

Just then, the grey duck came waddling up the hill.

“Why are you stealing all my nuts?” she said crossly. “I’ll teach you to steal them.”

With that, she flew at the rooster, with her bill open. The rooster fluffed up his feathers and picked and picked back at her. At last the grey duck cried out, “Stop! Please stop, and I will pull your cart home for you if you wish.”

This pleased the other two very much. They set the grey duck to pull the cart, and then climbed up into it. Grey Duck waddled quickly down the hill. The nearer she came to the river the faster she waddled. The poor hen and the rooster thought that their last days had come.

“Stop, stop!” cried the rooster.

“Help, help!” shouted the hen.

But the grey duck only waddled faster. Down, right into the river, she went. Down, right into the river, went the cart, the hen, and the rooster. Splash! The cart didn’t sink but floated on the river, and the hen and the rooster managed to sit on top of it. What a funny picture they made, with their feathers all wet! The grey duck swam about, laughing at them.

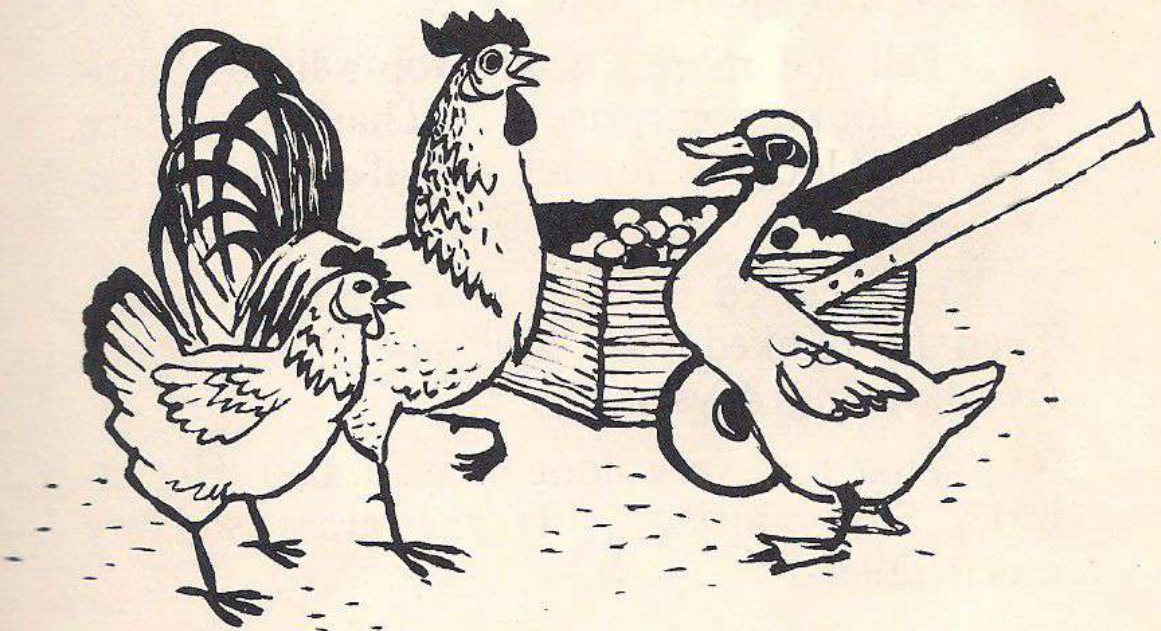
“Please, please, dear good little Grey Duck, will you pull us to the river bank?” asked the rooster.

“Please, do save us,” said the hen.

The little grey duck began to feel sorry for them both. She picked up the string of their little cart and swam with it to the river bank. Then she asked the hen and the rooster to go inside her pretty little house.

“Step inside,” she said, waddling ahead, “and dry your feathers by my fire.”

So the hen and the rooster dried their feathers by the fire, and then they each took some of the nuts from the cart. Since that day the three have been great friends.



THE GREEDY KANGAROO

Once there was a kangaroo who was very greedy. He ate not only the best grass on his own hunting-ground, but also the best on other hunting-grounds. The other animals did not like him, and called him Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little.

