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BUNNYBORO



BY GERALD ...



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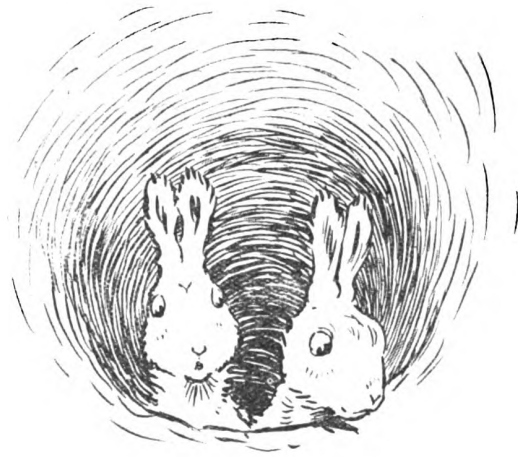
BUNNYBOROU



• CECIL ALDIN •

BY CECIL ALDIN





BUNNYBOROUGH

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Chapter I

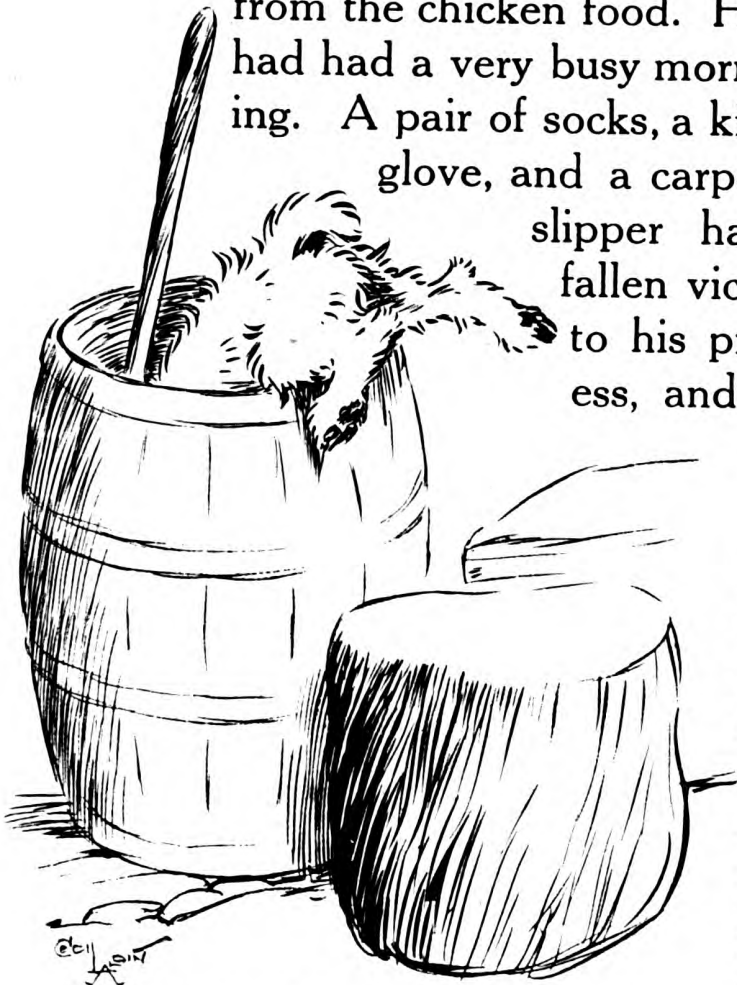
[T was a very hot day in June.

Rags, the wire-haired puppy, had just consumed the kitchen cat's dinner as well as his own, snatched a passing savoury from the pig-wash bucket, and filled up the crevices with toppings from the chicken food. He had had a very busy morning. A pair of socks, a kid glove, and a carpet slipper had fallen victims

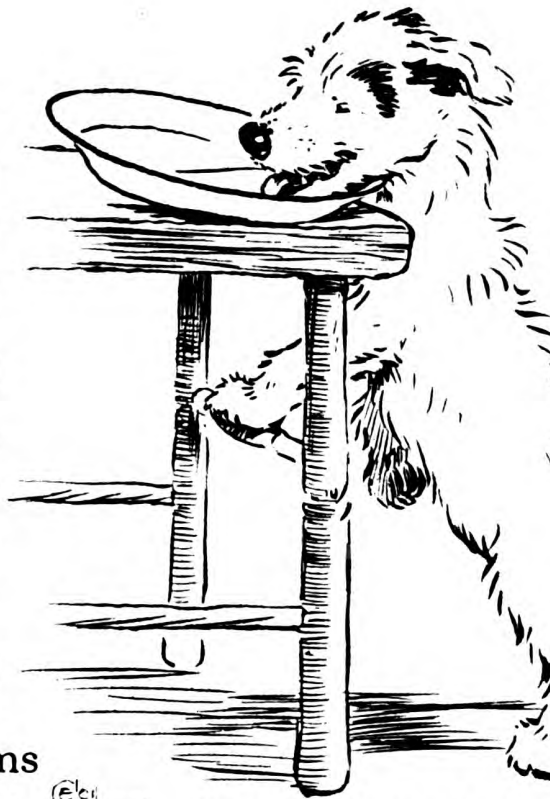
to his prowess, and he now felt that he deserved

some gentle relaxation.

Strolling into the kitchen garden, he wormed his way through the asparagus bed and after two or three preliminary circles, in order to press down the growing plants comfortably, he sank down on to the luxurious bed he had formed, in anticipation of well earned rest.



