

4: *Thursday*

OKAY, OKAY! I'll try and explain about the rabbit. For starters, I don't think anyone's given me enough credit for getting it through the cat-flap. That was *not easy*. I can tell you, it took about an hour to get that rabbit through that little hole. That rabbit was downright *fat*. It was more like a pig than a rabbit, if you want my opinion.

Not that any of them cared what I thought. They were going mental.

"It's Thumper!" cried Ellie. "It's next-door's Thumper!"

“Oh, Lordy!” said Ellie’s father.
“Now we’re in trouble. What are we going to do?”

Ellie’s mother stared at me.

“How could a cat *do* that?” she asked. “I mean, it’s not like a tiny bird, or a mouse, or anything. That rabbit is the same size as Tuffy. They both weigh a *ton*.”

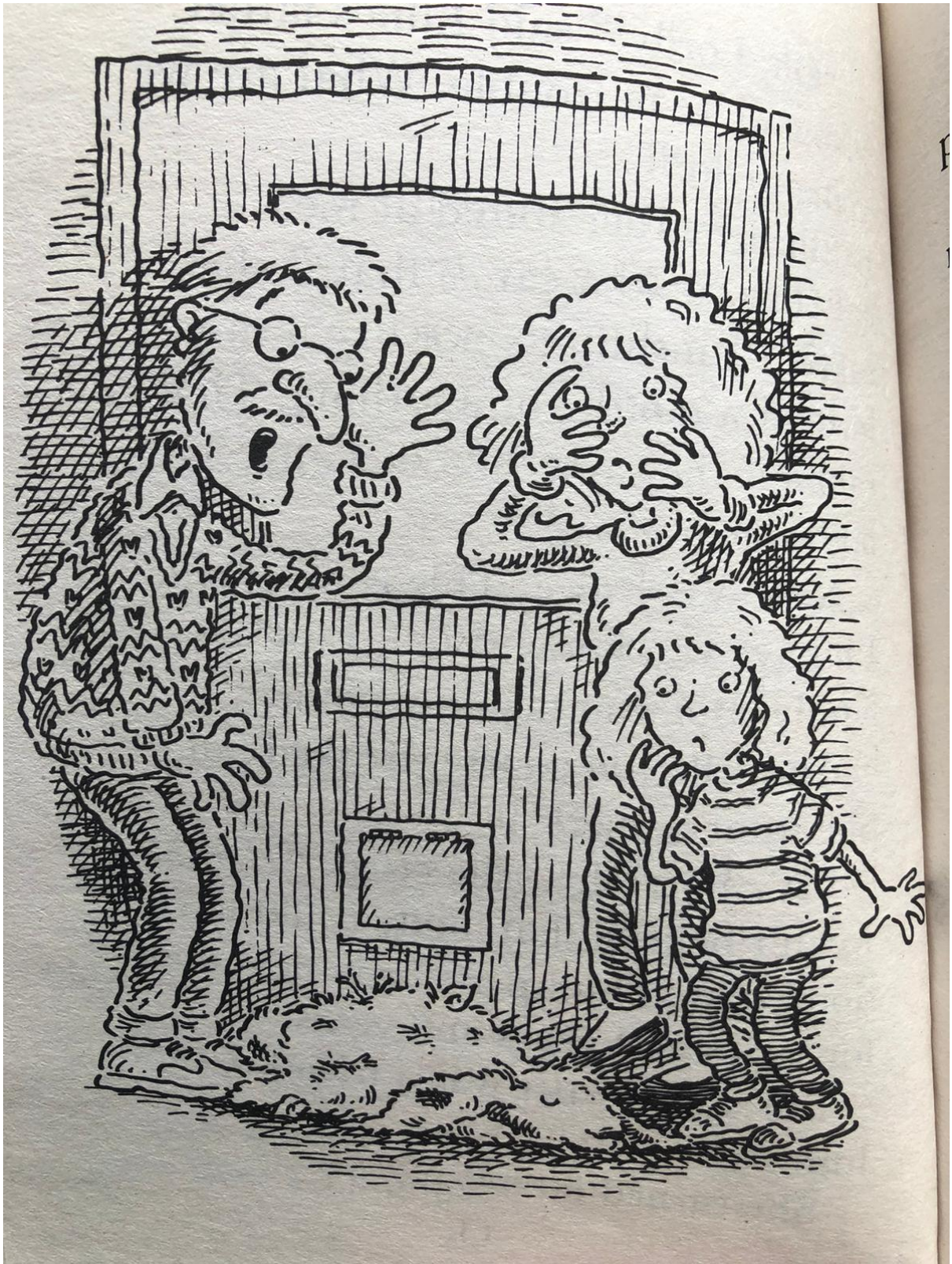
Nice. Very nice. This is my *family*, I’ll have you know. Well, Ellie’s family. But you take my point.

And Ellie, of course, freaked out. She went berserk.

“It’s horrible,” she cried. “*Horrible*. I can’t believe that Tuffy could have done that. Thumper’s been next door for years and years and years.”

Sure. Thumper was a friend. I knew him well.

She turned on me.



“Tuffy! This is the end. That poor, poor rabbit. Look at him!”

