbow snapped right across the middle and became two separate pieces.

The next thing that happened was extremely unfortunate. The ropes that the Cloud-Men had been using for lowering the rainbow got tangled up with the silk strings that went up from the peach to the seagulls! The peach was trapped! Panic and pandemonium broke out among the travelers, and James Henry Trotter, glancing up quickly, saw the faces of a thousand furious Cloud-Men peering down at him over the edge of the cloud. The faces had almost no shape at all because of the long white hairs that covered them. There were no noses, no mouths, no ears, no chins—only the eyes were visible in each face, two small black eyes glinting malevolently through the hairs.

Then came the most frightening thing of all. One Cloud-Man, a huge hairy creature who must have been fourteen feet tall at least, suddenly stood up and made a tremendous leap off the side of the cloud, trying to get to one of the silk strings above the peach. James and his friends saw him go flying through the air above them, his arms outstretched in front of him, reaching for the nearest string, and they saw him grab it and cling to it with his hands and legs. And then, very very slowly, hand over hand, he began to come down the string.

"Mercy! Help! Save us!" cried the Ladybug.

"He's coming down to eat us!" wailed the Old-Green-Grasshopper. "Jump overboard!"

"Then eat the Earthworm first!" shouted the Cen-



tapede. "It's no good eating me, I'm full of bones like a kipper!"

"Centipede!" yelled James. "Quickly! Bite through that string, the one he's coming down on!"

The Centipede rushed over to the stem of the peach and took the silk string in his teeth and bit through it with one snap of his jaws. Immediately, far above them, a single seagull was seen to come away from the rest of the flock and go flying off with a long string trailing from its

neck. And clinging desperately to the end of the string, shouting and cursing with fury, was the huge hairy Cloud-Man. Up and up he went, swinging across the moonlit sky, and James Henry Trotter, watching him with delight, said, "My goodness, he must weigh almost nothing at all for one seagull to be able to pull him up like that! He must be all hair and air!"

The rest of the Cloud-Men were so flabbergasted at seeing one of their company carried away in this manner that they let go the ropes they were holding, and then of course down went the rainbow, both halves of it together, tumbling toward the earth below. This freed the peach, which at once began sailing away from that terrible cloud.

But the travelers were not in the clear yet. The infuriated Cloud-Men jumped up and ran after them along the cloud, pelting them mercilessly with all sorts of hard and horrible objects. Empty paint buckets, paint brushes, stepladders, stools, saucepans, frying-pans, rotten eggs, dead rats, bottles of hair-oil—anything those brutes could lay their hands on came raining down upon the peach. One Cloud-Man, taking very careful aim, tipped a gallon of thick purple paint over the edge of the cloud right onto the Centipede himself.

The Centipede screamed with anger. "My legs!" he cried. "They are all sticking together! I can't walk! And my eyelids won't open! I can't see! And my boots! My boots are ruined!"

But for the moment everyone was far too busy dodging the things that the Cloud-Men were throwing to pay any attention to the Centipede.

"The paint is drying!" he moaned. "It's going hard! I

can't move my legs! I can't move anything!"

"You can still move your mouth," the Earthworm said. "And that is a great pity."

"James!" bawled the Centipede. "Please help me! Wash off this paint! Scrape it off! Anything!"

## 29

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IT SEEMED LIKE a long time before the seagulls were able to pull the peach away from that horrible rainbow-cloud. But they managed it at last, and then everybody gathered around the wretched Centipede and began arguing about the best way to get the paint off his body.

He really did look a sight. He was purple all over, and now that the paint was beginning to dry and harden, he was forced to sit very stiff and upright, as though he were encased in cement. And all forty-two of his legs were sticking out straight in front of him, like rods. He tried to say something, but his lips wouldn't move. All he could do now was to make gurgling noises in his throat.

The Old-Green-Grasshopper reached out and touched him carefully on the stomach. "But how could it possibly have dried so quickly?" he asked.

"It's rainbow-paint," James answered. "Rainbow-paint dries very quick and very hard."