"A savoury from the pig-wash bucket"



"The kitchen cat's dinner"

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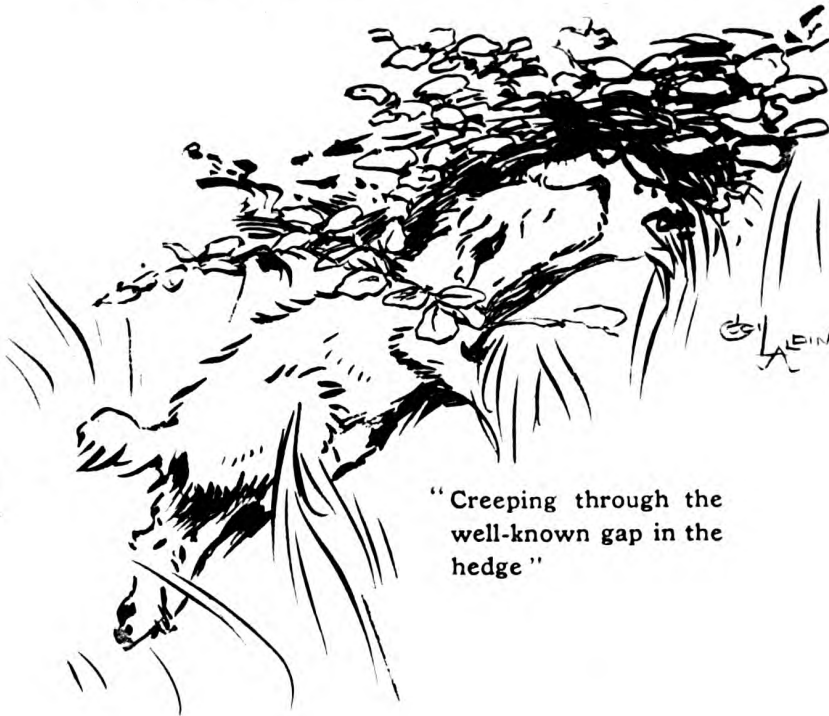
"Sank down on the luxurious bed"

scene of so many fruitless hunts after his friends the rabbits.

Creeping cautiously through the well-known gap in the hedge, he wriggled his way under the bracken and briars, towards the clearing in the centre of the wood, where the

rabbits had their home. On the edge of the last briar patch he paused, his tail erect and twitching, and one front paw lifted in anticipation of the moment when he should plunge

into the open and see the rabbits scuttling away.



"Creeping through the well-known gap in the hedge"

Gradually, from what seemed beautiful and restful void, he found himself trotting across the large paddock where the mushrooms grow. His favourite hunting ground, Daffodil Copse, lay before him, the



"Trotting across the large paddock"

Suddenly, when he was standing quivering with suppressed excitement a thin, high-pitched voice called out from the clearing, "Ha! I smell you, Rags!"







"On the edge of the last briar patch
he paused"

Rags nearly jumped out of his wire-haired skin with fright. He had never met anyone besides the rabbits in the wood before, and he knew that Giles, the gamekeeper, would not say he smelt him, even if he did.

His first thought was to bolt, but after all the voice sounded meek and mild enough.

He would see for himself what it was.

Once more he stalked cautiously up to the opening in the briars and peered through, nearly fainting (if puppies can faint) with astonishment at what he saw.

In a little dip in the ground, just in front of the entrance to the biggest rabbit hole, sat Mother Rabbit. She was neatly dressed in a stiffly starched cap, and wore a red early-Victorian dress, with a very large crinoline. Surrounding her, and seated on the ground, were three youngsters of various ages. They were obviously having their faces and hands washed, before starting the day.

Chapter II

Rags had hardly time to recover from his astonishment when Mother Rabbit called out, "Come along, Rags, and join us: we are all going in to breakfast as soon as I have finished washing the children. We could not see you, but we smelt you coming long ago."

To Rags, who was always hungry, the invitation to breakfast seemed an excellent idea, and his attack of nerves vanished immediately.

Stepping out into the open space, his stump of a tail wagging twenty miles an hour, he wished Mother Rabbit and family a cheery "Good morning," and joined the group.

The young rabbits all seemed delighted to see him. They jumped over his back and through his legs with delight, and the extraordinary thing to Rags was that they seemed to have no wish to chase or frighten them.

Mother Rabbit and her little ones seemed to him the nicest little people imaginable.

Having finished drying the faces and paws of her children, Mrs. Rabbit asked Rags to follow her into



"Rags proceeded to follow them"

her house, a thing he had never been asked to do before, although he had many times tried to scratch his way in without being asked. He was rather taken aback at the invitation, and blushed guiltily to the roots of his hair, the e



of his nose getting pinker and pinker. Meanwhile Mrs Rabbit and her family had all disappeared down the hole so Rags, especially as a most appetising smell of breakfast was wafted towards him, proceeded to follow them as best he could.

Chapter III

It was a tight squeeze for him, but he could hear the young rabbits pattering on ahead and calling out to each other.

Once he got stuck in creeping under a root, but Mother Rabbit, calling out to him to roll on his side and he would soon get by the root, helped him out of his difficulty.

It was a lucky thing he had no collar on or he might have got caught up by it.

Just as he was thinking that he would never be able to get out of the passage again, as there seemed no room for

him to turn round if he wished to do so, he heard shouts of delight just ahead of him, and rapid scrambling and crawling round the large turn, fell headlong to the floor of the Rabbits' parlour.

It was a very neatly furnished little room, cosy and snug. In the centre was a table with two basins of hot bread-and-milk, with a wooden spoon to each. Rags, who had



"Fell headlong to the floor of the Rabbits' parlour"

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never used a spoon before, felt rather awkward, and wondered if he would be allowed to lap up the bread and milk. Mother Rabbit put an extra basin on the table, and the whole family eagerly pulled up their chairs and started breakfast.

Rags had not much idea how to use his spoon at first, but refrained from lapping his food, as he felt it would be bad manners to do so.

To his astonishment he very soon, like his hostess, spooned it up quite easily, letting very little spill down his shirt front.



♠

"He very soon spooned
quite easily"

Chapter IV

"I wonder if you have ever met Aunt Hedgehog?" said Mother Rabbit, between two of her mouthfuls of bread-and-milk. "She is not, of course, really an aunt of ours, but the children always call her aunt."

Rags, who had a bitter remembrance of having met the possible "Aunt Hedgehog," said that he felt sure he had.

"Well," said Mrs. Rabbit, "we are going to see her to-day, and you must come too. She is a funny old thing and rather quick tempered. She lives in the quaintest little house under an old ivy root," continued Mrs. Rabbit, "and she goes to bed all the winter in a great four-poster bed. She is an old maid, and only has a bed-sitting room, but she keeps it very clean and tidy. I expect it is rather early in the year for her to be up, but we'll call and see. She sometimes oversleeps herself for a month or two."

"A month or two?" repeated Rags, thinking she had made a mistake; but Mother Rabbit said that that was nothing to Aunt Hedgehog.

Rags said he would be delighted to go, and soon as breakfast was finished the children got their hats and shoes, and all started off once more down the passage.

Rags, who had had a second helping of bread-and-milk, had this time much more difficulty at the root corner, but with the aid of some of the youngsters pushing him from behind, and some pulling in front, it was at last negotiated.



