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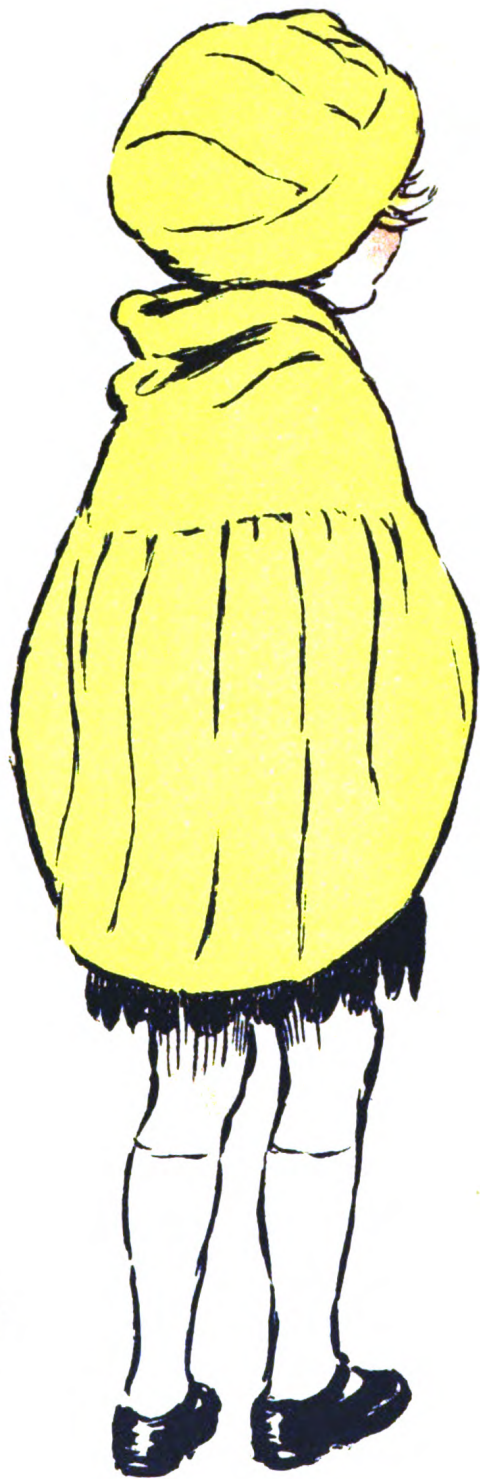


US









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A

**ME**

# US



CECIL  
ALDIN

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HUMPHREY·MILFORD



PRINTED BY THOS. FORMAN AND SONS, NOTTINGHAM, ENGLAND

# US:

## A Story in Seven Breaths

### THE FIRST BREATH

I AM calling this book “US” because—well, because it is all about us, you see, and the title of a book should always tell you what the book is about. At the beginning I must explain who “US” is—or should it be are?

First, there is Smut. He is a little black puppy of the Scotch terrier breed, and I gave him that name because he is quite black. There is not a speck of white about him anywhere.

Before he came there was only one of US: that was ME. He arrived on my birthday, January 4th, when I was six years old. I sometimes wish my birthday did not come so near to

Christmas, because people often give me one present and say that it is for both Christmas and my birthday. If it came in June they could not do that—although they might think of some other excuse ; but of course it is too late to change it now.

Smut came packed up in a basket, labelled “Live Dog,” and addressed to “Miss Pat Leslie,” which is my name. He was a Christmas-and-birthday present from Uncle George, who lives in Scotland.

Father says I talk so fast that I shall use up all my breath before I am ten years old ; but I don’t think I shall, because more always seems to come if I wait a minute. . . . .

At any rate, Father hasn’t used all his up yet, and he is ever so old ; but then, of course, he doesn’t talk as much as I do. When he is at home he is generally reading the newspaper, while Mother tells him what has happened at home during his absence at business.







Business must be very dull. I have noticed that Father never tells us what has happened during the day at business.

I am glad that Mother doesn't go to business as well as Father. If she did, I should have no one to talk to except Smut and Baby, and neither of them can say very much yet.

Isn't that just like me? I started out to tell you about Smut, and I get out of breath talking of Father and Mother. . . . .



