Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

The Castle of Creepiness !

written by

Ian Ogilvy

published by

Oxford University Press

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Matilda

Splat!

Something wet and warm—and very, *very* slimy—smacked against Measle's right cheek. It stuck there for a moment and then began to slide slowly down his face.

'Matilda Stubbs—you stop that this *instant*,' said Nanny Flannel, as firmly as she could without sounding cross.

Matilda Stubbs took no notice. She reached into the bowl in front of her and scooped up another handful.

'Tilly . . .' said Lee Stubbs, in a warning voice. Measle noticed, much to his disgust, that his mother—sitting on the far side of the kitchen table and thus well out of range of slimy wet stuff that

whizzed about the place—was grinning openly at Matilda.

Matilda Stubbs grinned back at Lee, showing off her collection of teeth. There were six of them, all fairly new and all in the front of her mouth, and Matilda liked showing them to people whenever possible. Then she turned her attention back to Measle. She raised her hand above her shoulder and prepared to throw again. And Tinker, Measle's little black-and-white terrier, started to edge closer and closer to Matilda's high chair. As far as Tinker was concerned, you simply couldn't have *enough* wet, warm, and slimy stuff whizzing about the place—and the more that came whizzing his way (and then into his open mouth) the better.

'Sam—our daughter is misbehaving,' said Lee. 'Please do something about it.'

'Hmm? What?' said Sam Stubbs. He was hidden behind his morning newspaper and the only way to tell that he was there at all was when, occasionally, his hand would sneak round from behind the paper to pick up the coffee cup on the table in front of him.

'Our daughter, Sam,' repeated Lee. 'She's being evil again.'

'Evil, eh? Oh, good for her,' muttered Sam from behind the paper.

Lee sighed.

By now, Matilda's arm was slowly moving backwards, to a spot somewhere behind her

shoulder. Measle knew from experience that, when the arm stopped, the missile that was clutched in her hand was only a second away from being launched in his direction.

Tinker, sensing that, at any minute now, some wet, slimy, and very tasty stuff was about to be let loose right here in the kitchen, began to wag his stumpy little tail so fast that it became a blur.

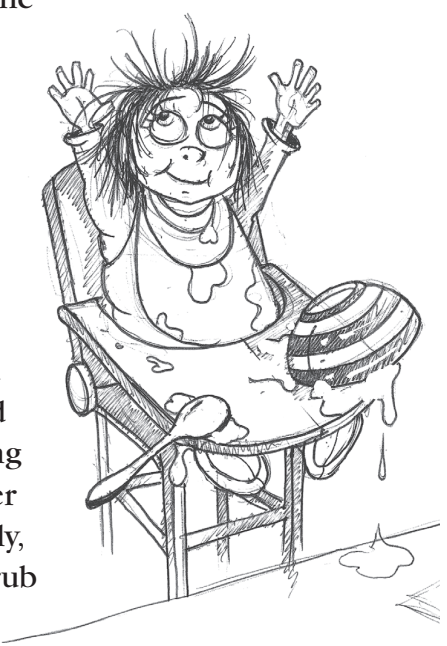
Measle sighed and put the piece of toast he'd been eating down on his plate.

'Tilly—cool it,' he said, glaring at Matilda with his pretend-fierce face.

Matilda Stubbs stopped the slow, backward movement of her arm and stared solemnly at Measle. Then she said, 'Blobba?'

'Yes,' said Measle, relaxing his face a little. '*Blobba*. Now, either put it down or eat it, Tilly. Just don't throw it at me, OK?'

'Goomba zoody gurk,' said Matilda, firmly—but she lowered her arm, opened her tiny fist, and stared intently at the congealing lump of porridge in her hand. Then, smiling blissfully, Matilda Stubbs began to rub the porridge into her hair.



Tinker's ears drooped in disappointment—and Nanny Flannel shrieked and ran for a washcloth.

With the danger past—at least for the moment—Measle felt safe enough to wipe his face with his napkin. Then he picked up his toast again and went back to getting on with his breakfast.

Matilda Stubbs had come to Merlin Manor nine months ago. She had arrived, snuggled in the arms of her mother, in a taxi that had driven them both from the local hospital. Then, for the next nine months, Matilda Stubbs had done what all babies do. She'd slept, she'd eaten, she'd cried and—in Measle's opinion—done awful, *dreadful* things in her nappies. Sam had once said that his darling little daughter was little more than a loud noise at *one* end, and an icky mess at the *other*—and Measle thought that was exactly right. Meanwhile, Matilda Stubbs had grown steadily into a chubby little baby girl, with piercing green eyes, spiky brown hair, six small, pearly white teeth, and a throwing arm of devastating accuracy.

