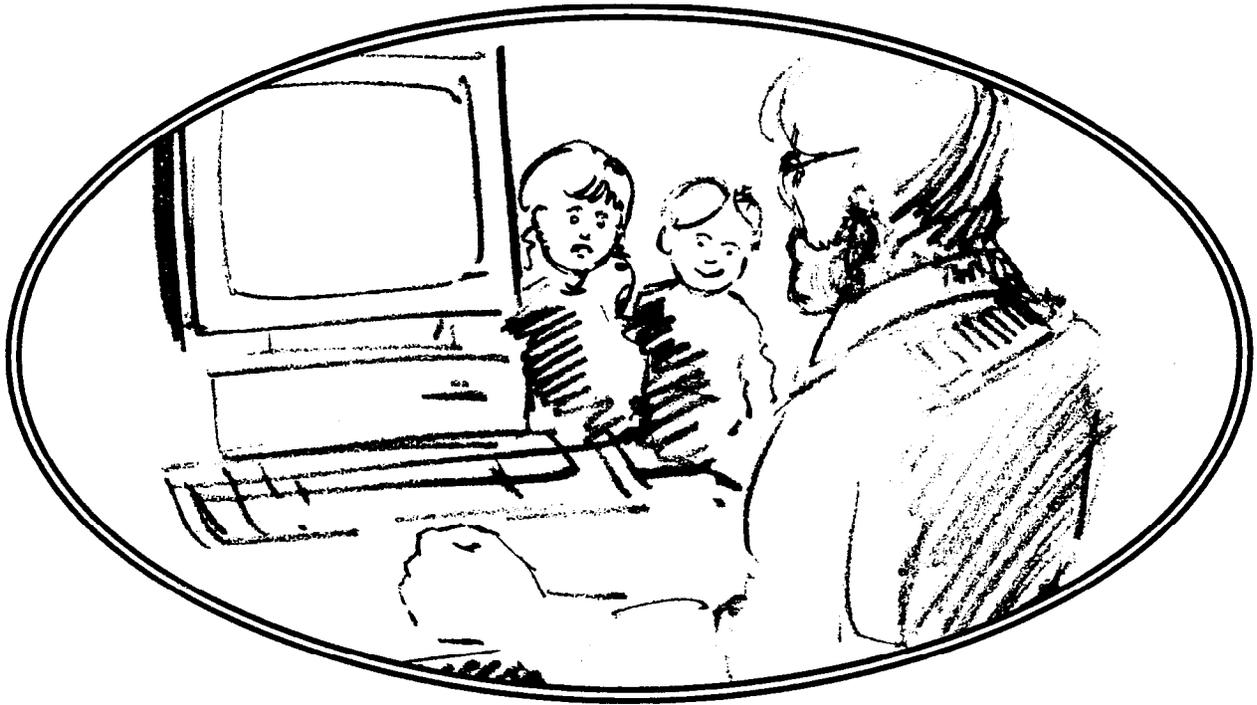




The Right Magic.

Story by Stuart Baum
Illustrations by Vic Tito

For Becca and Bill.
And the two wizards who conjured them.



It was early Sunday morning. Rebecca, called “Becca”, and Bill, her younger brother, were bored. Mother was singing at Church and would not be back until after lunch. Father was upstairs working on the computer, and was not to be disturbed. But the two children bothered him, anyway.

“We’re bored!” exclaimed Becca.

“Play a game,” said Father, not looking away from the computer screen.

“We played them all,” said Becca.

