



# Bunnicula

*A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery*

by DEBORAH  
and JAMES HOWE



ILLUSTRATED BY ALAN DANIEL



# BUNNICULA

*A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery*



*40th Anniversary Edition*

BY DEBORAH AND JAMES HOWE

Illustrated by Alan Daniel



Atheneum Books for Young Readers

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

To Mildred and Lester Smith  
—*with love*



*Bunnacula 40th Anniversary Edition is in memory of Deborah Howe.*

## **Contents**

[Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition of \*Bunnacula\*](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[ONE    \*The Arrival\*](#)

[TWO    \*Music in the Night\*](#)

[THREE Some Unusual Goings-on](#)  
[FOUR A Cat Prepares](#)  
[FIVE Chester Goes into His Act](#)  
[SIX Harold Helps Out](#)  
[SEVEN A \(New\) Friend in Need](#)  
[EIGHT Disaster in the Dining Room](#)  
[NINE All's Well that Ends Well . . . Almost](#)  
[\*Bunnicula\* through the Ages](#)  
[A Message from Max Brallier](#)  
[A Message from Holly Black](#)  
[A Message from Dav Pilkey](#)  
[Photographs](#)  
[Author's Note](#)

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE 40th ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF *BUNNICULA***

**by James Howe**

## EDITOR'S NOTE



The book you are about to read was brought to my attention in a most unusual way. One Friday afternoon, just before closing time, I heard a scratching sound at the front door of my office. When I opened the door, there before me stood a sad-eyed, droopy-eared dog carrying a large, plain envelope in his mouth. He dropped it at my feet, gave me a soulful glance and with great, quiet dignity sauntered away.

Inside the envelope was the manuscript of the book you now hold in your hands, together with this letter:

Gentlemen :

The enclosed story is true. It happened in this very town, to me and the family with whom I reside. I have changed the names of the family in order to protect them, but in all other respects, everything you will read here is factual.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Harold. I come to writing purely by chance. My full-time occupation is dog. I live with Mr. and Mrs. X (called here the "Monroes") and their two sons: Toby, age eight, and Pete, age ten. Also sharing our home is a cat named Chester, whom I am pleased to call my friend. We were a typical American family—and still are, though the events related in my story have, of course, had their effect on our lives.

I hope you will find this tale of sufficient interest to yourself and your readers to warrant its publication.

Sincerely, Harold

X

# One

## THE ARRIVAL



I shall never forget the first time I laid these now tired old eyes on our visitor. I had been left home by the family with the admonition to take care of the house until they returned. That's something they always say to me when they go out: "Take care of the house, Harold. You're the watchdog." I think it's their way of making up for not taking me with them. As if I *wanted* to go anyway. You can't lie down at the movies and still see the screen. And people think you're being impolite if you fall asleep and start to snore, or scratch yourself in public. No thank you, I'd rather be stretched out on my favorite rug in front of a nice, whistling radiator.

But I digress. I was talking about that first night. Well, it was cold, the rain was pelting the windows, the wind was howling, and it felt pretty good to be indoors. I was lying on the rug with my head on my paws just staring absently at

the front door. My friend Chester was curled up on the brown velvet armchair, which years ago he'd staked out as his own. I saw that once again he'd covered the whole seat with his cat hair, and I chuckled to myself, picturing the scene tomorrow. (Next to grasshoppers, there is nothing that frightens Chester more than the vacuum cleaner.)

In the midst of this reverie, I heard a car pull into the driveway. I didn't even bother to get up and see who it was. I knew it had to be my family—the Monroes—since it was just about time for the movie to be over. After a moment, the front door flew open. There they stood in the doorway: Toby and Pete and Mom and Dad Monroe. There was a flash of lightning, and in its glare I noticed that Mr. Monroe was carrying a little bundle—a bundle with tiny glistening eyes.

Pete and Toby bounded into the room, both talking at the top of their lungs. Toby shouted, "Put him over here, Dad."





“Take your boots off. You’re soaking wet,” replied his mother, somewhat calmly I thought, under the circumstances.