Matilda adored her big brother. Whenever Measle was in the room, Matilda had eyes only for him. Measle was the one she showed her teeth to most often. Measle was the one she addressed most of her remarks to, and lately—having discovered how to throw stuff—Measle was the one she chose to throw it at. (Matilda's reasoning

was that, since she rather liked rubbing her food in her hair, then her wonderful big brother would probably like some on *his* head too.)

Right now, however, Matilda was busy with her own affairs. Measle noticed that Matilda was trying to stuff as much porridge as she could into her ears before Nanny Flannel came back with the face cloth. Measle turned to his parents to tell them what Matilda was up to but, as usual, they were no good in an emergency like this. Lee was too busy laughing and, as for Sam—well, he was hidden behind his newspaper and completely oblivious to everything that was going on around him.

The newspaper suddenly started shaking, as if it was going through a small earthquake.

'I don't believe it! Justin Bucket? *Justin Bucket?*'

'What about Justin Bucket?' gasped Lee, raising her face out of her hands and trying hard to stifle her laughter.

Sam lowered his newspaper. There was a look of angry bewilderment on his face.

'The most appalling thing has happened,' he announced. 'You'll never believe this—but Justin Bucket is the new Prime Magus of the Wizards' Guild.'

'*What?* You're not serious?' said Lee—and Measle noticed that not only was his mother no longer laughing, she wasn't even smiling either.

Sam nodded. 'Quite serious. I knew the idiot was one of the candidates—but I was certain that there

was no way he could ever get *elected*. I was sure that Toby would win in a landslide!'

'Who's Toby?' asked Measle, taking a big bite of toast.

'Toby Jugg,' said Sam, 'is the fellow who should, by rights, be the new Prime Magus of the Wizards' Guild. He's the wizard everybody *assumed* would be elected—which is why I'm finding it hard to believe how Justin, The-Biggest-Fathead-In-The-Wizarding-Fraternity, Bucket has managed to beat him. Poor old Toby—he must be sick as a parrot!'

'We know Toby Jugg slightly,' explained Lee. 'He seems very nice. He's rich, too. He's got lots of houses, all over the place.'

'Is that why he should've been the Prime Magus?' said Measle, chewing thoughtfully.

Sam laughed. 'No, son, of course not. Money doesn't enter into it. No, Toby should be Prime Magus because he's the best man for the job, that's all.'

'Did you vote for him, Mum?'

Lee shook her head. 'I would've done, if I was qualified to vote. But I'm not. You've got to be a wizard to vote.'

'Or a warlock,' said Sam slowly. The newspaper was back in front of his face now and he was staring intently at the election story. 'Listen to this,' he muttered. 'Here's a list of the new members of Justin's Advisory Board.'

'Advisory Board?' said Lee. 'Since when has the

Prime Magus of the Wizards' Guild had an Advisory Board?'

'Never—until now, it seems. Listen—"Sir Peregrine Spine, Tully Telford, Dorian Fescue, Ermintrude Bacon, and Quentin Underwood".'

'But, Sam—' said Lee, her eyes very wide. 'Aren't they all—'

'All warlocks, yes.' Sam lowered the paper again. He stared round at his family, a worried frown creasing his forehead. 'This isn't good, you know.'

'Whassamatter?' mumbled Measle, through yet another mouthful of toast. (Very few things could distract Measle from his breakfast toast. His years of living with Basil Tramplebone—and being half-starved to death by the horrible wrathmonk—had made him determined never to go hungry again. But there was something in his father's manner that made Measle sit up and want to listen.)

'The matter is, son,' said Sam, '(a) try not to talk with your mouth full and (b) a warlock can't be elected Prime Magus of the Wizards' Guild. It's against the rules. Warlocks like power too much and they often reach very high levels of power in ordinary life. Sir Peregrine Spine is hugely rich, Tully Telford is a top lawyer, Dorian Fescue owns a whole chain of supermarkets, Ermintrude Bacon has a string of sausage factories—and Quentin Underwood is a junior minister in the government. Well, that's fine for them—but it's not fine when it comes to leading our Guild. We've always had just

plain, ordinary wizards before, who don't care about power much.'

Measle swallowed his toast. 'So this Bucket bloke—he isn't a warlock, then?' he said.

