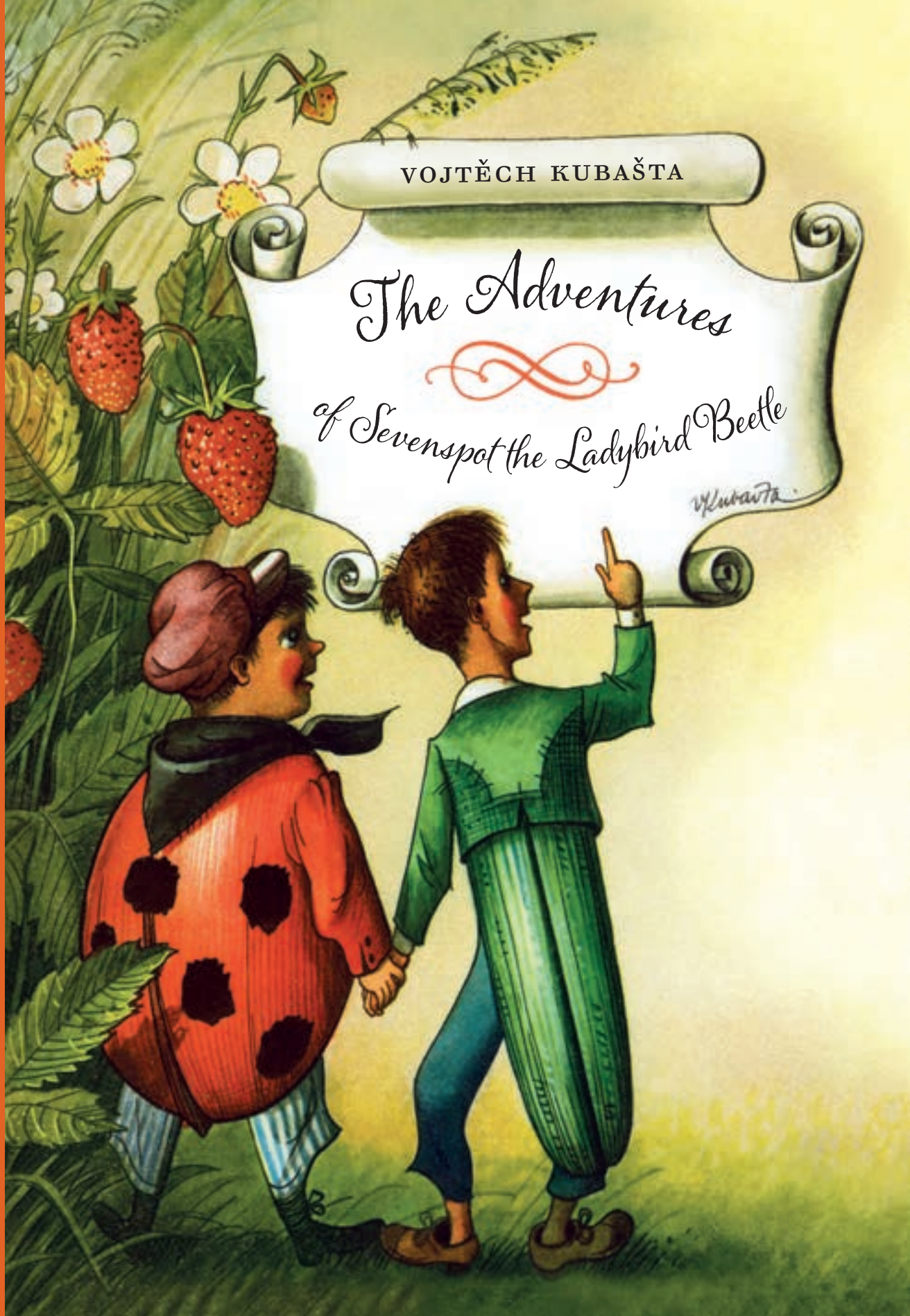