“But Mom, what about the—”

“First, stop dripping on the carpet.”

“Would somebody like to take this?” asked Mr. Monroe, indicating the bundle with the eyes. “I’d like to remove my coat.”

“I will,” Pete yelled.

“No, I will,” said Toby. “I found him.”

“You’ll drop him.”

“I will not.”

“You will, too.”

“Mom, Pete punched me!”

“I’ll take him,” said Mrs. Monroe. “Take off your coats this minute!” But she became so involved in helping the boys out of their coats that she didn’t take him at all.

My tranquil evening had been destroyed and no one had even said hello to me. I whimpered to remind them that I was there.

“Harold!” cried Toby. “Guess what happened to me.” And then, all over again, everyone started talking at once.

At this point, I feel I must explain something. In our family, everyone treats everyone else with great respect for his or her intelligence. That goes for the animals as well as the people. Everything that happens to them is explained to us. It’s never been just “Good boy, Harold,” or “Use the litter box, Chester” at our house. Oh no, with us it’s “Hey Harold, Dad got a raise and now we’re in a higher tax bracket,” or “Come sit on the bed, Chester, and watch this *Wild Kingdom* show. Maybe you’ll see a relative.” Which shows just how thoughtful they are. But after all, Mr. Monroe *is* a college professor and Mrs. Monroe *is* a lawyer, so we think of it as a rather special household. And we are, therefore, rather special pets. So it wasn’t at all surprising to me that they took the time to explain the strange circumstances surrounding the arrival of the little bundle

with the glistening eyes now among us.

It seems that they had arrived at the theater late, and rather than trip over the feet of the audience already seated, they decided to sit in the last row, which was empty. They tiptoed in and sat down very quietly, so they wouldn't disturb anyone. Suddenly, Toby, who's the little one, sprang up from his chair and squealed that he had sat on something. Mr. Monroe told him to stop making a fuss and move to another seat, but in an unusual display of independence, Toby said he wanted to see just what it was he had sat on. An usher came over to their row to shush them, and Mr. Monroe borrowed his flashlight. What they found on Toby's chair was the little blanketed bundle that was now sitting on Mr. Monroe's lap.

They now unwrapped the blanket, and there in the center was a tiny black and white rabbit, sitting in a shoebox filled with dirt. A piece of paper had been tied to his neck with a ribbon. There were words on the paper, but the Monroes were unable to decipher them because they were in a totally unfamiliar language. I moved closer for a better look.

Now, most people might call me a mongrel, but I have some pretty fancy bloodlines running through these veins and Russian wolfhound happens to be one of them. Because my family got around a lot, I was able to recognize the language as an obscure dialect of the Carpathian Mountain region. Roughly translated, it read, "Take good care of my baby." But I couldn't tell if it was a note from a bereaved mother or a piece of Roumanian sheet music.

The little guy was shivering from fear and cold. It was decided that Mr. Monroe and the boys would make a house for him out of an old crate and some heavy-duty wire mesh from the garage. For the night, the boys would make a bed for him in the shoebox. Toby and Pete ran outside to find the crate, and Mrs. Monroe went to the kitchen to get him some milk and lettuce. Mr. Monroe sat down, a dazed expression in his eyes, as if he were wondering how he came to be sitting in his own living room in a wet raincoat with a strange bunny on his lap.

I signaled to Chester and the two of us casually moseyed over to a corner of the room. We looked at each other.

“Well, what do you think?” I asked.

“I don’t think rabbits like milk,” he answered.

• • •

Chester and I were unable to continue our conversation because a deafening crash commanded our attention.

Pete yelled from the hallway: “Maaa! Toby broke the rabbit’s house!”

“I didn’t, I just dropped it. Pete won’t let me carry it.”

“It’s too big. Toby’s too little.”

“I am not!”

“You are, too!”

“Okay, fellas,” Mrs. Monroe called out as she entered with the milk and lettuce. “Let’s try to get it in here with as little hysteria as possible, please.”