Turning to Rags as soon as they were all outside, Mrs. Rabbit said :

“Now you are here, I must show you our kitchen garden. Run and get the key one of you children: it is in the brown teapot on the dresser.”

Chapter V

Down a little pathway towards the streamlet that trickled through the centre of the copse, Rags followed Mrs. Rabbit, until they came to a small white gateway with an exceedingly large and strong padlock attached to it. It was in the centre of a little fence about twelve inches high.

Rags was about to jump over it when he noticed Mrs. Rabbit glaring at him, and he stopped just in time. "That fence was put up by my great-great-grandfather," said the offended lady, "to keep the slugs and caterpillars out of the garden. We grow all our vegetables here."

Rags thought the slugs and caterpillars might easily crawl over it, and the more active ones even jump it; but after the look he had just received he refrained from saying so.

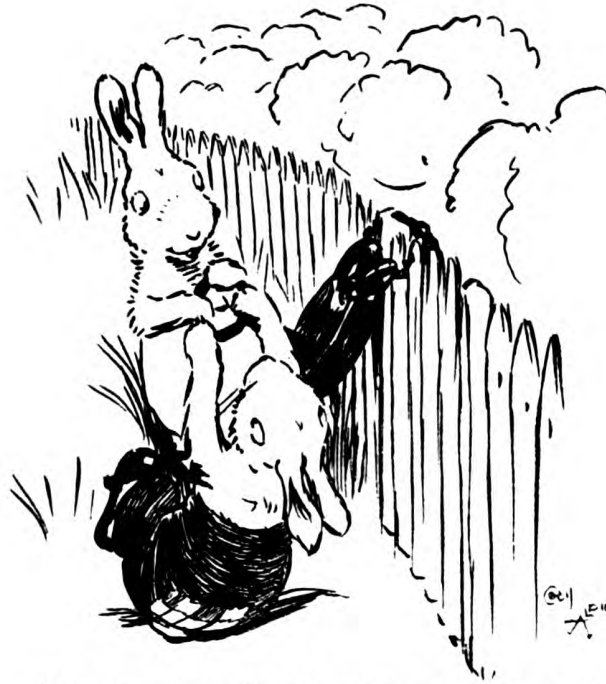
Meanwhile, some of the young Rabbits arrived with the key of the gate, which, after some considerable trouble,



"Down a little pathway Rags followed Mrs. Rabbit."



• ECIL
ADIN •



"It was very stiff and took a great deal of exertion to turn it"

inserted in the padlock ; but it was very stiff, and took a great deal of exertion to turn it.

When the gate was finally unlocked, and the chain and padlock taken off, they both walked into the garden.

Rags had never seen so many vegetables in his life —broccoli, cabbages, carrots, lettuces, onions, beans, and asparagus ; and he looked nervously over his shoulder

expecting every moment to hear an angry gardener shouting to him to get off the asparagus bed.

Mother Rabbit wished to give him samples of all her vegetables, and having tied up as many as she could in a handkerchief, she presented it to Rags, who felt very silly carrying the bundle, and wondered what his friend Bob, the sheepdog, would say if he could see him.

A dog with no clothes on, not even his collar, carrying a handkerchief stuffed full of vegetables, seemed to him to be absurd. He wished he had borrowed a coat and pair of trousers before starting.

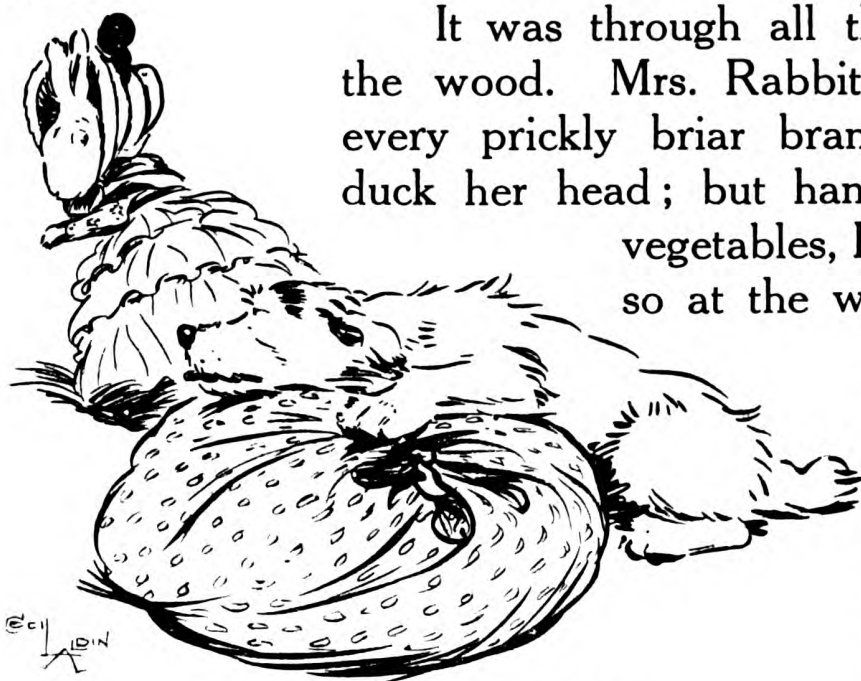
Chapter VI

At last Mother Rabbit, after seeing him yawn for the tenth time, turned once more towards the garden gate; and telling the children to lock it and run in home, she started off to see Aunt Hedgehog.

Rags, thinking anything better than looking at more vegetables, eagerly followed her, carrying his bulging spotted handkerchief with him.

He knew that bread-and-milk, although very filling, was not very staying, and there seemed no chance of getting anything else to eat here except vegetables.

Aunt Hedgehog's home was some little way off, and Rags wondered how his guide was able to find the way at all.



"Rags had decided to drop his load"

It was through all the densest part of the wood. Mrs. Rabbit seemed to know every prickly briar branch, and when she duck her head; but handicapped with her load of vegetables, Rags invariably came so at the wrong moment, and he got very back-scratched.

Presently, after a great deal of twisting and crawling, the party began to be a little more defined.





and just as Rags had decided to drop his load, they came to a small clearing with a path leading up to a very old front door under an ivy root.

This, he gathered, must be Aunt Hedgehog's home.

