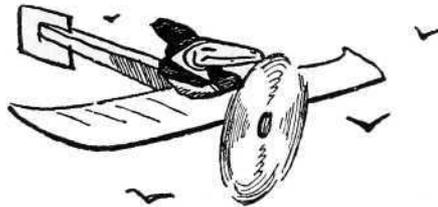


CROCODILE

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF K. CHVKOVSKY



WITH THE
ORIGINAL RUSSIAN
ILLUSTRATIONS



TRANSLATED BY BABETTE DEVTSCH

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CROCODILE I

Once a haughty Crocodile left his home upon the Nile,
To go strolling off in style on the Av-e-nue.
He could smoke and he could speak Turkish in a perfect streak,
(And he did it once a week)
This most haughty, green and warty, very sporty Crocodile.



He never smiled or bowed, though he gathered quite a crowd.
They laughed at every feature of the creature, long and loud.
Then a dog, not a polite one, but a very quick-to-bite one,
Up and bit the Crocodile who walked along so proud.



The Crocodile without a smile observed the crowd that followed him,
Beheld the dog and swallowed him, all in a single piece!
The crowd that had been curious grew suddenly quite furious.
They shouted: "Hold him! Tie him up!" They called for the police.



To a trolley car he dashed. Everybody was abashed.
And they hurried and they scurried in a flurry of dismay.
"How voracious! How audacious! Zounds! Adzooks!" and likewise
"Gracious!"
They exclaimed and ran away.



Quickly a policeman ran to the scene,—a peaceful man:
"Crocodiles can't take the air on a public thorofare!"
With a smile the Crocodile gulped the officer of the law
And his night-stick AND his boots—
They slid smooth as sugared fruits into that enormous maw.



Everybody quaked and quivered, everybody shook and shivered.

Only One didn't quake, only One didn't shake:

Ready to fell any foe at a stroke, VANYA VASSILCHIKOV stood like an oak!

He's a fellow you can't spank—he

Holds a sword and not a hanky.

Yea, the hero of my verse walks abroad without a nurse!



Quoth he: "You wretch! You monster vile!
You bad man-eating Crocodile!
I draw my wooden sword to slice your horrid head off in a trice!"



Trembling with fright, the Crocodile cried:
"Vanya, take pity upon my old hide!
Let me go home
to my sweet little dears,
I'll give you a cake
big as elephants' ears,"
The Crocodile promised with
Crocodile tears.

But said Vanya in reply:
"Wicked beast, prepare to die!
Not the least *bit* of pity I can
Feel for a monster who
Ate up a man !"

Cried the Crocodile: "Oh wait!
Surely it is not too late!
I'll return imme-di-ate-ly
All that I so rashly ate!"



As he spoke he gave a choke.
The policeman from his throat
Issued forth alive and well—he
Hadn't even mussed his coat
In the Crocodile's big belly.



Once again the Crocodile stretched his jaws about a mile,—
Bless my soul! Hale and whole,
With a jounce, Fido
Bounced!



Trumpet and drum, bugle and fife!
You never heard such a noise in your life!
And the town in jubilation
Thunders forth its approbation,
Fires salvoes in ovation.

All the citizens turn out.
"Vanya, the brave!" they shout.
All the town brags, hurrah!
Fido's tail wags, hurrah!
Banners and flags, hurrah!
Merrily wave.

To reward him now there comes a
Hundred pounds of sugar plums, a
Hundred pounds of lollipops, a
Hundred pounds of chocolate-drops,
Luscious grapes by tons and tons,
Waffles, apple-tarts and buns,
And—you'll think it was a dream—
A thousand portions of ice-cream!



But the monster in disgrace
They have hustled from the place.
Speedily he hopped a plane,
Rushing like a hurricane
Through the air and didn't dare
Ever to look back again.
'Till he landed like a shot
In a far and distant spot.
AFRICA was written on it
In big letters burning hot.

With a jump the Crocodile
Landed plump! in the Nile.
And he settled with a thud in the mud
where his spouse
Like a good and kind Mamma deep in
darksome Africa
Was caring for their babies and neatly
keeping house.



II

Right away his wife begins in accents sad:
"Oh, the babies drove me mad, they were so bad!
First Kokoshka slapped Leloshka, the poor dear,
Then Leloshka boxed Kokoshka on the ear.
And Totoshka had an awful tummy-ache
From a samovar he swallowed by mistake!"
"The samovar is gone! Oh, deary me,
Without my samovar I can't have tea!"