One day the kangaroo was far from his own hunting-ground, when a koala bear whom he had not seen for a long time went past. The kangaroo thought he had never seen the koala looking better.

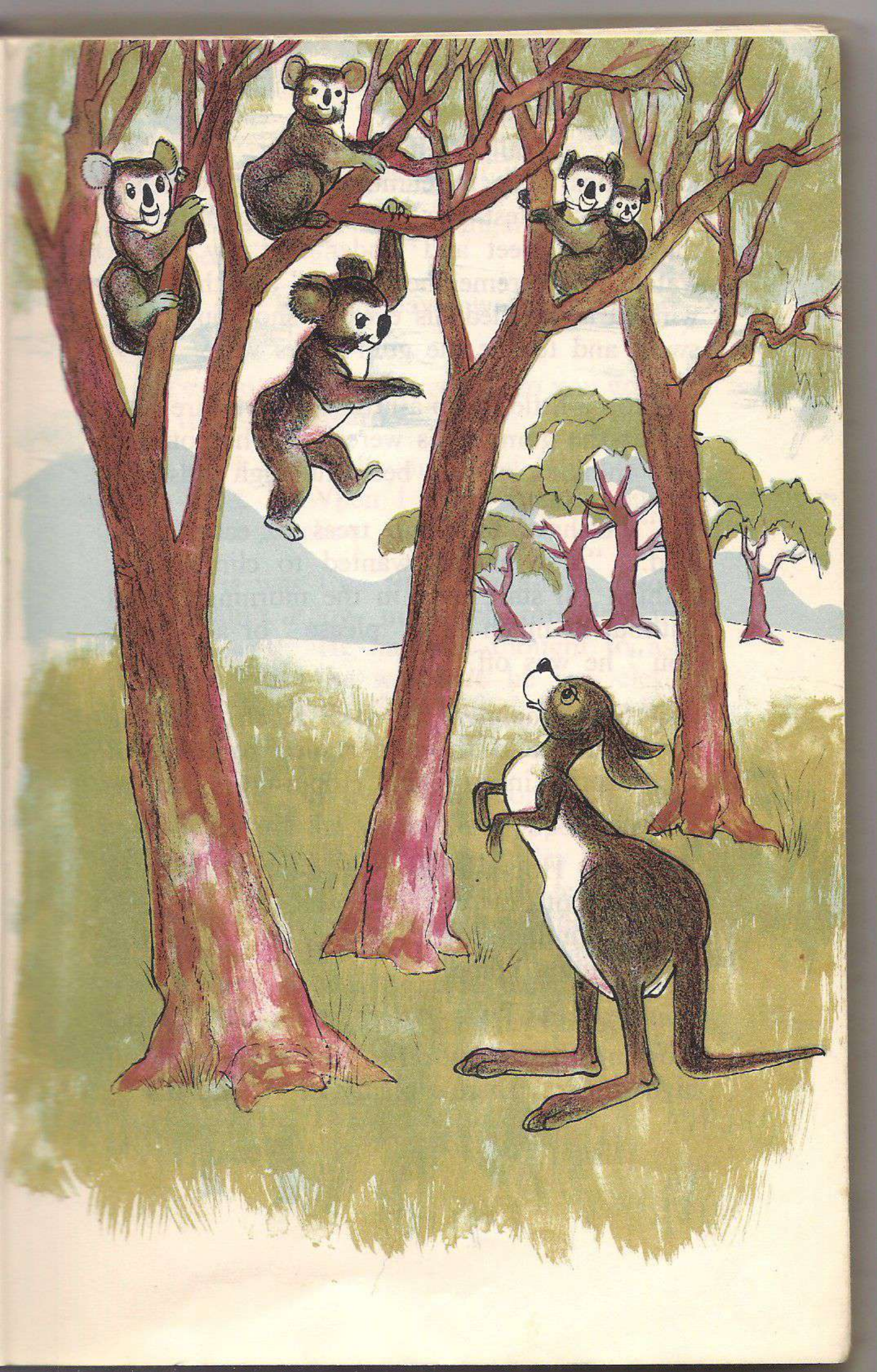
“ Good morning, Koala,” he said. “ You’re looking very well. Where have you been ? ”

“ Oh,” said the koala, “ I have been far away. The trees there are bigger and stronger, the grass is taller and greener, and the water sweeter and clearer than here.”

