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opening extract from

Mudpuddle Farm

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For Anna

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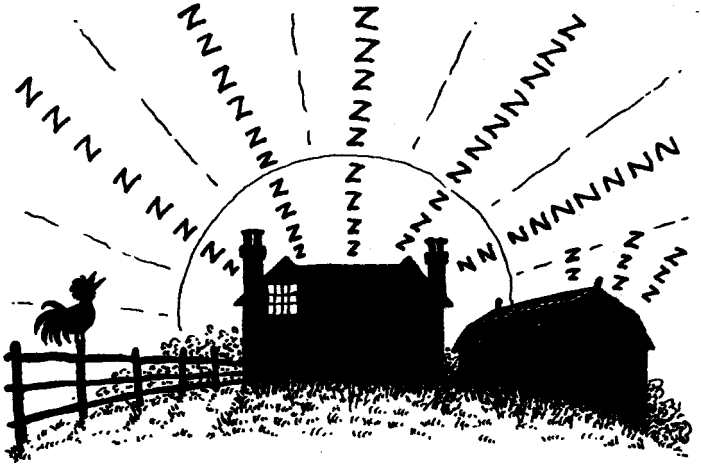
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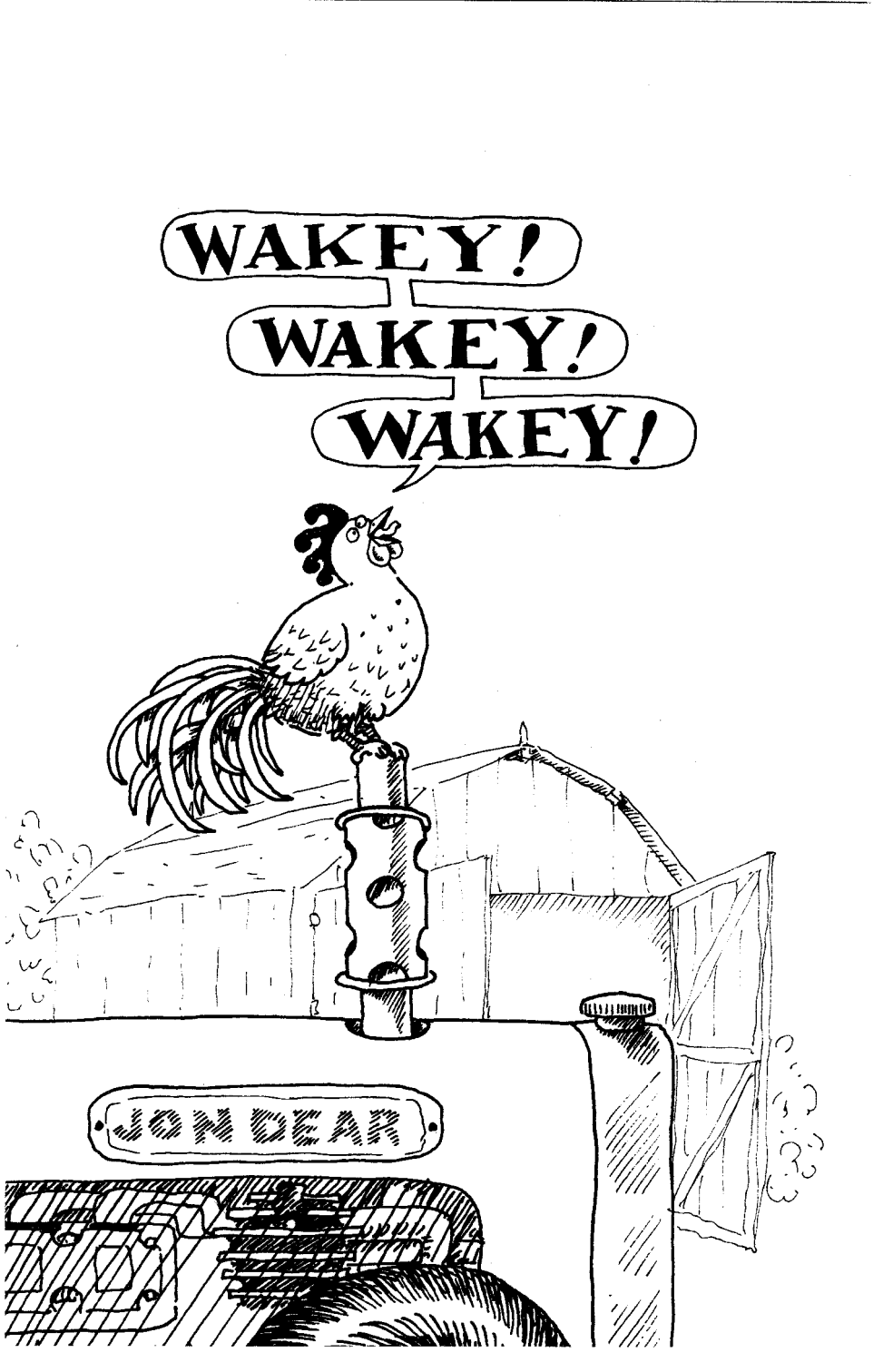
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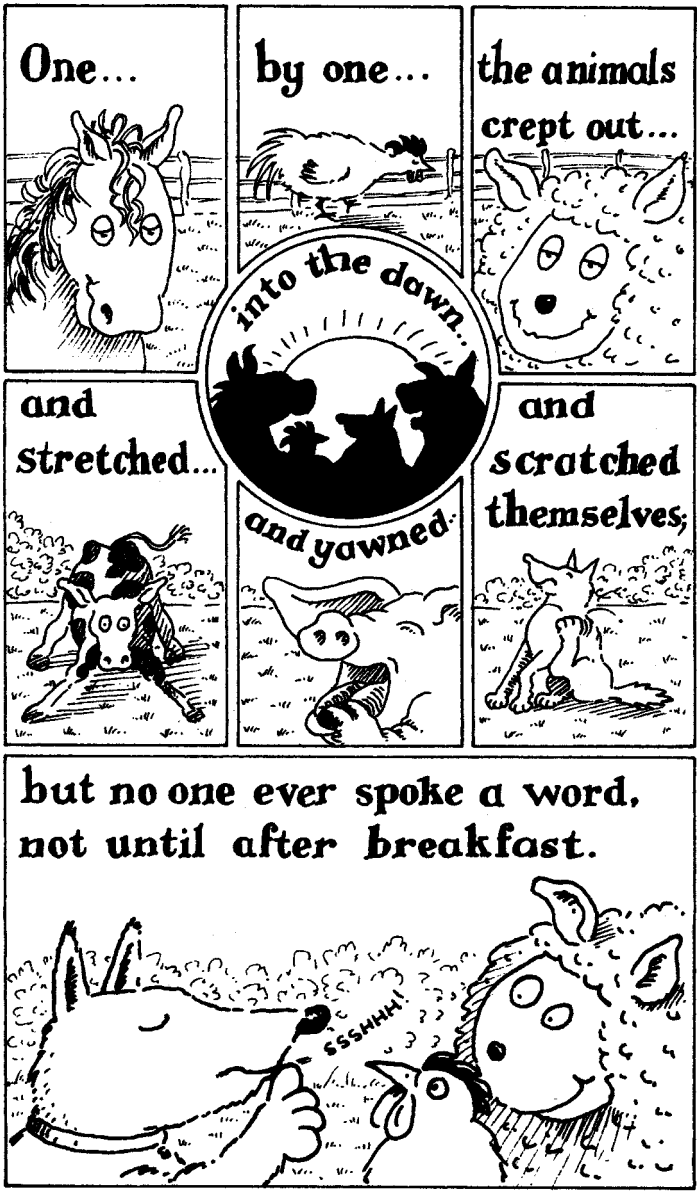
Chapter One