Then at the door
There WAS a din
As birds and beasts
Came trooping in.

The elephants
The lionesses,
The pythons and
The pythonesses,

The kangaroo, the turtle too,
The donkeys
And the slinky coon,
The monkeys and the
Big
Baboon.

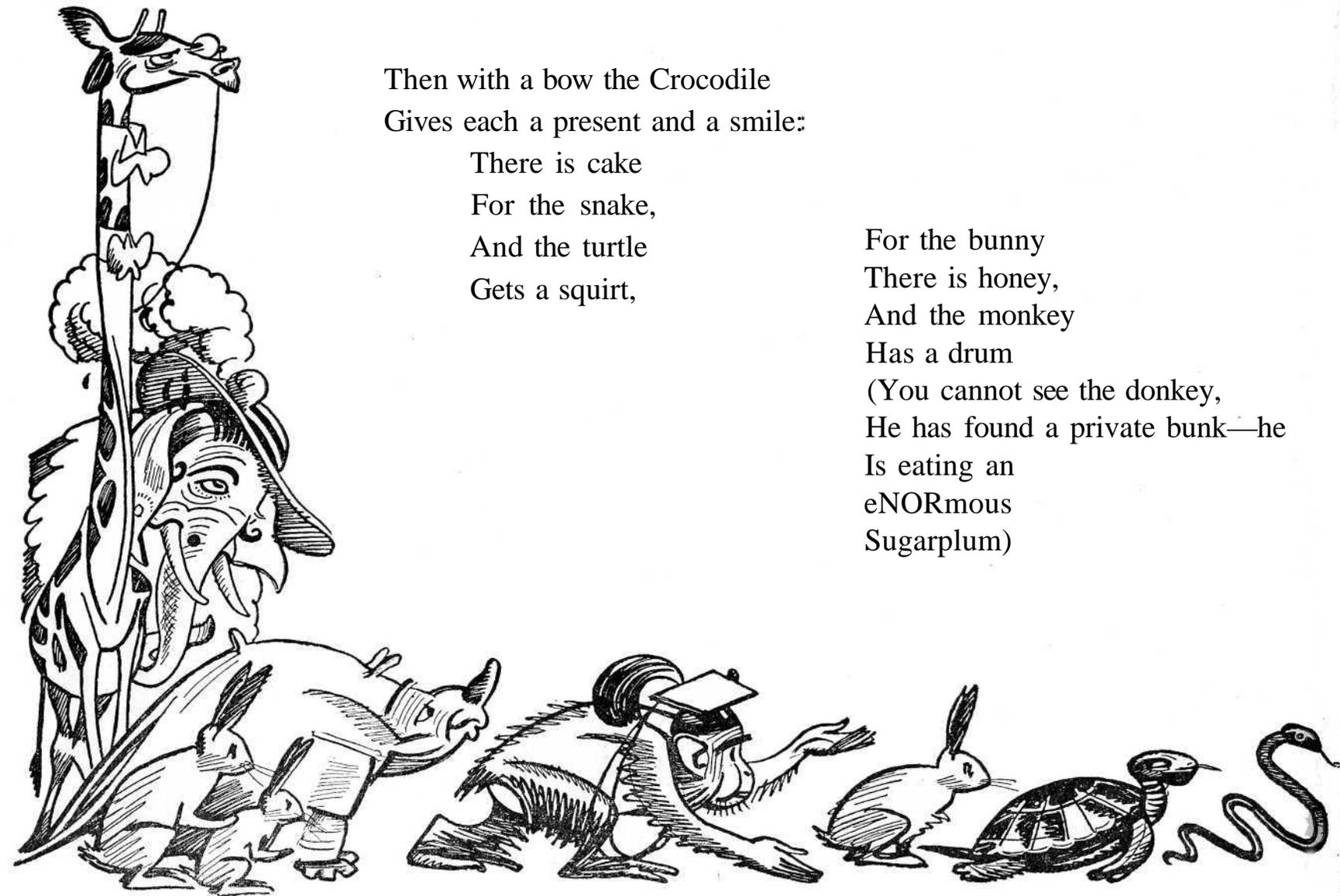
None of them more elegant
Than fat Mrs. Elephant,
And as for roomy Mrs. Rhino—
No one had a face so fine-O!
And in stalked the tall Giraffe
Like a walking telegraph.

All the uncles, aunts, and cousins,
Family friends by scores and dozens.

