

THE HOT AIR BALLOON



One summer afternoon, a storm blew up in the forest. Dolly the ladybird and Berry the snail sat watching it from the spotty house. The wild wind twisted the trees and blew the roofs off houses. The rain came down in buckets.



When the rain and the wind finally stopped, the two friends took a look around the forest. "Look, Dolly, the wind blew this tree over," Berry said. "And the rain washed my flowers away," Dolly sighed.



"Dolly! Berry! Come quickly! Someone's lying in the meadow," Leapy the grasshopper came running.
"We'll be right there," Dolly said.



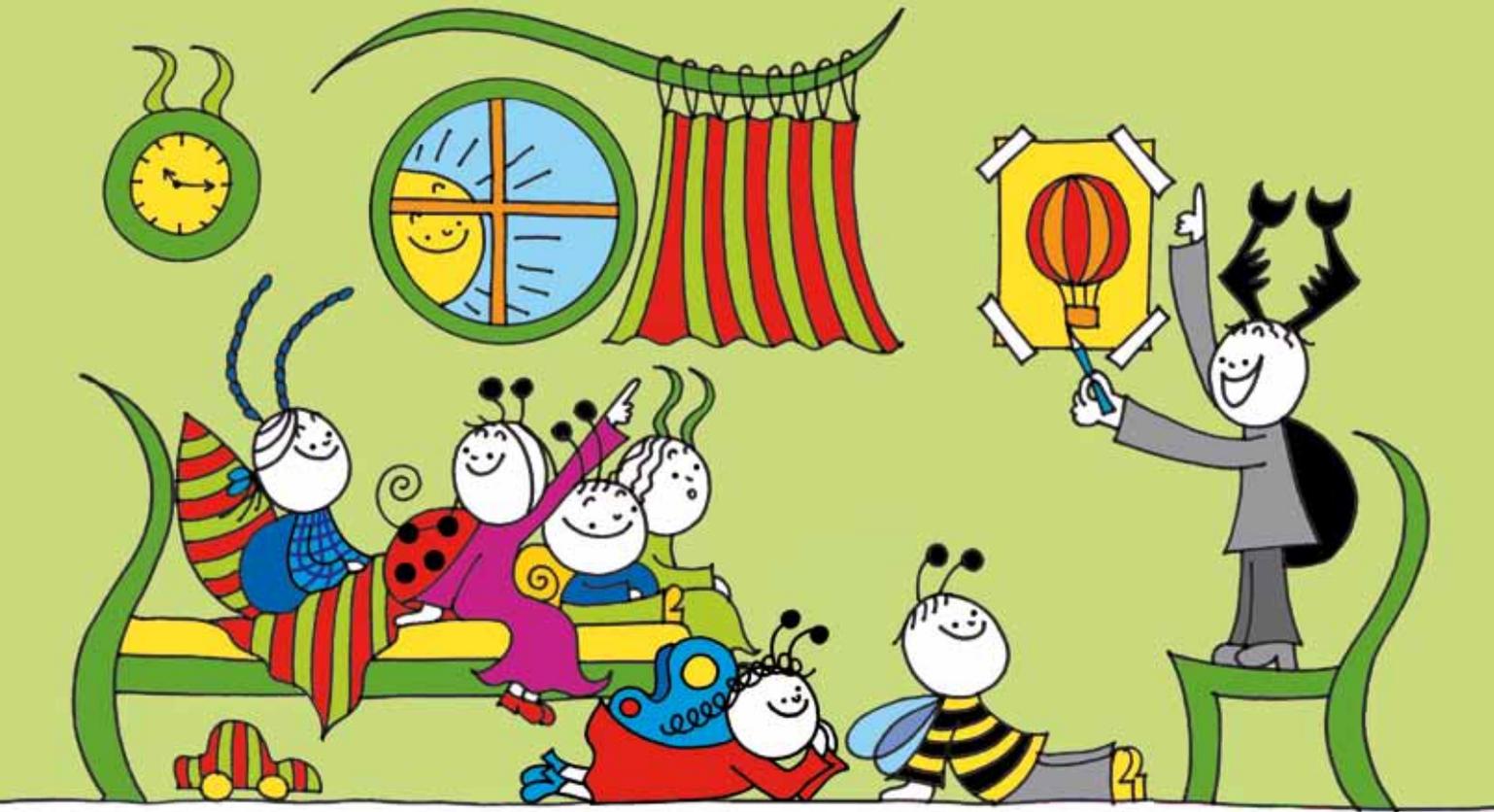
The friends found an oil beetle lying in the meadow.
"Oh, what happened to you? What's your name? Who are you?" Dolly sputtered.



"I'm Odette the oil beetle. I live up in the mountains but the wind blew me down here and I hit my head really hard. My wings are weak and wet and I can't fly. I don't know how I'm going to go home," the oil beetle sniffled.