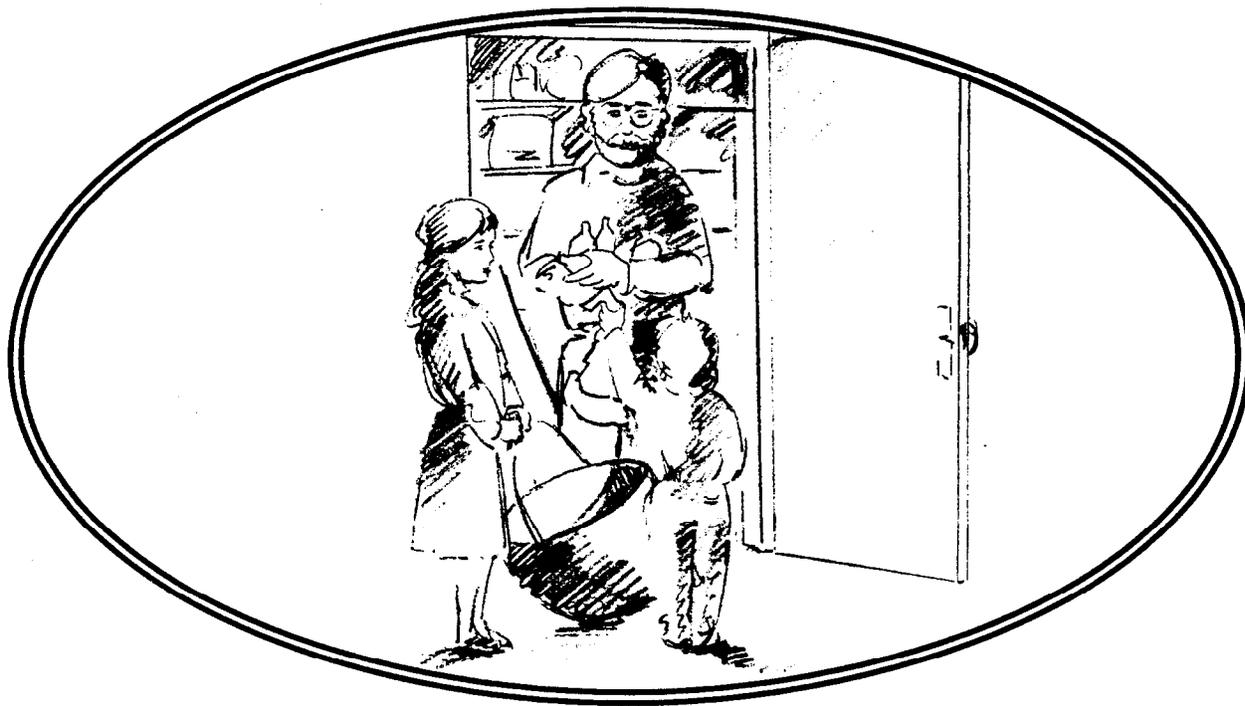
“Read your brother a book,” said Father.

“I read him one,” said Becca.

“Then go outside.”

“I don’t wanna go outside,” said Bill. “I want you to play with us.”

“I wish I could, but I’m working,” said Father. Then, looking up from the screen for the first time, Father said, “How about if I *make* you someone to play with?”



“Yay!” cheered the two children. Father walked across the room and opened up the cabinet where he kept all his magic powders and potions. “Now go get my cauldron,” said Father to Becca, who ran downstairs in a flash. “And you,” said Father to Bill, “can go get my hat.” In seconds, Becca appeared dragging a big, black pot and Bill ran in carrying Father’s floppy wizard’s hat. They were ready.

“What do you want me to make?” asked father.

“Someone to play with us,” said Bill.

“A dragon!” said Becca.