“ Tell me more,” said Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little, looking surprised. “ That’s the place I’ve been looking for all my life ! How far away is it ? ”

Koala closed his eyes and thought deeply. Then he blinked hard and said, “ It’s about five hopping days away.”

“ That’s a very long way,” said Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little. “ Is the grass so very much taller ? ”



“It’s so tall,” said the koala, “that the kangaroos have to climb the trees to reach the very sweetest bits. As for the gum-leaves, they’re so sweet and tender that my mouth waters just to remember them;” and the koala winked and rolled his eyes to show just how sweet and tender the gum-leaves were.

Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little did not care how tender the gum-leaves were. But he couldn’t stop thinking of that beautiful high grass.

“I’d have to climb trees to eat it,” he said. “I’ve always wanted to climb trees. I think I’ll start early in the morning;” and without as much as a “please” or a “thank you” he was off.

“Such manners!” said Koala, shaking his head; and then he smiled to think of the surprise in store for Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little.

Now, Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little loved to boast about how clever he was. He got back to the hunting-ground just as all the others were coming home.

“Good-bye,” he said. “Early in the morning I am going off to find some beautiful high grass. There’s plenty of it, and it’s so

tall that even the kangaroos need to climb trees to reach the tenderest of it.”

“ Indeed,” said one old kangaroo. “ Where is this beautiful grass ? ”

“ It’s five hopping days away,” said Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little.

“ Yes, but in which direction do you go ? ” asked the old kangaroo.

“ That I can’t tell you,” said Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little. “ When I come back, though, I’ll tell you all about it.”

Now, it was true that Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little didn’t know in which direction the tall grass was. He had not thought to ask the koala. But he was sure he was clever enough to find out. So, early in the morning, he was off on his way.

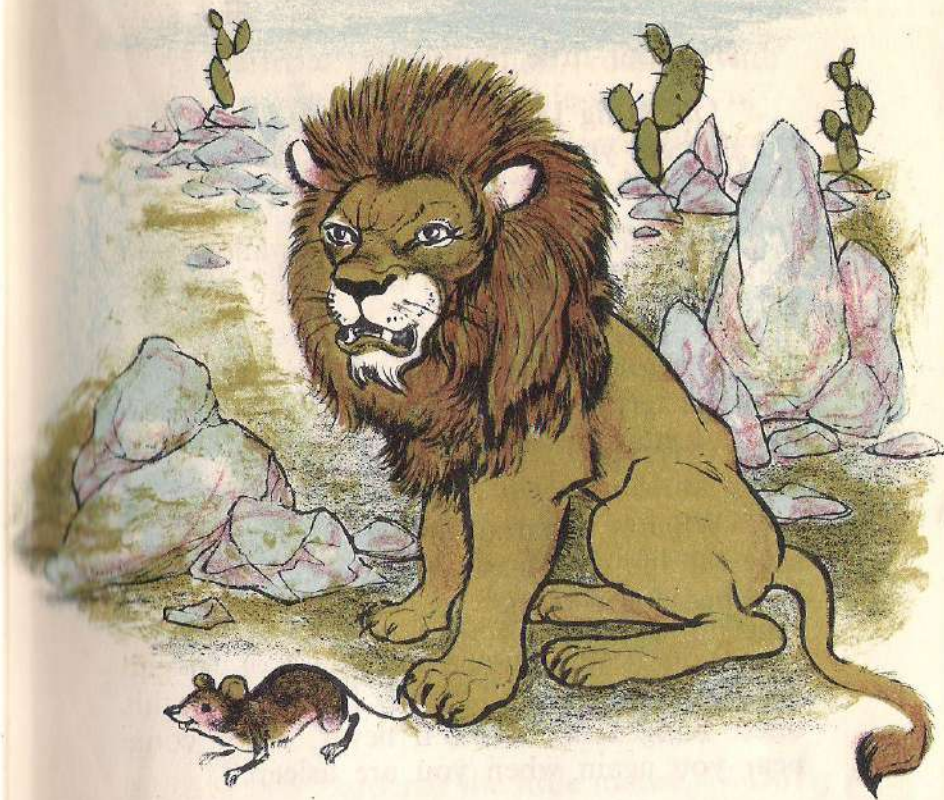
He looked in every direction, and then hopped toward the west. He hopped toward the west for five days, and each day the trees grew less tall and the grass less tender and green. Poor Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little hopped on, shaking his head as he went. At the end of five days he was right in the desert. A strange picture met his eyes. There was not a tree to be seen. There was nothing but a little dry grass showing here and there.

