

Mr Pip and the Magic Cupboard



by Mark D Watkins

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Chapter One -- The Big House

Mr Pip was a black and white rabbit who lived with two little boys called James and George. That should be the end of the story, but it isn't. You see Mr Pip wasn't an ordinary rabbit at all. He always started each day *intending* to be an ordinary rabbit. But extraordinary things kept happening to Mr Pip, and he was starting to think that he just wasn't cut out to be an ordinary bunny.

Mr Pip lived in a big hutch in a small garden. His hutch had a little enclosed area with a straw bed -- that was Mr Pip's bedroom -- and a larger sawdust covered area with a wire-mesh window -- that was Mr Pip's play area. In his play area were Mr Pip's food, drink and toys. It was here that Mr Pip spent most of his time, looking out over the garden and occasionally nibbling a carrot, chomping some nuts or playing with his toys.

The garden that Mr Pip's hutch stood in, was small and square. To the front of his hutch was a patio that stretched to the fence of the house next

door. To the left was a small area of grass that ran to the rear fence. To the right were the patio doors to the house where Mr Pip's people lived.

Each day, if Mr Pip had been very good, he was allowed to go indoors from his hutch to spend the evening with James and George. Mr Pip wasn't always good -- sometimes he could be very mischievous indeed -- but on this particular day, Mr Pip had been extraordinarily good. He hadn't thumped his foot to demand attention (as he sometimes did). He hadn't nipped or scratched James or George when they came to see him in his hutch (as he sometimes did). And he hadn't emptied his dinner all over the floor in a big rabbit tantrum (as he sometimes did). No, today Mr Pip had been very good, and today, when James and George got home from school, Mr Pip was lifted out of his hutch and into the big house.

Mr Pip had lots of things he liked to do when he came indoors. He liked to give his toy bell and big loud 'ting-a-ling'. He liked to see how high he could climb on the furniture. He particularly liked to nibble things -- carrots, corners of walls, telephone cables -- anything. But most of all, Mr Pip liked to explore.

The trouble was, when Mr Pip explored, he saw things that nobody else could see, and ended up having adventures in the most unlikely places!

Mr Pip just couldn't help himself. In his world, behind every door, up every stair, and on top of every chair, lay a magical world of carrot tops, toys and other bunnies to play with. It was all too exciting to resist for a young rabbit. And that's how Mr Pip found himself in the magic cupboard.

To James and George, the magic cupboard was just a small area under the stairs where things were stored and the clothes that were due to be ironed were piled up. So, innocently, James and George's mummy opened the cupboard, took out the pile of creased clothes, then came back for the ironing board and took that out, then, just as she was about to close the cupboard, she looked around to see where Mr Pip was. He was nowhere to be seen. Mr Pip had disappeared!

James and George and their mummy and daddy searched high and low, under tables, behind bookshelves -- in fact, they checked all of Mr Pip's favourite hiding places, but he was gone. There was only one other place he could be -- in the cupboard under the stairs.

Mr Pip had taken his chance, as James and George's mummy had turned round with an armful of unironed clothes, he had sneaked into the cupboard beneath the stairs and was tip-toeing deeper and deeper into the darkness. Behind him his people were peering, reaching and calling to

see if they could coax Mr Pip out of the cupboard. But Mr Pip could smell adventure and onwards he crept.

After a few more steps, Mr Pip began to sense a gentle breeze on his whiskers, a few steps still further and the darkness began to lift and a gentle light grew. Onward again and Mr Pip pushed out past a last cardboard box until he emerged in a small clearing in what appeared to be an early morning light. There was dew on the green surface and Mr Pip looked around him to see if there was anyone or anything else around. All seemed still, and Mr Pip gave a little yawn. The excitement and the effort of pushing past clothes and boxes and CDs had made him quite sleepy. Perhaps if he just had a little...

...When Mr Pip awoke, he had no idea how long he had been sleeping at all! He stretched his long back legs and sniffed the air to try and see if he could tell what time of day it was. That smell was... was... it was... it was carrots! Mr Pip went from being slightly sleepy to very awake in an instant! He looked down and gave another sniff. It wasn't grass that he'd fallen asleep on -- it was a mass of leafy green carrot tops that stretched as far as the eye could see! Mr Pip leaped in the air excitedly, landing on the exact spot he'd taken off from and began munching. Chomp, chomp, chomp, he went, and gave a contented sigh. No wonder his people were

always trying to keep him out of certain rooms and cupboards! There were amazing things to be found in them.

"Hello there!"

Mr Pip froze... there was someone behind him.

"Helloooooo?" the voice said again, this time somewhat cheekily.