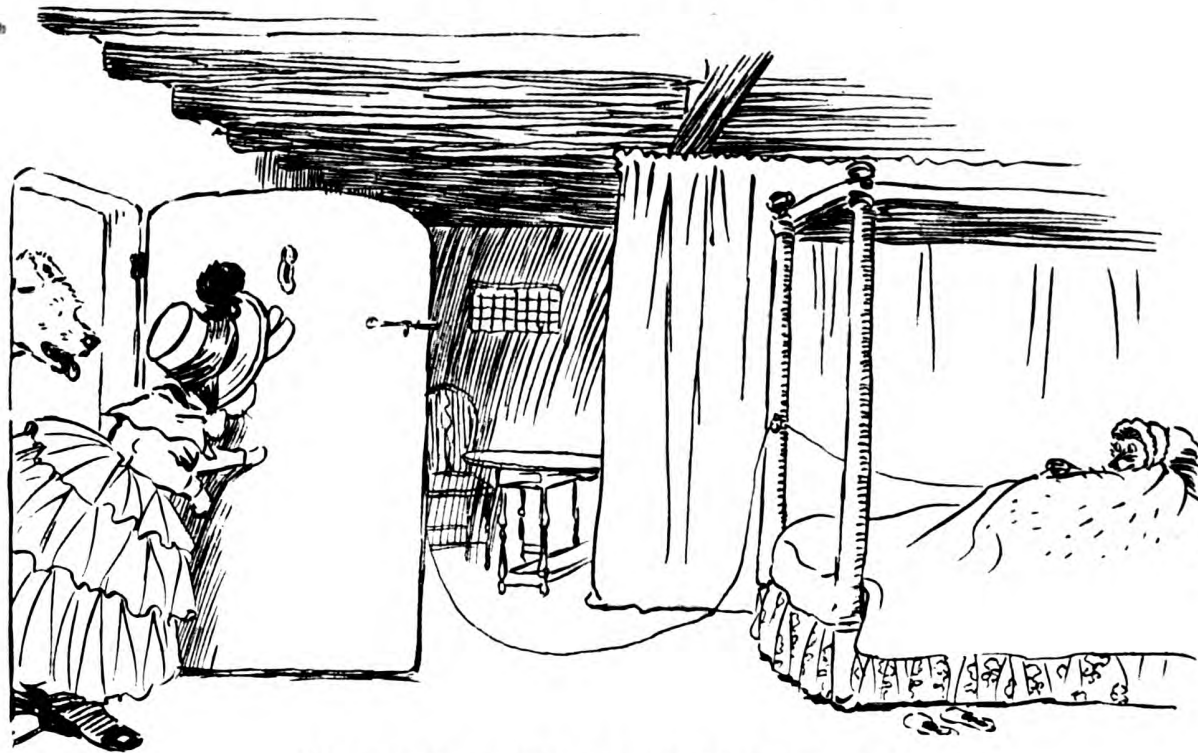


"They came to a small clearing with a path leading up to a very old front door"

Chapter VII

Mother Rabbit knocked smartly with a loud rat-tat on the knocker, but for some time there was no response.

After repeated knockings, which Mrs. Rabbit explained were necessary, as the owner might be asleep, the latch was suddenly pulled up with a jerk, and a very sleepy voice called out, "Oh, come in! come in!"



"Rags found himself in a small but very tidy room"

Rags followed his companion inside, and found himself in a small but very tidy room; but every piece of furniture was thick with dust, as if it had not been used for a very long time. It was a long, low room, with rafters in the ceiling, and a large open fireplace at one end. Dividing down the centre, was a heavy curtain drawn half-way across.



A large four-poster bedstead stood partly concealed by this curtain, and Rags noticed a string running from the bed to the door, which had evidently been used to pull the latch open.

From the centre of the bedstead appeared a hairy and whiskery face, surrounded by a nightcap made of some woolly material. The occupant of the bed had two very bright, beady eyes, which seemed to look through and through Rags.

“Ugh!” said the face, gazing fixedly at Rags, “and who are you?”

“Don’t you know me, Aunt?” said his companion. “I’m Mrs. Rabbit—Peggy Bunny that was—and I’ve brought a friend of mine to see you.”

“Ugh!” came once more from the pillows, “and what does he want? It’s much too early to see anyone, this winter can’t be over yet—what’s the date?” she asked, sitting more upright in bed.

Mrs. Rabbit mentioned the month.

“Surely I cannot have overslept another two months. I hardly seem to get to bed now in the autumn, when I’m called up again in the spring. Winters are much shorter than when I was a girl. However, now you’ve woken me up, I’ll see if I can find some tea for you. Give me my spectacles: my eyes have not yet got accustomed to the light.”

Chapter VIII

To Rags' astonishment, the lady now proceeded to roll herself out of bed, dragging the bedclothes with her; they hung from her back like a peer's robes.

"Oh! bother the clothes," said Aunt Hedgehog, "that always happens if I get out of bed quickly."

She then tucked her head into her middle, rolling herself up into a compact ball. After some manœuvring on the floor she managed, with the help of the others, to roll herself clear of the bedclothes.

Rags was very much amused at this, and he wondered how Aunt Hedgehog got out of bed when there was no one to help her; also it must be rather bad for the bedclothes, he thought, for Miss Hedgehog was covered all over with little bits of cotton. She did not seem very much put out, however, and began to clean herself with a clothes-brush and to sort out her clothes.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Rabbit, having found her spectacles (a pair of horn-rimmed ones in a black case), was busy lighting a fire with dry sticks and fir cones, of which she found a pile in a corner. She then set the kettle on the blaze, which soon began to warm the room.



© J. L. W. "She managed to roll herself clear of the bedclothes."





“You have taken me quite by surprise,” said Miss Hedgehog; “how the time does fly when one is asleep!”



“Mrs. Rabbit was busy lighting a fire”

I don't know what to put on—I haven't seen any of the Spring fashions yet. Are hoops still being worn?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Rabbit, “I don't think there are any great changes since you went to sleep; and you always did know how to dress—I've said so many a time.”

Rags was not a bit interested in the fashions: he kept his eye on the table, and wondered when tea would be ready.

Chapter IX

"Tea and nuts," said Miss Hedgehog, "is what I get here—I hope you like them," she added as an afterthought.