"I detest paint," Miss Spider announced. "It frightens me. It reminds me of Aunt Spiker—the *late* Aunt Spiker, I mean—because the last time she painted her kitchen



ceiling my poor darling grandmother stepped into it by mistake when it was still wet, and there she stuck. And all through the night we could hear her calling to us, saying 'Help! help! help!' and it was heartbreaking to listen to her. But what could we do? Not a thing until the next day when the paint had dried, and then of course we all rushed over to her and calmed her down and gave her some food. Believe it or not, she lived for six months like that, upside down on the ceiling with her legs stuck permanently in the paint. She really did. We fed her every day. We brought her fresh flies straight from the web. But then on the twenty-sixth of April last, Aunt Sponge—the *late* Aunt Sponge, I mean—happened to glance up at the ceiling, and she spotted her. 'A spider!' she cried. 'A disgusting spider! Quick! Fetch me the mop with the long

handle!' And then—Oh, it was so awful I can't bear to think of it. . . ." Miss Spider wiped away a tear and looked sadly at the Centipede. "You poor thing," she murmured. "I do feel sorry for you."

"It'll never come off," the Earthworm said brightly. "Our Centipede will never move again. He will turn into a statue and we shall be able to put him in the middle of the lawn with a bird-bath on the top of his head."

"We could try peeling him like a banana," the Old-Green-Grasshopper suggested.

"Or rubbing him with sandpaper," the Ladybug said.

"Now if he stuck out his tongue," the Earthworm said, smiling a little for perhaps the first time in his life, "if he stuck it out really far, then we could all catch hold of it and start pulling. And if we pulled hard enough we could turn him inside out and he would have a new skin!"

There was a pause while the others considered this interesting proposal.

"I think," James said slowly, "I think that the best thing to do . . ." Then he stopped. "What was *that*?" he asked quickly. "I heard a voice! I heard someone shouting!"

## 30

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THEY ALL RAISED their heads, listening.

"Ssshh! There it is again!"

But the voice was too far away for them to hear what it was saying.



"It's a Cloud-Man!" Miss Spider cried. "I just know it's a Cloud-Man! They're after us again!"

"It came from above!" the Earthworm said, and automatically everybody looked upward, everybody except the Centipede, who couldn't move.

"Ouch!" they said. "Help! Mercy! We're going to catch it this time!" For what they now saw, swirling and twisting directly over their heads, was an immense black cloud, a terrible, dangerous, thundery-looking thing that began to rumble and roar even as they were staring at it. And then, from high up on the top of the cloud, the faraway voice came down to them once again, this time very loud and clear.

*"On with the faucets!"* it shouted. *"On with the faucets! On with the faucets!"*

Three seconds later, the whole underneath of the cloud seemed to split and burst open like a paper bag, and then—*out* came the water! They saw it coming. It was quite easy to see because it wasn't just raindrops. It wasn't raindrops at all. It was a great solid mass of water that might have been a lake or a whole ocean dropping out of the sky on top of them, and down it came, down and down and down, crashing first onto the seagulls and then onto the peach itself, while the poor travelers shrieked with fear and groped around frantically for something to catch hold of—the peach stem, the silk strings, anything they could find—and all the time the water came pouring and roaring down upon them, bouncing and smashing and sloshing and slashing and swashing and swirling and surging and whirling and gurgling and gushing and rushing and rushing, and it was like



being pinned down underneath the biggest waterfall in the world and not being able to get out. They couldn't speak. They couldn't see. They couldn't breathe. And James Henry Trotter, holding on madly to one of the silk strings above the peach stem, told himself that this must surely be the end of everything at last. But then, just as suddenly as it had started, the deluge stopped. They were out of it and it was all over. The wonderful seagulls had flown right through it and had come out safely on the other side. Once again the giant peach was sailing peacefully through the mysterious moonlit sky.

"I am drowned!" gasped the Old-Green-Grasshopper, spitting out water by the pint.

"It's gone right through my skin!" the Earthworm groaned. "I always thought my skin was waterproof but it isn't and now I'm full of rain!"