Mr Pip leaped into the air and, this time, landed in exactly the same spot but facing the opposite way. He found himself face to face with another rabbit.

"What's your name?" said the rabbit.

Mr Pip was about to give a little 'tut tut' with his cheeks and teeth when, "My name's Mr Pip" came out.

He couldn't believe it, he was actually talking!

"My name's Tupenny," said the rabbit, who was a golden colour with long fluffy fur. "When I was a baby, my people called me Tupenny Half, but I'm

big now, so they just call me Tupenny... I've not seen you here before Mr Pip?"

Pip didn't know what to say... he'd only been able to speak for about ten seconds, but already he was speechless.

"Erm, I, er, just found it. Here, I mean. Just now. Through there," he nuzzled at the air to indicate where he thought he'd just come from, but there was nothing there to point at.

"You don't know where you are then?" said Tupenny.

"Er, in the cupboard, I think," said Pip, but he wasn't really sure of anything at the moment.

"Not just any cupboard," said Tupenny. "You're in the Magic Cupboard!"

Mr Pip's little head was beginning to hurt with all this thinking.

"What's the Magic Cupboard?" he said.

"Blimey, didn't they teach you anything at Bunday School?!" mocked Tupenny.

Mr Pip was beginning to get fed up with being made to feel so stupid.

"WHAT'S Bunday School?" he said, irritated.

By now Tupenny was rolling about on her back laughing and tickling her own tummy, all of which was making Mr Pip feel foolish and cross. After a few moments Tupenny appeared to have laughed herself out and, using her paws to pull her ears down, dabbed the corners of her eyes with the insides of her big ears to wipe away a few tears of laughter.

"Whoo," she said, "I've not laughed like that since Toofpeg's carrot stalk snapped and he rolled all the way down the hill to the nettle patch. He's still got a rash on his bottom you know! Eeeehhh." She blinked a few times to clear the final few tears and seemed to be over the joke now.

"Bunday school is where bunnies go before they adopt a person. One day of lessons to tell you everything you need to know about keeping people happy and looked after. They also teach you about the Magic Cupboard, Stair Mountain, Pellet Recycling and tons of other stuff," said Tupenny.

Mr Pip looked blank.

"Don't say they didn't send you!" Tupenny looked shocked and Mr Pip shook his head a little sadly.

"Right then, one crash course coming up! Someone's got to put you straight and it looks like it's going to have to be me."

For the first time since he had met Tupenny, Mr Pip began to brighten. Perhaps she wasn't all bad after all.

Chapter Two -- Lessons in Bunlaw

"Everything that a young rabbit needs to know is covered in the Bunlaw Rhymes," said Tupenny. "The Bunlaw Rhymes teach us and help us to remember all the good and bad things that can happen to a rabbit. There are rhymes on keeping safe, what foods are nicest, how to play with toys, and how the magic cupboard was found. Although actually," said Tupenny in a whisper, "Not all rabbits get here by cupboard. Wild rabbits get here through a magic burrow, garden rabbits get here behind a magic bush and rabbits who aren't allowed out to play at all get here under a magic pile of straw. That's how it was originally found, long ago by a rabbit whose people never let him out of his hutch."

"But what *is* the magic cupboard," asked Pip, "And how come I can speak?!"

It was all very confusing, and for every new piece of information that Tupenny gave him, Mr Pip had about ten questions in response.

"Let's start with the magic cupboard rhyme," said Tupenny, "And take things from there, shall we?"

Mr Pip nodded, and Tupenny cleared her throat with a dramatic "Ahem!"

In olden times when rabbits hopped, And hopped and hopped until they stopped,

A wise old bun with nose of grey, Discovered what would seal his fame,

Old Silverbun, for it was he, Was settling down to a carrot tea,

When curiosity of brain, Meant things would never be the same,

Silverbun had twitched a breeze, that tickled all around his knees,

With caution, stealth and nose aflare, He slowly crept towards this air,

His first thought was to check his gate, in case his hutch was left agape,

But puzzled, Silverbun discovered, His door was shut and window covered,

And yet the breeze it rustled round, As if it came straight from the ground,

So Silverbun he gave a twitch, And with his nose took in a sniff,

His sense of smell had led his paws, Towards a pile of bundled straw,

He nosed it back and opened up, A path that led him out and up,

On he walked and ever upward, Until he found this magic cupboard,

And now we come to sit in sun, And thank the luck of Silverbun.

Little Mr Pip was very impressed that Tupenny had remembered all that.

Tupenny seemed to sense this and said proudly, "That's lesson number one at Bunday School."