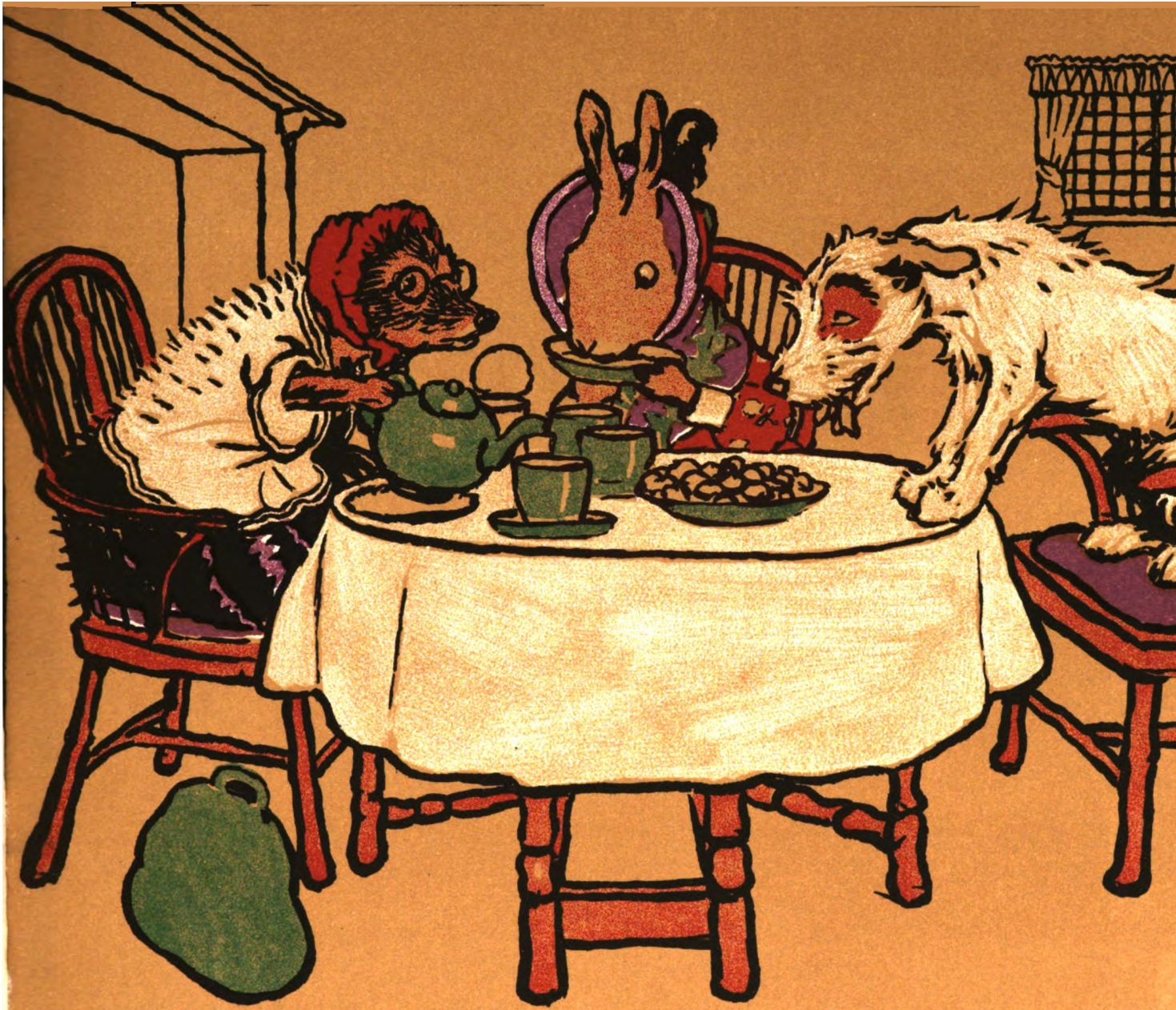
Rags said he thought he should, although he had never tried to eat nuts. The bread-and-milk breakfast seemed years ago, and he was feeling terribly empty again.

At last the kettle boiled, and having dusted the table the tea things were found and spread out, and the three sat down to their meal.

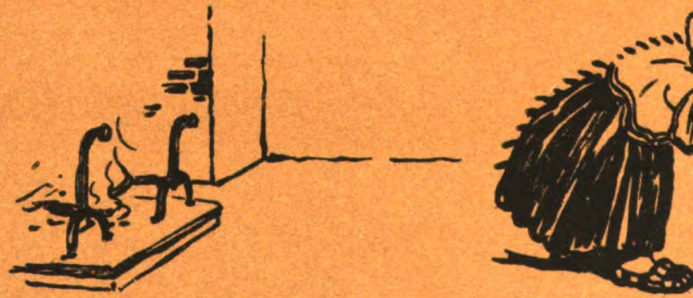
The tea, Rags noticed, was very weak: it hardly coloured the water; but with some condensed milk added to it he found it quite palatable. With the nuts he had much more difficulty, but having watched the hedgehog crack them, he was soon quite an expert at getting them out of their shells and made a very hearty meal.

"How is old Surly and Mrs. Snarly, my dear?" said Aunt Hedgehog. "I want to hear all the news now I have got up."

"Old bachelor Badger," said Mother Rabbit, "Brother Badger with the hyphen, as he calls himself, is very well, I believe, though I have not heard much about him for some months; but Mrs. Vixen has been very busy since she went to bed. They tell me she has a family of three babies. They must be about three months old now; and I hear that Uncle Badger, who lives in the flat opposite, has given his landlord notice that he is going to move on account of the annoyance."



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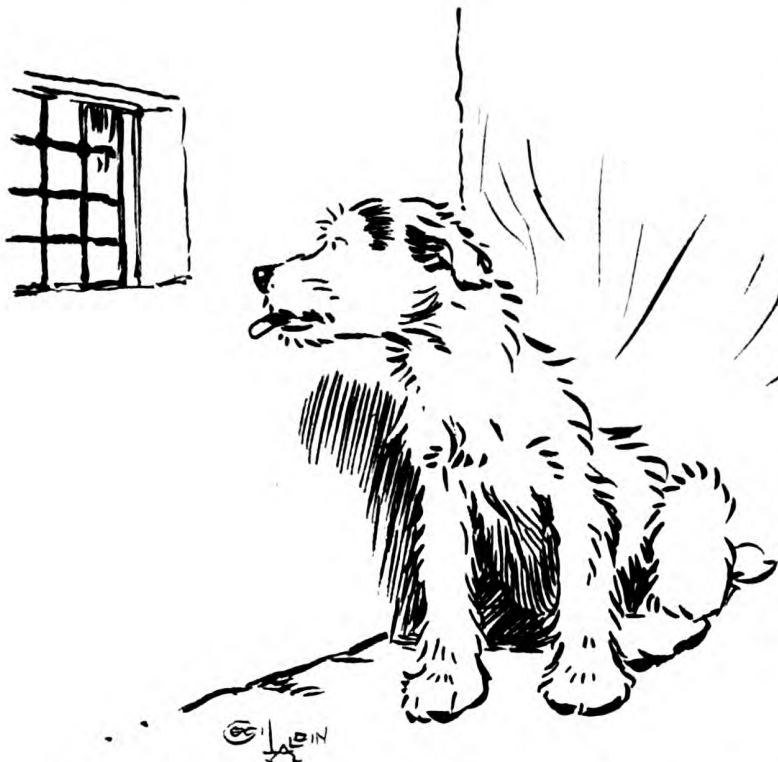


“Dear me, dear me,” murmured Aunt Hedgehog longingly, “I should like to see her babies: that woman never could bring up children properly.”