Dolly, Berry and Leapy didn't know what to do.
"Don't worry," Dolly said eventually. "I'm sure we can think of something.
We'll help you get home."
They lifted Odette up and carried her into Leapy's house.



That afternoon, Balthazar the bee, Flutter the butterfly and Stanley the stag beetle all came to see Odette. They tried to think of ways to help her get home. "The best thing would be a hot air balloon," Stanley said. "If we had one of those, we could all climb in the basket and it would take us up into the mountains."



"But what could we use to make a balloon?" Berry asked.
"We could use blankets, pillows and sheets," Flutter suggested.
"And curtains and towels, too," Stanley added.



Everybody ran home and soon they all returned carrying blankets and curtains.



They got to work immediately. Everybody lent a hand. They stitched all the blankets, curtains, sheets and towels together. It took a while to get everything finished but Odette helped as much as she could. She was feeling stronger by the day and her head had stopped hurting.



Stanley tied the basket to the balloon, lit the flame and turned to Odette.
"It's ready to fly up into the mountains. Let's go!"
"Thank you," the oil beetle replied happily.



They all climbed into the basket, Balthazar cut the string and the balloon lifted up into the air.
“Hurray! We’re flying!” Berry exclaimed.



They flew up and up.

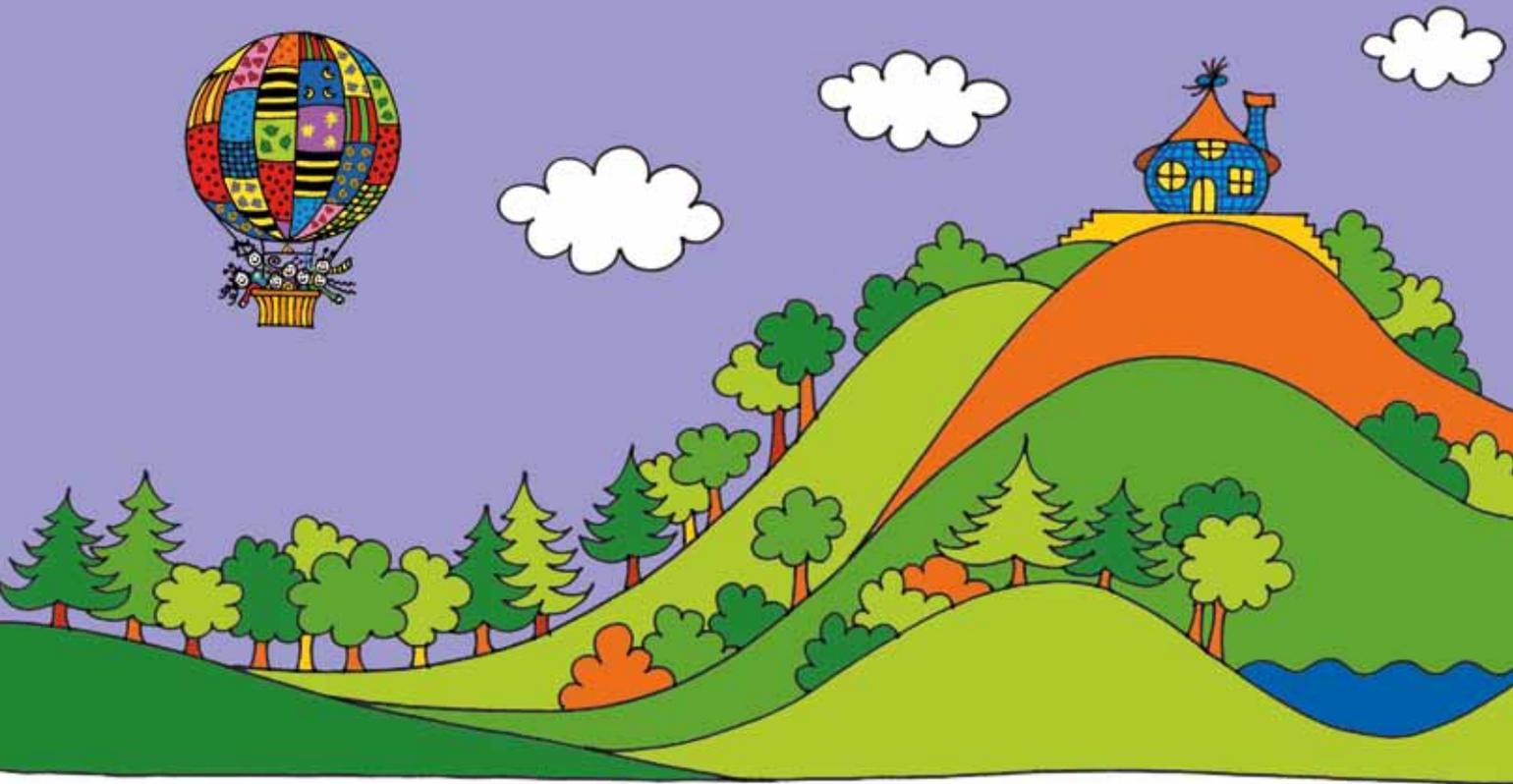
"Wow, it's beautiful! We can see the whole forest from here," Dolly laughed.