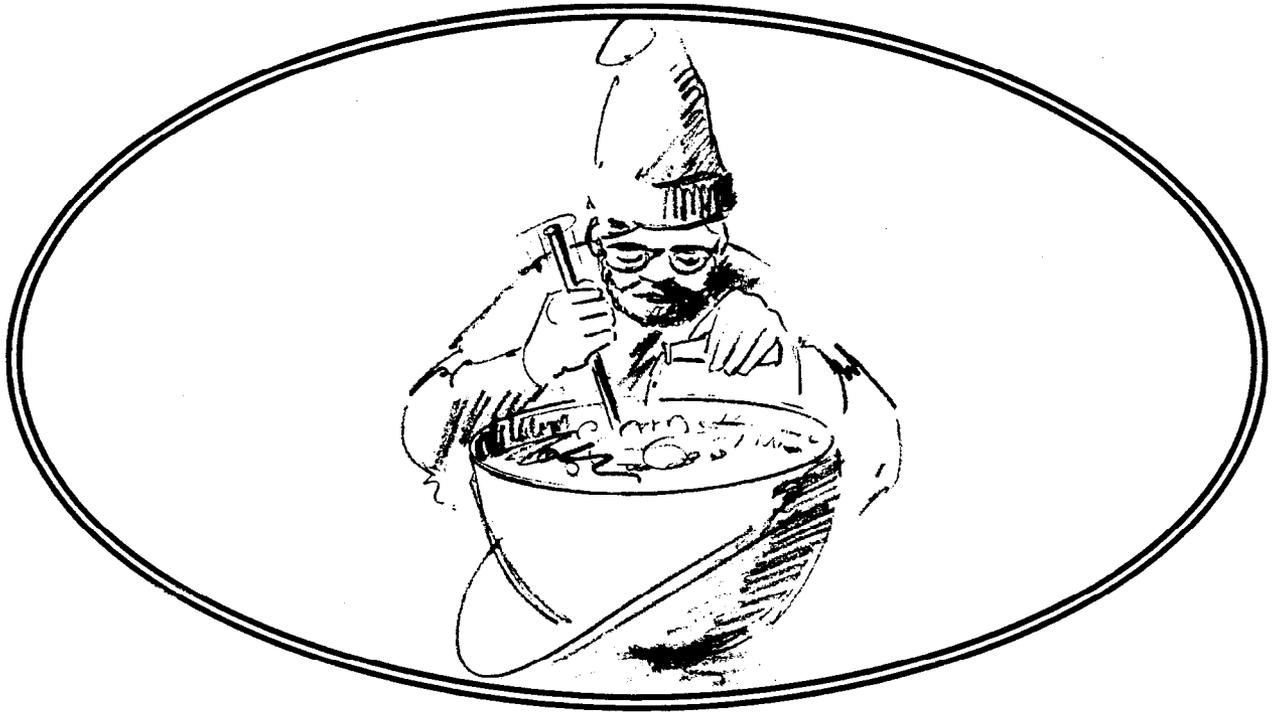
“A *friendly* dragon,” Bill added quickly.

“Who will let us ride on his back,” Becca said.

“And tell us stories,” said Bill.

“Is that all?” asked Father with a smile. The two children nodded. “A dragon, a *friendly, story-telling* dragon it is,” said Father. “With soft green scales so you won’t get scratched while you ride on his back and bright purple eyes, so you can tell he’s friendly.

“Yay!” screamed the two children again.



The children watched as Father filled the cauldron with potions and powders and chanted magic words. Soon, the mixture in the cauldron was green and blue and made soft popping sounds and low, growly gurgling noises. First it smelled a little too sweet like cotton candy. Next it smelled a little too sour like a fresh lemon. Then it had no smell at all.