“That’s easily done, my dear: we’ll go and see them now. A little walk in the sun will do you good after your long rest.”

“I’m afraid old Grumpy will always remain a bachelor,” said Miss Hedgehog, gazing thoughtfully at her toes. “Get me my new white bonnet and best shawl, dear—the one I bought last year from the hen-pheasant.”

Chapter X



"Rags thought the two ladies would never be ready"

Miss Hedgehog spent a long time touching her face and smoothing the wrinkles, and Rags, who had strolled outside, thought the two ladies would never be ready.

At last they both appeared, Aunt Hedgehog simpering under a bright parasol, evidently intending to make an impression on Mr. Brock-Badger.

Rags thought she looked very much younger than when he first saw her in his

Aunt Hedgehog walked very slowly, and Rags and Mr. Rabbit had to sit down every few minutes and wait for her, but after about half-an-hour's walk, they came to a sandy bank, with a well-worn track up to the mouth of a large fox and badger earth.

The old maid immediately began touching up her face with a small powder puff which she carried in a little basket.

"Quite a mansion," said Rags, "and from the way the grass has been trodden down all round, and the scraps of food lying about, it looks as if a regiment of soldiers had been camping here."



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L. N. Z.

There were feathers and bones lying about in all directions, and in one corner a rat's tail stuck up through the ground where it had been buried.

The whole entrance was horribly untidy, but it was a very warm and sunny spot facing south, with the stream running a little way below.

"Children always do ruin a garden," said Miss Hedgehog waddling up the path, "and this is evidently their playground. I cannot understand Mrs. Vixen allowing it to remain in such a state,—not even a notice to say 'keep off the grass.'

"Electric bells," said Mother Rabbit, as she pushed the button under the name "Mrs. Vixen," which was neatly printed above it; "these new flats have every convenience."

On the opposite side of the entrance was a similar notice with the name "Izaak Brock-Badger," and under it pushed in a little slot made for the purpose, was the word "OUT" in large letters.

"Rubbish," said Mrs. Rabbit as she passed in: "he never out at this time of day. We'll call on him afterwards the surly old rascal."

Chapter XI

After walking some six yards down the passage, they came to two further doors, one on each side, and turning to the right hand one, they gave a rap.

Immediately there came from just inside the door such a din of snarling and quarrelling, that they were nearly deafened by the noise.

"That," said Miss Hedgehog with acidity, "is evidently the Vixen family."

As she said this, the door was opened about six inches, and three fox-cub heads were pushed through the aperture. As soon as they saw Rags, however, they bolted back, rudely slamming the door in the face of the visitors.

"What manners!" said the Aunt Hedgehog, as she pushed the door open herself and entered, followed by the other two.



"Rags followed the other two, holding his nose"

Rags wished he had brought his pocket handkerchief, as the smell of the fox was most unpleasant, but he followed the other two into the flat, holding his nose.

They found themselves in an untidy room, not too clean, with three extremely untidy beds on one side.

Mrs. Vixen had hastily snatched up some knitting, with



KNOCK
AND
RING

©ci
ALDIN.

which she was pretending to be busily at work. Her family however, seemed to have completely disappeared.

“Good afternoon,” said Mrs. Rabbit, “I have brought Miss Hedgehog and a friend of mine to see you; I hope we don’t intrude?”

“Intrude, my dear!” said Mrs. Vixen hastily, but at the same time gazing suspiciously at Rags, “I’m quite glad to see you.”

Chapter XII

"And how is Mr. Fox?" asked Miss Hedgehog.

"Pretty well, dear, thank you," replied Mrs. Vixen. "He's been very poorly during the winter, and he couldn't get any regular work, which rather preyed on his mind, but he's much better now. I'm expecting him in to dinner any moment."

Rags glanced round, but couldn't see any sign of dinner being got ready. Perhaps Mr. Fox would bring it with him. Then he heard a giggling sound coming from the bed, and saw three little snouts and eyes slowly appear from the covers. He hastily pulled up bedclothes, and disappeared immediately when they saw him looking at them.