Chester turned to me and said under his breath, “That lettuce looks repulsive, but if there’s any milk left, *I* get it.” I certainly wasn’t going to argue with him. I’m a water man myself.

At that moment, the crate arrived, barely standing the strain of being pulled in two directions at once.

“Ma, Toby says he’s going to keep the rabbit in his room. That’s not fair. Harold sleeps in his room.”

Only sometimes, I thought, when I know he’s got a leftover ham sandwich in his drawer. Toby’s a nice kid, don’t get me wrong, but it doesn’t hurt that he shares his stash with me. It was, after all, at one of those late night parties in Toby’s room that I first developed my taste for chocolate cake. And Toby, noting my preference, has kept me in chocolate cake ever since. Pete, on the other hand, doesn’t believe in sharing. And the only time I tried to sleep on his bed, he rolled over on me and pinned me by my ears so that I couldn’t move for

the rest of the night. I had a crick in my neck for days.

“But he’s mine,” Toby said. “I found him.”

“You sat on him, you mean!”

“I found him, and he’s sleeping in my room.”

“You can keep smelly ol’ Harold in your room, and Chester, too, if you want to, but I’m going to keep the rabbit in mine.”

Smelly ol’ Harold! I would have bitten his ankle, but I knew he hadn’t changed his socks for a week. Smelly, indeed!

Mr. Monroe spoke up. “I think the best place for the rabbit is right here in the living room on that table by the window. It’s light there, and he’ll get lots of fresh air.”

“Pete’s taller than I am,” Toby cried. “He’ll be able to see the rabbit better.”

“Too bad, squirt.”

“Okay,” said Mrs. Monroe through clenched teeth, “let’s put him to bed and make him comfortable, and then we can all get some sleep.”

“Why?” Pete asked. “I don’t want to go to sleep.”

Mrs. Monroe smiled a little too sweetly at Pete.

“Look, Ma,” said Toby, “he’s not drinking his milk.”

Chester nudged me in the ribs. “Didn’t I tell you?” he asked. “Excuse me while I make myself available.”

“Hey,” said Toby, “we gotta name him.”

“Can’t that wait until tomorrow?” asked Mr. Monroe.

The boys shouted in unison: “No! He has to have a name right now.” I have to say I agreed with them. It took them three days to name me, and those were the three most anxious days of my life. I couldn’t sleep at all, worrying that they were really going to call me Fluffy as Mrs. Monroe had suggested.

“Well, all right,” sighed Mrs. Monroe, “what about . . . oh, say . . . Bun-Bun?”

Oh, oh. There she goes again, I thought. Where *does* she get them?

“Yech!” we all said.

“Well, then, how about Fluffy?” she offered hopefully.

Pete looked at his mother and smiled. “You never give up, do you, Ma?”

Meanwhile, Chester (who had also been named Fluffy for a short time) was rubbing against Mrs. Monroe’s ankles and purring loudly.

“No, Chester, not now,” she said, pushing him aside.

“He wants to help us name him, don’t you Chester?” Toby asked, as he scooped him up into his arms. Chester shot me a look. I could tell this was not what he had in mind.

“Come on, Harold,” Toby called, “you’ve got to help with the name, too.”

I joined the family and serious thinking began. We all peered into the box. It was the first time I had really seen him. So, this is a rabbit, I thought. He sort of looks like Chester, only he’s got longer ears and a shorter tail. And a motor in his nose.

“Well,” said Pete, after a moment, “since we found him at the movies, why don’t we call him Mr. Johnson?”

There was a moment of silence.

“Who’s Mr. Johnson?” asked Toby.

“The guy who owns the movie theater,” Pete answered.

No one seemed to like the idea.

“How about Prince?” said Mr. Monroe.

“Dad,” said Toby, “are you kidding?”

“Well, I had a dog named Prince once,” he replied lamely.

Prince, I thought, that’s a silly name for a dog.

“We found him at a Dracula movie. Let’s call him Dracula,” Toby said.

“That’s a stupid name,” said Pete.

“No, it’s not! And anyway, I found him, so I should get to name him.”