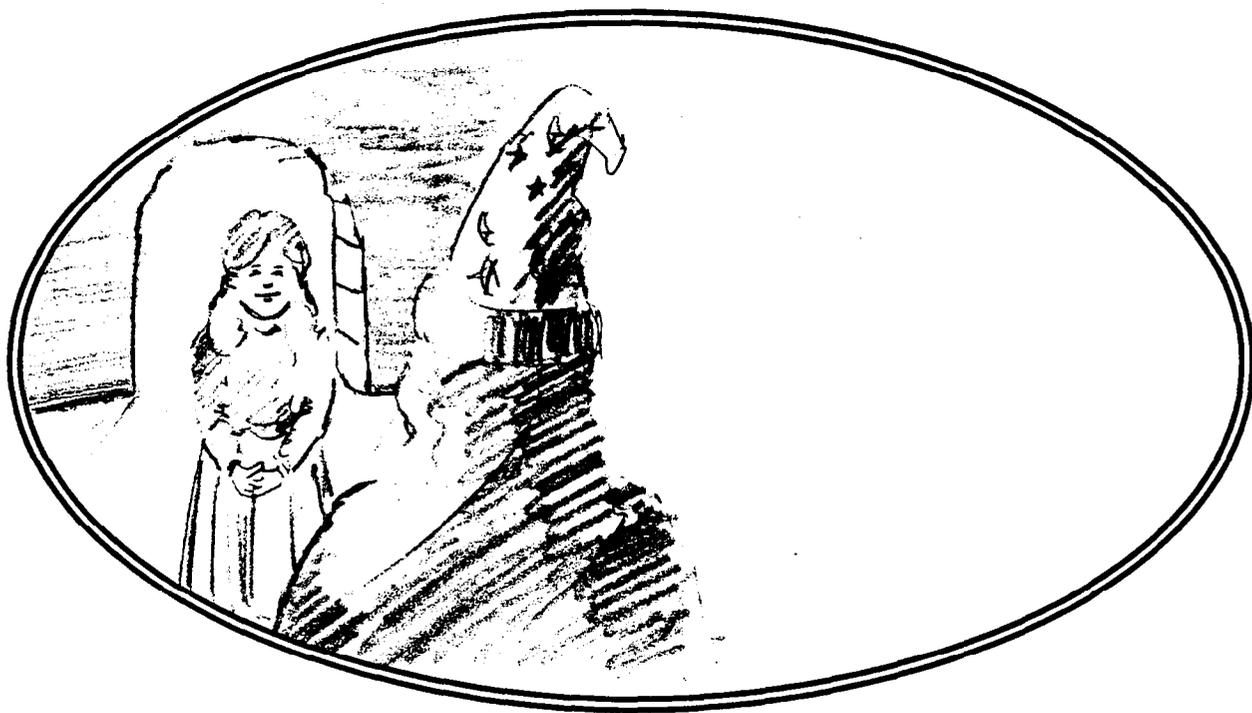
The children helped add some of the powders, being careful to get all the powder into the pot and none on their fingers, and once, for a short while, Father let Becca stir.

“Oh no!” said Father all of a sudden.

“What?” said both children.

“I’m missing something,” said Father searching through the cabinet where he kept his magic. “Becca, I need you to go to the Old Wizard’s Shop. But listen carefully,” said Father, “it’s very important that you get *exactly* the right thing.” Becca tried to listen carefully. “I need a magic, sparkly, purple gem.”

Becca ran out of the room so fast that she didn’t hear her Father when he said, “Make sure you get the right color!”



Becca ran all the way to the Old Wizard's Shop and was out of breath when she got there.

"Father needs (pant), a magic (pant), sparkly (pant) gem," she told the Old Wizard.

The Old Wizard was no taller than you are, but much, much older, and he was wearing a wizard's hat with yellow and silver stars and moons all over it. And his beard was so long it touched the floor and so grey it seemed as if it were made out of metal.

The Old Wizard opened a drawer and took out a fairly large-sized box marked 'Sparkly Gems.'

In his scratchy sing-songy voice, the Old Wizard told Becca, "I have so many sparkly gems, you have to tell me what color you need."

Becca tried to remember, but could not. "Let me see them all," she said, "and then I will remember what color Father wants."

The Old Wizard let Becca look into the box and she saw more sparkly gems than she had ever seen before in her whole life. Blue, red, yellow, green, orange, purple, brown, black, white, turquoise, olive, magenta, and dozens of colors she could not even name. And they all sparkled so!