Poor foolish Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little had never seen a desert before. He had never even heard of a desert. He did not know what it was. He stood looking at it and shaking his head.

“How greedy those animals were!” he said. “They’ve eaten all the beautiful green grass, and all the strong, tall trees. They’ve even managed to drink all the clear, sweet water.”

He turned his back on the desert and hopped sadly toward his own hunting-ground. He hoped that the greedy kangaroos would not come there and drink up all the clear water and eat all the tall trees and the tender grass. He thought he had better stay home and look after it. Then he remembered that he himself had been greedy and boastful, and he made up his mind not to be greedy or boastful any more.

So Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little went back and stayed in his own hunting-ground and never saw the desert again. Nor did he ever see the koala again, so he could not ask whether he had gone in the right direction to look for the beautiful grass. As for the koala, he is still chuckling at the trick he played on Hop-a-little, Stop-a-little.



THE LION AND THE MOUSE

One day a lion lay asleep near the rocks where he lived. A little mouse, running about looking for food, ran over the lion's head. Sleepily, the lion put up a paw and caught him.

“Grr, grr!” he roared.

The poor little mouse was terrified.

"Oh, King Lion, I'm so sorry!" he said. "I thought you were just one of those rocks. Please forgive me!"

"I'm not sure whether to swallow you whole, or to tear you to bits first," said the lion.

"Oh, please, King Lion, save my life," said the terrified little mouse. "If you save mine, I may be able to save your life some day."

"What!" roared the lion. "A mouse save the life of a lion! That's the best story I've heard for years."

"You never know what's in store," said the little mouse. "Please forgive me this once, King Lion, and I'll never, never come near you again when you are asleep."

"Very well. I won't swallow you this time," said the lion, who had had a very good lunch. "But after this always take note of where you're going. If you ever waken me like that again, my friend, it will cost you your life."

"Thank you, indeed, King Lion," said the little mouse. "I hope I may be able to do something for you some day."

"So do I," said the lion, roaring with laughter. "Good-bye, little life-saver."

After this the little mouse kept well away from the lion. One day, however, he heard a very angry roar.

"Dear me!" said the little mouse. "I think that must be King Lion. I'd better run along and see if he wants my help;" and away he ran in the direction of the angry roars.

The lion did indeed want help. He had been caught in a very strong net, which had been put down by hunters. He had tried to tear the net apart, but the ropes of which it was made were not far enough apart. He roared angrily each time he tried to get his paws through the net and could not do so. It was then that the little mouse had heard him.

"Sh, sh!" ordered the little mouse. "Do you want the hunters to hear you? Just be quiet while I set to work."