“Mom, you’re not going to let him name him, are you? That’s favoritism, and I’ll be traumatized if you do.”

Mrs. Monroe looked in wonder at Pete.

“Please Mom, please Dad, let’s name him Dracula,” cried Toby, “please, please, please.” And with each *please*, he squeezed Chester a little harder.



Mrs. Monroe picked up the bowl of milk and moved toward the kitchen. Chester followed her every movement with his eyes, which now seemed to be popping out of his head. When she reached the kitchen door, she turned back and said, "Let's not have any more arguments. We'll compromise. He's a bunny and we found him at a Dracula movie, so we'll call him Bunny-cula. Bunnacula! That should make everybody happy, including me."

"What about me?" muttered Chester. "I won't be happy until she puts down that milk."

"Well, guys, is that okay with you?" she asked.

Toby and Pete looked at one another. And then at the rabbit. A smile grew on Toby's face.

"Yeah, Ma, I think that name is just right."

Pete shrugged. "It's okay. But I get to feed him."

"Okay, I'm going to put the milk back in the fridge. Maybe he'll drink it tomorrow."

"What about Chester?" Toby said, dropping the frantic cat to the floor. "Maybe he would like it." Chester made a beeline for Mrs. Monroe and looked up at her plaintively.

"Oh, Chester doesn't want any more milk, do you, Chester? You've already had your milk today." She reached down, patted Chester on his head, and walked into the kitchen. Chester didn't move.

"Okay, bedtime," said Mr. Monroe.

"Good night, Bunnacula," Toby said.

"Good night, Count Bunnacula," Pete said sarcastically, in what I took to be his attempt at a Transylvanian accent. I may be wrong but I thought I saw a flicker of movement from the cage.

"Good night, Harold. Good night, Chester." I licked Toby good night.

"Good night, smelly Harold. Good night, dumb Chester." I drooled on Pete's foot. "Mom, Harold drooled on my foot!"

"*Good night, Pete!*" Mrs. Monroe said with great finality as she came back

into the living room, and then more calmly, “Good night, Harold. Good night, Chester.”

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe went up the stairs together.

“You know, dear,” Mr. Monroe said, “that was very clever. Bunnacula. I could never have thought of a name like that.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Robert.” She smiled as she put her arm through his. “I think Prince is a lovely name, too.”

The room was quiet. Chester was still sitting by the closed kitchen door in a state of shock. Slowly, he turned to me.

“I wish they *had* named him Fluffy,” was all he said.



## Two

### MUSIC IN THE NIGHT



I feel at this time there are a few things you should know about Chester. He is not your ordinary cat. (But then, I'm not your ordinary dog, since an ordinary dog wouldn't be writing this book, would he?)

Chester came into the house several years ago as a birthday gift for Mr. Monroe, along with two volumes of G. K. Chesterton (hence the name, Chester) and a first edition of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. As a result of this introduction to literature, and given the fact that Mr. Monroe is an English professor, Chester developed a taste of reading early in life. (I, on the other hand, have developed a taste for books. I found *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* particularly delicious.) From Chester's kittenhood on, Mr. Monroe has used him as a sounding board for all his student lectures. If Chester doesn't fall asleep when Mr. Monroe is talking, the lecture can be counted a success.

Every night when the family is sleeping, Chester goes to the bookshelf, selects his midnight reading, and curls up on his favorite chair. He especially likes mystery stories and tales of horror and the supernatural. As a result, he has developed a very vivid imagination.

I'm telling you this because I think it's important for you to know something of Chester's background before I relate to you the story of the events following the arrival of Bunnacula into our home. Let me begin with that first night.

It seems that after I went to sleep, Chester, still stewing over the lost milk, settled down with his latest book and attempted to ignore the rumbling in his stomach. The room was dark and quiet. This did not prevent his reading, of course, since as you know, cats can see in the dark. A shaft of moonlight fell across the rabbit's cage and spilled onto the floor below. The wind and rain had stopped and, as Chester read Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," he became increasingly aware of the eerie stillness that had taken their place. As Chester tells it, he suddenly felt compelled to look at the rabbit.