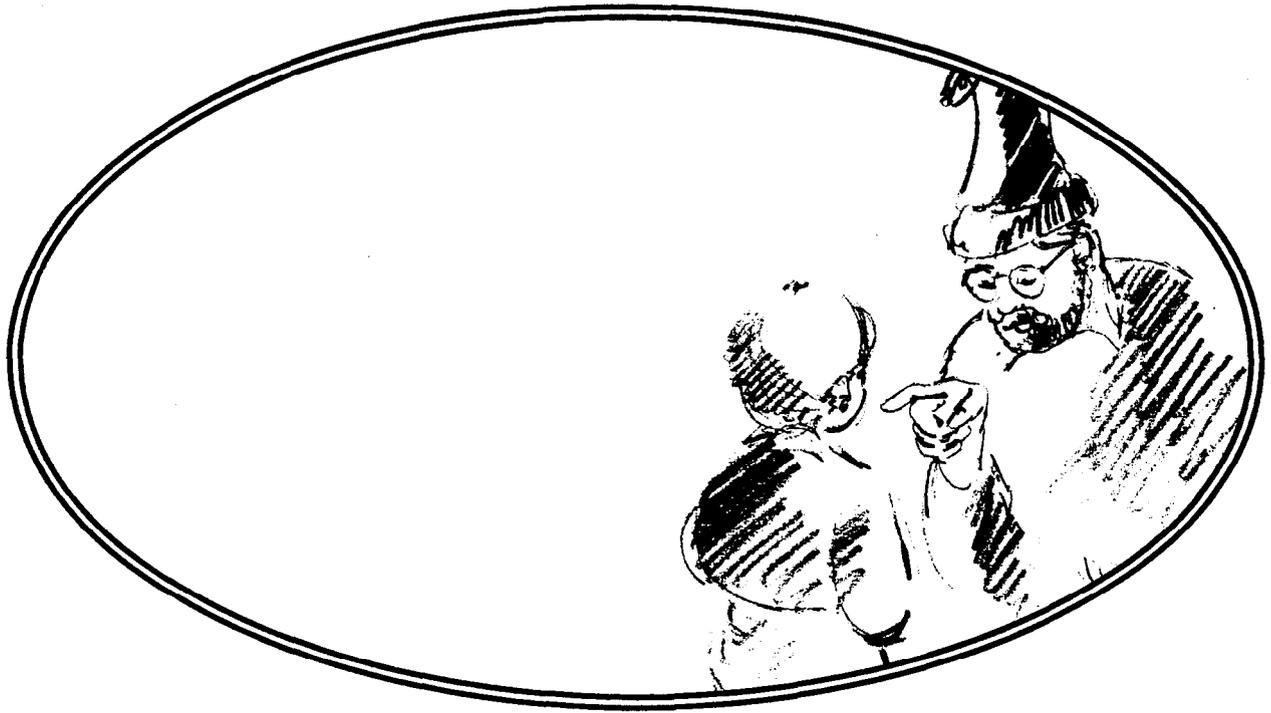
“Pink,” said Becca, sounding more certain than she was. “He asked for a magic, sparkly, pink gem.”

“Are you sure?” asked the Old Wizard. “It will make a big difference.”

Becca was not sure, but she nodded anyway. So, the Old Wizard plucked out a pink gem, wrapped it in tissue paper, put it into a small velvet pouch, and gave it to Becca. Becca ran all the way home.



Father took the velvet pouch from Becca, removed the gem and, without even unwrapping it from the tissue paper, dropped it into the cauldron. There was a loud 'Pweeeerrrrr-op!' as the gem hit the mixture. Father looked at Becca curiously for an instant, then continued stirring and adding other potions and powders.