"*Look at me, look at me!*" shouted the Centipede excitedly. "It's washed me *clean!* The paint's all gone! I can move again!"

"That's the worst news I've had in a long time," the Earthworm said.

The Centipede was dancing around the deck and turning somersaults in the air and singing at the top of his voice:

*"Ob, hooray for the storm and the rain!  
I can move! I don't feel any pain!"*



*And now I'm a pest,  
I'm the biggest and best,  
The most marvelous pest once again!"*

"Oh, do shut up," the Old-Green-Grasshopper said.  
"Look at me!" cried the Centipede.

*"Look at ME! I am freed! I am freed!  
Not a scratch nor a bruise nor a bleed!  
To his grave this fine gent  
They all thought they had sent  
And I very near went!  
Oh, I VERY near went!  
But they cent quite the wrong Sentipede!"*

## 31

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"HOW FAST WE ARE GOING all of a sudden," the Ladybug said. "I wonder why?"

"I don't think the seagulls like this place any better than we do," James answered. "I imagine they want to get out of it as soon as they can. They got a bad fright in the storm we've just been through."

Faster and faster flew the seagulls, skimming across the sky at a tremendous pace, with the peach trailing out behind them. Cloud after cloud went by on either side, all of them ghostly white in the moonlight, and several more times during the night the travelers caught glimpses of

Cloud-Men moving around on the tops of these clouds, working their sinister magic upon the world below.

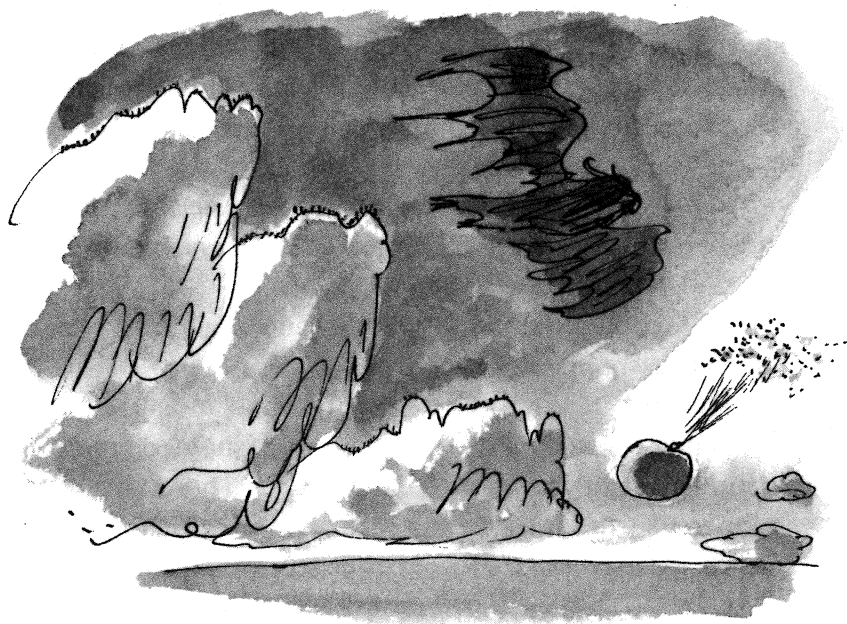
Once they passed a snow machine in operation, with the Cloud-Men turning the handle and a blizzard of snowflakes blowing out of the great funnel above. They saw the huge drums that were used for making thunder, and the Cloud-Men beating them furiously with long hammers. They saw the frost factories and the wind producers and the places where cyclones and tornadoes were manufactured and sent spinning down toward the Earth, and once, deep in the hollow of a large billowy cloud, they spotted something that could only have been a Cloud-Men's city. There were caves everywhere running into the cloud, and at the entrances to the caves the Cloud-Men's wives were crouching over little stoves with frying-pans in their hands, frying snowballs for their husbands' suppers. And hundreds of Cloud-Men's children were frisking about all over the place and shrieking with laughter and sliding down the billows of the cloud on toboggans.