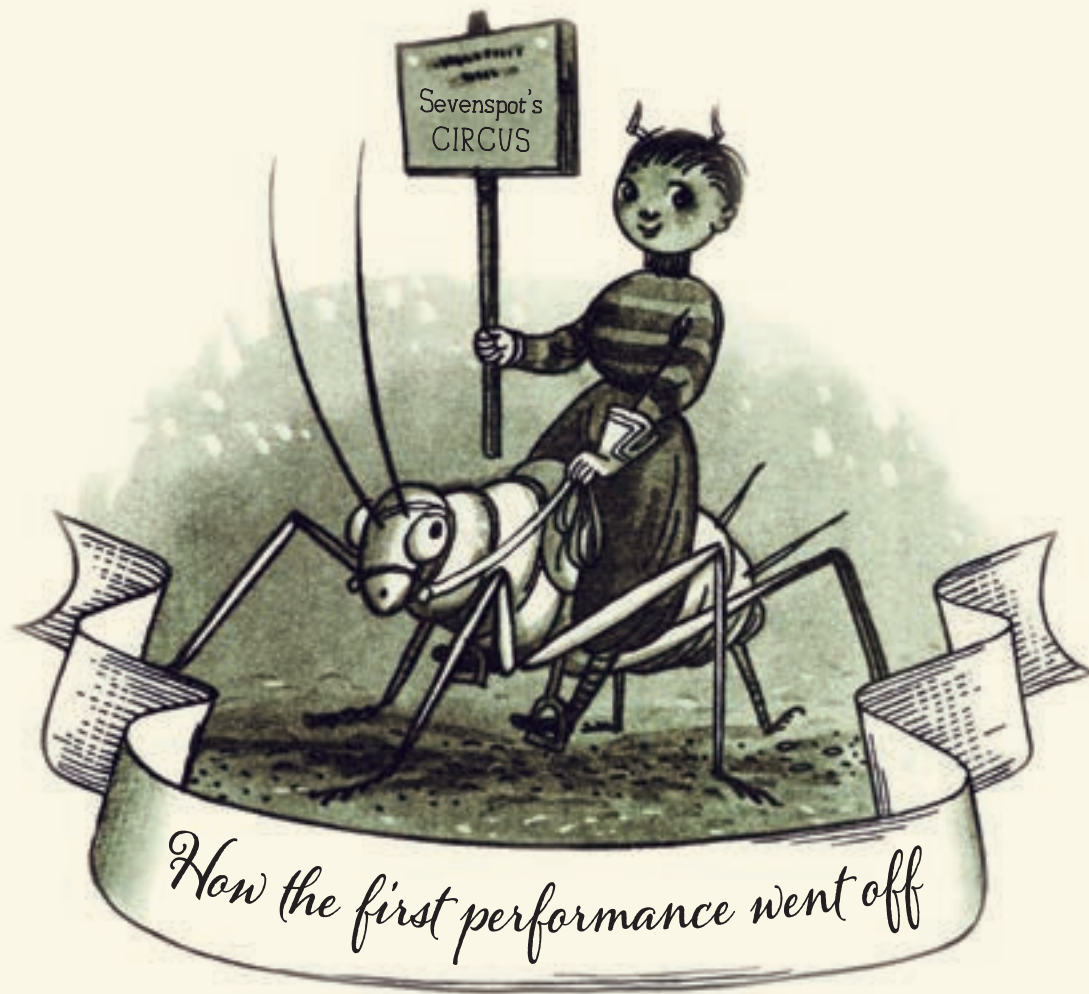