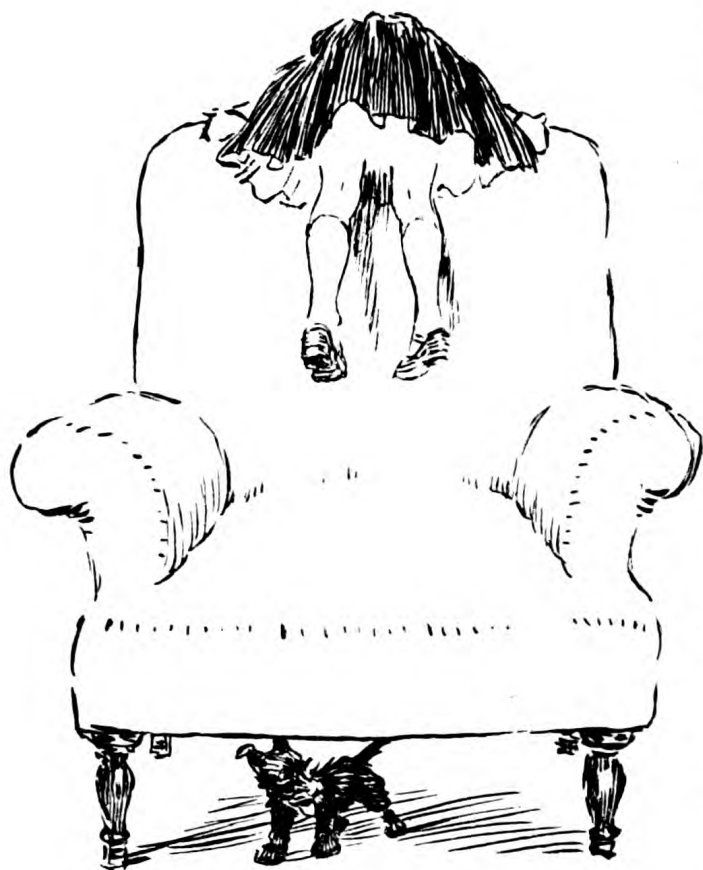


## THE SECOND BREATH

WELL, when Smut arrived you can imagine how delighted I was. I did so want someone to play with. You see, I haven't any brothers and sisters—except of course Baby, and he's much too young to play at anything yet. Nurse has only allowed me to hold him once. Smut was just what I wanted, especially since Nurse and Mother were so taken up with my little brother.

Smut was full of fun and dearly loved a romp. He would rush round and round the rooms, and play hide and seek with me for hours. I taught him a lot of



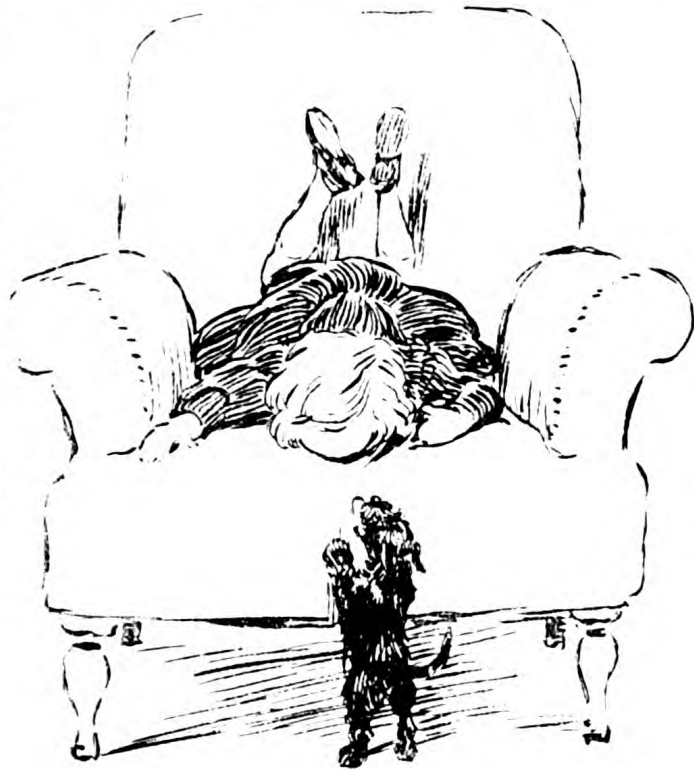


things, and introduced him to all my family of dolls. I told him he must never touch them without my permission, because he was rather fond of shaking and tearing things with his teeth. One day he got one of Father's slippers and munched and crunched it as though it had been

a nice bone, until the poor slipper was in tatters. Father was very cross about it, as he said they were the only comfortable slippers he'd got, and he didn't know when he would be able to afford a new pair, times were so hard. I told Smut he must never do such a thing again, and he looked at me as though he quite under-

stood. But, he *did* it again, very often. When ever he found a pocket-handkerchief or a glove lying about he seemed to think it was put there on purpose for him to play with ; and his idea of playing with a thing was to tear it to ribbons. One day he even started to chew the front-door mat. . . . .

