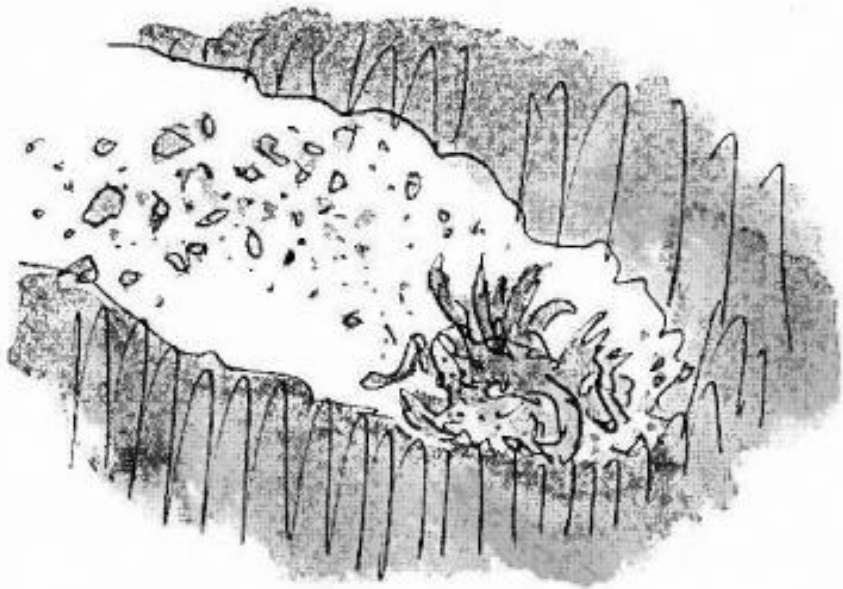


Boggis's Chicken House Number One

"THIS TIME we must go in a very special direction," said Mr. Fox, pointing sideways and downward.

So he and his four children started to dig once again. The work went much more slowly now. Yet they kept at it with great courage, and little by little the tunnel began to grow.



"Dad, I wish you would tell us *where* we are going," said one of the children.

"I dare not do that," said Mr. Fox, "because this place I am *hoping* to get to is so *marvellous* that if I described it to you now you would go crazy with excitement. And then, if we failed to get there (which is very possible), you would die of disappointment. I don't want to raise your hopes too much, my darlings."

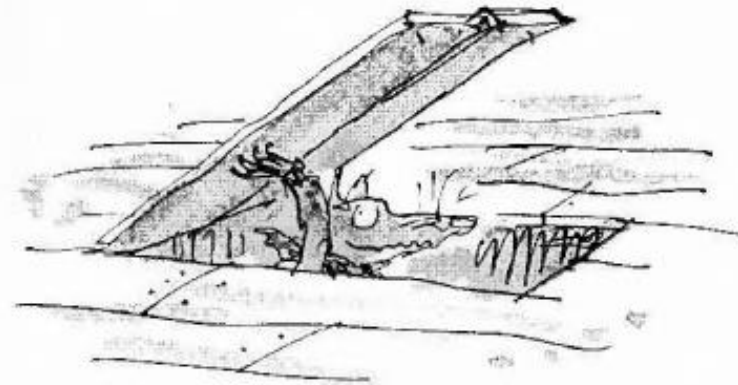
For a long long time they kept on digging. For how long they did not know, because there were no days and no nights down there in the murky tunnel. But at last Mr. Fox gave the order to stop. "I think," he said, "we had better take a peep upstairs now and see where we are. I know where I *want* to be, but I can't possibly be sure we're anywhere near it."



Slowly, wearily, the foxes began to slope the tunnel up towards the surface. Up and up it went . . . until suddenly they came to something hard above their heads and they couldn't go up any further. Mr. Fox reached up to examine this hard thing. "It's wood!" he whispered. "Wooden planks!"

"What does that mean, Dad?"

"It means, unless I am very much mistaken, that we are right underneath somebody's house," whispered Mr. Fox. "Be very quiet now while I take a peek."



Carefully, Mr. Fox began pushing up one of the floorboards. The board creaked most terribly and they all ducked down, waiting for something awful to happen. Nothing did. So Mr. Fox pushed up a second board. And then, very very cautiously, he poked his head up through the gap. He let out a shriek of excitement.

"I've done it!" he yelled. "I've done it *first time!* I've done it! I've done it!" He pulled himself up through the gap in the floor and started prancing and dancing with joy. "Come on up!" he sang out. "Come up and see where you are, my darlings! What a sight for a hungry fox! Hallelujah! Hooray! Hooray!"

The four Small Foxes scrambled up out of the tunnel and what a fantastic sight it was that now met their eyes! They were in a huge shed and the whole place was teeming with chickens. There were white chickens and brown chickens and black chickens by the thousand!

"Boggis's Chicken House Number One!" cried Mr. Fox. "It's exactly what I was aiming at! I hit it slap in the middle! First time! Isn't that fantastic! *And*, if I may say so, rather clever!"

The Small Foxes went wild with excitement. They started running around in all directions, chasing the stupid chickens.

"Wait!" ordered Mr. Fox. "Don't lose your heads! Stand back! Calm down! Let's do this properly! First of all, everyone have a drink of water!"

They all ran over to the chickens' drinking-trough and lapped up the lovely cool water. Then Mr. Fox chose three of the plumpest hens, and with a clever flick of his jaws he killed them instantly.

"Back to the tunnel!" he ordered. "Come on! No





fooling around! The quicker you move, the quicker you shall have something to eat!"

One after another, they climbed down through the hole in the floor and soon they were all standing once again in the dark tunnel. Mr. Fox reached up and pulled the floorboards back into place. He did this with great care. He did it so that no one could tell they had ever been moved.

"My son," he said, giving the three plump hens to the biggest of his four small children, "run back with these to your mother. Tell her to prepare a feast. Tell her the rest of us will be along in a jiffy, as soon as we have made a few other little arrangements."