VOJTĚCH KUBAŠTA

The Adventures
of Sevenspot the Ladybird Beetle

V. Kubašta





Finally, the long-awaited day of first performance arrived! Anthony led his well-nourished aphid from the stables, climbed onto its back and rode through the forest, calling out to all the beetles and inviting them to the amazing, spectacular premiere of Sevenspot Circus. They all gathered round him and begged him to tell them more. The little ones were the most curious. Anthony quickly apprised them of the details and rode off again. The forest was large and by the time he had been around it all, it would already be evening.



Sevenspot, who had been rather nervous since the morning, hastily rehearsed his circus-riding act to make sure he didn't slip up in the evening. In the afternoon, Croquette the frog arrived, accompanied by the firefly brothers. She looked absolutely ravishing in a lovely dress with pale blue flowers. Today, she didn't boast before the show, quite the opposite. With her head bowed, she kept reassuring Sevenspot: "Don't worry Sevenspot, this time I won't let you down, this time I'll do it right." "But, of course, Croquette! I know you sing beautifully, I have no worries. Today, you will see how everybody loves you," said the little beetle, calming the frightened little frog's nerves.

The fireflies promised to illuminate the evening beautifully with the help of their parents. They declared that they would put a show of light that had never been seen anywhere.

As soon as it was dark, the fireflies with their lanterns took up positions all around the canopy of the circus tent. From a distance, it looked as if it was on fire, so bright was the light from it. The audience poured in. There wasn't a single free seat left in the whole of the big top, and those who were unlucky had to stand squeezed in wherever they could. Crowds of beetles were also gathered disappointedly outside the tent, as no more could get in. Anthony the organizer stood on a platform and tried to cheer them up. "My esteemed beetles! Do not be downhearted. Tomorrow is another day, and so is the day after. We will put on a performance every night. Come and enjoy, you don't have to miss it!" And the performance really lived up to its billing!

A debonair ground beetle took a bow and invited one artist after another onto the stage. Anthony presented the artistes with thank-you bouquets. The prettiest of them, the one destined for Miss Willow the leaf beetle, he had picked with his own hands. After all, she deserved it. She floated across the stage as light and delicate as the finest fluff of a dande-

lion. The music stopped and the little ballerina delicately curtsied to all sides of the audience, who applauded her so hard that she had to do another dance.

After the ballerina, came the turn of Croquette, accompanied by the virtuoso Mr. Cricket. It was an unforgettable musical occasion. The little frog's mellifluous voice was perfectly complemented by the breathtaking melody of the Stradivarius violin. Instead of just one song, she ended up singing seven. The clamorous audience didn't want her to leave the stage.

Next up was the fire eater, followed by the earwig Fakir, a tamer, and a fly dancer, who all took to the stage as if they were at home there. After that came the gold-medal-winning professional flea jumper.

The final act was Sevenspot's. He was shaking with nerves; he wanted so much to get it right. But, guess what happened. As soon as the grasshopper saw the audience, it panicked and



bolted. Sevenspot, who was standing on its back, held on with all his strength as he tried to subdue the grasshopper. But his efforts were in vain, the insect was frantic and ran round and round in increasingly faster circles. Luckily, Sevenspot remembered his wings. At the last moment, he opened his wing case and flew up into the roof of the tent. The audience were now presented with an absurd spectacle. On the stage, a terrified grasshopper was running around in a frenzy, and above it flew an equally frightened beetle with no idea what to do. But, hang on a moment! What's this? A rope is unexpectedly lowered down from the ceiling and a clown holding a parachute in his hand climbs down on it. This wasn't in the programme!

Now the clown is swinging around on the rope and he throws Sevenspot the parachute. "Here you are! Go back to earth, so you don't wind up there forever." And then the clown again swings around on the rope and catches up with the grasshopper, who is weakening. He does a somersault and lands on the grasshopper's back, grabbing the bridle rein and pulling it hard. The grasshopper stops instantly, and the clown takes a bow. The audience is clapping, whistling, laughing, and slapping their thighs. Who do you think was hiding in that clown costume? Who was the hero who saved the day and, with it, the reputation of the circus?

It was Gregory, of course! He had noticed how unsettled the grasshopper was and anticipated that it might ruin Sevenspot's performance. He then climbed secretly into the rafters, hid behind a beam, and waited to see what would happen. And what he thought might happen, did happen.



Sevenspot's circus had provided entertainment every evening for the forest residents for a whole month. The programme was constantly changing so the audience was always pleasantly surprised. The fame of the circus soon spread, and under the tall fir tree soon appeared water beetles from the pond around their old island, and even the spiteful little frogs who had once mocked the unfortunate performance of Miss Croquette so cruelly. They seated themselves in the first row, and with a malicious smirk, waited to see what their former friend would do. They couldn't believe it when they discovered that Croquette was one of the most successful performers in the circus. Right after the show, they ran after

Sevenspot and begged him for a chance to perform as a singing group in the circus. The kind-hearted Sevenspot let the frogs sing, but soon wished he hadn't. The frogs became even more swollen-headed and were spiteful to the other artists. And since they weren't very good singers either, after a while Sevenspot lost patience and fired them. After that, they went about the pond, telling everybody, "Don't go to that circus, there's nothing there worth seeing, ribbit!" But it did no harm to Sevenspot's circus. It already had such a good reputation both in the water and on the ground and nobody took the malicious gossip seriously. But Sevenspot wasn't yet completely satisfied with his success. He was constantly thinking of how to bring more colour and life to his circus with something new, interesting or unconventional, something the circus world hadn't yet seen or experienced. One day, he was lying under a blue chicory flower thinking hard when he heard grumbling and a loud whirring of long wings. He looked and saw an enormous bumblebee. "Why are you grumbling, uncle Bumblebee?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I grumble when it's so hard to make a living? There's been such a terrible drought that the flowers don't have any nectar! You can't imagine how far I have to fly and how hard I have to look just to put something in my belly?" "Oh, you poor thing! You wouldn't know it from the size of your belly!" laughed Sevenspot. "You cheeky rascal, stop pulling my leg! Take me into your circus instead." Sevenspot couldn't stop laughing. He couldn't imagine what this clumsy, portly bumblebee could be good for. "Well, uncle Bumblebee, what can you do? Can you tap dance or put your leg around your neck?" "For heaven's sake!" cursed the bumblebee. "Are you only looking for a dancing buffoon? You already have a circus full of them!" He moved his big furry head closer to Sevenspot. "No, my dear boy, I know how to do something else. I can turn myself