Of course, he was very young, and didn't know any better. When I said this to Father, he replied that he hoped he would soon grow up, as otherwise there was every prospect that he would die young.





## THE THIRD BREATH

WHEN Smut got tired of romping he would lie down and go to sleep. He often had sleepy fits, even in the day-time. He would jump into my lap, or into his little basket, and suddenly flop down, tired out. Once or twice every day he wanted to sleep—just as Baby does. It seemed such a silly thing to do in the day-time. I never want to go to sleep, even at night; and when Father says, “It’s quite time Pat went to bed,” I always feel more wide awake than ever. I expect puppies are made differently.

It was rather dull for me when Smut went to sleep, especially when he did so on my lap, because then I could not move for fear of waking him up. I didn’t like to do that, as I once

heard Father say you should always let sleeping dogs lie. I couldn't understand what he meant at the time, for he hadn't been talking about dogs at all.

I had got rather tired of my dolls ; and one day I thought how nice it would be if I could make Smut into a proper Baby, and dress and undress him just as Nurse dresses and undresses my Baby brother. Dolls are all very well, but after all they are only toys : they are not real. Smut would be so very much better : he was real enough, and I was sure he would make a very good Baby—at any rate, when he was asleep.

So that day, when I noticed that Smut was beginning to get tired of his romps, I collected all my dolls and undressed them, putting all their clothes by the fire, so that, as soon as Smut was asleep, I could dress him up in them.

In my family I had one very large doll, with

joints that moved, and she could open and shut her eyes. Her name was Caroline. She was last year's Christmas-and-birthday present from Aunt Nancy. Caroline had a lot of clothes—many more than she could wear at once. She had day frocks, and night dresses, and bonnets, and other things. I put all her clothes ready, because I thought they would just fit Smut.

Then I sat down, and after a few moments Smut jumped on to my lap. He lay down flat on his side with his head dangling over my knee, and very soon dropped off to sleep.

I gave him a minute or two to settle down ; then I rolled him gently over until he had all his legs in the air, and tried one of Caroline's bonnets on his head, tying the strings loosely under his chin.

He looked so sweet, and was so good asleep, that I made up my mind to try on the other



things. It was not so easy to put the frock on him, and he fidgetted all the while I was doing it; but I hushed and patted him off to sleep again every time he woke up, just as Nurse does with the baby. Sometimes he would wake for a moment or two and chew at the ribbons of his bonnet; but for an hour he let me roll him about and dress him up in all sorts of things.

Every day after that, when he got tired, I did this, until at last he would let me carry him about in my arms all dressed up. He seemed to know that having his bonnet and frock put on meant



good long sleep, and I think he really liked it. At any rate, he did not cry or struggle much as children very often do when they are dressed. Sometimes, when I had



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dressed him, I would lay him down in my doll's cot, and he would very often sleep there for an hour if I stayed in the room.



## THE FOURTH BREATH



AS the weather grew warmer, and Baby—that is, Mother's Baby—got a little older, Nurse used to take him out in the perambulator. I often went with them into the Park. Of course, I should have loved to take Smut, and I am sure he would have loved to go; but at that time, all dogs had to wear horrid muzzles out of doors; and as the one thing Smut would *not* wear was a muzzle, he had to be left behind.

One day, just as we were starting off for a walk in Kensington Gardens, somehow or other Smut managed to get out, and came rushing after us when we



were some way down the street.

Nurse and I did not know what to do with him. We did not want to go back ; and at any moment we might meet a policeman who would see at once that Smut had not got a muzzle on, and would march him off to the police station. Then I had an idea.



“Let us put him in the pram,” I said, “at the other end, opposite Baby.”

At that moment Nurse saw a policeman coming round the next corner, so she quickly snatched up Smut, and popped him in the pram. I tucked in the pram cover all round him, just leaving his nose poking out so that he could breathe. Smut no sooner





found himself comfortable under the cover than he stretched himself out and went sound asleep ; and he did not move until we lifted him out when we got home at dinner time.







## THE FIFTH BREATH

I THOUGHT the fresh air would do Smut ever so much good : it was much better for him than being stuffed up indoors all day long, even though he could not run about ; so every day after that I dressed him in the morning, and he went out with Baby in the pram. Nurse said she only hoped she didn't get "had up" for it ; but I always pulled Smut's bonnet well down over his head and tucked him in so that no one could possibly tell what he was. After a time he seemed to look forward to this daily outing in the smooth-running pram.

Lots and lots of times old ladies in Kensington Gardens have peeped into the pram to see Baby, and seen also Smut's black nose poking out from under his bonnet at the other end. I am afraid

it sometimes gave them a terrible shock ; but I always told them in a whisper that that was *my* Baby, not *Mother's*, and I don't think they ever guessed it was a little puppy.