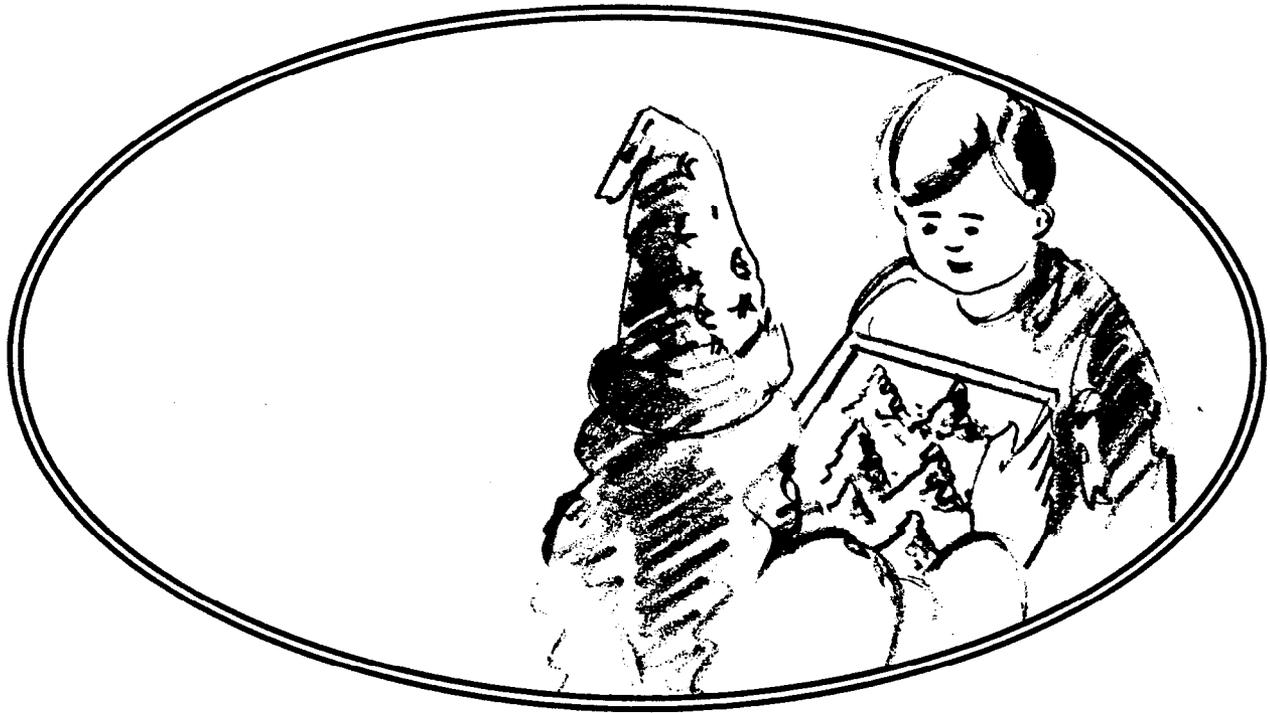
After a short while, Father once again said, "Oh no!" Becca gasped.

Bill looked up at his Father and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I'm missing one more ingredient," answered Father to Becca's relief.

"Bill," said Father, "it's your turn to go to the Old Wizard's Shop. Please listen carefully." Bill put his ear right next to Father's mouth. Father spoke very slowly, emphasizing every word carefully, "I need some fine, blue and green magic flakes. Did you hear that?" asked Father.

Bill nodded. Then Bill ran to the Old Wizard's Shop.



The Old Wizard smiled as Bill entered and asked in his sing-songy voice, "What do you need little boy?"

Bill, who was a little frightened of the tiny Old Wizard, said quietly, "Father needs some blue and green magic flakes."

The Old Wizard nodded, straightened his hat, and pulled out a drawer that was filled with piles of flakes. All of them were blue and green. "What *kind* of blue and green flakes did he want?" asked the Old Wizard. "I have a number of different kinds and they all do very different things."

Bill said nothing.

The Old Wizard pointed to each pile of flakes as he spoke, "I have *quick* blue and green flakes, *slow* blue and green flakes, *hard* blue and green flakes, *soft* blue and green flakes, *fine* blue and green flakes, and *clumpy* blue and green flakes.

Bill knew that his father wanted blue and green flakes, but couldn't remember which kind. But he *did* know that the dragon's scales were going to be soft, so he asked for some *soft* blue and green flakes.

"Are you sure?" sang the Old Wizard. "It will make a big difference." Bill nodded, but was not at all sure. The Old Wizard poured some flakes into a white envelope and put the envelope into a velvet pouch and handed it to Bill, who ran home as fast as he could.



