

Bunce's Giant Storehouse

"MY DEAR FOXY!" cried Badger. "What in the world has happened to your tail?"

"Don't talk about it, *please*," said Mr. Fox. "It's a painful subject."

They were digging the new tunnel. They dug on in silence. Badger was a great digger and the tunnel went forward at a terrific pace now that he was lending a paw. Soon they were crouching underneath yet another wooden floor.

Mr. Fox grinned slyly, showing sharp white teeth. "If I am not mistaken, my dear Badger," he said, "we are now underneath the farm which belongs to that nasty little pot-bellied dwarf, Bunce. We are, in fact,

directly underneath the most *interesting part* of that farm."

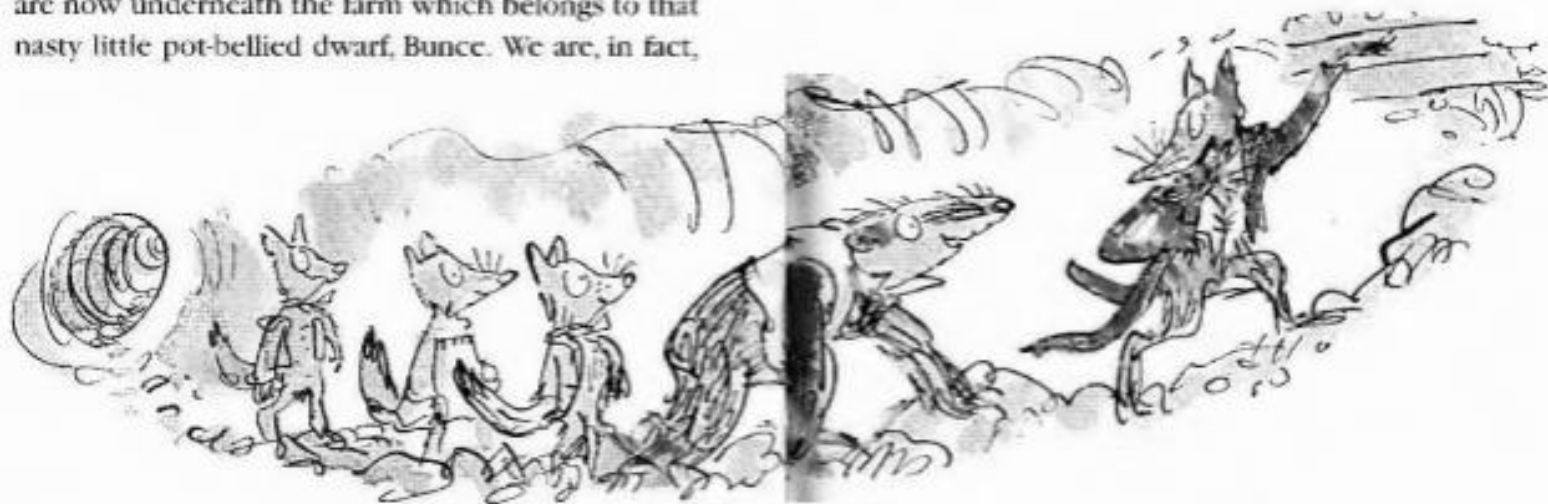
"Ducks and geese!" cried the Small Foxes, licking their lips. "Juicy tender ducks and big fat geese!"

"*Ex-actly!*" said Mr. Fox.

"But how in the world can you know where we are?" asked Badger.

Mr. Fox grinned again, showing even more white teeth. "Look," he said, "I know my way around these farms blindfold. For me it's just as easy below ground as it is above it." He reached high and pushed up one wooden floorboard, then another. He poked his head through the gap.

"Yes!" he shouted, jumping up into the room above. "I've done it again! I've hit it smack on the nose! Right in the bull's-eye! Come and look!"