Then one day *I* had a terrible shock. A *POLICEMAN* saw Smut ! He was talking to Nurse, and I had all the time been making faces at her, to get her to send him away, when suddenly he caught sight of Smut. I could hardly breathe, I was so frightened. Great tears began to drop down my cheeks, and I knew that I was about to burst out crying. Just as I felt that the corners of my mouth couldn't get any lower without a great bellow, I saw him pull back Smut's bonnet. Then a broad smile came over his face.

Turning to Nurse, he said :

“Got twins, Nurse, I see !”

I was very much annoyed, though I was also relieved to see him smile.

“They are not twins at all,” I said. “That”—  
pointing to Smut—“is *my* Baby!” I tried to  
look very fierce, and put my arms across the pram  
in front of Smut to prevent the policeman carrying  
him off. Then Nurse and the policeman had a  
little further talk, and I heard him say, “That’s  
all right,” as he walked off with his slow and  
solemn tread. I feared he had gone to get help  
to carry Smut off to jail; but Nurse told me to  
stop crying, as he was quite a nice policeman when  
you got to know him, and said that if I was a good  
girl she was sure he would not take Smut away.



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JA

## THE SIXTH BREATH

THAT was a great fright for me, and afterwards I did not care about taking Smut out in the pram. However, it was not very long before the order about dogs wearing muzzles was taken off. Then, of course, everything was all right. Smut could go out, and I need not be afraid of meeting a policeman.

I still dressed him up, and we took him through Kensington High Street in the pram. He got plenty of exercise indoors, and was always ready for a sleep. It was much more comfortable for him lying in the pram than it would have been walking on a lead. But when we got into the Gardens I undressed him, and let him have a run in one of the big grass enclosures. Here, on fine and dry days, if there were no other dogs about,

we would have a good scamper together. When he was tired out I would pick him up, put on his things again, and lay him down at his end of the pram. I knew that, once he had his things on his long baby robe and bonnet, he would lie perfectly still until we got home again.

One hot sunny day he had had a great game with me on the grass, running after a rubber ball and was quite tired out. I had dressed him in a new baby frock that day, one that had been given to me for my dolls. Smut looked dinky in it, and it was light and cool for him. I put it on him and laid him down in the pram to sleep, while we sat under some trees, and I looked at a picture book Nurse had brought for me.

Presently I saw a great, ugly bull-terrier coming down the Broad Walk towards us ; and at the same moment a collie rushed by chasing a ball someone had thrown for him. The ball bounded





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along the path, and hit the bull-terrier just as the collie was about to snatch it up, and the two dogs bumped into each other.

I could not see exactly what happened after that because everything moved so quickly. The bull-terrier, I suppose, told the collie to mind where he was going ; and the collie, no doubt, replied that he knew where he was going, and that he, the bull-terrier, had better get out of the way. At any rate they started an argument, and that led to a fight ; and the next thing I remember was a crowd of people trying to separate two snapping and snarling dogs by hitting them with sticks and umbrellas, or anything they could lay hold of. Over and over they rolled, and nobody could part them. Then I heard some one call out for some pepper.



Gil  
ALPIN

## THE SEVENTH BREATH

**A**T that very moment there was a creak from the pram just behind me ; and turning round, I saw Smut sitting up, eagerly looking on. His eyes looked very fierce beneath the white baby's bonnet. Then he sprang to the ground, his long robe flowing behind him. I shouted to him to come back, for the two fighting dogs were quite near and I feared he would be killed ; but for the first time in his life Smut took no notice of my voice.