There was once a family of all sorts of animals that lived in the farmyard behind the tumble-down barn on Mudpuddle Farm.

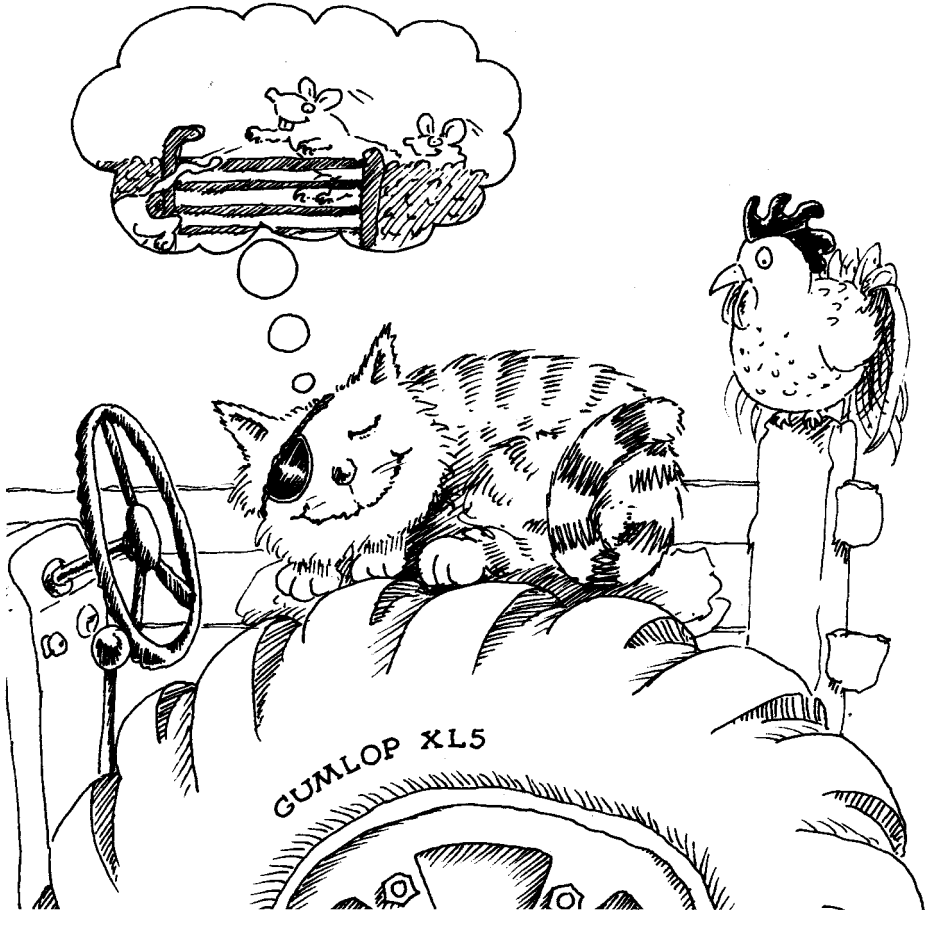


At first light every morning Frederick, the flame-feathered cockerel, lifted his eyes to the sun and crowed and crowed, until the light came on at old Farmer Rafferty's bedroom window.


WAKEY!
WAKEY!
WAKEY!
?
JONDEAR


One...
by one...
the animals crept out...
into the dawn...
and stretched...
and yawned
and scratched themselves;
but no one ever spoke a word, not until after breakfast.
SSSHHH!

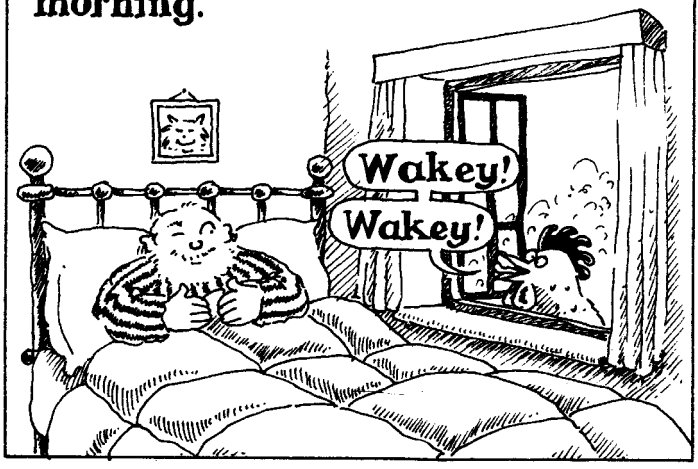
Mossop was a tired old farm cat who spent most of his day curled up asleep on the seat of Farmer Rafferty's tractor. Mossop paid no attention to Frederick – he got up when he pleased.



Farmer Rafferty was usually a kind man with smiling eyes, but like Mossop he was old and tired, and he ached in his bones in the wet weather. His animals were his only friends and his only family.



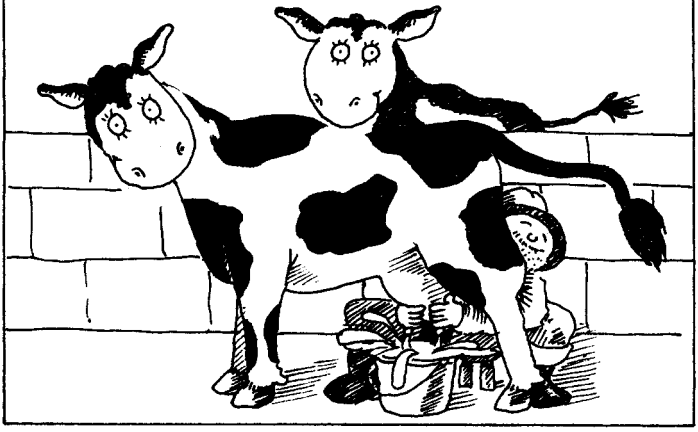
So, Frederick woke him up every morning.