Father took pouch from Bill, removed the envelope and threw the flakes, envelope and all, into the cauldron. This time there was a very, very slow hissing sound like air being carefully let out of a bicycle tire: 'Hhhhhhhissssss-isssss-isssssssssss.'

Father looked curiously at Bill. Bill smiled, a little nervous. Then Father added more magic powders and potions and kept stirring. The mixture was getting thick and very gurgly. A bluish, sticky smoke began filling the room.

After adding one final sprinkle of some green-colored something or other, Father said, "Almost done."

"Yay!" the two children cheered, but not as loudly as earlier.

"All right," said Father, "I just have two say two magic words and then we'll have the *friendly, story-telling, ride-giving* dragon you requested."

Father waved his hand five times over the bubbling mixture and said very softly, "Abara Cadabara."



The bluish smoke that filled the room became thicker and thicker and stickier and stickier and began taking shape right in front of Becca and Bill. The children watched, mouths open. There was the green body! There were the scales! There were the sparkly eyes! But they were pink instead of purple. How would they know it was friendly? And where were the wings? And the scales were sharp and pointed instead of soft.

Suddenly the smoke cleared. In the middle of the room, instead of a friendly dragon, loomed a huge, hideous, menacing, hissing snake. It had awful pink eyes and a long leathery tongue. And before the two children could even breathe, it sprang at Father and wrapped itself around him. Father reached up and grabbed the snake by its head with both hands, keeping the snake's flickering tongue just inches away from his face.

The two children screamed.



Father and the snake fought and fought. Sometimes it looked like Father would win, but the snake tightened its coils and Father gasped for air. Sometimes it looked like the snake would win, but Father gritted his teeth and held the snake away from his face.

“Hurry!” said Father as he wrestled the snake. “Go back to the Old Wizard’s Shop and, *listen carefully*, get me some milky white, bad magic dissolving potion. Both of you. And hurry!”

Becca and Bill ran to the Old Magic Shop. When they arrived, they were completely out of breath. “Father needs some (pant) ...” started Becca.

“...white (pant) ...” added Bill.

“...bad magic (pant) ...” added Becca.

“...dissolving (pant) ...” said Bill.

“...potion,” finished Becca. “And hurry!”

The Old Wizard seemed to take forever as he scratched his chin, smoothed the entire length of his long grey beard, looked around the whole Magic Shop and, finally, pulled out an old cardboard box. Inside the box was another box. This one was covered with embroidered dragons and snakes and lions and tigers of all shapes and colors. The Old Wizard blew the dust from the top of the box, untied the string that held the box top on, and pulled out four glass bottles. Each bottle was filled with a white potion.



“Now,” said the Old Wizard, in a serious, not at all sing-songy voice, “which *kind* of white, bad magic dissolving potion does your Father need?”

The two children could not remember. Becca asked the Old Wizard, “Why don’t you show us all the kinds you have and maybe we will remember which one Father needs?”

The Old Wizard named the different dissolving potions as he pointed to them, “This one is *hazy* white. This one is *milky* white. This one is *sparkly* white. And this last one is *pearly* white.

“Sparkly,” said Becca. “I think he wanted sparkly.” Bill said nothing.

“Are you sure?” asked the Old Wizard. “It will make a big difference.”