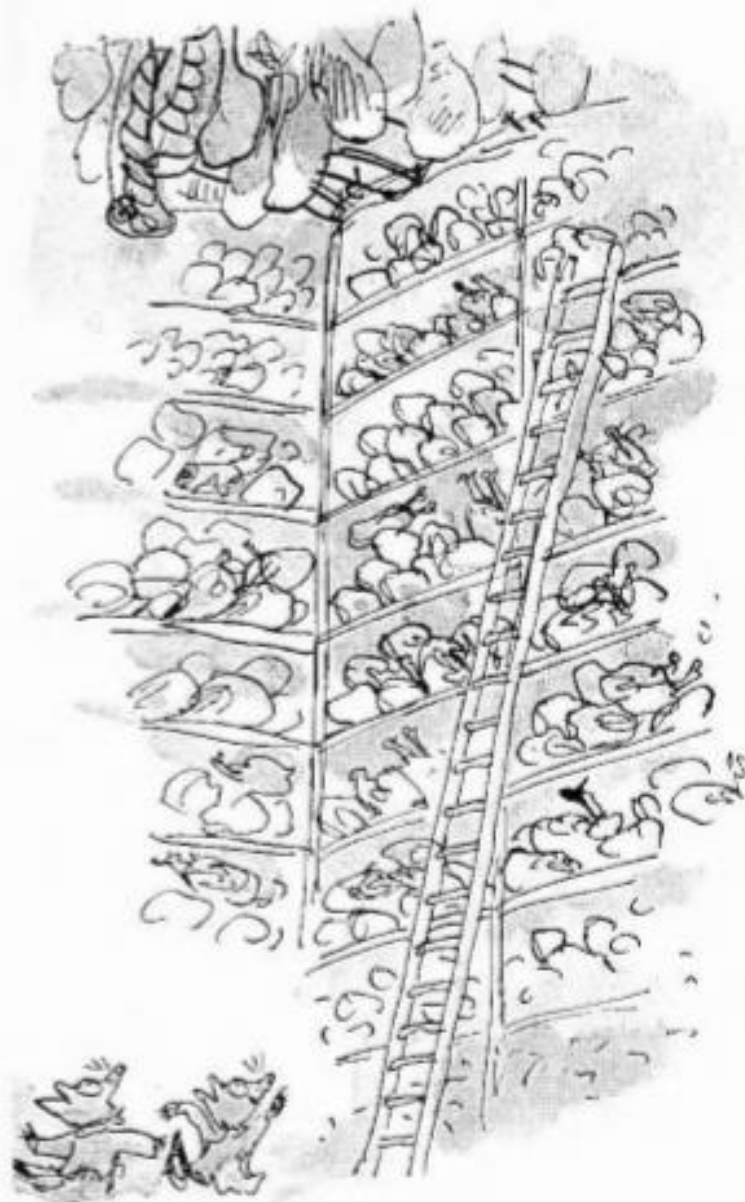


Quickly Badger and the three Small Foxes scrambled up after him. They stopped and stared. They stood and gaped. They were so overwhelmed they couldn't speak; for what they now saw was a kind of fox's dream, a badger's dream, a paradise for hungry animals.

"This, my dear old Badger," proclaimed Mr. Fox, "is Bunce's Mighty Storehouse! All his finest stuff is stored in here before he sends it off to market."

Against all the four walls of the great room, stacked in cupboards and piled upon shelves reaching from floor to ceiling, were thousands and thousands of the finest and fattest ducks and geese, plucked and ready for roasting! And up above, dangling from the rafters, there must have been at least a hundred smoked hams and fifty sides of bacon!

"Just feast your eyes on *that!*" cried Mr. Fox, dancing up and down. "What d'you think of it, eh? Pretty good grub!"



Suddenly, as though springs had been released in their legs, the three hungry Small Foxes and the ravenously hungry Badger sprang forward to grab the luscious food.

"Stop!" ordered Mr. Fox. "This is *my* party, so I shall do the choosing." The others fell back, licking their chops. Mr. Fox began prowling around the storehouse examining the glorious display with an expert eye. A thread of saliva slid down one side of his jaw and hung suspended in mid-air, then snapped.

"We mustn't overdo it," he said. "Mustn't give the game away. Mustn't let them know what we've been up to. We must be neat and tidy and take just a few of the choicest morsels. So, to start with we shall have four plump young ducks." He took them from the shelf. "Oh, how lovely and fat they are! No wonder Bunce gets a special price for them in the market! . . . All right, Badger, lend me a hand to get them down . . . You children can help as well . . . There we go . . . Goodness me, look how your mouths are watering . . . And now . . . I think we had better have a few geese . . . Three will be quite enough . . . We'll take the biggest . . . Oh my, oh my, you'll never see finer geese than these in a king's kitchen . . . Gently does it . . . that's the way . . . And what about a couple of nice smoked hams . . . I adore smoked ham, don't you, Badger? . . . Fetch me that step-ladder, will you please . . ."

Mr. Fox climbed up the ladder and handed down



three magnificent hams. "And do you like bacon, Badger?"

"I'm mad about bacon!" cried Badger, dancing with excitement. "Let's have a side of bacon! That big one up there!"

"And carrots, Dad!" said the smallest of the three Small Foxes. "We must take some of those carrots."

"Don't be a twerp," said Mr. Fox. "You know we never eat things like that."

"It's not for us, Dad. It's for the Rabbits. They only eat vegetables."

"My goodness me, you're right!" cried Mr. Fox. "What a thoughtful little fellow you are! Take ten bunches of carrots!"



Soon, all this lovely loot was lying in a neat heap upon the floor. The Small Foxes crouched close, their noses twitching, their eyes shining like stars.

"And now," said Mr. Fox, "we shall have to borrow from our friend Bunce two of those useful push-carts over in the corner." He and Badger fetched the push-carts, and the ducks and geese and hams and bacon were loaded on to them. Quickly the push-

carts were lowered through the hole in the floor. The animals slid down after them. Back in the tunnel, Mr. Fox again pulled the floorboards very carefully into place so that no one could see they had been moved.

"My darlings," he said, pointing to two of the three Small Foxes, "take a cart each and run back as fast as you can to your mother. Give her my love and tell her we are having guests for dinner—the Badgers, the Moles, the Rabbits and the Weasels. Tell her it must be a truly great feast. And tell her the rest of us will be home as soon as we've done one more little job."

"Yes, Dad! Right away, Dad!" they answered, and they grabbed a trolley each and went rushing off down the tunnel.