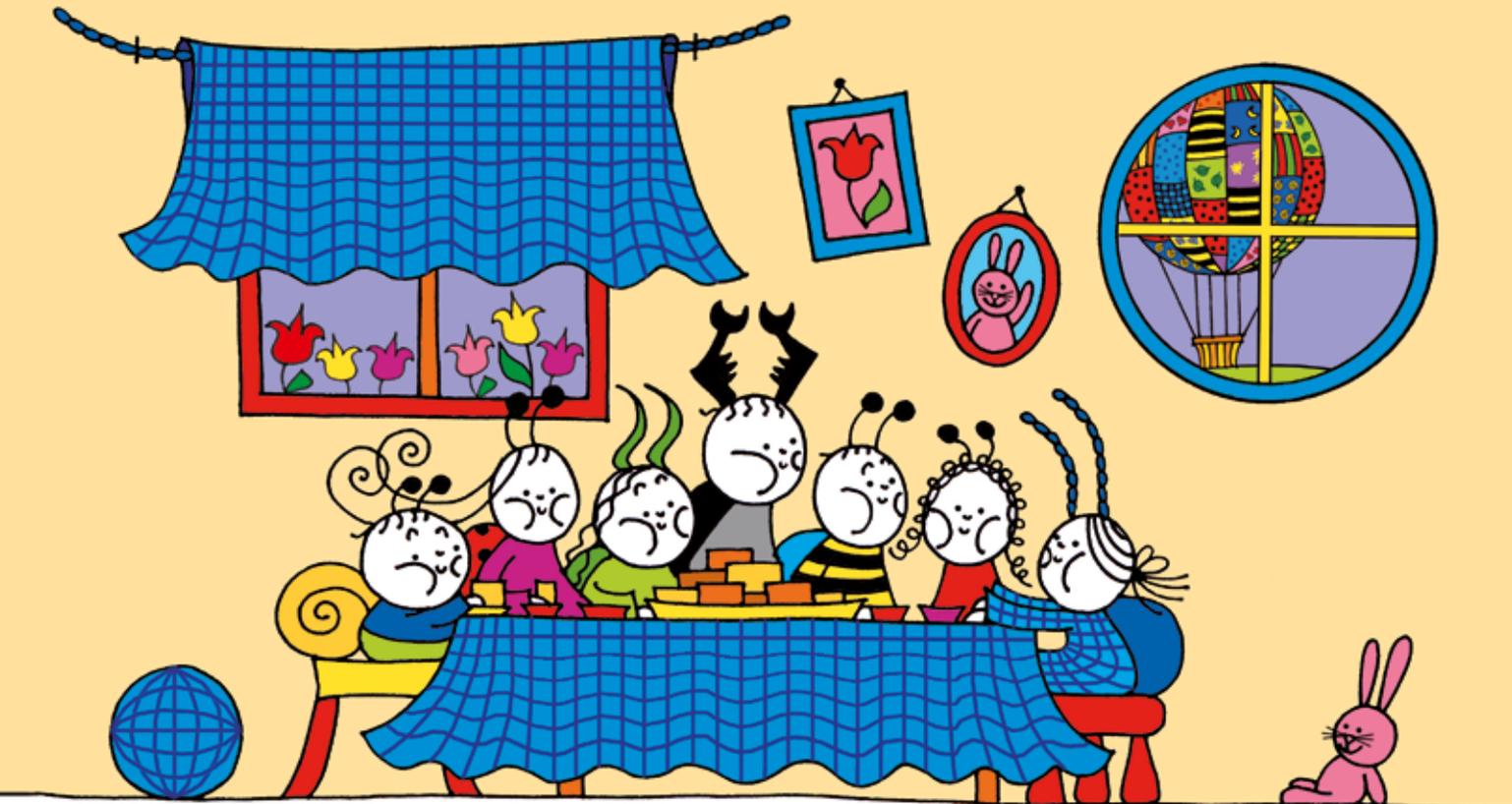
They could see all the houses, the hill and the little stream. They could even see Zephyr the dragonfly waving at them from her window. "Bon voyage!" Alfonso shouted from the bridge.



It started to get dark and Harry Hedgehog peeked out of his house. The ant queen stared up at the balloon. Even the big spider came out of his cave and waved at the friends as they flew overhead.