'Justin? No, he's not clever enough for that. He's just an ordinary wizard. A pretty pathetic one, if you ask me. But—and it's a *big* "but"—now he's got all these very powerful, very ambitious warlocks all apparently "*advising*" him. And what sort of advice do you suppose he'll be getting, eh?'

Measle—who had no idea—shook his head.

'Then I'll tell you, Measle,' said Sam, gloomily. 'The *wrong* sort of advice, that's what. The sort of advice that'll make the warlocks even stronger than they are now. The sort of advice that—if Justin Bucket listens to it (and, knowing him, he will)—could easily change the Wizards' Guild out of all recognition. I don't like it. I don't like it at all.'

Nanny Flannel had come back into the room and was now busy cleaning the porridge out of Matilda's ear. She said, 'Well, never mind what you like or what you don't like, Sam—it's time Measle and I were off.' She turned to Measle and jerked her head towards the kitchen door. 'Put your helmet on, dear,' she said. 'I'll be with you in a minute.'

Measle whistled to Tinker, who scurried out from under Matilda's high chair. Then they both went out into the big hallway of Merlin Manor, where a row of brass hooks lined the wall near the heavy front door. Measle took a motorbike helmet

down from a hook and jammed it on his head. The helmet was bright red, with orange flames painted on it. Measle swung his school bag over his shoulder and, with Tinker trotting beside him, he went out of the front door and down the wide steps that led to the drive.

The motorbike that was standing there waiting for him was big and black and shiny, and so was the sidecar attached to it. It had once belonged to the giant wrathmonk, Buford Cudgel—but now it belonged pretty much to Nanny Flannel, since she was the only one in the Stubbs family who rode it regularly. When Buford Cudgel had owned the bike, it had been a filthy, broken-down, smoky old thing. But now it was clean and shiny and in tip-top condition and Nanny Flannel used it to take Measle to school.

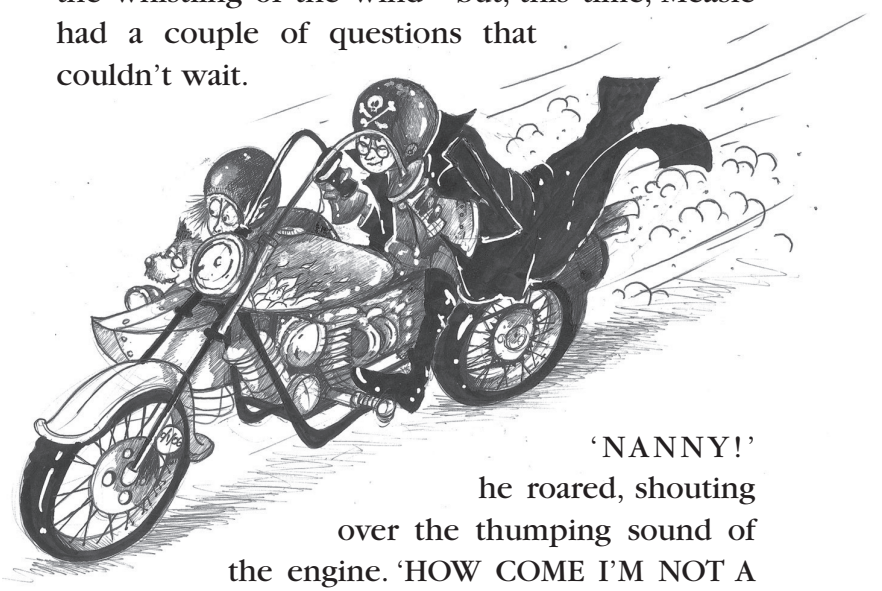
Measle and Tinker hopped into the sidecar. It was cramped in there and Tinker had to sit on Measle's knees—which was fine, as far as Tinker was concerned. Tinker didn't mind where he sat, or how uncomfortable it was, just as long as he got to ride in the sidecar when the old lady and the smelly kid went to school. He liked the feeling of the wind in his face and was quite proud of the way his ears flapped when they went fast.

A few moments later, Nanny Flannel bustled out of the front door. She was all bundled up in a long leather coat, and a pair of leather gauntlets encased her hands. Her own helmet was already on her

head. Nanny Flannel's helmet was silver and had a sticker of a skull and crossbones stuck on the front of it.

Nanny Flannel, who was surprisingly agile for somebody of her great age, hopped into the saddle and pushed the starter button. The engine rumbled into life and, with a roar, the big motorcycle combination sped off down the long drive.