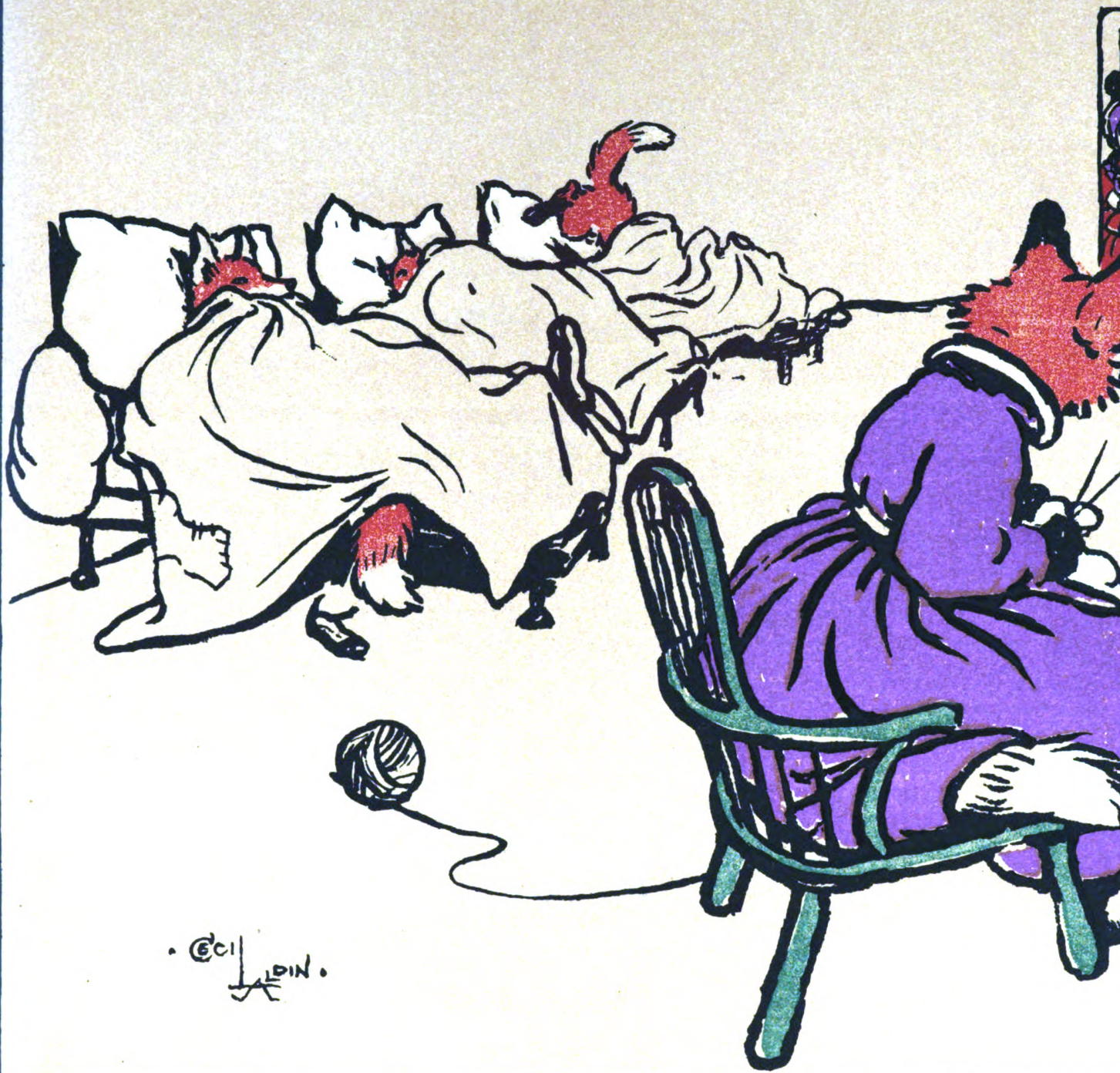
"My dear babies," said Mrs. Vixen, "are all asleep. They always rest during the heat of the day."

"So we see," said Miss Hedgehog, having also heard the giggle; "but do they always go to bed, dear, with their boots on? It's rather a slovenly habit, don't you think?"

One little foot which had been uncovered was quickly drawn under the bedclothes.

Mrs. Vixen snapped that she presumed she could put her children to bed in their clothes if she wished to do so without being told by old maids (and she emphasized the "old maids" very pointedly) how she ought to bring up her family.

Miss Hedgehog's bristles stood up on end, and she snapped out that it was in any case a very dirty habit to put children to bed with their clothes and shoes on.



• Cecil Aldin •





At this, Mrs. Vixen fairly lost her temper, and made a swift snap at Miss Hedgehog, only just missing her nose.



“ Mrs. Vixen made a swift snap at Miss Hedgehog ”

Chapter XIII

The two ladies then started hammer and tongs at each other.

Miss Hedgehog eventually rolled herself into a ball, sadly crumpling up all her finery, and hurled herself at Mrs. Vixen. The more Mrs. Vixen snapped at her opponent's prickly back, the more Miss Hedgehog chuckled and jeered at her from inside her armour, until at last she was thoroughly worn out and with her nose very sore, Mrs. Vixen sank down by the side of one of the beds.

During all this time Rags and Mrs. Rabbit stood behind the door not daring to interfere, and the three cubs sat in bed, their little white teeth bared, glaring and snarling at Miss Hedgehog. They looked as though they intended to join in the fray; but when they caught sight of Rags watching them, they thought better of it, and dived down beneath the bedclothes again.

It was not a pretty sight to see two respectable middle-aged ladies fighting on the floor, and Miss Hedgehog's companions were heartily glad when the affair was over.

Miss Hedgehog got up from the floor, smoothed down her dress, and picked up her parasol, but Mrs. Vixen made no attempt to renew the struggle.

"Good-day dear, so glad I called; I think your fan is sweet," said the victor, gathering up her skirts and making a triumphant move towards the door; the effect of which, however, was rather spoilt by her bonnet being perc-



© Cecil Aldin.



rakishly over one eye, making Rags and Mrs. Rabbit howl with laughter.



" Making Rags and Mrs. Rabbit howl with laughter "

Chapter XIV

When they got outside, poor Mrs. Rabbit was very much upset at the disturbance, but Miss Hedgehog seemed to be quite used to it, and muttered, as she once more produced her powder puff and dabbed her face, "I never come to this place without having a row with the cat."

The two ladies were busy for some minutes tidying up, and Miss Hedgehog, with the aid of a pocket mirror, being at last made presentable again, they turned towards the opposite door.

"Now my dears, we'll call on the bachelor, where there are no brats of unmannered children, at any rate, to upset us; but," said Mrs. Rabbit, turning to Rags, "you'll find him rather surly. He dislikes terriers I know."

Knocking boldly at the door opposite Mrs. Vixen's, they waited anxiously for the expected "Come in." A surly grunt was their only answer, so plucking up courage, Mrs. Rabbit pushed open the door herself, and walked in.

"Good-evening, Mr. Brock-Badger," said she, in her sweetest tones, "may we come in?" She explained in a whisper to Rags that that was his name, a hyphen name which he was very particular about.

"Oh, come in, and who the dickens are you?" said the gruff voice.

Once inside, they saw the back view of an apparently very old gentleman sitting in front of a fire in a high-backed arm chair. The room smelt very sweet and clean—very different from Mrs. Vixen's piggery—but was really rather small for its occupant.



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Chapter XV

In front of Uncle Badger—who was in carpet slipper, a dressing gown, and a black velvet smoking cap,—hung some male garments airing in front of the fire.

“Ugh!” said the Badger, turning his head toward them, “and what do you confounded women want with me? I’m very busy airing my clean clothes for to-morrow, and I don’t want to see you”; and gazing at Rags, he added, “or your disreputable-looking friend either. Didn’t you see Out on my door?”

Rags, who thought himself rather a dog, was extremely annoyed, and raised his upper lip, showing his sharp little teeth.

“Oh,” said Mr. Badger, “that’s your game, is it? It’s not the first time I’ve met some of your sort.”