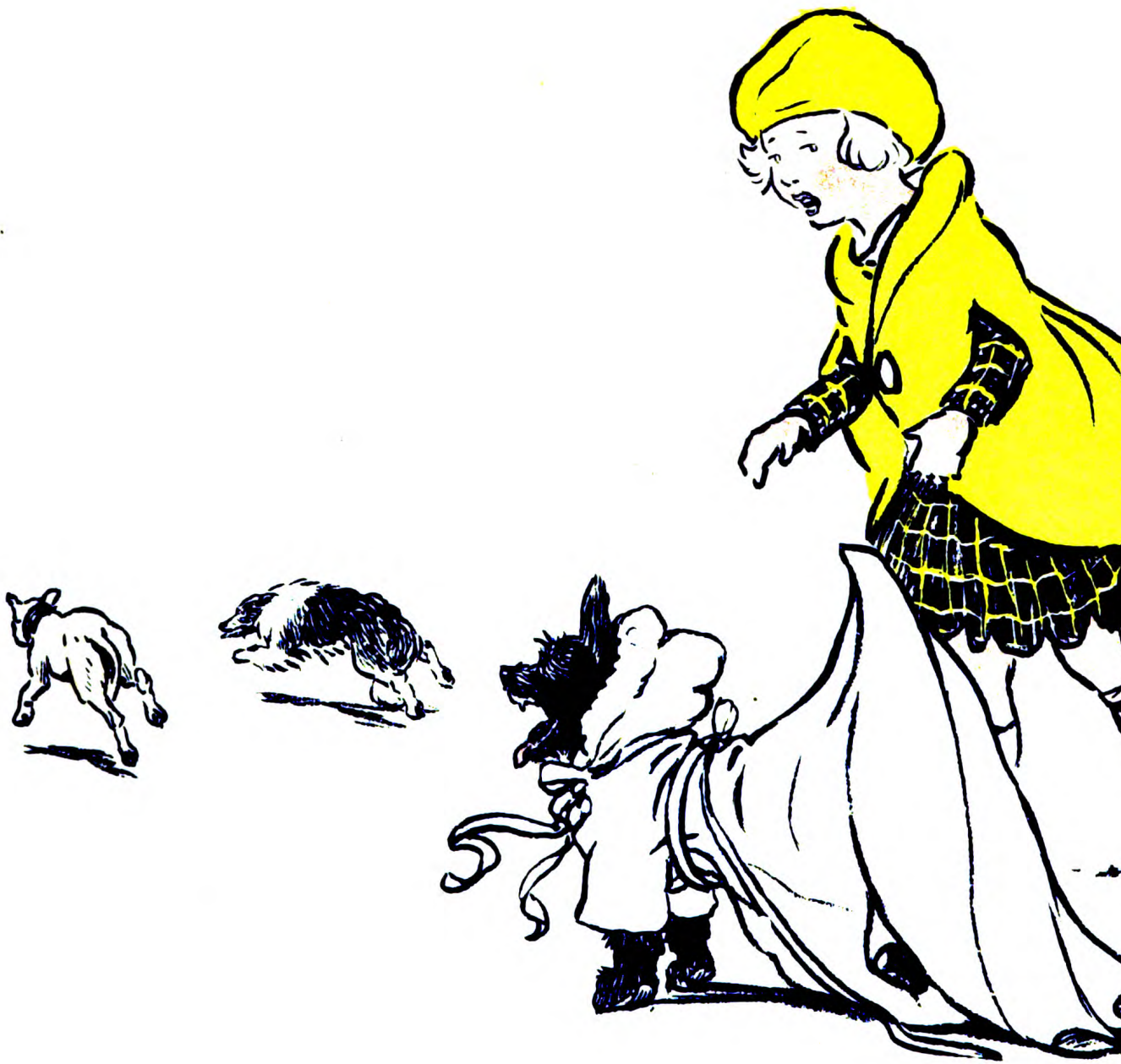
As straight as he could go (for he kept tripping up over his robe) he walked or lurched towards the crowd round the fight. He dodged between the legs of a policeman, and then, without a sign of fear, he sprang at the two dogs, both of which,



of course, were much bigger than he was, and looked as though they could have eaten him up.

I shouted at the top of my voice, but the only thing I heard in reply was the growling of the dogs, and a laugh from the people standing by when they saw Smut, my Baby, with his bonnet and long robe still on, join in the fray.





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At the same moment, the bull-terrier and the collie must have caught sight of him as he hurled himself at them. His strange appearance, his black face with the white bonnet above it, and what must have looked to them like a huge waving white tail behind, was too much for them. I think they must have thought it was a ghost, for I am sure there were never two dogs so scared as those two were then. They jumped apart as though they had been shot, and scampered away, in opposite directions, with their tails between their legs.

As for Smut, he gave a snap at each as it darted past ; then stood in the centre of the crowd, his four short legs planted firmly on the ground, and his tail stuck up in the air with the robe draped over it in a most comical manner. There was defiance in his attitude, as though he was quite willing to fight all the dogs in town.

The people were laughing and patting him when



I rushed amongst them and snatched him up in my arms. He had come to no harm, although his robe was dirty and torn and his bonnet sadly crumpled. But I was too much overjoyed to know that he himself was safe to take any notice of that.

That was the last time I took Smut out in the pram dressed as my baby. He was growing up and had shown himself to be a very brave little doggie. After that, his baby clothes did not seem to suit him so well ; and now, when he goes out he wears nothing but a collar and a chain. Still, though he is no more my Baby, he is still one of US.