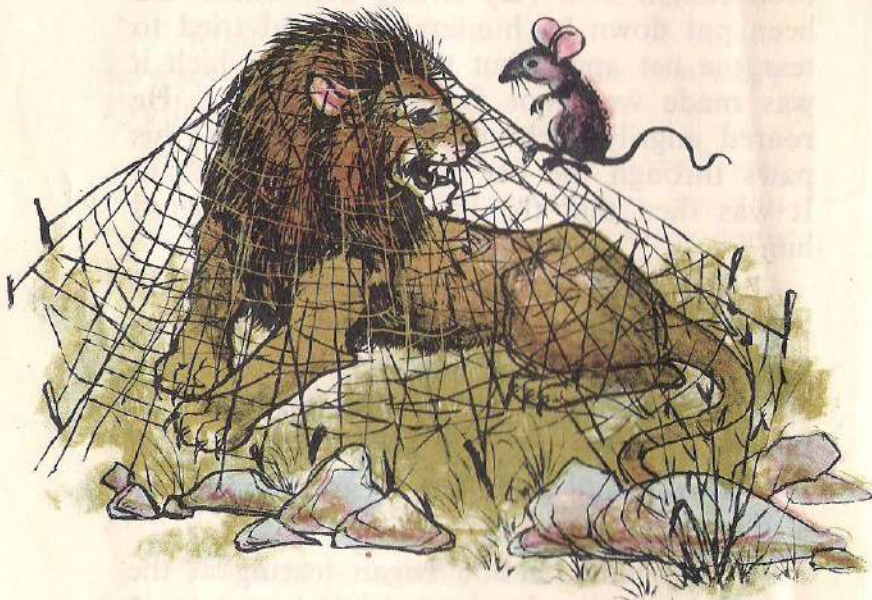
Soon the mouse had nibbled through first one rope of the net, and then another.

"Now you'll be able to tear it apart," he said at last.

Once again the lion began tearing at the net, and this time he managed to tear it apart and break through it.

"Thank you, indeed, little mouse, for saving my life," he said.

"I've always said that even a mouse could help a lion," said the mouse. "I'm glad I was there when you needed me. Good-bye, King Lion;" and the little mouse ran off once more to look for food.



THE THREE AUNTS

PART I.

Once there lived a poor wood-cutter. He had only one daughter, who was as pretty as a picture. She had lost her mother when she was a child, so there had been no-one to teach her much about house-work. One day, however, she said good-bye to her father and went to work at the palace. She worked so hard that soon the queen heard about her and asked to see her. The queen was quite pleased to see that the girl was very pretty and well mannered, as well as being such a hard worker.

This did not please the other servants though, and they tried to think how they could make the queen think less of the girl. One of them told the queen that the wood-cutter's daughter had boasted that she could spin more thread in a day than any other girl. The poor girl had said no such thing, and the queen was surprised to hear of such boasting.

She sent for the girl, and said, "I have heard that you think you can spin more thread in one day than any other girl. I should like to see for myself just how clever you are. Will you please stay in this room

and spin all this flax into thread before morning?"

Then the queen smiled at the girl and left the room. The poor girl looked at the flax spread on the floor. Then she looked at the spinning-wheel. She had never seen one before and didn't know how to use it. She began to cry softly to herself.

Just then she heard a faint noise. A little old woman, whom the girl had never seen before, stood at the door.

"What is the matter, my dear?" she said.

"Since you are kind enough to ask, I will tell you," said the girl. "The queen has asked me to spin all this flax into thread before morning, and I really can't spin."

"May-be I can help you," said the old woman, feeling sorry for the girl. "If you will call me Aunt on the happiest day of your life, I will see that all this flax is spun into thread for you before morning."

The girl was quite pleased to make the promise, so the old woman spun the flax into fine, even thread while the girl slept.

Next morning, early, the little old woman had gone. The girl took the spun thread and showed it to the queen, who was delighted

with it, and with the girl too. This made the other servants at the palace even more jealous. So they told the queen that the girl had boasted that she could weave the whole thread into cloth in a day. Once again the queen sent for the wood-cutter's daughter and asked her to weave the thread into cloth by the next morning.

The poor girl didn't know how to weave. She began to cry softly to herself. Then in came another little old woman whom the girl had never seen before.

"What is the matter, my dear?" she asked.

The girl told her what the jealous servants had told the queen.

"I've never woven anything in my life," she said. "What ever can I do?"

"May-be I can help you," said the old woman, who had an ugly hump on her back. "If you promise to call me Aunt on the happiest day of your life, I'll weave this thread into cloth for you."