Usually, Measle and Nanny Flannel didn't talk much on the way to school. There was too much noise, what with the thunder from the engine and the whistling of the wind—but, this time, Measle had a couple of questions that couldn't wait.



'NANNY!' he roared, shouting over the thumping sound of the engine. 'HOW COME I'M NOT A WIZARD?'

It was a question that had been bothering Measle for some time but the opportunity to ask it had never really presented itself. The whole

subject of wizarding was usually avoided in the Stubbs household and, most of the time, Sam and Lee behaved as if they were perfectly ordinary people—so Measle had been hesitant to bring it up. And the longer he left the matter *un*asked, the harder it was to ask it. But now, with this latest news and his dad's obvious anxiety about the future of the Wizard's Guild, Measle decided it was now or never.

'WHAT WAS THAT, DEAR?' screamed Nanny Flannel, without taking her eyes off the road ahead.

'ME! WIZARD! WHY NOT?'

Nanny Flannel risked a quick glance down into the sidecar.

'I DON'T KNOW, DEAR!' she yelled. 'WHY *SHOULD* YOU BE?'

'BECAUSE I'M A WIZARD'S *SON*, NANNY!'

Nanny Flannel steered the motorbike to the side of the road, brought it to a quick stop, and switched off the engine.

'Now then—why aren't you a wizard?' she asked, pulling her helmet off her head and shaking out her grey curls. 'Why are you asking me? Why not ask your father?'

Measle shrugged, uncomfortably. 'Well—you know—he might be disappointed—that I'm *not* a wizard.'

Nanny Flannel laughed. 'He's not disappointed, dear. He's relieved. So's your mum.'

'Relieved? Why?'

'Because being a wizard is not all that wonderful, dear. As to why you're not a wizard—well, as far as I understand it, being a wizard's son or daughter does mean that there's quite a good chance of being a wizard yourself—but it's not *guaranteed*. On the other hand, being the son or the daughter of a perfectly ordinary mother and father doesn't mean that you're *not* going to be a wizard. There are plenty of members of the Guild whose parents have no magical qualities at all. In fact, I'm told that there are thousands of wizards out in the world who have no idea whatsoever that they *are* wizards!'

'Does that mean—that I *might* be a wizard, then?'

Nanny Flannel shook her head. 'No, dear. You're not. Any more than I am. No, you're an ordinary boy.'

'Oh,' said Measle, in a disappointed voice.

Nanny Flannel rapped gently on the top of Measle's helmet with her gauntleted fist.

'Oh, don't sound all sad, Measle dear,' she said. 'There's nothing wrong with being an ordinary boy. You should be very glad you're *not* a wizard. It isn't an easy life, you know. Wizards face dangers that ordinary people know nothing about.'

'What—dangers like the ones *I've* faced?' said Measle, staring straight ahead.

There was a pause while Nanny Flannel thought about this. Then she said, quietly, 'Yes, dear. Just like the ones you've faced.' Then she pressed the starter

button and the big engine rumbled back to life—and they drove the rest of the way to school in thoughtful silence.

Later in the day, when school was finally over, Measle waved cheerfully to his friends and swung out through the school gates, his bag bouncing against his shoulder blades. Nanny Flannel was there, a few yards down the road, sitting astride the big motorbike. The bike's engine was throbbing steadily and, as Measle sauntered towards it, Nanny Flannel waved and then beckoned to him firmly. Measle quickened his pace. As he drew nearer, he saw that Tinker wasn't in his customary place in the sidecar and that, behind her helmet visor, Nanny Flannel's usually cheerful face was dark with worry.

'What's the matter, Nanny?' said Measle, taking his own helmet out of the open sidecar and jamming it on his head. 'Where's Tink?'

'He's busy,' muttered Nanny Flannel.

'Busy?'

'With *visitors*!' said Nanny, spitting the word out of the corner of her mouth. 'Hop in, dear.'

'What sort of visitors?' said Measle, squeezing himself into the sidecar.

'Unpleasant ones,' muttered Nanny Flannel. 'That's why Tinker's busy with them. He's keeping an eye on them. Oh—and you know these visitors, Measle.'

'I do?'

Nanny Flannel nodded sourly. 'Mr Needle and Mr Bland. Remember them?'

Measle remembered them. They were the two representatives from the Wizards' Guild who had come to Merlin Manor when Lee had been kidnapped by the gang of wrathmonks. The two men had been cold and unhelpful. Then, later, after Sam had trapped the last four wrathmonks in a magical net, Mr Needle and Mr Bland had been the ones to take them away in a white van—although, even then, with the Stubbs family triumphant and victorious, neither of the Wizards' Guild representatives had been particularly nice about it.