An hour later, just before dawn, the travelers heard a soft *whooshing* noise above their heads and they glanced up and saw an immense gray batlike creature swooping down toward them out of the dark. It circled round and round the peach, flapping its great wings slowly in the moonlight and staring at the travelers. Then it uttered a series of long deep melancholy cries and flew off again into the night.

"Oh, I do wish the morning would come!" Miss Spider said, shivering all over.

"It won't be long now," James answered. "Look, it's getting lighter over there already."

They all sat in silence watching the sun as it came up slowly over the rim of the horizon for a new day.



## 32

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AND WHEN FULL DAYLIGHT came at last, they all got to their feet and stretched their poor cramped bodies, and then the Centipede, who always seemed to see things first, shouted, "Look! There's land below!"

"He's right!" they cried, running to the edge of the peach and peering over. "Hooray! Hooray!"

"It looks like streets and houses!"

"But how enormous it all is!"

A vast city, glistening in the early-morning sunshine, lay spread out three thousand feet below them. At that height, the cars were like little beetles crawling along the streets, and people walking on the pavements looked no larger than tiny grains of soot.

"But what tremendous tall buildings!" exclaimed the Ladybug. "I've never seen anything like *them* before in England. Which town do you think it is?"

"This couldn't possibly be England," said the Old-Green-Grasshopper.

"Then where is it?" asked Miss Spider.

"You know what those buildings are?" shouted James, jumping up and down with excitement. "Those are skyscrapers! So this must be America! And that, my friends, means that we have crossed the Atlantic Ocean overnight!"

"You don't mean it!" they cried.

"It's not possible!"

"It's incredible! It's unbelievable!"

"Oh, I've always dreamed of going to America!" cried the Centipede. "I had a friend once who—"

"Be quiet!" said the Earthworm. "Who cares about your friend? The thing we've got to think about now is *how on earth are we going to get down to earth?*"

"Ask James," said the Ladybug.

"I don't think that should be so very difficult," James told them. "All we'll have to do is to cut loose a few sea-

gulls. Not too many, mind you, but just enough so that the others can't *quite* keep us up in the air. Then down we shall go, slowly and gently, until we reach the ground. Centipede will bite through the strings for us one at a time."

## 33

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FAR BELOW THEM, in the City of New York, something like pandemonium was breaking out. A great round ball as big as a house had been sighted hovering high up in the sky over the very center of Manhattan, and the cry had gone up that it was an enormous bomb sent over by another country to blow the whole city to smithereens. Air-raid sirens began wailing in every section. All radio and television programs were interrupted with announcements that the population must go down into their cellars immediately. One million people walking in the streets on their way to work looked up into the sky and saw the monster hovering above them, and started running for the nearest subway entrance to take cover. Generals grabbed hold of telephones and shouted orders to everyone they could think of. The Mayor of New York called up the President of the United States down in Washington, D.C., to ask him for help, and the President, who at that moment was having breakfast in his pajamas, quickly pushed away his half-finished plate of Sugar Crisps and started pressing buttons right and left to summon his





Admirals and his Generals. And all the way across the vast stretch of America, in all the fifty States from Alaska to Florida, from Pennsylvania to Hawaii, the alarm was sounded and the word went out that the biggest bomb in the history of the world was hovering over New York City, and that at any moment it might go off.

## 34

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"COME ON, CENTIPEDE, bite through the first string," James ordered.

The Centipede took one of the silk strings between his teeth and bit through it. And once again (but *not* with an angry Cloud-Man dangling from the end of the string this time) a single seagull came away from the rest of the flock and went flying off on its own.

"Bite another," James ordered.

The Centipede bit through another string.

"Why aren't we sinking?"

"We are sinking!"

"No, we're not!"

"Don't forget the peach is a lot lighter now than when we started out," James told them. "It lost an awful lot of juice when all those hailstones hit it in the night. Cut away two more seagulls, Centipede!"

"Ah, that's better!"

"Here we go!"

"Now we really are sinking!"

"Yes, this is perfect! Don't bite any more, Centipede, or we'll sink too fast! Gently does it!"