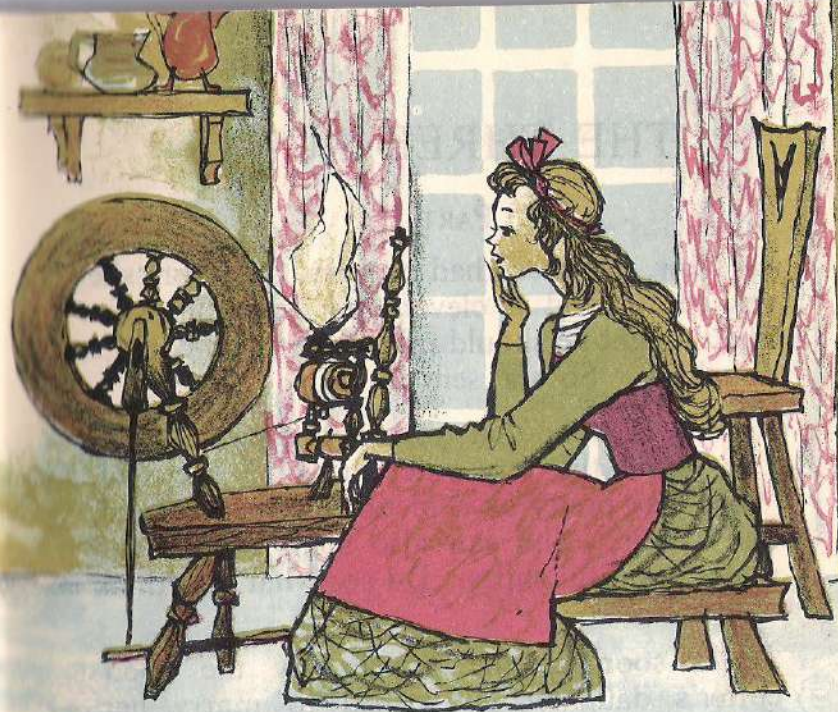
The girl was quite pleased to make the promise, so the old woman wove the thread into linen cloth while the girl slept.

In the morning the little old woman was gone. The girl took the hand-woven linen



and showed it to the queen. The queen was even more delighted, and the servants were even more jealous than before.

This time, they told the queen that the girl had said that she could make all the hand-woven linen into shirts in one day. So once again the queen sent for the girl and asked her to make all the linen into shirts before morning.



Once again the girl did not know what to do. She began to cry softly to herself. Still a third strange old woman stood before her. She said she would make the shirts if the girl promised to call her Aunt on the happiest day of her life. As before, the girl promised to do so; the old woman made the hand-woven linen into shirts, and the girl took them in the morning to show the queen.

THE THREE AUNTS

PART II.

Now, the queen had one son, for whom she wished to find a clever and beautiful wife. She thought he should marry the wood-cutter's daughter. So she sent for him.

"It is time that you were married, and I've found the very wife for you," she said. "She's as pretty as a picture, well mannered, and clever. She can also spin, weave, and make beautiful shirts. Do see what you think of her."

As soon as the prince saw the wood-cutter's daughter he wished to marry her. A little later he asked her to marry him, and, to his delight, she said that she would.

When the great day came, the wood-cutter came to the palace to see his daughter marry the prince.

After the wedding, the whole crowd went into the great hall of the palace for the wedding-feast. As they were about to sit down, in came an ugly old woman, with a really very long nose.

"Good morning, Aunt," said the prince's wife, who looked a picture in her wedding-gown.

"Good morning, my dear," said the old woman.

"Is that your aunt?" asked the prince in great surprise, and, when his wife said it was, he invited the old woman to sit by his side at the wedding-feast.

Then in came another old woman, with an ugly hump on her back.

"Good morning, Aunt," said the prince's wife.

"Good morning, my dear," answered the old woman with the hump.

"Is that your aunt too?" said the prince in even greater surprise, and, on being told that it was, he invited the second old woman to sit down at the wedding-feast.

Just then, in came the third old woman, with big, ugly, red, watery eyes.

"Good morning, Aunt," said the prince's wife.

"Good morning, my dear," answered the old woman.