"So Silverbun discover the magic cupboard? How long ago was that?" asked Pip.

"Nobody can remember," said Tupenny, "But when he came back, Silverbun told a passing field rabbit, who then told a small colony of rabbits, who told other rabbits in hutches, until every rabbit was searching for a way into the magic cupboard. Before long, we were all meeting here. It's as if the magic cupboard is what every rabbit would dream of... we can talk to each other, chew everything in sight and the floors are paved with soft green carrot tops."

"But what will my people say when I go back and they discover I can talk?!" said Pip, who was beginning to worry about the consequences of all this.

"Don't worry," said Tupenny, "What happens in the magic cupboard only works while you're here. You can eat as many carrot tops as you want and it won't spoil your dinner when you get home, you can stay for days and

your people will still only think you've been gone for a few minutes, and you can only talk when you're here."

"And I can come whenever I want?" asked Pip.

"As long as you can get to your doorway to the magic cupboard," said Tupenny.

"I'm going to come every chance I get!" said Pip, who was so excited to have discovered this wonderful place that he decided to do a backwards somersault to prove it."

"But be careful," said Tupenny. "One of the rules of the magic cupboard is that you must promise on your tail *never* to lead a dog, cat, fox or person into the magic cupboard. If you do, you will never be allowed back and your tail will disappear forever!"

Mr Pip promised he would never do anything so awful as to ruin the magic cupboard for other rabbits and tried to imagine what he would look like without a tail. He didn't like the prospect at all and gave a little shudder at the thought.

"Come on then," said Tupenny, "Let's go and explore. You can meet my friends and tell me all about your people."

With that, Tupenny sprinted off towards a hill top and Mr Pip gave a big leap and started after her. As they ran, hopped and leaped, Mr Pip told Tupenny all about his home, his people, his favourite toys and how he liked nothing more than to sit in the big house with his people and snooze on a big fluffy rug.

"My favourite treat is Jaffa Cakes," he said, and as they played, he told her what they tasted like.

Chapter Three -- Toofpeg the Grumpy Rabbit

On and on skipped Mr Pip and Tupenny over fields and fields of lush green carrot tops, past rabbits chomping on the free food or just laying belly up in the sun. Mr Pip met Troubadour, a boy rabbit who could juggle carrots, Mistletoe, a girl rabbit who was always falling in love, Tricksy, a boy rabbit so clever that his own tail couldn't keep up with him, and Hazy, a podgy rabbit who could never quite remember anything.

"He can never remember when he last had a good meal, even if it was five minutes ago," Tupenny had told Pip, "That's why he's so big! It's a wonder that he ever remembers his way back to the magic cupboard at all!" she said.

Everybody had been very nice to Mr Pip, welcoming him to the magic cupboard, and saying that they hoped they'd see lots more of him in future. And as the day had gone on, Tupenny had told Mr Pip lots more about Bunlaw and sang him lots more rhymes about life as a rabbit. One, warned of the dangers of trusting other animals too much:

Never underestimate the sneakiness of cats,

It's not for pleasant reasons that they purr and pile on fat,

*For cats have all perfected something of a nasty habit,
They hide in grass, up trees and things and pounce on little rabbits,
Never underestimate the doziness of dogs,
Or else they'll set their bottoms down and squash you like a frog,
For dogs are big and bouncy and they often think its fun,
To pin you down and slurp you with their pink and smelly tongue,
Never underestimate the slyness of a fox,
Their brains are always ticking like a dark and devious clock,
They'll tiptoe up behind you without giving any warning,
And pretty soon your rabbit's skin will fox's toes be warming,
Never underestimate the farmer and his gun,
He'll send his dogs to chase you till you're tired just for fun,
Never let him take an aim assuming he will fail,
For though you yet may get away, he may collect your tail!*

Pip nodded earnestly as Tupenny recited these Bunlaw Rhymes and noticed that his new friend adopted an altogether quite serious manner when she was about to begin a rhyme. Tupenny would sit upright and flick her tail out behind her so that, with her two hind legs, she formed a three legged stool with the back half of her body. Then, she would puff her chest out, say "Ahem" in a very important voice, and wait for silence before beginning. Mr Pip was impressed. The only rhyme he knew was the one

his people used, which went, "No Mr Pip! Bad Mr Pip! Don't poop on the chair Mr Pip!" and even he would be the first to admit that it wasn't a very good rhyme.

As Tupenny finished her latest Bunlaw Rhyme, Mr Pip could see another rabbit coming towards them. Pip brightened his face into the friendliest expression he could manage, but as the new face came nearer it continued to scowl, even though Mr Pip felt sure that the owner of the scowl could see his chirpy expression by now.