“Oh, please don’t quarrel, you two; we’ve had enough quarrelling already with Mrs. Vixen and Isabella here,” said Mrs. Rabbit, pointing to Miss Hedgehog.

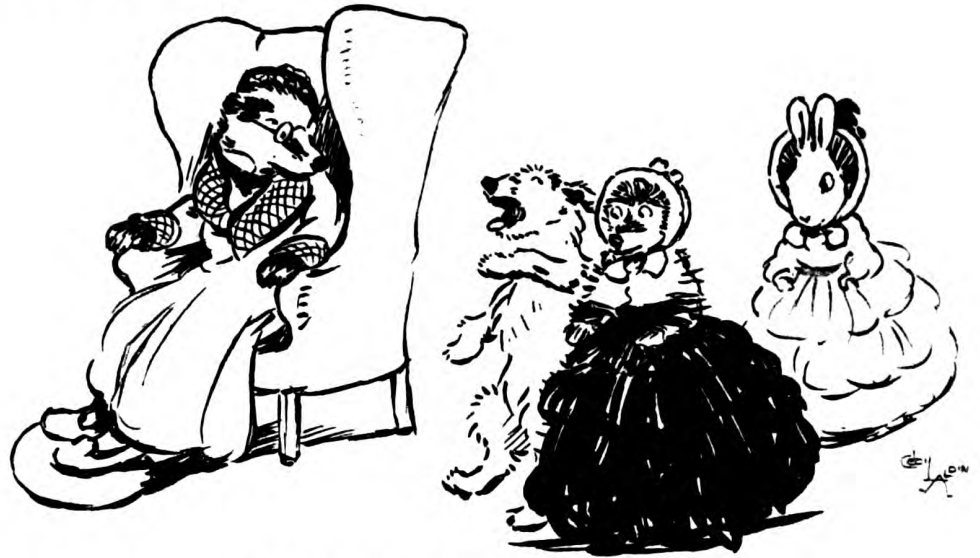
“I’m sure I have no wish to quarrel with the gentleman,” said Rags, which was really perfectly true.

“So you’ve been to see Mrs. Vixen, have you? I hope you gave those brats of her’s a lesson. I never saw such a crew,” said he under his breath. “If ever those youngsters show themselves inside my door, I’ll snap their heads off



“Rags was extremely annoyed”

They stand and jeer at me every night when I go out—but I'll catch one some day," said he surlily. Rags felt sorry for them if he did.



"Please don't quarrel," said Mrs. Rabbit

"Please Mr. Badger—Mr. Brock-Badger I mean, may I please have Rags and I look round your delightful room?—he's so interested," said Miss Hedgehog, mincingly.



Cecil
ALDIN

Chapter XVI

Miss Hedgehog having gained permission from the owner of the room (who was discussing his neighbours with Mrs. Rabbit), she told Rags to keep quiet and follow her round.

"Hush," said she in a whisper, "I am going to show you his bedroom." As she said this she led him to the far end of the room, and pulling aside a curtain,

disclosed what struck Rags as a particularly cosy dug-out, beautifully lined with long clean rushes and dried grass.

"Discussing his neighbours with Mrs. Rabbit"

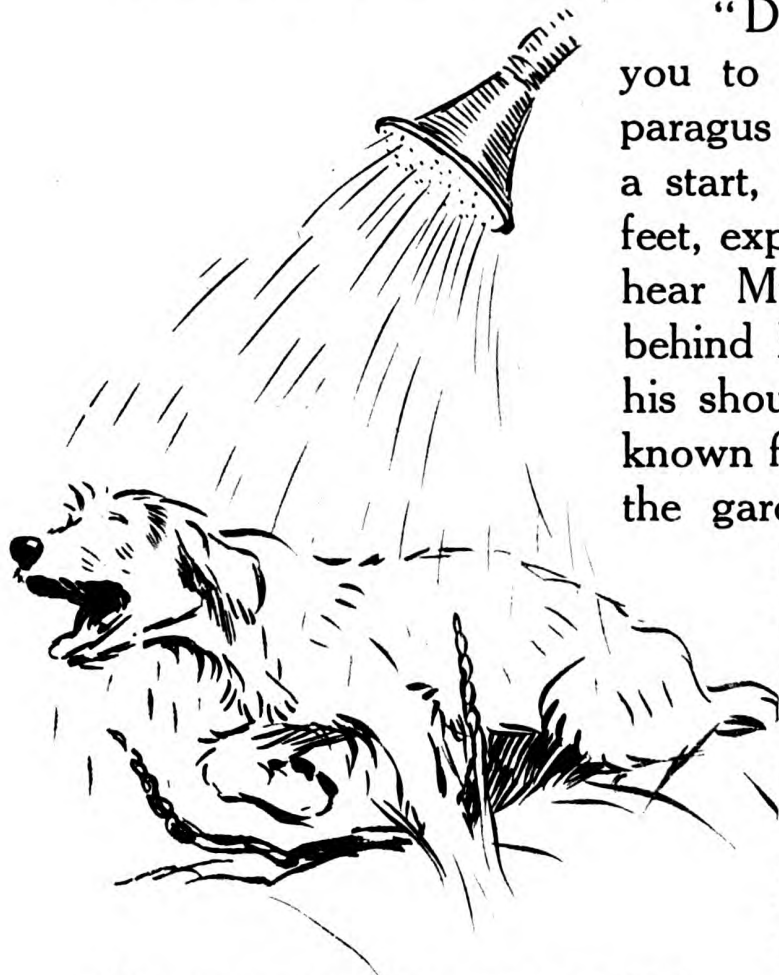


"The more Rags gazed at it, the sleepier he got"

The more Rags gazed at it, the sleepier he got, and as the other three had now got into an animated conversation in front of the fire, apparently on the subject of Mrs. Vixen, he decided to curl up, and in less than ten seconds was sound asleep.



" In less than ten seconds was sound asleep "



" The contents of which he poured over him "

"Drat the dog! I'll teach you to sleep on my best paragus bed." Awaking with a start, Rags scrambled to his feet, expecting every second to hear Mr. Badger's jaws snap behind him; but looking over his shoulder, he saw the well known figure of old Anderson the gardener, rushing toward him with a large garden broom, and a water can, the contents of which he poured over him.

Mr. Badger, Mr. Rabbit, Miss Hedgehog and Mrs. Vixen seemed all to have disappeared

and Rags, being now wet through, decided to do the same