"This old woman is your aunt too?" said the prince, wondering for how long this was going on.

"Yes. She is the last one," said his wife. So the third old woman was also invited to the feast.

The prince could not bear to look at the ugly old women.

"How strange that my beautiful wife should have such ugly old aunts!" he said to himself. "I wonder whether she will grow as ugly as they are when she is older."

Now, the old women knew the prince's thoughts, and the first one said, "Oh dear, in the past I was almost as pretty as your wife is, but look at me now! That's what comes of sitting spinning all day. My poor nose has grown longer and longer."

"Yes, and look at me with this hump!" said the second one. "Who would have thought, in the past, that I would have such a hump on my back when I grew older? That's what comes of weaving all day!"

Then the third one spoke, and said to the others, "Do you remember my beautiful eyes? Look at them now. That's what comes of making shirts all day!"

Then the prince chuckled with laughter, and said to the three women, "Thank you, Aunts, for telling me all this. Now that she is

married, my beautiful wife need do none of these things. She shall not spin, or weave, or make shirts as long as she lives."





THE CAT AND THE RAT

Long years ago, the cat and the rat lived together on an island. For years past they had been great friends. The cat hunted the birds, while the rat found nuts and roots to eat.

One day, however, the rat said, "I am tired of living on this island. Let's live in a really big town instead. You could then find plenty of food without hunting after birds, and I could have plenty of food without digging for roots."

"That would be delightful," said the cat, "but we should have to leave this island. How could we cross the sea?"

They both began to wonder how they could manage it. Then the rat said, "Why

not make ourselves a boat from the root of one of these trees?"

"That would be the very thing!" said the cat. So they dug up a big root, and, while the rat gnawed and gnawed at the inside of the boat, the cat scratched and scratched at the outside.

Between them they made it smooth inside and out. They were delighted as they sailed from the island in the direction of the shore, which they could faintly see a mile or so to the west.

Though the sea was quite smooth, it took much longer to sail to the other shore than they had thought. In their hurry to leave the island they had forgotten to bring any food, but it was too late then to return. They began to feel hungry.

The sun was sinking in the west, and, soon after, it grew dark. They became hungrier and hungrier. The cat, trying to forget that she was hungry, curled herself up, closed her eyes, and slept. The rat also curled himself up and closed his eyes, but he did not sleep. He lay there and thought.

"Oh, I know!" he said slyly to himself at last. "This boat is made of a root. The cat would never know if I nibbled a tiny little bit of it." So the rat began to nibble.

“What is that noise?” asked the cat, waking up. But the rat had closed his eyes as if he had gone to sleep.

“I must be dreaming,” said the cat, as she curled up again and slept.

The rat waited until the cat was again asleep, then his sharp teeth began to nibble once more.

“What is that noise?” said the cat, again waking from sleep. She looked across at the rat, who certainly seemed to be fast asleep.

“What strange dreams I am having!” said the cat. “Perhaps it is because I am so hungry:” and once more she curled up and slept.

Once again the rat nibbled at the inside of the boat with his sharp teeth. But this time he gnawed a hole right through and the water came inside.

“Where ever did this water come from?” asked the cat, jumping up very quickly.

The rat, by this time, was climbing up on one end of the boat, and the cat began to climb on the other end.

“You wicked, wicked animal!” shouted the cat. “You did this mean trick!”

“I was so hungry,” squeaked the rat.

Then the little boat began to sink, so there was no time to talk. They both began to swim toward the shore.

“This trick will cost you your life,” said the cat as they swam.

“I know that I deserve it,” squeaked the rat; “but you’re almost sure to sink if you try to eat me while we’re swimming. Wouldn’t



it be a better plan to wait instead until we're ashore ?”

So the cat waited until they reached the shore.

“ Now I shall eat you,” she said.

“ I deserve it, I know,” squeaked the rat slyly ; “ but just now my coat is too wet for good eating. Wouldn't it be a better plan instead if we dried ourselves first ? I'll be ready as soon as you are.”

So they both sat down on the shore to dry their coats.