The rabbit had lop ears, one of which had a big chunk taken out of it, and a single tooth sticking out over his front lip which gave him the look of someone who had a permanent squint.

"Who are you!?" snapped its voice as the rabbit reached their side.

"Erm, I'm, er, Mr Pip," he said.

"Stupid name," said the new rabbit.

"Hello Toofpeg," said Tupenny.

Toofpeg turned his head to Tupenny, "Still here? I thought I told you to clear off last week," he said.

"You did," replied Tupenny, "And I didn't take any notice."

Mr Pip tried to hide a giggle, he would never dare be as cheeky as Tupenny was being, not to anyone!

"How's your bottom, Toofpeg, still got nettle rash?"

Mr Pip laughed out loud. When Tupenny had first told him that a rabbit's carrot stalk had snapped while he was chewing on it and the rabbit had rolled to the bottom of a hill and landed in some nettles, Mr Pip had felt sorry for the rabbit. But now he'd met Toofpeg, he could understand why Tupenny had told him that she had laughed. Mr Pip didn't like to think of nasty things happening to anyone, but it seemed to him that if anybody deserved a sting on the bottom, then it was Toofpeg.

"Just you watch your cotton tail Miss Tupenny. One big thump from my back leg and you'll have a flat tail forever!" snarled Toofpeg.

Better a flat tail than a red bottom," shouted Tupenny and began to run around Toofpeg in a circle, singing "Nettle pants, nettle pants, nettle pants!"

Toofpeg kept jumping and stamping and trying to catch Tupenny, but she was too quick for him, and with a last "Tut-tut-tut" with her teeth, shouted, "Come on Pip" and they both hopped away.

Toofpeg watched them disappearing into the distance but was too dizzy to give chase. Instead, he shouted "I'll have your tail Miss Tupenny Half! And yours too Mr Pip!"

Mr Pip bounded away with Tupenny. He had never been in any trouble before, unless you count pooping on his people's comfy chairs, and while part of him felt bad for being involved in upsetting someone, another part of him felt a rush of excitement at having a friend who had shown him how to stand up to a bully.

When Tupenny and Pip eventually stopped running, they lay panting in a shaded patch of carrot tops, just next to a wooded area.

"Why is Toofpeg miserable in such a wonderful place?" asked Pip with a puzzled expression.

"He doesn't mean to be miserable really," said Tupenny, "But Toofpeg has mean owners who tease him and keep him locked up all the time, and he doesn't really know how to be happy any more. Even when he comes here, he falls in the nettle patch, or pricks his nose on a thistle. Sometimes I think he does it deliberately so he has an excuse to be grumpy."

"How did he get that hole in his ear, was he in a fight?" Pip enquired. "No," said Tupenny, "He was chewing carrot tops in the magic cupboard's big field, and moved his head to chomp on a lush carrot top to his left, and ended up chewing a lump out of his own ear. He jumped so high in the air that we all thought he'd learned to fly!"

Mr Pip gave a little giggle at the thought, but felt a little sorry for poor old Toofpeg. It seemed that bad luck followed him wherever he went, which would be enough to get anybody down.

"So why does he still come here then?" said Pip.

"Even bad luck can feel not so bad if you're in a place like this," said Tupenny, "Besides, if you had people who didn't love and look after you properly, wouldn't you get away as often as you could?"

"I suppose," he said, and his thoughts turned to how lucky he was to have such a nice home with James and George and their mummy and daddy. Just as he was thinking that, much as he'd had a lovely time in the magic cupboard, it was probably time to be heading home, he heard a lot of shouting and screaming from the woods behind them.

"Hey there, stop him, quick!" "Where did he go! Help someone, help!"

Mr Pip sat bolt upright and looked at Tupenny, whose ears were twitching round and round, trying to hear what was happening.

Suddenly, from the woods, there emerged a big fox, running faster than Mr Pip had ever seen anything run before. The fox was heading straight for Mr Pip!

Pip thought he was going to be flattened and, in an attempt to get out of the way, he kicked downwards and put all of his strength into the biggest

leap he could manage, there was no time to run anywhere so he was going to leap over the fox!

Thump! Mr Pip was knocked flying as the foxed bowled into him, and both he and the fox sprawled on the ground a few feet apart. The fox leaped straight to his feet again, picked up something in his mouth that he seemed to have dropped, gave Pip a nasty look and then bound off into the distance.

Chapter Four -- Meeting Princess Belle

No sooner had the fox disappeared than a group of five or six rabbits came hopping out of the woods together.

"Where did he go? Where did he go?" asked a proud looking rabbit at the front of the group.