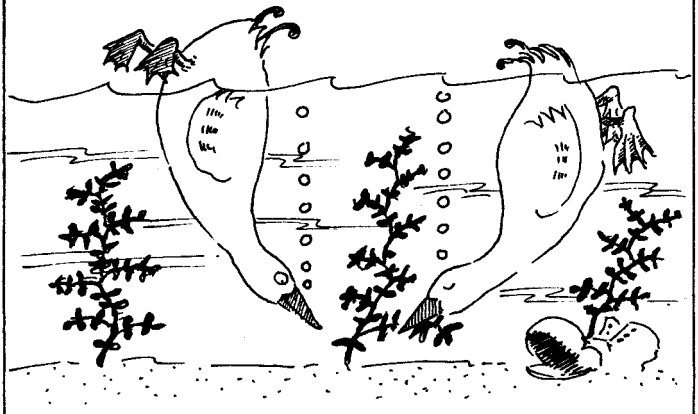


Penelope and her speckled friends laid their eggs for him.



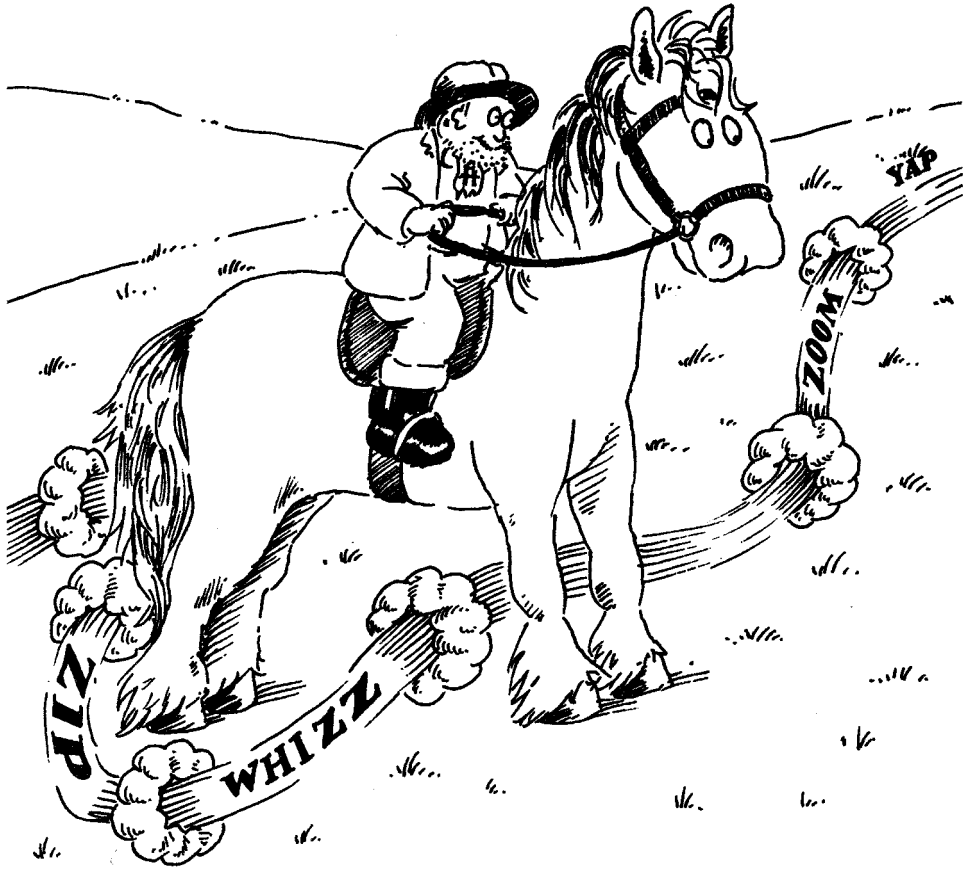
Auntie Grace and Primrose let down their milk for him.