Now, while the cat was making her own coat smooth and beautiful, the rat was very busy scratching a hole behind the cat.

“ Are you ready ?” asked the cat at last.

“ Certainly,” squeaked the rat, as he disappeared into the hole.

“ You wicked, wicked animal !” shouted the cat, as she tried to catch the rat's tail before it had quite disappeared. “ You will never live to come out of that hole,” she said angrily. “ I shall wait here, and as soon as you show your nose I shall eat you.”

“ What if I never come out ?” squeaked the rat, still digging.

“ Then you can stay there and starve as you deserve,” said the cat, and she sat down in front of the hole, with her head on her paws.

All day she waited for the rat, and all day the rat was busy digging and gnawing. By nightfall he had dug and gnawed right under the tree-root and through to the other side of the tree. Quietly he crept from the hole and ran off toward the town, while the cat waited at the other end.

Now we can understand why the cat and the rat are no longer friends. Since that day the cat is never so fast asleep that she does not hear the gnawing of a rat, nor is she ever tired of waiting at the rat-hole for him to come out.





BILL'S NINTH BIRTHDAY

PART I.

Bill wakened early on the morning of his ninth birthday and wondered what kind of day was in store for him. A year ago, his friends from school had come to his party. There had been a beautiful birthday cake made from ice-cream. He had had many presents, and after the party they had all played with his new cricket set. It had been a wonderful day.

His ninth birthday, however, would be quite different. There would be no cake,

and certainly no party. He began to wonder whether he would get any presents. He knew his father might forget his birthday.

His mother was in hospital, and he had a new baby sister whom he had not yet seen. She was just three days old. Bill wasn't very happy about the new sister. It would not have been quite so bad, he thought, if he had had a new brother. But a sister! He got out of bed, washed and dressed himself, and went to breakfast.

His father wished him a good morning and a happy birthday.

"I think there'll be some presents for you a little later, Bill," he said. "There may be none to-day perhaps, because your mother is in hospital."

At school Bill forgot his birthday for most of the time, and no-one else seemed to remember it, not even Peter, his best friend.

He and Peter came home together as usual and, when they came to Bill's gate, Peter suddenly pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to Bill.

"Happy birthday, Bill!" he said, and raced off down the street.

So Peter knew it was his ninth birthday! Bill was so surprised that he didn't say a

word, and by this time, anyway, Peter had almost disappeared.

"Thank you, Peter," he shouted after him at last.

Bill looked at the folded piece of paper. There was something inside it. He unfolded it very carefully. Inside was an old stamp. It didn't look much of a stamp, but Bill had seen it often. Peter's grandfather had given Peter some old stamps, and this one was the best of the whole lot, so the grandfather had said. Bill knew it was Peter's greatest treasure. To think that Peter should have given him such a present!

"I wish I could think of something to give Peter instead," thought Bill, remembering how often they had both looked at this stamp.

At tea-time he showed the stamp to his father.

"Peter really liked this stamp more than anything else he had, Dad," said Bill. "Do you think I should ask him to take it back?"

"No," said his father. "Peter treasured this stamp, but he wanted to give you a very fine present; so he decided on this. I'm sure he must want you to keep it. It would be a good idea, though, to keep your eyes open

and see whether you can find something else to give him instead."

Now, Bill's mother had always said what a fine idea it was to try to make other people happy on his own birthday. Bill suddenly remembered this when he was going past his dahlia bed. He knew that his mother would love to have some dahlias, but he hated to carry flowers. Somehow, to him, it didn't seem right for boys to carry them. His mother could never get him to take flowers to school.

He wondered whether his father might carry them into the hospital. He decided to pick some, anyhow, and this he did very carefully. Then he made them into a bunch, wound a piece of string round the dahlias, and tied it. It was a beautiful bunch. If only he didn't have to carry it into the hospital!

"I'll just drop you at the hospital, Bill, and you can tell your mother that I shall be along very soon," said his father, when they were in the car.

Bill's heart began to sink. He would need to carry those dahlias in for himself after all. He hoped that he would not meet anyone whom he knew. He got out of the car at the hospital gate.