Then with a bow the Crocodile
Gives each a present and a smile:

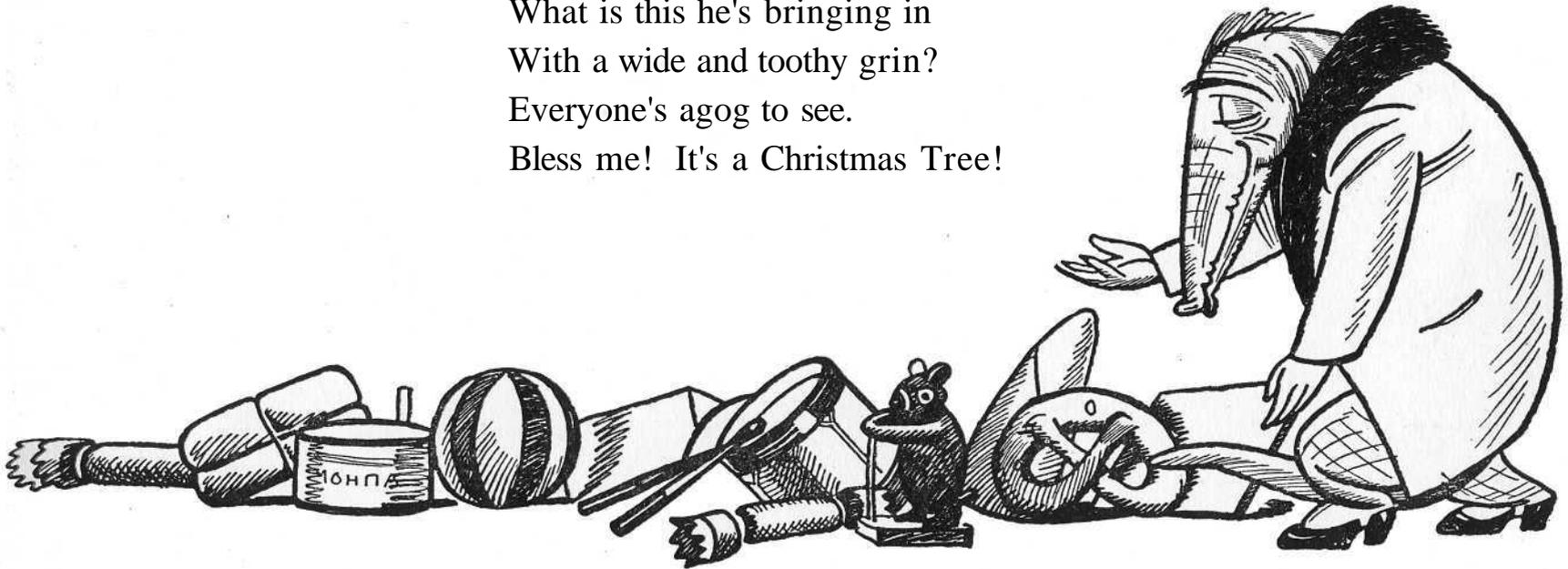
There is cake
For the snake,
And the turtle
Gets a squirt,

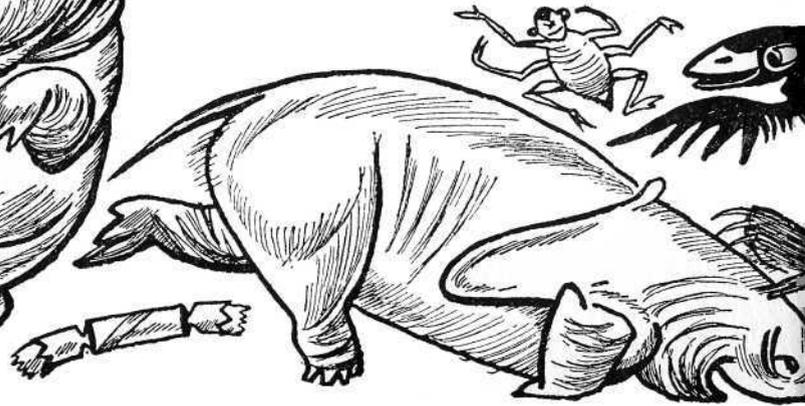
For the bunny
There is honey,
And the monkey
Has a drum
(You cannot see the donkey,
He has found a private bunk—he
Is eating an
eNORMous
Sugarplum)



Then Kokoshka and Leloshka
Cry: "Oh what a bad Papashka!"
"Please," said Papa Crocodile,
"Pardon me a little while.
There is something I must do

I have not attended to."
What is this he's bringing in
With a wide and toothy grin?
Everyone's agog to see.
Bless me! It's a Christmas Tree!