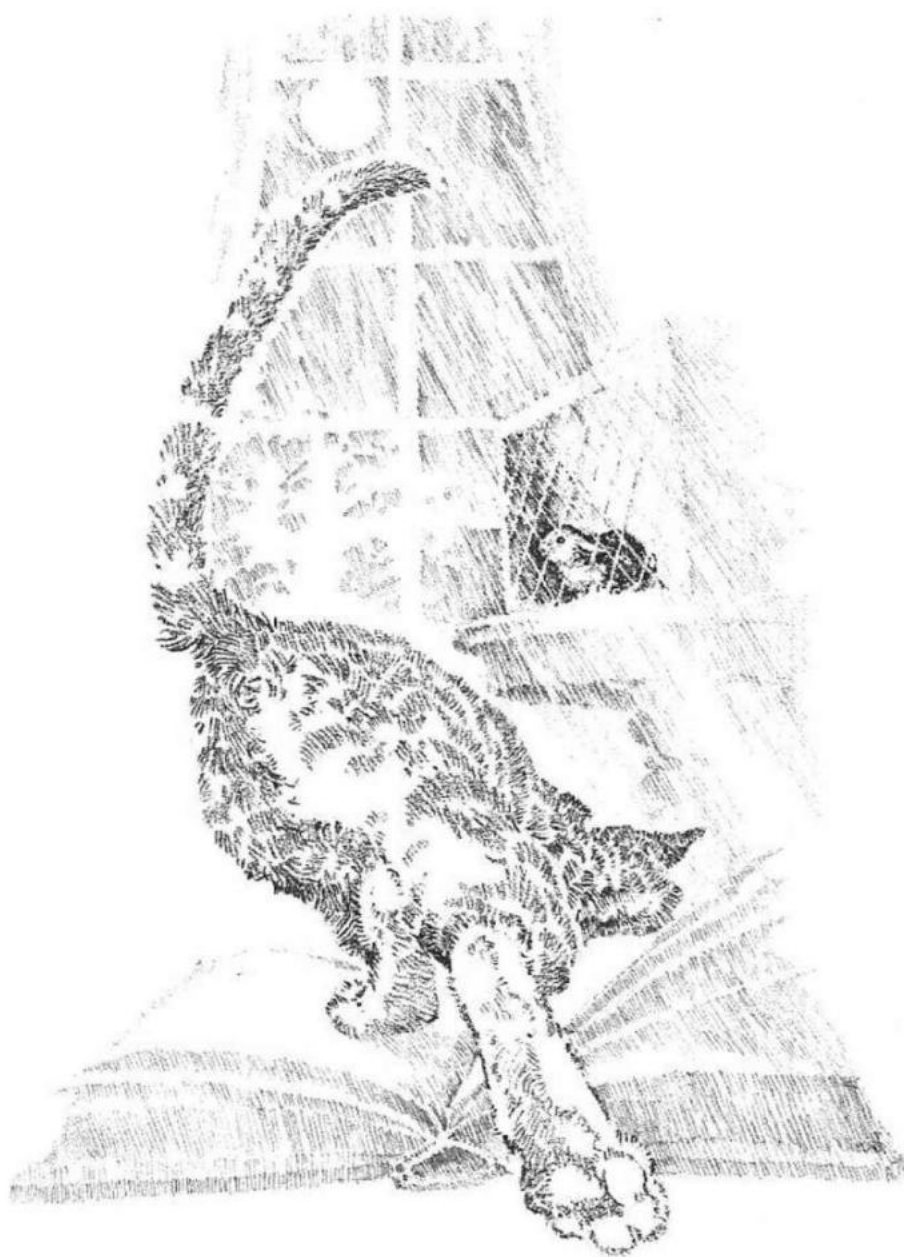
"I don't know what came over me," he said to me the next morning, "but a cold chill ran down my spine."