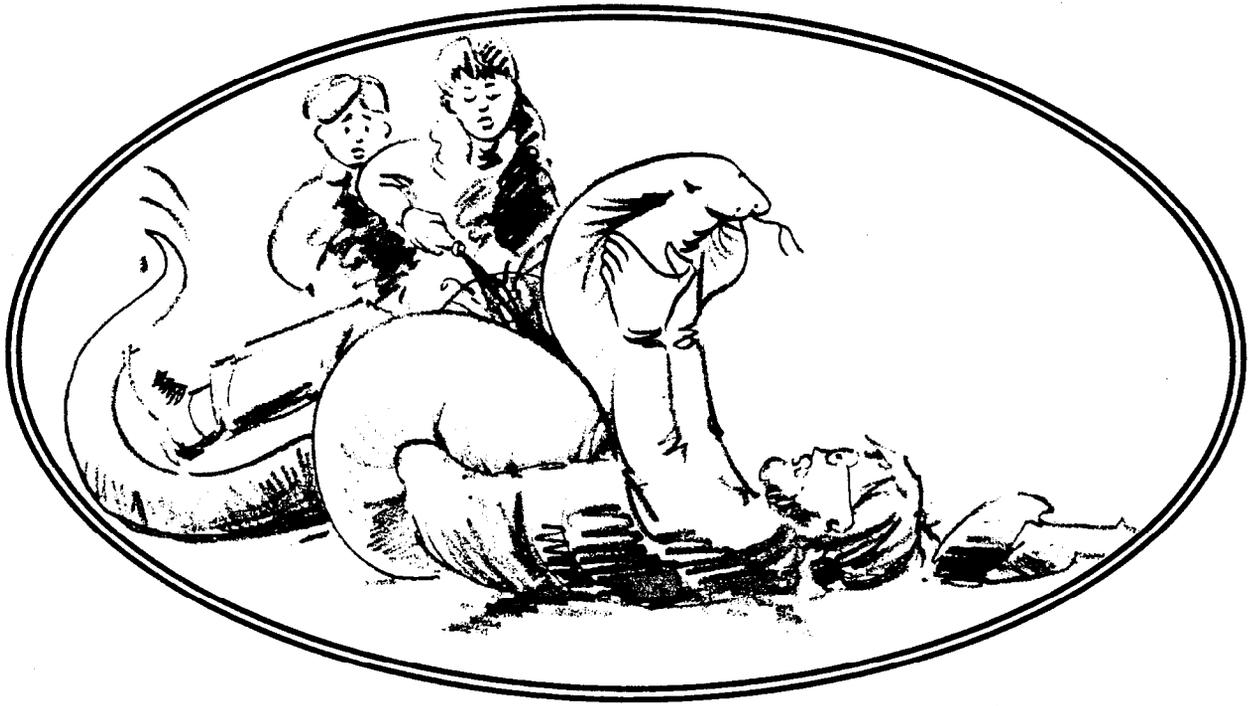
Becca thought about Father fighting with the snake and what might happen if she were wrong. She shook her head. “No,” she admitted, “I am not sure.” She started to cry. Bill, too, thought about Father being eaten by the snake and also started to cry.

“Maybe I can help,” said the Old Wizard with a knowing smile. “What kind of bad magic did your Father make?”

“A snake!” both children yelled at once.

The Old Wizard smiled and nodded his head proudly at the two children. Without saying a word and without stopping to wrap the bottle or even put it into a velvet pouch, the Old Wizard handed Becca a bottle of *milky* white, bad magic dissolving potion.

The two children ran home.



When they got inside, Father was lying underneath the snake, out of breath, his strength nearly gone, and just barely holding the snake's leathery flickering tongue away from his face.

"Hurry!" said Father. "Open the bottle and pour it onto the snake!" Becca pulled the small cork out of the bottle and poured the milky white potion onto the snake's back.

At first, nothing happened. Then the snake turned from green to milky white. Then there was a small *pop* and the snake disappeared.



Father got up off the floor, picked up his cauldron, and walked upstairs. The two children, without moving or making a sound, watched their Father leave the room. Soon Father returned. He no longer held the cauldron and was no longer wearing his floppy wizard's hat. Father sighed a long sigh. The two children hung their heads, knowing that though they had gotten the right dissolving potion in the end, they had each gotten something wrong. They expected a spanking, a scolding, or at least a long lecture.

But Father simply reached up onto the shelf and got down 'Chutes and Ladders.' He said softly, tiredly, "Maybe we should just play a game after all."

So the three of them played games until it was lunchtime. And while the two children did not get to ride on a friendly, story-telling dragon that day, they did have a nice time playing with their Father.

The End.