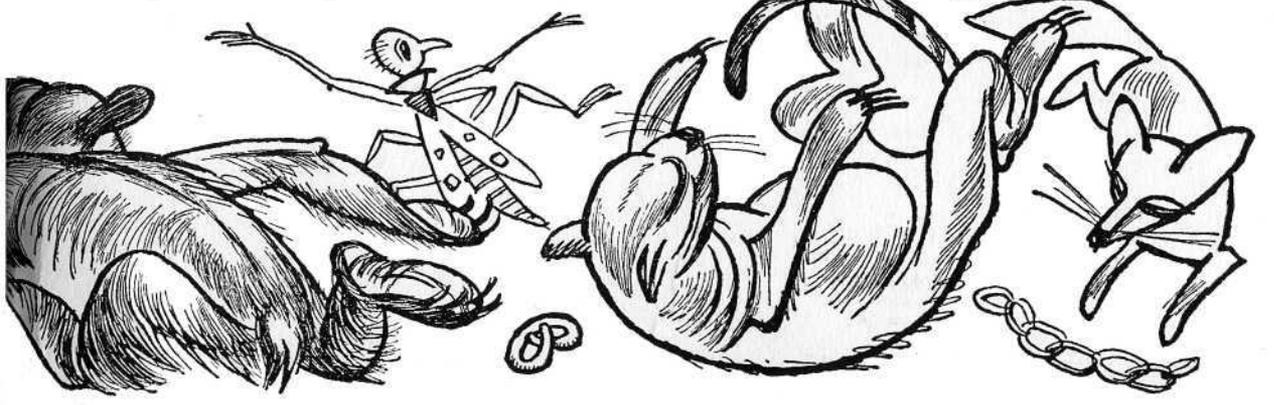


Now the lion and the fox
And the husky water-ox
Joining paws, commence to dance
Round the tree with leap and prance
Till they all begin to pant
Specially the Elephant.



The mosquitoes are athrill
With the butterflies' quadrille,
And the rabbit and the cricket
Do a Cakewalk in the thicket,
While the crabs and fishes flee
To a hornpipe through the sea.

While the Tiger all alone
Plays upon a saxophone.





Hark! The monkeys' drumming
Sets all ears athrumming:
Rum-ta-tum! Dum-da-dum!
Hippopotamus is coming!
"What!