When they eventually arrived, Odette cried out, "Hurray, I'm home! Thank you. Please stay the night and watch the shooting stars with me."



"We'd love to," the little friends said.
Odette quickly made them something to eat and gave them delicious cakes and tea.



After dinner, they all sat down in front of Odette's house and waited for shooting stars to appear in the night sky.



It wasn't long before they saw the first one.

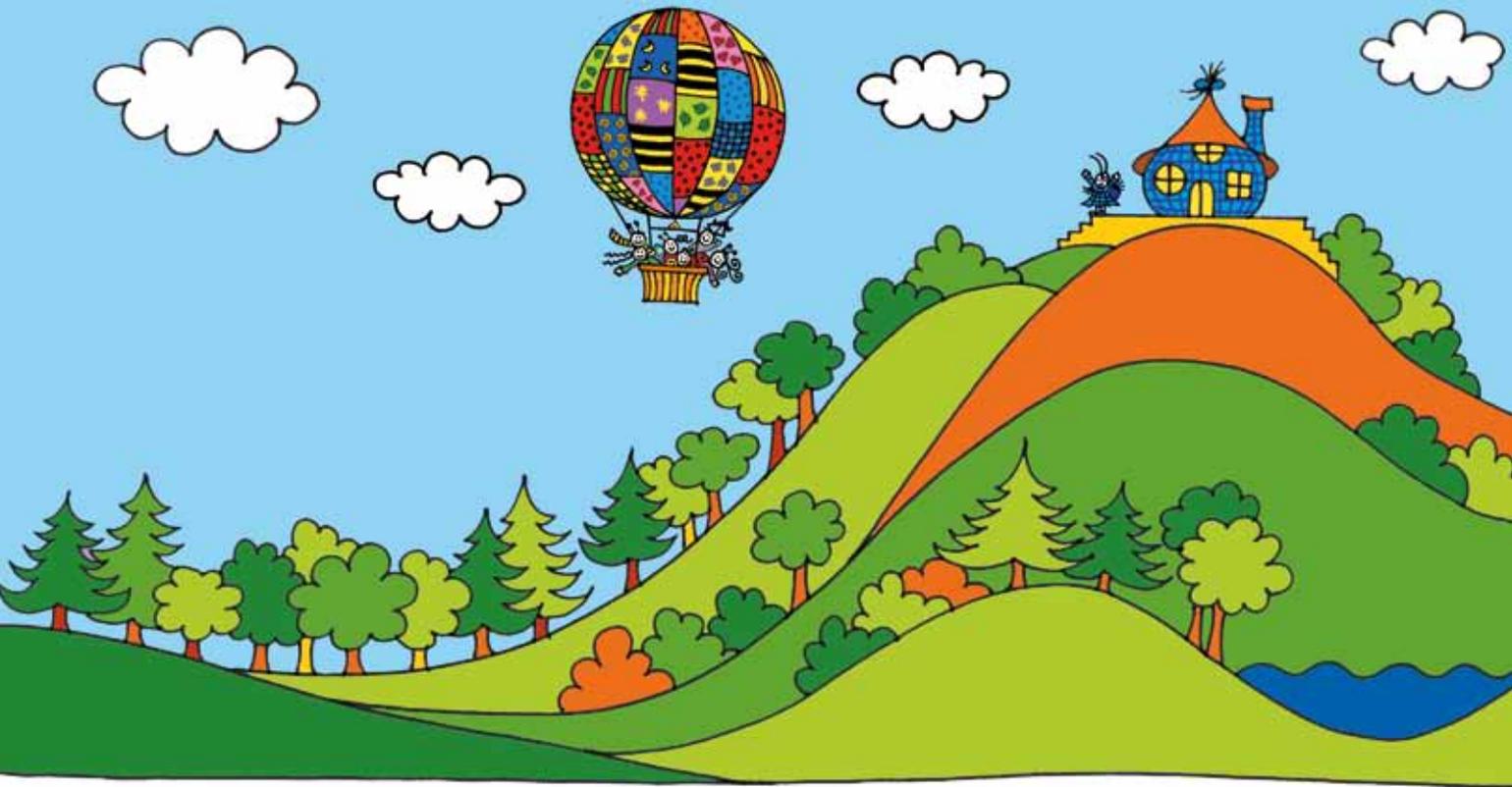
"Hurray, a shooting star!" Berry exclaimed excitedly. "I saw it! I saw it!"

"Me too," Dolly said.

"And me," added Stanley.



They went into Odette's house when it got colder and sat and watched the stars through the window. They all made a wish and fell fast asleep. Odette wished that she would meet her new friends again someday.



The next morning, Berry, Dolly, Stanley, Balthazar, Flutter and Leapy climbed into the basket and set off back to their home in the forest. They waved for a long time from the balloon. The little oil beetle was very happy to have found such good new friends.