Slowly the great peach began losing height, and the buildings and streets down below began coming closer and closer.

"Do you think we'll all get our pictures in the papers when we get down?" the Ladybug asked.

"My goodness, I've forgotten to polish my boots!" the Centipede said. "Everyone must help me to polish my boots before we arrive."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" said the Earthworm. "Can't you ever stop thinking about—"

But he never finished his sentence. For suddenly . . . *WHOOOSH!* . . . and they looked up and saw a huge four-engined plane come shooting out of a nearby cloud and go whizzing past them not more than twenty feet over their heads. This was actually the regular early-morning passenger plane coming in to New York from Chicago, and as it went by, it sliced right through every single one of the silken strings, and immediately the seagulls broke away, and the enormous peach, having nothing to hold it up in the air any longer, went tumbling down toward the earth like a lump of lead.

"Help!" cried the Centipede.

"Save us!" cried Miss Spider.

"We are lost!" cried the Ladybug.

"This is the end!" cried the Old-Green-Grasshopper.

"James!" cried the Earthworm. "Do something, James! Quickly, do something!"

"I can't!" cried James. "I'm sorry! Good-by! Shut your eyes, everybody! It won't be long now!"

ROUND AND ROUND and upside down went the peach as it plummeted toward the earth, and they were all clinging desperately to the stem to save themselves from being flung into space.

Faster and faster it fell. Down and down and down, racing closer and closer to the houses and streets below, where it would surely smash into a million pieces when it hit. And all the way along Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue, and along all the other streets in the City, people who had not yet reached the underground shelters looked up and saw it coming, and they stopped running and stood there staring in a sort of stupor at what they thought was the biggest bomb in all the world falling out of the sky onto their heads. A few women screamed. Others knelt down on the sidewalks and began praying aloud. Strong men turned to one another and said things like, "I guess this is it, Joe," and "Good-by, everybody, good-by." And for the next thirty seconds the whole City held its breath, waiting for the end to come.

"GOOD-BY, LADYBUG!" gasped James, clinging to the stem of the falling peach. "Good-by, Centipede. Good-by, everybody!" There were only a few seconds to go now and it

looked as though they were going to fall right in among all the tallest buildings. James could see the skyscrapers rushing up to meet them at the most awful speed, and most of them had square flat tops, but the very tallest of them all had a top that tapered off into a long sharp point—like an enormous silver needle sticking up into the sky.

And it was precisely onto the top of this needle that the peach fell!

There was a squelch. The needle went in deep. And suddenly—there was the giant peach, caught and spiked upon the very pinnacle of the Empire State Building.

## 37

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IT WAS REALLY an amazing sight, and in two or three minutes, as soon as the people below realized that this now couldn't possibly be a bomb, they came pouring out of the shelters and the subways to gape at the marvel. The streets for half a mile around the building were jammed with men and women, and when the word spread that there were actually living things moving about on the top of the great round ball, then everyone went wild with excitement.

"It's a flying saucer!" they shouted.

"They are from Outer Space!"

"They are men from Mars!"

"Or maybe they came from the Moon!"



And a man who had a pair of binoculars to his eyes said, "They look *pritt-ty* peculiar to me, I'll tell you that."

Police cars and fire engines came screaming in from all over the city and pulled up outside the Empire State Building. Two hundred firemen and six hundred policemen swarmed into the building and went up in the elevators as high as they could go. Then they poured out onto the observation roof—which is the place where tourists stand—just at the bottom of the big spike.

All the policemen were holding their guns at the ready, with their fingers on the triggers, and the firemen were clutching their hatchets. But from where they stood, almost directly underneath the peach, they couldn't actually see the travelers up on top.

"Ahoy there!" shouted the Chief of Police. "Come out and show yourselves!"

Suddenly, the great brown head of the Centipede appeared over the side of the peach. His black eyes, as large and round as two marbles, glared down at the policemen and the firemen below. Then his monstrous ugly face broke into a wide grin.