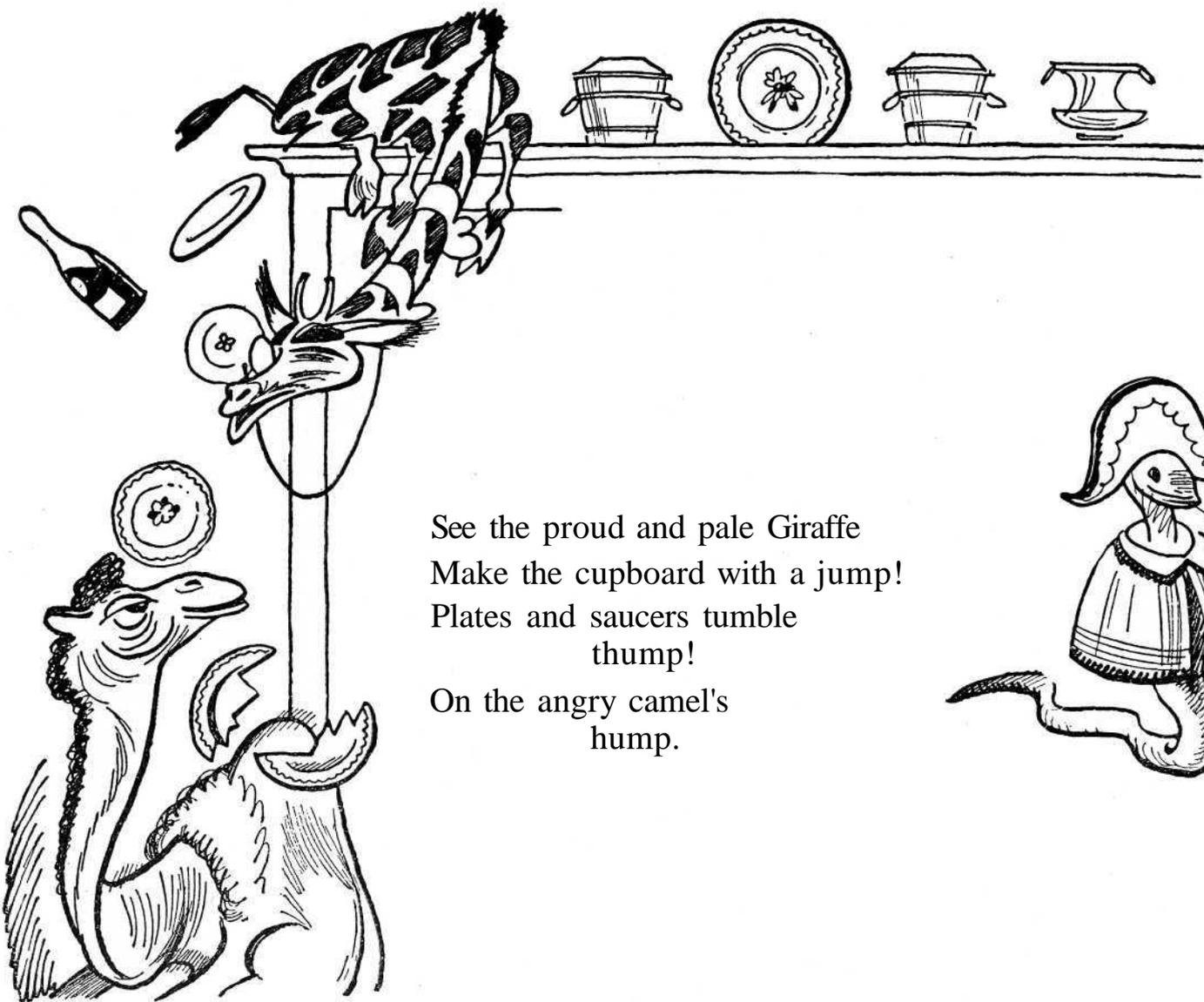


He's coming
Here to us?
Good King
Hippo-
Potamus?"

How they grunt and they growl,
How they bellow, how they howl,
Mooing, mewling, barking, bawling,
Roaring, cackling, caterwauling!