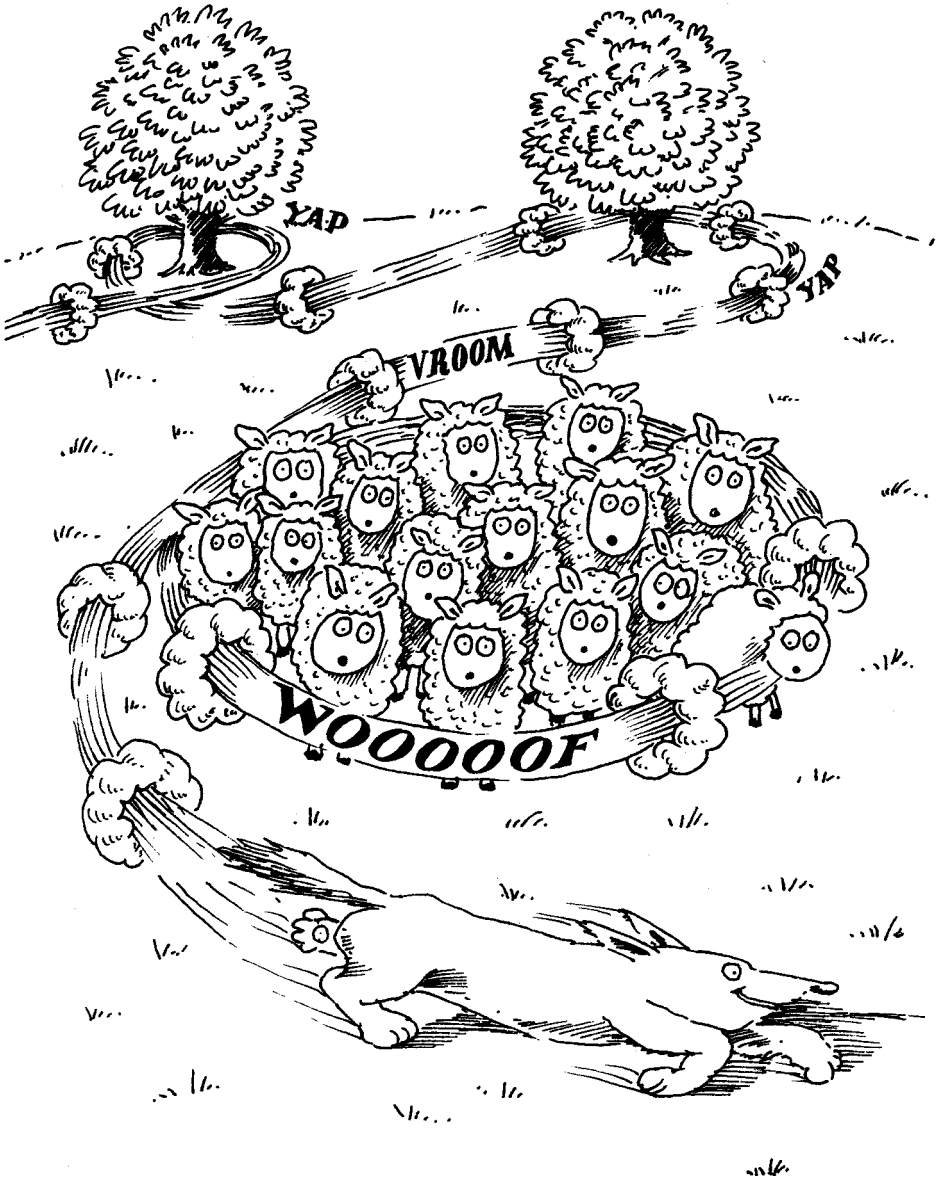


Upside and Down kept the pond clear of weeds.

Captain carried him all around the farm to check the sheep.



Jigger, the almost-always-sensible sheepdog, rounded up the sheep.