The policemen and the firemen all started shouting at once. "Look out!" they cried. "It's a Dragon!"

"It's not a Dragon! It's a Wampus!"

"It's a Gorgon!"

"It's a Sea-serpent!"

"It's a Prock!"

"It's a Manticore!"

Three firemen and five policemen fainted and had to be carried away.

"It's a Snozzwanger!" cried the Chief of Police.

"It's a Whangdoodle!" yelled the Head of the Fire Department.

The Centipede kept on grinning. He seemed to be enjoying enormously the commotion that he was causing.

"Now see here!" shouted the Chief of Police, cupping his hands to his mouth. "You listen to me! I want you to tell me exactly where you've come from!"

"We've come from thousands of miles away!" the Centipede shouted back, grinning more broadly than ever and showing his brown teeth.

"There you are!" cried the Chief of Police. "I *told* you they came from Mars!"

"I guess you're right!" said the Head of the Fire Department.

At this point, the Old-Green-Grasshopper poked his huge green head over the side of the peach, alongside the Centipede's. Six more big strong men fainted when they saw him.

"That one's an Oinck!" screamed the Head of the Fire Department. "I just *know* it's an Oinck!"

"Or a Cockatrice!" yelled the Chief of Police. "Stand back, men! It may jump down on us any moment!"

"What on earth are they talking about?" the Old-Green-Grasshopper said to the Centipede.

"Search me," the Centipede answered. "But they seem to be in an awful stew about something."

Then Miss Spider's large black murderous-looking head, which to a stranger was probably the most terrifying of all, appeared next to the Grasshopper's.

"Snakes and ladders!" yelled the Head of the Fire Department. "We are finished now! It's a giant Scorpula!"



"It's worse than that!" cried the Chief of Police. "It's a vermicious Knid! Oh, just look at its vermicious gruesome face!"

"Is that the kind that eats fully grown men for breakfast?" the Head of the Fire Department asked, going white as a sheet.

"I'm afraid it is," the Chief of Police answered.

"Oh, *please* why doesn't someone help us to get down from here?" Miss Spider called out. "It's making me giddy."

"This could be a trick!" said the Head of the Fire Department. "Don't anyone make a move until I say!"

"They've probably got space guns!" muttered the Chief of Police.

"But we've *got* to do *something*!" the Head of the Fire Department announced grimly. "About five million people are standing down there on the streets watching us."

"Then why don't you put up a ladder?" the Chief of Police asked him. "I'll stand at the bottom and hold it steady for you while you go up and see what's happening."

"Thanks very much!" snapped the Head of the Fire Department.

Soon there were no less than *seven* large fantastic faces peering down over the side of the peach—the Centipede's, the Old-Green-Grasshopper's, Miss Spider's, the Earthworm's, the Ladybug's, the Silkworm's, and the Glowworm's. And a sort of panic was beginning to break out among the firemen and the policemen on the rooftop.

Then, all at once, the panic stopped and a great gasp of astonishment went up all around. For now, a small boy was seen to be standing up there beside the other crea-



tures. His hair was blowing in the wind, and he was laughing and waving and calling out, "Hello, everybody! Hello!"

For a few moments, the men below just stood and stared and gaped. They simply couldn't believe their eyes.

"*Bless my soul!*" cried the Head of the Fire Department, going red in the face. "It really is a little boy, isn't it?"

"Don't be frightened of us, please!" James called out. "We are so glad to be here!"

"What about those others beside you?" shouted the

Chief of Police. "Are any of them dangerous?"

"Of course they're not dangerous!" James answered. "They're the nicest creatures in the world! Allow me to introduce them to you one by one and then I'm sure you will believe me.