Mr Pip was still sprawled on the ground and feeling rather dazed. It was as much as he could do to flick out one of his hind legs to indicate where the fox had gone.

"He'll be making for Stair Mountain," said another of the group. "What are we going to do?!"

Tupenny helped Mr Pip to stagger to his feet and Pip began to lick himself. Partly because he was now covered in dirt, but also because he wanted to see whether he was really hurt or just winded. The first rabbit to have emerged from the woods hopped over to them.

"I saw what you tried to do back there. Well done," he said.

"It was nothing," said Mr Pip, amazed that this brave looking rabbit thought it was clever to try and jump out of the way.

"Never seen a rabbit try to take down a fox before," said the new rabbit, "Shame it didn't come off, though I'd say you surprised him. I'm Mr Bojangles, chief guard-rabbit to Princess Belle."

Tupenny's eyes widened with surprise and she did a little rabbit curtsy.

Take down a fox... take down a fox?! Mr Pip couldn't believe what he was hearing, they honestly thought that he deliberately jumped in the way of the fox?!

"N-n-n-no," he stuttered, but was interrupted before he could continue.

"You tried to save the day, and jolly well nearly succeeded."

The rest of the group of rabbits had now joined them. There were a few that looked like Mr Bojangles, but these parted to make way for another rabbit. Mr Pip was entranced. Where the crowd had parted, there stood a small, beautiful, white rabbit.

"Your Highness," Mr Bojangles bowed, "The hero of the day is one Mr Pip."

Mr Pip was speechless for the second time since he found he could speak.

"I am Princess Belle," said the white rabbit. All around Pip, rabbits were bowing and curtsying. Mr Pip just stared. "Somehow, a fox has invaded our perfect world," said the Princess, "And you, Mr Pip, were brave enough to put up a fight."

"B-b-but..." said Pip.

The Princess did not let him interrupt, "Despite your brave efforts though Mr Pip, disaster has befallen us. The fox has stolen my royal tail, and as the Bunlaw Rhymes state, no rabbit without a tail can ever become King or Queen."

At this, one of the rabbits to the rear of the group began sobbing.

"Your Highness," said Mr Bojangles "Let me take this brave rabbit and lead a raid on Stair Mountain. If we can steal your tail back then we can

still save the day, and who knows, if we have a companion as brave as Mr Pip with us, we may even banish the fox from the magic cupboard altogether."

Mr Pip couldn't believe what he was hearing. Royal rabbits, guard rabbits, stolen tails, and now a raid on a real-life fox. He felt sure that he had simply nodded off in his own hutch and would awake any moment to find he had had the most amazing dream.

"I cannot sanction the risk of so many rabbits," said the Princess.

"Then let me take just one companion with me," begged Mr Bojangles, "The brave Mr Pip!"

All around gave a cheer and poor Mr Pip felt quite bowled along by a momentum that was not his own.

"Very well then, but if you do not return, then we shall have to surrender this place to the fox, and no more will rabbits know the pleasure of the magic cupboard. Good luck brave rabbits, and fare well."

Mr Bojangles slapped Pip on the shoulder with a friendly paw, and Mr Pip promptly fell flat on his nose again in the dirt he had just picked himself up from. Everybody laughed as Tupenny pushed her way to the front of the crowd.

"Well done Mr Pip, you're the hero of the day," she said as he picked himself up again.

"B-b-but I didn't... at least I didn't mean to... I mean, it was an accident..."

But Tupenny wasn't listening. She was looking at Pip with a glazed look in her eye. She gave him a little nuzzle on the nose with her own nose, wished him good luck and pushed her way back through the crowd of rabbits, which was now beginning to grow as news of Pip The Hero has spread across the fields.

The royal entourage turned to go back into the forest and Mr Bojangles led Mr Pip behind them.

"So Mr Pip, which warren did you train in?" Asked Mr Bojangles.

"Warren?" asked Pip.

"Yes, have you been in the Somerset Badger Conflicts? I've heard that there's some rough stuff going on there."

Somerset Badger Conflicts? Mr Pip could only manage a soft, "No."

"No?" said Bojangles, "Then you must have seen action in the Hertfordshire Hare Incursions, eh?"

"No," said Mr Pip timidly, "I live with James and George."

"James Gorge eh? I haven't heard of that training camp, but it must be good if that's where they taught you that fox-kick."

Oh dear, Mr Pip was getting very worried. The more he spoke, the more Mr Bojangles seemed to misunderstand. Mr Pip wanted to say, "You don't understand! I'm a young rabbit who lives in a hutch in a garden and sometimes gets to go into a big house. I don't know anything about Badger Conflicts or Hare Incursions. In fact, the most trouble I've ever been in was when I pooped on the sofa or nibbled the telephone cable."