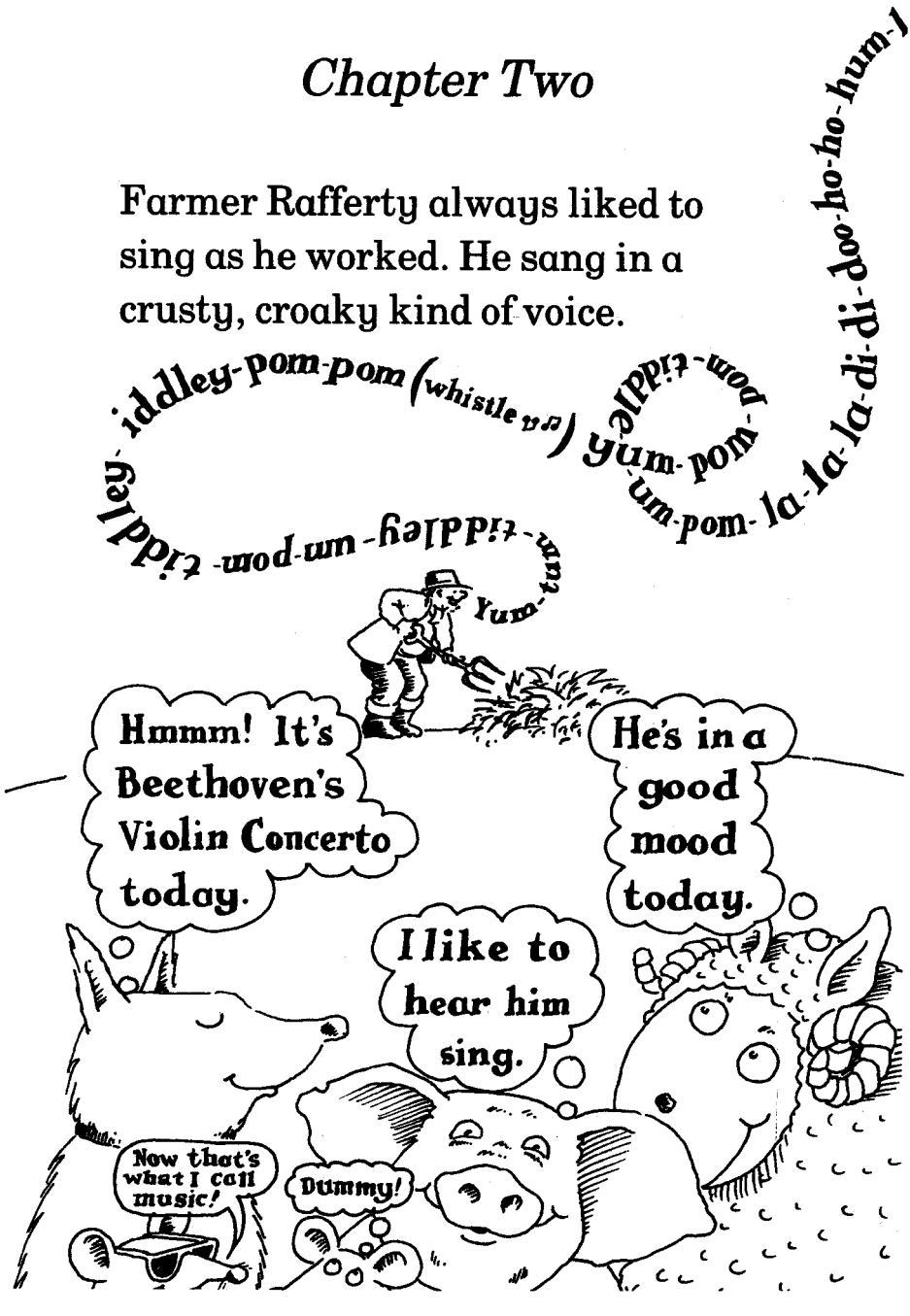


And Mossop was
supposed to catch
mice and rats.



Chapter Two

Farmer Rafferty always liked to sing as he worked. He sang in a crusty, croaky kind of voice.



la-la- tiddley-um-pom pom-tiddley-um-pom-pom-with a hey and a ho and a tiddle-iddle-o-and-a-bing-bang-

That morning though, as old Farmer Rafferty went into the tumble-down barn to fetch corn from the corn bin, he suddenly stopped singing.



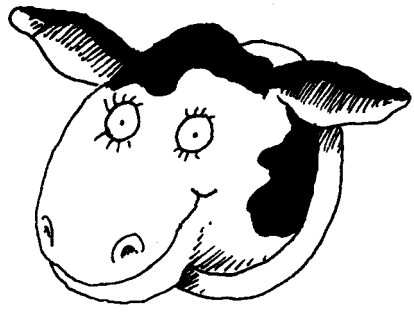
The animals crowded into the barn to find out what was the matter. They found Farmer Rafferty standing by the corn bin holding a mouse up by its tail.

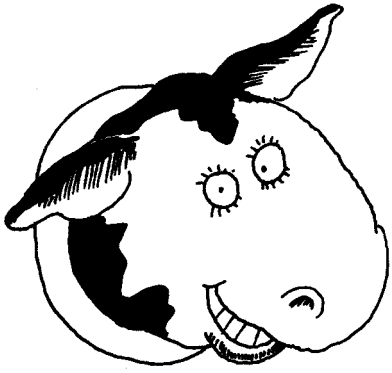




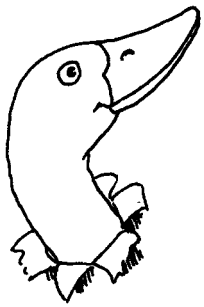
Have we or have we not
got a cat on this farm?'
said Farmer Rafferty
in the nasty,
raspy voice
he kept for
special occasions.