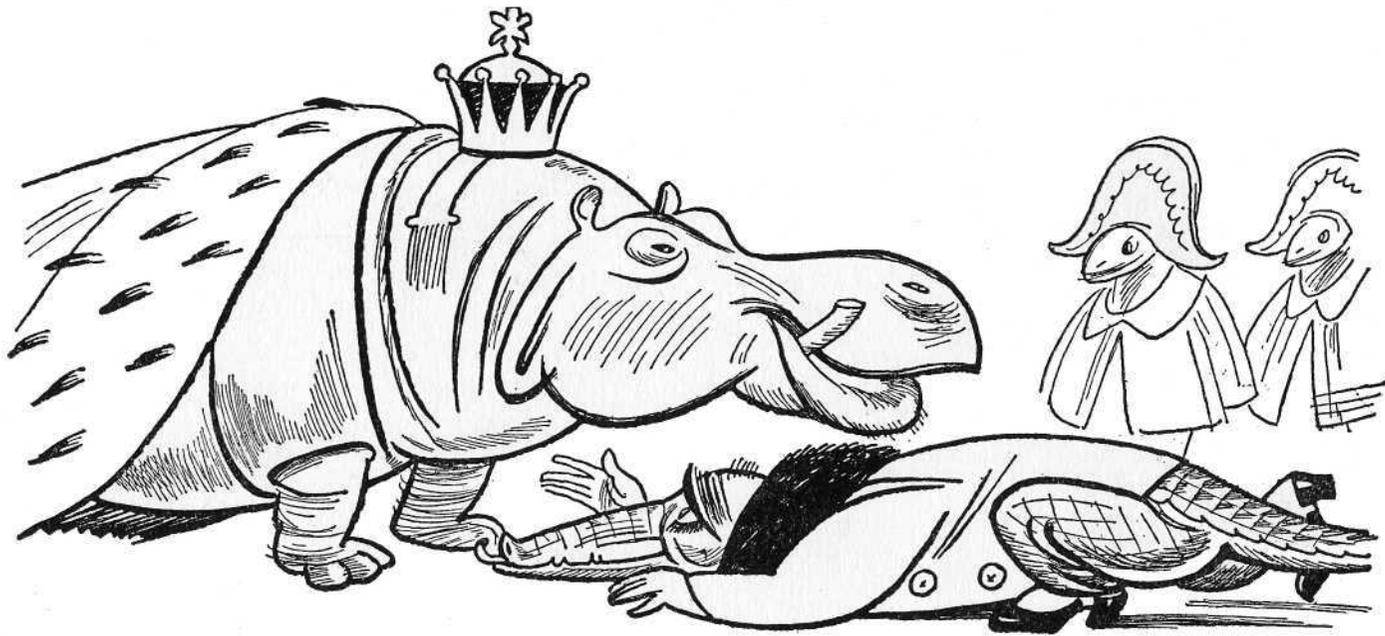


Mama Crocodile, with many "Ah-s" and "Oh-s"
Runs at once to put some powder on her nose.
Papa Crocodile, delighted, is so mightily excited
That he swallows up his napkin and he wriggles all his toes.



See the proud and pale Giraffe
Make the cupboard with a jump!
Plates and saucers tumble
thump!
On the angry camel's
hump.





The Crocodile is quick to greet the Monarch and to kiss his feet.
Then says King Hippopotamus: "Good Crocodile, relate to us
All that you saw on foreign shores.
I'll doze awhile. Don't mind my snores."

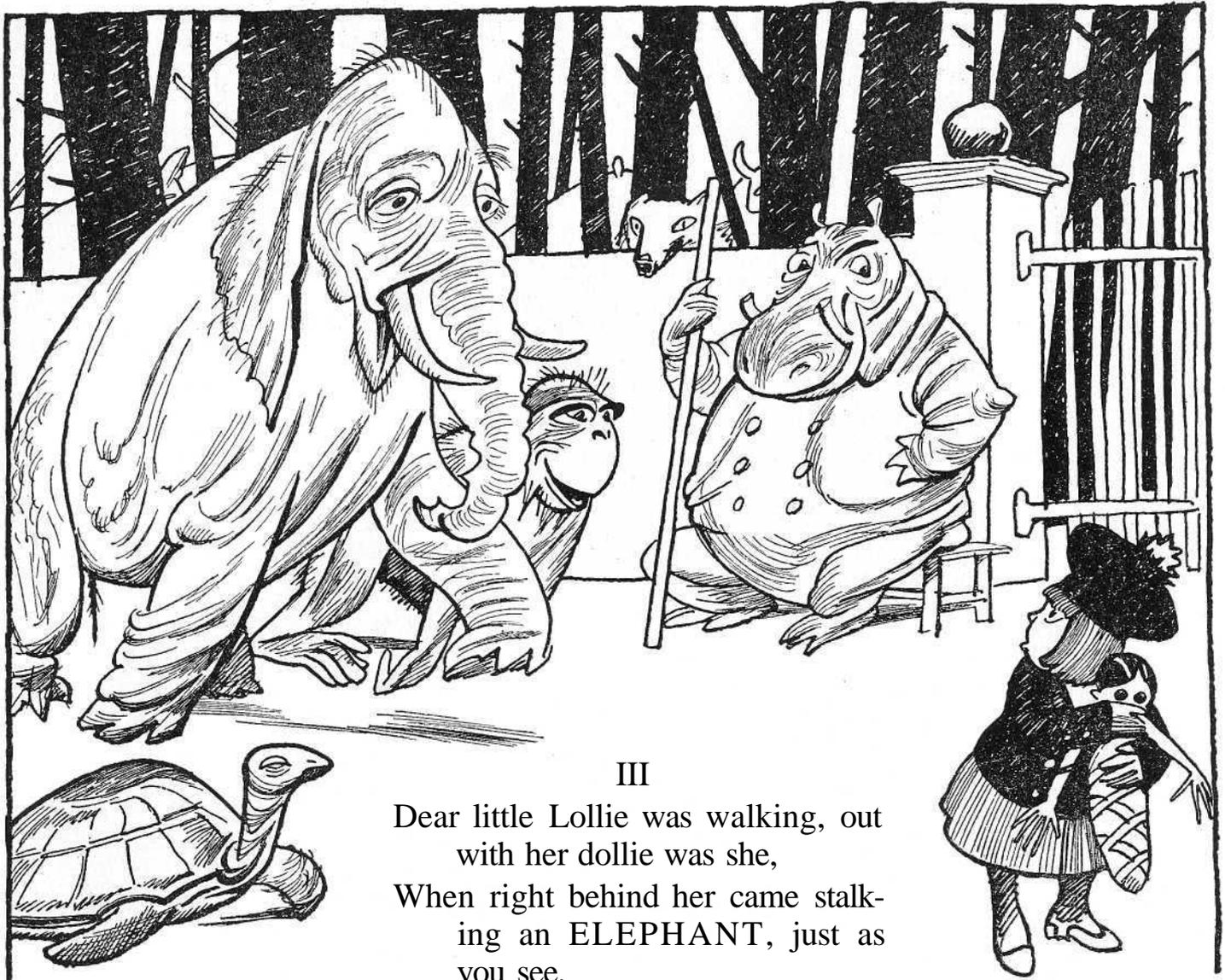
The Crocodile with tears replied:
"Sire, you will be horrified!
A monster named Vassilchikov
Was there,—he tried to kill me off.
Nay, worse, my heart nigh broke in two
To see a place that's called the Zoo!