While Measle had been doing his remembering, Nanny Flannel had pulled away from the school and now they were thundering their way out of the small town.

'WHAT DO THEY WANT?' shouted Measle.

Nanny Flannel didn't reply. She just looked ahead, her mouth set in a grim line—and drove a little faster than usual.

When they got home, Measle and Nanny Flannel left the motorbike at the foot of the stone steps in front of Merlin Manor and met Lee coming out of the door. Lee held Matilda in her arms and there was a worried look in her eyes.

'What's going on, Mum?' said Measle.

'I don't know, darling. Your dad's in his study with Mr Needle and Mr Bland. And they've locked the door.'

'But—what do they want?'

'Your guess is as good as mine. They just turned up on the doorstep an hour ago and, when Dad opened the door, they barged in waving a bunch of papers and demanding that they talk to him in private—'

Lee broke off—because here, marching out of the front door, came Mr Needle and Mr Bland.

Mr Needle was tall and thin and dark. Mr Bland was short and round and blond. Both men wore dark suits, sunglasses, and bowler hats—and each man carried a black leather briefcase and a furled umbrella. As they passed by Lee and Measle and Nanny Flannel, Mr Needle and Mr Bland tipped their bowler hats, and then continued down the front steps of Merlin Manor, their twinkling black shoes making a sharp, tap-tapping noise on the ancient stones.

When the white van disappeared out of the distant gates at the far end of the long driveway, Measle and Nanny Flannel and Lee—with Matilda in her arms—went back into Merlin Manor and hurried to Sam's study. They found him there, sitting behind his desk, his face pale and his lips compressed. Tinker was at his feet. In Sam's hands there was a sheaf of papers. Sam looked up when they came in and Measle saw real anger in his father's eyes.

'What was that all about?' said Lee.

'An *Inquiry*,' said Sam, his voice trembling with

fury. 'That's what it was all about. There is to be an Inquiry—and we are summoned—by those two dim little office boys—to answer its questions.'

'*Whose* Inquiry, Sam?'

'The Wizards' Guild. We are summoned to appear before the Wizards' Guild! Well, by its latest committee, actually. This committee calls itself—' and Sam peered at the top page of the sheaf of papers—'yes, here we are—this committee calls itself "*The Isle of Smiles Investigation Committee*" and is made up of some very interesting people indeed. *Very* interesting. Guess who?'

Lee thought for a moment and then her face cleared. 'Oh dear. Quentin Underwood?'

Sam nodded. 'He's one of 'em.'

'Dorian Fescue?'

'Yup.'

'Ermintrude Bacon?'

'Trudy will be there.'

'Tully Telford?'

'He's the leading interrogator.'

'Sir Peregrine Spine?'

'Every languid, lanky bone.'

'And—and Justin Bucket?'

'He's the presiding chairman.'

'But what do they *want*, Sam?' said Lee, shifting Matilda on to her other arm. 'What's this Inquiry all about?'

Sam shook his head. 'Well, other than what happened on the Isle of Smiles, I have no idea, my

love,' he said. 'And, since what happened on the Isle of Smiles turned out to be a triumph for the Wizards' Guild—not to mention for the Stubbs family, too—I can't imagine *what* they're all steamed up about. But steamed up they seem to be. All I know is, we have to be at the committee rooms, in the Wizards' Guild building, on Sunday night at ten o'clock sharp, to answer any—and all—questions they choose to ask us.'

'Us?' said Lee, faintly. 'Who's us?'

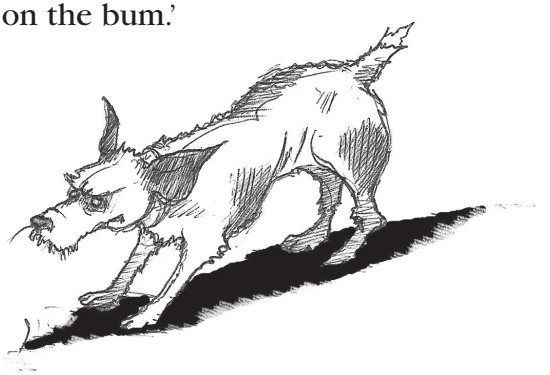
'The whole family.'

'What—*all* of us.'

'Yup. Every single one of us. Even Tinker. Don't ask me why.'