And Thumper did look a bit of a mess, I admit it. I mean, most of it was only mud. And a few grass stains, I suppose. And there were quite a few bits of twig and stuff stuck in his fur. And he had a streak of oil on one ear. But no one gets dragged the whole way across a garden, and through a hedge, and over another garden, and through a freshly-oiled cat-flap, and ends up looking as if they’re just off to a party.

And Thumper didn’t care what he looked like. He was *dead*.

The rest of them minded, though. They minded a *lot*.

“What are we going to do?”

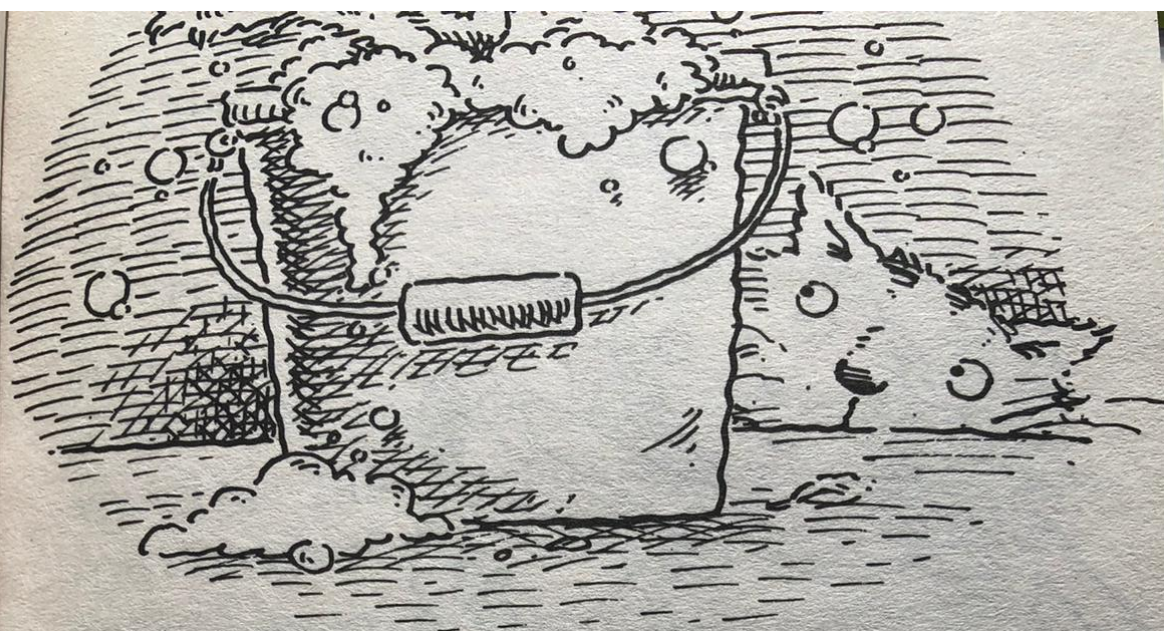
“Oh, this is dreadful. Next-door will never speak to us again.”

“We must think of something.”

And they did. I have to say, it was a brilliant plan, by any standards. First, Ellie's father fetched the bucket again, and filled it with warm soapy water. (He gave me a bit of a look as he did this, trying to make me feel guilty for the fact that he'd had to dip his hands in the old Fairy Liquid twice in one week. I just gave him my old 'I-am-not-impressed' stare back.)

Then Ellie's mother dunked Thumper in the bucket and gave him a nice bubbly wash and a swill-about. The water turned a pretty nasty brown colour. (All that mud.) And then, glaring at me as if it were all *my* fault, they tipped it down the sink and began over again with fresh soap suds.

Ellie was snivelling, of course. "Do stop that, Ellie," her mother said. "It's getting on my nerves. If you



want to do something useful, go and fetch the hairdrier.”

So Ellie trailed upstairs, still bawling her eyes out.

I sat on the top of the dresser, and watched them.

They up-ended poor Thumper and dunked him again in the bucket. (Good job he wasn't his old self. He'd have hated all this washing.) And when the water finally ran clear, they pulled him out and drained him,



Then they plonked him on newspaper, and gave Ellie the hairdrier.

"There you go," they said. "Fluff him up nicely."

Well, she got right into it, I can tell you. That Ellie could grow up to be a real hot-shot hairdresser, the way she fluffed him up. I have to say, I never saw Thumper look so nice before, and he lived in next-door's hutch for years and years, and I saw him every day.

"Hiya, Thump," I'd sort of nod at him as I strolled over the lawn to check out what was left in the feeding bowls further down the avenue.

"Hi, Tuff," he'd sort of twitch back.

Yes, we were good mates. We were pals. And so it was really nice to see him looking so spruced up and smart when Ellie had finished with him.

He looked *good*.

"What now?" said Ellie's father.

Ellie's mum gave him a look – the sort of look she sometimes gives me, only nicer.

"Oh, no," he said. "Not me. Oh, no, no, no, no, no."

"It's you or me," she said. "And I can't go, can I?"

"Why not?" he said. "You're smaller than I am. You can crawl through the hedge easier."

That's when I realised what they had in mind. But what could I say? What could I do to stop them? To *explain*?

Nothing. I'm just a cat.
I sat and watched.