There our brothers, uncles, aunts,
Lions, tigers, elephants,
Pine behind the bars in cages.
Babies laugh to see their rages!
Could a greater insult be?
Let us go and set them free!



With tearful eye and bristling hide:
"On to the Zoo!" the creatures cried.
"We'll march by day, we'll march by night.
"We'll roar and rage and butt and bite
(For babies' bones are good to crunch).
We'll free our friends, and then have lunch."



III

Dear little Lollie was walking, out
with her dollie was she,
When right behind her came stalk-
ing an ELEPHANT, just as
you see.

Hippo, hyena and tiger
Bellow and roar in her ears,
Beasts from the Nile and the Niger
Scare little Lollie to tears.
Lollie runs off with her dollie,
Chased by a villainous ape.
Now he has snatched up our Lollie.
How will she ever escape?
There at the window her mother
Waits for poor Lollie in vain,
Saying: "Now something or other
Is keeping my Lollie again!"
Oh deary me, how it thunders!
No! It's the lions that roar!
What are they doing, she wonders,
Growling in front of her door?

Who from the cruel claws
And from the grinning jaws
And from the hairy paws
Will save our Lollie?

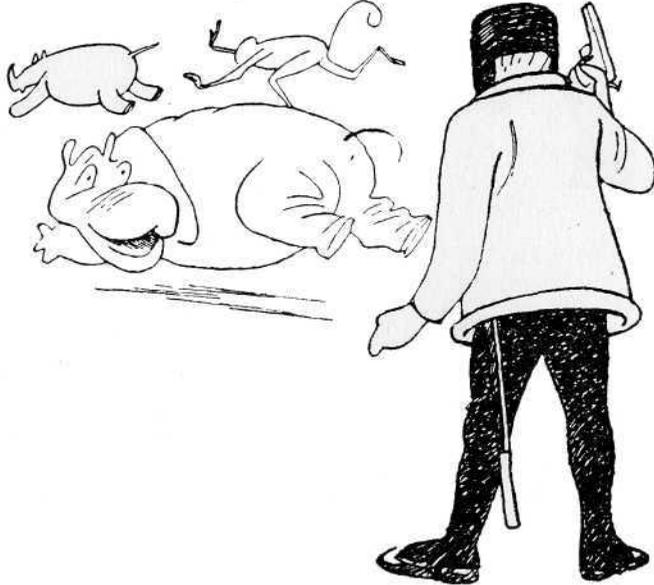
Only one heart is tough,
Valiant and brave enough—
Vanya Vassilchikov
Will fire a volley.

Lions and elephants,
Tigers in striped pants,
Give him a wicked glance,
Bellow and taunt him.

Vanya, the valorous,
Makes not the slightest fuss,
Bold as a blunderbuss,
Nothing can daunt him.



He lets them growl and howl and roar
As though he'd heard it all before.
He takes his little pistol out
And puts the animals to rout.
Bing-bang! the rhino runs away,
He simply doesn't dare to stay.
Bing-bang! the monkey's tail grows dim,
The quaking hippo follows him.
And soon the whole wild horde is off,



Dispatched by bold Vassilchikov.
And so once more, you understand,
Vanya has saved his native land.
Again, as loud the cheers resound,
They bring him chocolate by the pound.
But where is Lollie? While they cheered,
The little darling disappeared.
What if—horrific thought and vile!—
She's eaten by the Crocodile?



Vanya caught up with the creatures:
"Give back my Lollie to me!"
But with a grin on their features,
"Wait," they replied, "we shall see.

Though you are Lollie's defender,
You have made prisoners, too;
Lollie we'll never surrender
Till *they* come out of the Zoo.