*"My friends, this is the Centipede, and let me  
make it known*

*He is so sweet and gentle that (although he's  
overgrown)*

*The Queen of Spain, again and again, has  
summoned him by phone*

*To baby-sit and sing and knit and be a  
chaperone*

*When nurse is off and all the royal children are  
all alone."*

*("Small wonder," said a Fireman, "they're no  
longer on the throne.")*

*"The Earthworm, on the other hand,"  
Said James, beginning to expand,*



*"Is great for digging up the land  
And making old soils newer.  
Moreover, you should understand  
He would be absolutely grand  
For digging subway tunnels and  
For making you a sewer."  
(The Earthworm blushed and beamed with  
pride.  
Miss Spider clapped and cheered and cried,  
"Could any words be truer?"")*

*"And the Grasshopper, ladies and gents, is a  
boon  
In millions and millions of ways.  
You have only to ask him to give you a  
tune  
And he plays and he plays and he plays.  
As a toy for your children he's perfectly  
sweet;  
There's nothing so good in the shops—*



*You've only to tickle the soles of his feet  
And he hops and he hops and he hops."  
("He can't be very fierce!" exclaimed  
The Head of all the Cops.)*



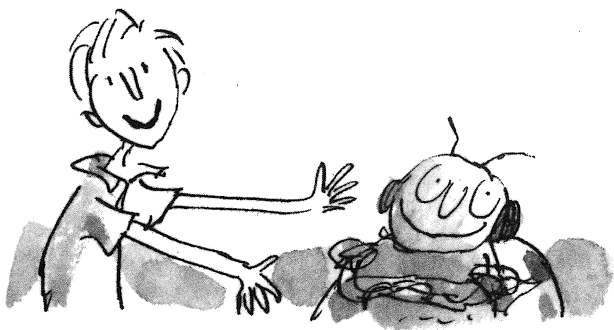
*"And now without excuse  
I'd like to introduce  
This charming Glow-worm, lover of simplicity.  
She is easy to install  
On your ceiling or your wall,*

*And although this smacks a bit of eccentricity,  
 It's really rather clever  
 For thereafter you will never  
 You will NEVER NEVER NEVER  
 Have the slightest need for using electricity."  
 (At which, no less than fifty-two  
 Policemen cried, "If this is true  
 That creature'll get some fabulous publicity!")*



*"And here we have Miss Spider  
 With a mile of thread inside her  
 Who has personally requested me to say  
 That she's NEVER met Miss Muffet—  
 On her charming little tuffet—  
 If she had she'd NOT have frightened her away.  
 Should her looks sometimes alarm you  
 Then I don't think it would harm you  
 To repeat at least a hundred times a day:  
 'I must NEVER kill a spider  
 I must only help and guide her*

*And invite her in the nursery to play.”  
(The Police all nodded slightly,  
And the Firemen smiled politely,  
And about a dozen people cried,  
“Hooray!”)*



*“And here’s my darling Ladybug, so beautiful,  
so kind,  
My greatest comfort since this trip began.  
She has four hundred children and she’s left  
them all behind,  
But they’re coming on the next peach if they  
can.”  
(The Cops cried, “She’s entrancing!”  
All the Firemen started dancing,  
And the crowds all started cheering to a man!)*

*“And now, the Silkworm,” James went on,  
“Whose silk will bear comparison  
With all the greatest silks there are  
In Rome and Philadelphia.  
If you would search the whole world through*



*From Paraguay to Timbuctoo  
I don't think you would find one bit  
Of silk that could compare with it.  
Even the shops in Singapore  
Don't have the stuff. And what is more,  
This Silkworm had, I'll have you know,  
The honor, not so long ago,  
To spin and weave and sew and press  
The Queen of England's wedding dress.  
And she's already made and sent  
A waistcoat for your President."  
("Well, good for her!" the Cops cried out,  
And all at once a mighty shout  
Went up around the Empire State,  
"Let's get them down at once! Why WAIT?")*



FIVE MINUTES LATER, they were all safely down, and James was excitedly telling his story to a group of flabbergasted officials.

And suddenly—everyone who had come over on the peach was a hero! They were all escorted to the steps of City Hall, where the Mayor of New York made a speech of welcome. And while he was doing this, one hundred steeplejacks, armed with ropes and ladders and pulleys, swarmed up to the top of the Empire State Building and lifted the giant peach off the spike and lowered it to the ground.