into an aeroplane, the kind people fly in when they go on exotic holidays,” he proclaimed. “If you don’t you believe me, take a look at this!” And with that, the chubby uncle bumblebee set off running, like when an aeroplane takes off on a runway, and with much buzzing lifted up into the air. When he came in to land, he invited Sevenspot to sit between his wings. The curious little beetle settled comfortably on the bumblebee’s broad back, and sat back and took in the spectacular views during the delightful flight. “Uncle, you’ve convinced me. From now on you’re a member of our team. But...” “But what?” asked the bumblebee with a slight worry in his voice. “But I need you to look more like a real aeroplane than a bumblebee.” At that moment he had an ingenious idea. He would cover him with paper and turn him into a real flying machine. “I agree, Sevenspot, we have a deal,” growled the bumblebee. “There’s just one thing.” “What is it?” asked Sevenspot. “I have two conditions. In addition to my salary and other benefits, I want a barrel of sweet nectar every day!” “But where am I going to get that?” asked Sevenspot shrugging his shoulders sadly. “The wasp cooks are grateful to get just enough to be able to prepare the meals for my artistes.”

“That won’t be a problem,” said the bumblebee, “I’m friends with the black bees who live nearby. I’ll pop around to see them and sort it out.” And with a buzz he was gone. It was a great surprise to Sevenspot when shortly the bumblebee returned with four pretty little bees in tow. The girls politely greeted the little beetle, praised his illustrious circus, and told him that when the summer work was over, they were very much looking forward to coming and seeing it. By the evening, they had brought two barrels full of sweet mead and put them under the tall fir tree. The bumblebee got one of the barrels straight away, and Sevenspot put away the other one for a rainy day. The bumblebee closed himself in his tent

and drank and guzzled it all away until the barrel was empty. After that, it was quite difficult to talk to him and his strange behaviour looked as though it would spoil his performance. Fortunately, at the very last moment, he pulled himself together. The audience was astonished to see Sevenspot flying boldly above their heads in a peculiar airplane. Some of them were crouching right down to the ground in fear. What if the plane fell out of the sky?

“Do not be afraid, ladies and gentlemen, all is well! It’s just Sevenspot, our great and fearless aviator, performing loops, twists and turns in the air.” At the end, the audience were in raptures and couldn’t stop applauding, so successful was the bumblebee’s act. Unfortunately, the chubby fellow drank the second barrel of mead right after the show and there was no talking to him again until the next day. As time went on, the bumblebee began to demand more of this delicious, intoxicating drink. If he didn’t get any, he was very bad-tempered. He would shout and swear and threaten that under such conditions he would no longer be able to perform his aeroplane act. Well, this arguing and haggling went on for a while until one day an unfortunate accident happened. The greedy bumblebee broke into a pantry where an enormous barrel of mead was stored. He drank and guzzled and drank and guzzled until, finally, he drank himself to death.

On his grave beneath an old pine tree, masses of bluebells grow that are like no other flowers anywhere around, such is the amount of sweet juice have they have been nourished with.

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The Adventures of Sevenspot the Ladybird Beetle

They all want to get to know Sevenspot the ladybird, the little beetle with the red wing case and pitch-black spots. All creatures great and small, from forests and meadows, as well as children and their parents. Not only does this little rascal of a beetle get up to the usual children's mischief, he also orchestrates the most successful circus ever under the tall fir tree. The beautiful classic drawings by the acclaimed Czech illustrator Vojtěch Kubašta will guide you through the fabulous world of Sevenspot and all his friends. Roll up, roll up, the story is about to begin!