We can be wild in our rages,
Better attend to our plea:
Open the doors of the cages,
Set our dear relatives free.

Give back her whelps to the tiger,
Let the fox go to her den,—
We of the Nile and the Niger
Will not molest you again.

Let the poor jackal be jolly,
Unchain the lions and bears,
Then we'll surrender your Lollie,
And we'll go back to our lairs.



"A happy notion—very!"
Cried Vanya. "Let's be merry!
The hatchet we will bury,
Rejoice, my friends, because
I'll take the bars and bash them,
I'll break the chains and smash them,
The cages I will crash them,
And you shall sheathe your claws.
Come, bears and boars and foxes,
And monks and water-oxes,
In party pumps and sockses,
Come dance and shake your paws!"



What felicity and joy!
None to bite or to annoy!
When the tigress strolls this way
Lollie runs to say good-day.
As for Vanya, all declare
He's a lad beyond compare.

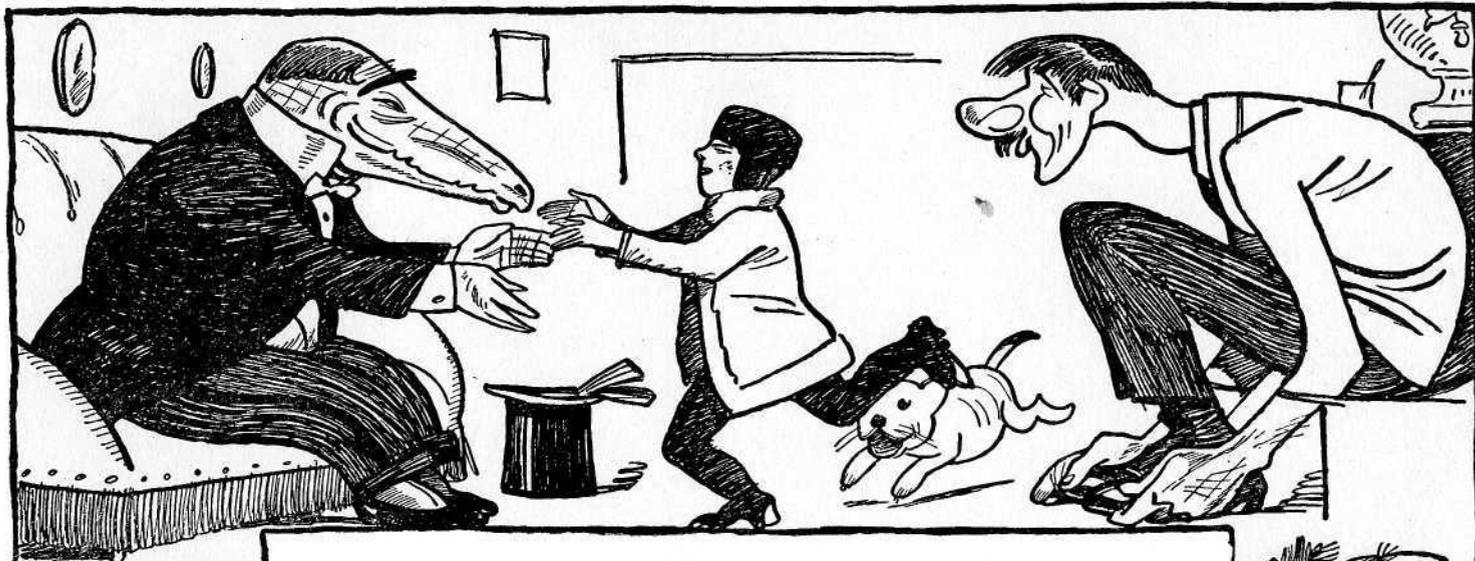
This is the glorious end of my tale:
Here is our Lollikins, hearty and hale,
Eating a bonbon she got from the bear:
Bruin has always some sweetings to share.

All of the animals out in the park
Play with the children until it is dark.
When it is sunny you'll see them out boating,
Catching a crab or just quietly floating.

After their suppers the children at night
Call Uncle Wolf in to put out the light.

He'll sit by the bed—he's so kind and so good—
And tell them the story of Red-Riding-Hood!





The last is quite the best of all:
The Crocodile went out to call,—

He sat upon the parlor chair
O MOST polite and debonair!

Then in ran Vanya as you see
As out of breath as he could be

And rushed to hug the Crocodile,
Who took it with a charming smile.

If you should ever chance to meet him
You'll know the proper way to greet him!