But he couldn't. Instead, all he said was, "Yes,"

And Mr Bojangles said, "Good, well we'll need every trick you know if we're to outwit this fox. We'll get some rest and head off soon."

Chapter Five -- An Adventure with Mr Bojangles

Mr Pip and Mr Bojangles stopped off in a valley some 20 minutes from the edge of the woods. There, Mr Bojangles dozed before their big adventure, but poor Mr Pip didn't sleep a wink. He kept thinking about how everything had gone wrong because he had wanted to see what was at the back of the cupboard under the stairs. Now he'd been mistaken for some sort of rabbit commando and was about to head off to find a fox deliberately. Deliberately! What would his people say if they knew?

He knew what he thought. That he'd like to be safely back in his hutch playing with his cardboard tube, chewing on his wicker basket and thumping the floor whenever he wanted attention. He liked attention from his people, because that invariably meant carrots and cuddles. He wasn't at all sure that he wanted the type of attention that seemed to have found him at the moment.

Before too long, Mr Bojangles was stirring.

"Eeeaaaaaawwww," he yawned as he roused himself from his curled-up sleep. "Sleep well?" he asked Mr Pip.

"Not really," squeaked Pip.

"Too excited eh?" said Mr Bojangles. If only he knew!

After licking his paws and giving his face a good wash, Mr Bojangles turned conversation to the adventure ahead.

"Stair Mountain is about an hour's hop in that direction," he nodded up the side of the valley to the right. "If the fox has got any sense, he'll have set up camp at the top... it'll be easiest to defend against attack from below. Have you climbed stairs before?"

Mr Pip had, he definitely had, at home there was a big flight of stairs that led to some very interesting rooms. Almost as interesting as the magic cupboard, in fact.

"Yes," said Mr Pip.

"Good, then you can make the first assault."

Ooooh noooo, Mr Pip wished he had said no now!

With that, Mr Bojangles led off, and signalled Mr Pip to follow. They hopped up the side of the valley and as they reached the ridge, the land swooped away from them again until it led to the foot of a huge structure with square block-like steps that reached higher and higher to a peak -- Stair Mountain. At the top, Pip could just make out something moving. It looked like a flag or perhaps a very large pair of rabbits ears.

"Fox's tail!" said Mr Bojangles and hopped onwards at an even faster pace.

After another twenty minutes or so, they had reached the foot of Stair Mountain and Mr Bojangles paused to talk to Pip.

"Right," he said, "You go up and lure him off the top. Get him to chase you if you can. When you get back down to the bottom, I'll trip him up, you give him one of your big kicks, hopefully, he'll drop the Princess's tail and we'll grab it and run."

Oh dear, Mr Pip didn't like the sound of this. I could end up as a fox sandwich, he thought to himself. But he didn't have a better suggestion so, with Mr Bojangles crouched in position underneath the first step at the foot of Stair Mountain, Pip began to hop up the steps, one at a time.

To keep his spirits up, Pip tried to remember one of the rhymes that Tupenny had taught him, but the only bit he could remember wasn't cheering him up very much:

*Never underestimate the slyness of a fox,
Their brains are always ticking like a dark and devious clock,
They'll tiptoe up behind you without giving any warning,
And pretty soon your rabbit's skin will fox's toes be warming,*

Pip kept imagining a big sly fox curling up for the night under a Pip-skin blanket and didn't like the thought very much at all. If only Tupenny had come with them, she would know what to do right now. And even if she didn't, she would know another rhyme to take his mind off being turned into a blanket!

Hop, hop, hop, Pip was nearing the top of the mountain and the breeze was getting stronger. He would soon be within sight of the summit, so, after each hop, he crouched into the shelter of each step to avoid being spotted by the fox. Hop, hop, hop. Pip was just below the fox's position. He could hear the fox breathing and occasionally smell his breath as the fox prowled round and round on the top of the mountain.

Suddenly, Pip was thrust into darkness -- Pip closed his eyes, he was sure that the fox was upon him and that he would never be going home again, he waited for the fox's jaws to snap shut -- but nothing happened. Slowly Pip opened an eye, then the other. The fox was looking the other way and his tail had drooped over the edge into Pip's face!

Pip remembered the telephone cable at home and, quick as a flash, bit hard into the fox's tail. With a great "Yaroooooooooooo!" the fox yelped. Pip let go as the fox leapt into the air, as the fox went up, the Princess's tail came down -- the fox had spat it out when yelling in pain.

