

SIDE #3

Characters: Maurice, Keith, Malicia

MAURICE Very unusual rat-catchers they have round here.

KEITH They looked *nasty*. Like they enjoy it.

MAURICE I haven't seen rat-catchers who've been so busy but who've still got clean boots. But even that's not as odd as the rats they have round here.

KEITH What's odd about the rats?

MAURICE They have very strange tails.

[Pause.]

Something's going on, and that means someone's getting rich, and when someone's getting rich, I don't see why that shouldn't be m—us.

KEITH But we don't want Dangerous Beans and the others getting caught and killed.

MAURICE They won't get caught. Those men wouldn't win any prizes for thinking. Even ordinary rats can out-think humans. Humans think that just because they're bigger, they're better...

*[He stops as **Malicia** crosses to them.]*

MALICIA *[To **Keith**]* You're new here, aren't you? Come looking for work, have you? Probably got sacked from your last job, I expect. Probably because you fell asleep and things got spoiled. Or you ran away because your master beat you with a big stick. But you probably deserved it because of being lazy. And then you probably stole the cat, knowing how much people would pay for a cat round here. And you must have gone mad with hunger because you were talking to the cat and everyone knows cats can't talk.

MAURICE Can't say a single word.

MALICIA And probably you're a mysterious boy who – did that cat just say something?

KEITH I thought everyone knew that cats can't talk.

MALICIA Ah, but maybe you were apprenticed to a wizard. Yes, that sounds about right. But you fell asleep and let the cauldron of bubbling green stuff boil over and he threatened to, to turn you into a, a, a —

MAURICE Gerbil.

MALICIA A gerbil, and you stole his magical cat because you hated it so much and – did that *cat* just say 'gerbil'?

KEITH Don't ask me, I'm just standing here!

MALICIA All right. And then you brought the cat here because you know there's a terrible famine and that's why you were going to sell it.

KEITH But he's not much of a ratter.

MALICIA Ratter? Everyone's hungry here – there's at least two meals on that cat!

MAURICE *What?* You eat *cats* here?

MALICIA [*Triumphantly*] Got you! You fell for a very simple trick! I think you two had better come with me, don't you? Or I'll scream. And people *listen* to me when I'm screaming!