Then the Mayor shouted, "We must now have a ticker-tape parade for our wonderful visitors!"

And so a procession was formed, and in the leading car (which was an enormous open limousine) sat James and all his friends.

Next came the giant peach itself. Men with cranes and hooks had quickly hoisted it onto a very large truck and there it now sat, looking just as huge and proud and brave as ever. There was, of course, a bit of a hole in the bottom of it where the spike of the Empire State Building had gone in, but who cared about that—or indeed about the peach juice that was dripping out of it onto the street?

Behind the peach, skidding about all over the place in the peach juice, came the Mayor's limousine, and behind the Mayor's limousine came about twenty other limousines carrying all the important people of the City.

And the crowds went wild with excitement. They leaned out of the windows of the skyscrapers, cheering and yelling and screaming and clapping and throwing out bits of white paper and ticker-tape, and James and his friends stood up in their car and waved back at them as they went by.

Then a rather curious thing happened. The procession was moving slowly along Fifth Avenue when suddenly a little girl in a red dress ran out from the crowd and shouted, "Oh, James, James! Could I *please* have just a tiny taste of your marvelous peach?"

"Help yourself!" James shouted back. "Eat all you want! It won't keep forever, anyway!"

No sooner had he said this than about fifty other children exploded out of the crowd and came running onto the street.

"Can *we* have some, too?" they cried.

"Of course you can!" James answered. "Everyone can have some!"

The children jumped up onto the truck and swarmed like ants all over the giant peach, eating and eating to their hearts' content. And as the news of what was happening spread quickly from street to street, more and more boys and girls came running from all directions to join the feast. Soon, there was a trail of children a mile long chasing after the peach as it proceeded slowly up Fifth Avenue. Really, it was a fantastic sight. To some people it looked as though the Pied Piper of Hamelin had suddenly descended upon New York. And to James, who had never dreamed that there could be so many children



as this in the world, it was the most marvelous thing that had ever happened.

By the time the procession was over, the whole gigantic fruit had been completely eaten up, and only the big brown stone in the middle, licked clean and shiny by ten thousand eager little tongues, was left standing on the truck.

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AND THUS THE JOURNEY ENDED. But the travelers lived on. Every one of them became rich and successful in the new country.

The Centipede was made Vice-President-in-Charge-of-Sales of a high-class firm of boot and shoe manufacturers.

The Earthworm, with his lovely pink skin, was employed by a company that made women's face creams to speak commercials on television.

The Silkworm and Miss Spider, after they had both been taught to make nylon thread instead of silk, set up a factory together and made ropes for tightrope walkers.

The Glow-worm became the light inside the torch on the Statue of Liberty, and thus saved a grateful City from having to pay a huge electricity bill every year.

The Old-Green-Grasshopper became a member of the New York Symphony Orchestra, where his playing was greatly admired.

The Ladybug, who had been haunted all her life by the fear that her house was on fire and her children all gone, married the Head of the Fire Department and lived happily ever after.

And as for the enormous peach stone—it was set up permanently in a place of honor in Central Park and became a famous monument. But it was not *only* a famous monument. It was also a famous house. And inside the famous house there lived a famous person—

JAMES HENRY TROTTER  
himself.

And all you had to do any day of the week was to go and knock upon the door, and the door would always be opened to you, and you would always be asked to come inside and see the famous room where James had first met his friends. And sometimes, if you were very lucky, you would find the Old-Green-Grasshopper in there as well, resting peacefully in a chair before the fire, or perhaps it would be the Ladybug who had dropped in for a cup of tea and a gossip, or the Centipede to show off a new batch of particularly elegant boots that he had just acquired.

Every day of the week, hundreds and hundreds of children from far and near came pouring into the City to see the marvelous peach stone in the Park. And James Henry Trotter, who once, if you remember, had been the saddest and loneliest little boy that you could find, now had all the friends and playmates in the world. And because so



many of them were always begging him to tell and tell again the story of his adventures on the peach, he thought it would be nice if one day he sat down and wrote a book.

So he did.

And *that* is what you have just finished reading.