Pip caught the tail just in time. A split second later, the fox came down too. Mr Pip closed his eyes. Together, the fox and Mr Pip tumbled down and down the mountain-side until, with a thunderous thud, they landed hard on ground below.

Mr Pip tried to move his toes. They felt fine. Then he tried to move his legs. They were fine too. Finally, he decided to open his eyes. He found himself looking down on Mr Bojangles, and neither of them could quite believe what they were seeing. Mr Pip had landed on top of the fox, still holding the Princess's tail. The fox meanwhile, was out cold.

To Mr Bojangles, Mr Pip looked like a rabbit who had taken on the fox single-handed and delivered him to the foot of the mountain like an oven-ready chicken!

"Well done Mr Pip!" exclaimed Mr Bojangles, "I've never seen anything like it! You've rescued Princess Belle's tail and captured the fox too!"

By the time the fox had come round, groaning, he was surprised to find himself tied up with vines and leaves and being rolled by an army of rabbits back towards the wood. As they neared the field of carrot tops they had started from, more and more rabbits had joined their procession, all singing the name of Mr Pip. Little Pip had never known anything like it! He had once been given a little treat by his people for learning how to use his rabbit litter properly. But he had never been the hero of the day before.

As the procession came to a halt, Princess Belle stepped forward to meet them. Mr Bojangles described the what had happened during their adventure and the Princess thanked them both. Mr Pip handed back the Princess's tail and she disappeared with her rabbits-in-waiting -- presumably to fix it back on again.

Chapter Six -- Tupenny's Hero

The rest of the day turned into a celebration of Pip and Mr Bojangles' adventure with the fox. The Princess returned to join the festivities with her tail firmly back in place. As Mr Pip began his forty-second retelling of the whole escapade, Tupenny appeared from the crowd of celebrating rabbits.

Mr Pip wasn't sure if Tupenny had heard about how things had turned out but then she shouted, "Mr Pip!" she cried, "You're a hero throughout rabbit-dom!"

If Mr Pip's black and white whiskers hadn't been so thick and fluffy, Tupenny would have seen him blush.

Mr Bojangles was telling everybody that Pip was the bravest rabbit he had ever met, and that he hadn't even shouted for Mr Bojangles' help, he'd just delivered the fox to the bottom of Stair Mountain all trussed up like a deck-chair!

The hustle and bustle continued until Pip heard a very dramatic, "Ahem!" from behind him.

The chatter of rabbit-talk subsided and a little clearing appeared with Tupenny at the middle. Mr Pip knew that Tupenny's 'Ahem' usually meant the beginning of another Bunlaw rhyme, but these were usually lessons in basic knowledge that it seemed everybody but Mr Pip was familiar with. Pip couldn't believe that Tupenny was going to launch into one now -- was she going to lecture every rabbit here? Even the Princess?!

"A-HEM!" repeated Tupenny, a little more insistently this time. The final murmurs and chatters were silenced.

"At the request of Princess Belle, a new Bunlaw rhyme has been commissioned so that baby rabbits will never forget the bravery of our new friend Sir Pipkins of the Cupboard."

Mr Pip was just about to look around to see who Tupenny was talking about when Princess Belle walked towards him.

"S-s-sir Pipkins?" he mouthed, with a puzzled expression.

Princess Belle smiled. "It's you Mr Pip. You shall be known as Sir Pipkins of the Cupboard. Our brave rabbit from James Gorge."

And with that, she kissed Mr Pip on the top of his furry head and said,
"Arise Sir Pipkins of the Cupboard, Protector of Tails and Champion of
Foxes."

A huge hurrah went up from the surrounding crowd and, as silence fell
again, Tupenny gave third and final, "A-hem!" before launching into:

*A black and white bunny, new to our heaven,
Came and protected us from a fox's deception,
Sir Pipkins of the Cupboard, from the place James Gorge,
Defended our Princess, once tail-less and sore,
A sly fox stole in and stole off with her cotton,
He was cruel and most devious, had a core that was rotten,
But Pipkins was braver, and had a cleverer plan,
To bite on his tail and bound him up where he lands,
With a fox that was beaten, Mr Pip won the day,
And the fox was rolled home and sent far away,
Mr Pip was our hero, our black and white squire,
And long will we sing his name, louder and higher,
Pipkins the hero, our newly found friend,
Defended the princess, our friend till the end,
Pipkins our dear friend, whenever he feels,*

Will be welcome in cupboards from the skies to the seas.

Mr Pip couldn't believe it. He had only wanted to see what was behind the ironing pile, but now it seemed that he was the hero of rabbit-dom!