'We have,' said
Auntie Grace, the
dreamy-eyed
brown cow.





'She's right,' said
her friend Primrose,
who always agreed
with her.
'We have, and
he's asleep on
the tractor seat.'



'Having a catnap,'
sniggered Upside
or Down – no one
could ever tell
which was which.



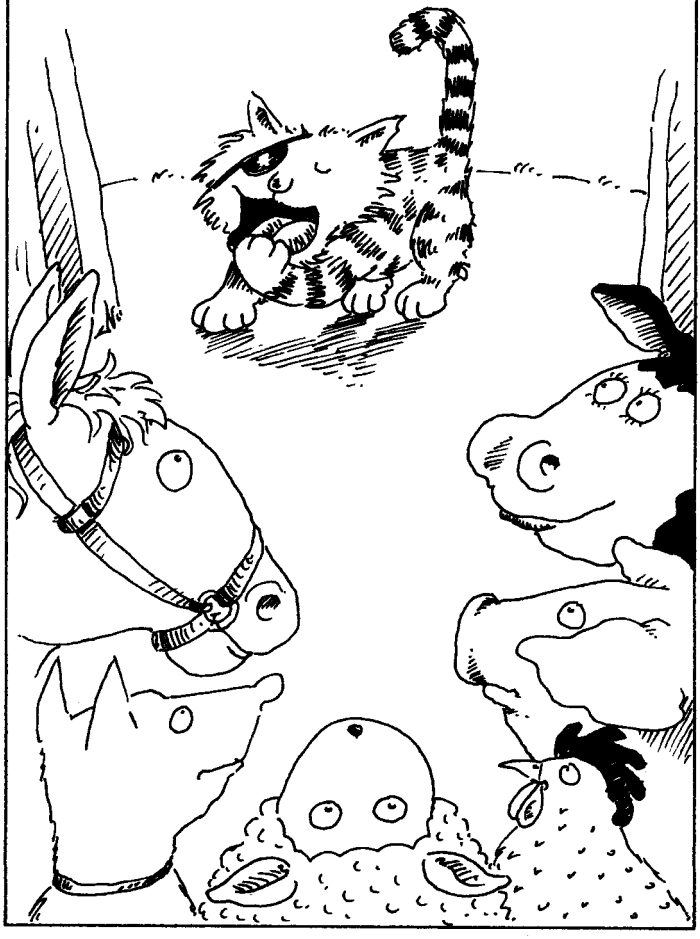


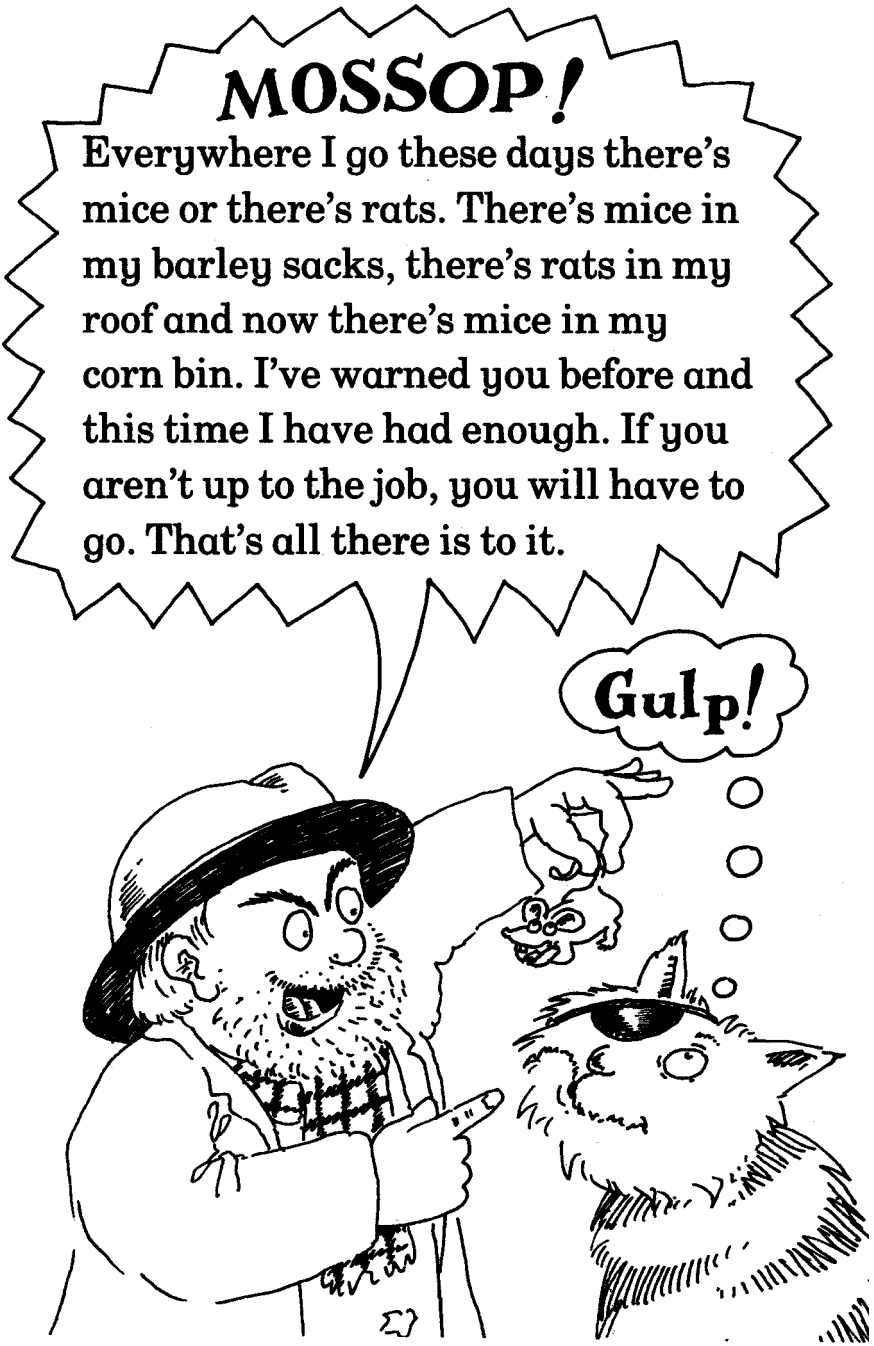
'Having his beauty sleep,'
mumbled Egbert,
the greedy, grumbly
goat who ate anything
and everything.
'Not that it'll help
him much.'

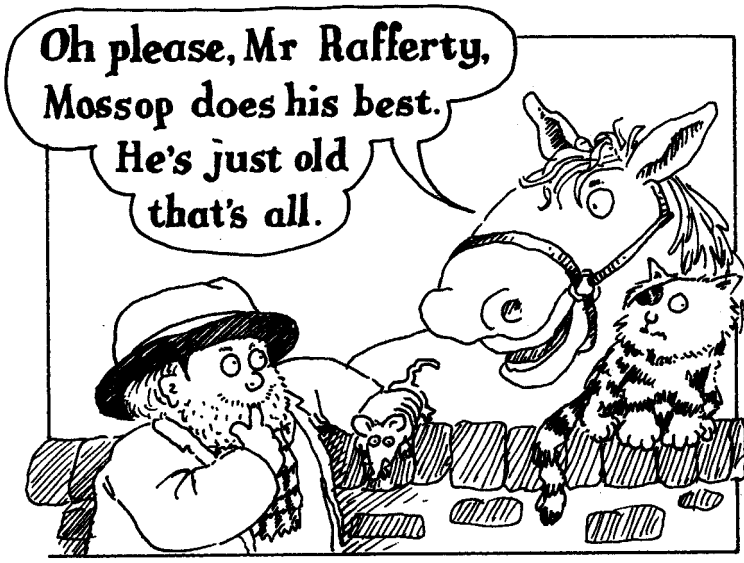
'Fetch him,' ordered old
Farmer Rafferty.
'Fetch that Mossop
here. I have a thing
or two to say to him.'



But at that very same moment Mossop wandered into the barn, yawning hugely.




MOSSOP!
Everywhere I go these days there's mice or there's rats. There's mice in my barley sacks, there's rats in my roof and now there's mice in my corn bin. I've warned you before and this time I have had enough. If you aren't up to the job, you will have to go. That's all there is to it.
Gulp!



All right Captain, I'll give him one last chance to prove he's still cat enough to stay on this farm. Mossop, by tomorrow I want twenty-six mice dropped outside my backdoor, d'you hear me? Twenty-six mice or you're on your way.