The little bunny had begun to move for the first time since he had been put in his cage. He lifted his tiny nose and inhaled deeply, as if gathering sustenance from the moonlight.

"He slicked his ears back close to his body, and for the first time," Chester said, "I noticed the peculiar marking on his forehead. What had seemed an ordinary black spot between his ears took on a strange v-shape, which connected with the big black patch that covered his back and each side of his neck. It looked as if he was wearing a coat . . . no, more like a *cape* than a coat."

Through the silence had drifted the strains of a remote and exotic music.

"I could have sworn it was a gypsy violin," Chester told me. "I thought perhaps a caravan was passing by, so I ran to the window."





I remembered my mother telling me something about caravans when I was a puppy. But for the life of me, I couldn't remember what.

"What's a caravan?" I asked, feeling a little stupid.

"A caravan is a band of gypsies traveling through the forest in their wagons," Chester answered.

"Ah, yes." It was coming back to me now. "Station wagons?"

"No, covered wagons! The gypsies travel all through the land, setting up camps around great bonfires, doing magical tricks, and sometimes, if you cross their palms with a piece of silver, they'll tell your fortune."

"You mean if I gave them a fork, they'd tell my fortune?" I asked, breathlessly.

Chester looked at me with disdain. "Save your silverware," he said. "It wasn't a caravan after all."

I was disappointed. "What was it?" I asked.

Chester explained that when he looked out the window, he saw Professor Mickelwhite, our next door neighbor, playing the violin in his living room. He listened for a few moments to the haunting melody and sighed with relief. I've really got to stop reading these horror stories late at night, he thought. It's beginning to affect my mind. He yawned and turned to go back to his chair and get some sleep. As he turned, however, he was startled by what he saw.

There in the moonlight, as the music filtered through the air, sat the bunny, his eyes intense and staring, an unearthly aura about them.

"Now, this is the part you won't believe," Chester said to me, "but as I watched, his lips parted in a hideous smile, and where a rabbit's buck teeth should have been, two little pointed fangs glistened."

I wasn't sure what to make of Chester's story, but the way he told it, it set my hair on end.

### Three

## SOME UNUSUAL GOINGS-ON



The next few days passed uneventfully. I was very bored. Our new arrival slept all day, and Chester, whose curiosity had been aroused by the strange behavior of the rabbit that first night, had decided to stay awake every night to observe him. Therefore, he, too, spent most of his days sleeping. So *I* had no one to talk to.

The evenings weren't much better. Toby and Pete, who used to play with me as soon as they got home from school, now ran immediately to that silly rabbit's cage to play with him. Or at least they'd try to. Bunnacula did not make the most energetic playmate. It took him quite a while to wake up each night and then when he did awaken, he didn't do much except hop around the living room. He didn't play catch, he didn't fetch, he didn't roll over to get his tummy rubbed. I

couldn't understand why they played with him at all. I expect it was because he was new and different. But I was confident that they would soon tire of him and come back to trusty ol' Harold.

Finally, on the morning of the fourth day, I caught Chester bleary-eyed over the water dish. He grumbled at me in a most unpleasant manner.

"You know, Chester, you were never exactly charming in the morning, but lately you've become downright grumpy."

Chester growled in response.

"What are you doing this for anyway? What are you looking for? He's just a cute little bunny."

"Cute little bunny!" Chester was amazed at my character analysis. "That's what you think. He's a danger to this household and everyone in it."

"Oh, Chester," I said, with an indulgent smile, "I think your reading has gone to your head."

"It's just because I do read that I know what I'm talking about."

"Well, what are you talking about? I still don't understand."

"I'm not sure yet, but I know there's something funny about that rabbit. That's why I have to keep alert."

"But look at you—you're exhausted. You sleep all the time. How can you call that alert?"

"I'm awake when it's important. He sleeps all day, so I sleep all day."

"So just what have you seen since that first night that makes you uneasy?"

"Well . . ." said Chester, "I, uh . . . that is . . ." At this point, Chester started to bathe his tail, which is a cat's way of changing a subject he finds uncomfortable. He then stumbled sleepily into the living room.