Ever the modest rabbit, Pip thanked everybody and tried to say that it was really nothing and that any young rabbit would have done exactly the same, but nobody would let Pip's modesty get in the way of their admiration for the biggest hero they had had since a famous rabbit had scared off a wolf many years ago by pulling a face just like a gorilla.

Even Toofpeg the grumpy rabbit came over and said, "Well done young rabbit," before hopping off to scold some baby rabbits who seemed to be enjoying themselves a little too much and were pulling faces that looked like impressions of Toofpeg in a very bad mood.

Eventually, when Pip had spoken to every rabbit present, he finally found his way back to Tupenny.

"It'll begin to get dark soon," she said, "And then we all start to find our ways home."

"How do we do that?" asked Pip.

"Once darkness has fallen," said Tupenny, "Close your eyes and begin walking forwards. The cupboard knows where you belong and before long, you'll find yourself pushing out into the place you came from.

Chapter Seven -- Bad Mr Pip!

As Darkness began to fall, a group of rabbits joined forces to roll the fox out of the magic cupboard. Before long, the fox emerged from a bush and plopped into a muddy ditch in a field near his home. It was some hours before one of his friends found him and nibbled him free from the leaves and vines that bound him up. And until he was found, the fox had to sit, shivering and sniffing in a big dirty puddle.

"Atchoo!" he snorted, every few minutes, and it was his loud sneezing that eventually brought him to the attention of another fox.

Back in the magic cupboard, the rabbits were all saying their goodbyes before they went back to their hutches and warrens. They all rubbed noses affectionately and promised to come back as soon as they could.

Their goodbyes all said, Pip watched as one rabbit after another closed their eyes and began walking in different directions. Pip was waiting for them all to walk into each other but instead, one by one, they began to disappear. Tupenny was one of the last to leave and seemed to have saved an extra affectionate nose-rub for Mr Pip.

"Come back soon Mr Pip," she said. Then, she too, was gone.

Before long, Mr Pip was all alone.

"Oh well, here goes," he said, to no-one in particular, and began walking, his eyes tightly shut.

Within a few steps, he felt something brushing against his face. Opening his eyes, Pip could see the familiar shadowy outline of the laundry basket. He pushed on further...

"Come ON Mr Pip!" he could hear, from a voice that didn't sound very happy at all!

"MI-STER PIP!" The voice was getting louder, and crosser as he drew closer.

Before he could push clear of the final pile of clothes a huge hand appeared from above and grabbed the scruff of his neck.

"Got him, the little tinker!" said a voice. It was James and George's mummy.

Mr Pip felt himself being lifted into the air. He opened his eyes, but all was still black. Mr Pip couldn't see a thing. He had gone blind! What was he going to do?

Suddenly, light flooded back into his eyes and Mr Pip saw that James and George's mummy was holding him high in front of her face. Above his head he could see something move. Pip strained his eyes to look up and saw that he was wearing a pair of James' underpants on his head. He must have pushed his head inside it as he tried to force his way out of the magic cupboard. That's what must have caused everything to stay black even after he had emerged from the cupboard. Mr Pip must have looked a ridiculous sight, emerging from a cupboard full of laundry with underpants on his head!

"Bad Mr Pip!" said James and George's mummy, "You've been in that cupboard for over FIVE minutes! Bad Pip!"

"But Mummy," said Mr Pip, "I was in the Magic Cupboard and I met Tupenny and lots of other rabbits in there, and me and Mr Bojangles had to go on an adventure to rescue the Princess's tail from the fox, but it was alright, because we captured the fox, and they made me a knight and

sang songs about me..." but even as he began speaking, Pip could only hear a "Tut, tut, tut, tut, tut," noise coming from his front teeth.

"Bedtime for bad rabbits," said the voice in front of him and the big hands carried Mr Pip out to his hutch in the back garden. In went Mr Pip and the door was shut behind him.

Before turning to go indoors, James and George's mummy pushed a couple of fresh carrot tops into Mr Pip's cage and stroked him on the head. "Mummy gets ever so cross when she can't catch you Mr Pip, you must try to come when you are called... anything could have happened to you in the cupboard... something could have fallen on you or anything!"

Mr Pip nuzzled her fingers and turned to go to his own bed. As he snuggled down on his straw, he felt a little breeze coming from inside his hutch.

He sniffed the air and tried to tell where it was coming from. It only lasted for a few seconds, but on the breeze he could have sworn that he heard Tupenny's voice saying, "Night, night, Mr Pip."

The lights in the big house went out and all around was in darkness, then Sir Pipkins of the Cupboard snuggled down for a long and dreamy sleep.

The End