'What about Tilly? And Measle? Ten o'clock at night is far too late for them to be doing *anything*, let alone going to some ridiculous Wizards' Guild affair.'

'Oh, the committee doesn't care about that,' Sam grinned wryly. 'And all I can hope,' he said, with as much cheerfulness as he could manage, 'is that Tilly will find something nice and wet and sticky to throw at the whole lot of 'em—and Tinker will bite 'em all on the bum.'



'But—what do they want?'

'Your guess is as good as mine. They just turned up on the doorstep an hour ago and, when Dad opened the door, they barged in waving a bunch of papers and demanding that they talk to him in private—'

Lee broke off—because here, marching out of the front door, came Mr Needle and Mr Bland.

Mr Needle was tall and thin and dark. Mr Bland was short and round and blond. Both men wore dark suits, sunglasses, and bowler hats—and each man carried a black leather briefcase and a furled umbrella. As they passed by Lee and Measle and Nanny Flannel, Mr Needle and Mr Bland tipped their bowler hats, and then continued down the front steps of Merlin Manor, their twinkling black shoes making a sharp, tap-tapping noise on the ancient stones.

When the white van disappeared out of the distant gates at the far end of the long driveway, Measle and Nanny Flannel and Lee—with Matilda in her arms—went back into Merlin Manor and hurried to Sam's study. They found him there, sitting behind his desk, his face pale and his lips compressed. Tinker was at his feet. In Sam's hands there was a sheaf of papers. Sam looked up when they came in and Measle saw real anger in his father's eyes.

'What was that all about?' said Lee.

'An *Inquiry*,' said Sam, his voice trembling with

fury. 'That's what it was all about. There is to be an Inquiry—and we are summoned—by those two dim little office boys—to answer its questions.'

'*Whose* Inquiry, Sam?'

'The Wizards' Guild. We are summoned to appear before the Wizards' Guild! Well, by its latest committee, actually. This committee calls itself—' and Sam peered at the top page of the sheaf of papers—'yes, here we are—this committee calls itself "*The Isle of Smiles Investigation Committee*" and is made up of some very interesting people indeed. *Very* interesting. Guess who?'

Lee thought for a moment and then her face cleared. 'Oh dear. Quentin Underwood?'

Sam nodded. 'He's one of 'em.'

'Dorian Fescue?'

'Yup.'

'Ermintrude Bacon?'

'Trudy will be there.'

'Tully Telford?'

'He's the leading interrogator.'

'Sir Peregrine Spine?'

'Every languid, lanky bone.'

'And—and Justin Bucket?'

'He's the presiding chairman.'

'But what do they *want*, Sam?' said Lee, shifting Matilda on to her other arm. 'What's this Inquiry all about?'

Sam shook his head. 'Well, other than what happened on the Isle of Smiles, I have no idea, my

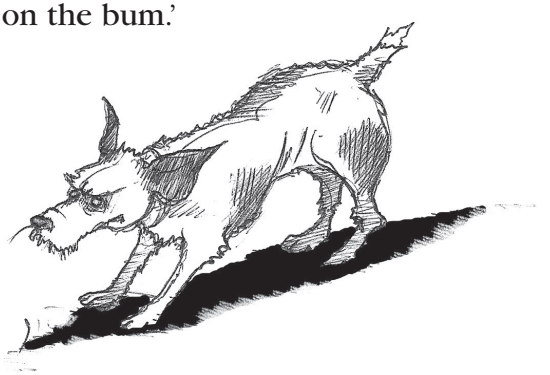
love,' he said. 'And, since what happened on the Isle of Smiles turned out to be a triumph for the Wizards' Guild—not to mention for the Stubbs family, too—I can't imagine *what* they're all steamed up about. But steamed up they seem to be. All I know is, we have to be at the committee rooms, in the Wizards' Guild building, on Sunday night at ten o'clock sharp, to answer any—and all—questions they choose to ask us.'

'Us?' said Lee, faintly. 'Who's us?'

'The whole family.'

'What—*all* of us.'

'Yup. Every single one of us. Even Tinker. Don't ask me why.'

'What about Tilly? And Measle? Ten o'clock at night is far too late for them to be doing *anything*, let alone going to some ridiculous Wizards' Guild affair.'

'Oh, the committee doesn't care about that,' Sam grinned wryly. 'And all I can hope,' he said, with as much cheerfulness as he could manage, 'is that Tilly will find something nice and wet and sticky to throw at the whole lot of 'em—and Tinker will bite 'em all on the bum.'