"So?" I asked again, following him, "what have you seen?"

"Nothing!" he snapped, and proceeded to curl up on his chair to go to sleep. After a moment, he opened one eye. "But that doesn't mean there's nothing *to* see."

For the next few mornings, it was the same routine. I'd be ready for a good

romp around the living room, and Chester would go to sleep. Pete and Toby were at school. Mr. Monroe was at the university (he never did too much romping around, anyway). And Mrs. Monroe was at her office.

No one to play with poor, neglected Harold. At first, I thought I could strike up a friendship with Bunnacula and maybe teach him a few tricks. But I could never wake him up. He was always waking up just about sunset, when I wanted to take a snooze. A rabbit, I concluded, is cute to look at, but is generally useless, especially as a companion to dogs. So, I would retire each day with my favorite shoe to the rug and chew.

Now, some people (especially Mr. and Mrs. Monroe) can't understand my taste for shoes and yell at me for snacking on them. But I always say there's no accounting for taste. For instance, I remember one evening when Mr. Monroe picked some of his sour balls out of the bowl by his chair and dropped a green one on the floor. He didn't notice as it rolled across the room and landed near my nose. I decided this was a perfect opportunity to try one for myself. I placed it in my mouth . . . and wished immediately that I hadn't. As the tears started running out of my eyes, I thought, What's wrong with my mouth?! It's turning inside out!

Mr. Monroe immediately noticed that something had happened. "What's the matter, Harold? Are you looking for someone to kiss?"

"Help! Help!" I wanted to cry, but all that came out was an "ooooo" sound. I "ooooo"-ed for days.

So how can anyone who likes green sourballs criticize me for preferring a nice penny loafer or a bedroom slipper?

But back to the matter at hand:

One morning, Chester had news.

"That bunny," he whispered to me across our food bowls, "got out of his cage last night."

"Don't be ridiculous," I said. "How could he break through that wire? Look how little he is."

“That’s just it! He didn’t break through any wire. He got out of his cage without breaking anything, or opening any doors!”

I looked puzzled. So Chester told me the following story.

“Now, Harold,” he said, “I don’t want you thinking I’m not a good watchcat, but after a few hours last night, I grew curious about the time. I went into the hallway and . . . you know that new clock they’ve got? The big one? That goes all the way to the ceiling? Well, see, it has this thing in the middle called a pendulum. At first, I figured I would just leave it alone. It looked like that spool they tied on a string and hung from the doorknob for me to play with when I was a kitten. Everytime I hit that silly spool with my paw, it would swing back and hit me on the nose. I hated that toy. So naturally, when I saw this one, I decided not to have anything to do with it. I checked the time. It was midnight. I was all set to go back to the living room when something stopped me.”

“Curiosity?” I ventured.

“I suppose you could call it that. I prefer to think of it as the challenge of the unknown. I put one paw over my nose and reached out with the other one and gave it one good smack. I darn near broke my arm. It’s still tender; see how swollen it is.”

He showed me his little paw. I couldn’t see anything wrong. But I knew better than to argue with him. “Oh yes,” I said, “that looks terrible. You must be suffering awfully. You’d better go easy today.” He limped dramatically, just far enough to display his new handicap, and continued.

“I couldn’t even get to the pendulum. Somebody had put glass in front of it, and I was pretty mad. I was all set to go back, but at the same time, I couldn’t help watching the thing move back and forth, back and forth. Back and forth . . . It was so easy to watch, and before I knew what had happened, I was waking up.”

“You fell asleep?” I asked incredulously.

“I couldn’t help it. I didn’t even know it had happened. But I looked up at the face of the clock and it was twelve forty-five! I’d been gone forty-five minutes. I



ran back into the living room, looked at Bunnacula's cage, and it was empty. I couldn't imagine where he was. Then I noticed a light coming from under the kitchen door. I went into a crouch, stalking the light, when . . . *click* . . . I heard the refrigerator door close, and the light went out."

"It must have been Mr. Monroe having his midnight snack," I suggested.

"No, that's what I thought. I jumped on my chair, curled up real quick and kept one eye open, pretending to be asleep. Slowly, the door to the kitchen squeaked open. This little head poked out from around the corner and looked to either side to see if the coast was clear. Then . . . guess who came bouncing out all by himself, and with that idiotic grin of his plastered all over his face?"

"Well . . . I guess it wasn't Mr. Monroe," I said.

"Not unless he wears bunny pajamas and gets very tiny at night."

"Bunnacula, huh?"

"You got it. Unfortunately, I hadn't positioned myself so that I could see him get back into the cage. And I didn't want to let him know that I had seen anything, so I had to stay put. I still don't know how he got out, or back in."

At this point, Mr. Monroe came downstairs to make breakfast.

I wondered if Chester hadn't dreamed the whole thing. He did admit he'd fallen asleep and, as I've said, he has quite an imagination. But I was game. After all, there hadn't been any excitement in this place for days. Chester and I took our positions under the kitchen table. We didn't have long to wait.

"Holy cow!" Mr. Monroe yelled as he opened the refrigerator door. He took this funny-looking white thing out of the fridge and held it at arm's length.

"Peter, come down here!"

"What is that?" I whispered.

"Beats me," Chester answered. "It looks like a white tomato."

"Very funny," I said, as Pete came into the kitchen.

"Peter, have you been playing with your chemistry set in here?"

"No, Dad, why?"

"I thought this might be one of your experiments. Do you know what it is?"

“Gee, Dad, it looks like a white tomato.”

Just then, Mrs. Monroe and Toby came in the door.

“What’s all the fuss about?” Mrs. Monroe asked.

“We were just trying to figure out what this is.”

Toby pulled it down so he could get a better look.

“Well,” he said, “it looks to me like a white tomato.”

Mr. Monroe took a good long look. “You know,” he said to his wife, “it really does look like a white tomato.”

“There’s one way to find out,” said Mrs. Monroe, who always was the practical one. “Let’s cut it open and see what’s inside.”

Everybody gathered around the table. I jumped up on a chair, and in all the excitement, no one noticed that I had my paws on the table (which under normal circumstances was discouraged, to say the least). Chester wasn’t so lucky.

“Chester, get off the table,” Mrs. Monroe said. Chester jumped onto Toby’s shoulders, where he stayed to view the proceedings.

Mrs. Monroe took her sharpest knife and cut cleanly through the thing. It fell into two halves.

“It’s a tomato, all right,” said Mrs. Monroe. “Here are the seeds.”

“But it’s all white,” Toby observed.

“And look,” said Pete, “it’s dry.”

“So it is,” Mr. Monroe said, as he picked up one of the halves. “There is no juice at all. Well, Ann, what do you think?”

“It’s gone bad, I guess, though I’ve never heard of a tomato turning white before. Come on,” she said, clearing the table, “let’s throw it out and have breakfast. And Harold, get your paws off the table.”

Rats.

Chester jumped down from Toby’s shoulders and motioned for me to follow him into the living room.

“This had better be important,” I said. “They’re cooking bacon.”

“A white tomato. Very significant,” Chester murmured.

“So it’s a white tomato,” I said, edging my way back to the kitchen door. “What does that have to do with Bunnacula?”

“I can tell you one thing,” Chester said. “I got a good look at the tomato. There were very suspicious marks on the skin.”

“So?”

“I believe they’re teeth marks.”

“So?”

“So tonight I’m going to reread a book I read last year.”

“How fascinating,” I said, as the aroma of frying bacon wafted across my nostrils. “And what book might that be?”

*“The Mark of the Vampire!”*

“What!” I stopped dead in my tracks.

“Meet me tonight after the others have gone to sleep. You’d better take a nap today so you can stay awake.”

Chester closed his eyes. I shifted my look to Bunnacula, who seemed to be asleep in this cage. A tiny smile sat upon his lips. A happy dream? I wondered. Or something else?

My reverie was broken by the sound of crunching bacon. I was in the kitchen in a flash.