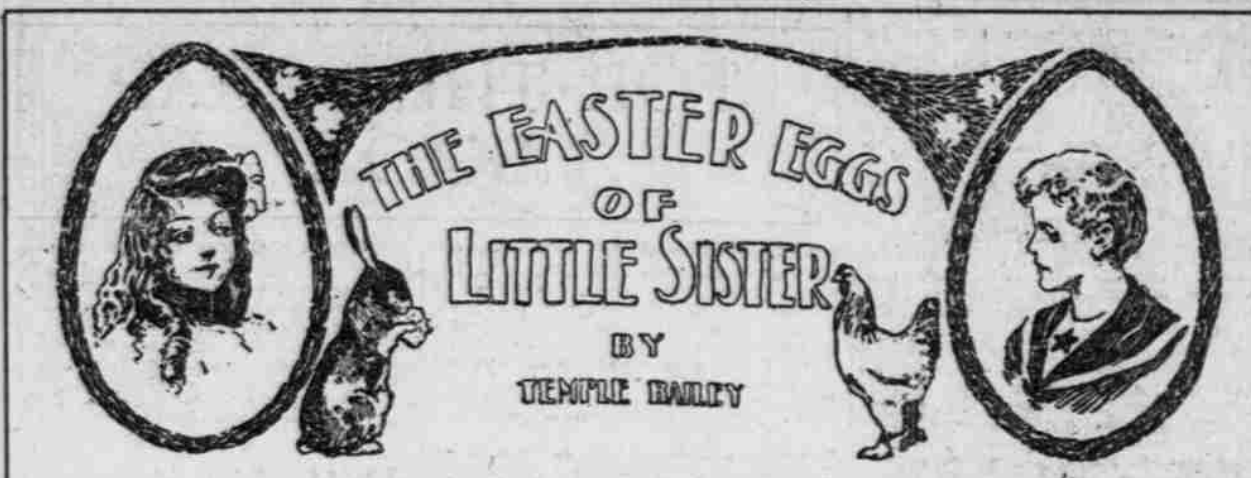




THE EASTER EGGS OF LITTLE SISTER BY TEMPLE DAWLEY

THEY are just hens' eggs," said Buster, topically.

"No, no, Buster, Easter eggs," Little Sister showed them proudly—one pin, one green and one mottled.

"Where'd you find them?" asked Buster.

"There," and Little Sister pointed to a corner of the porch.

Buster pulled the nest of hay to pieces.

"Uncle Fred put them there," he affirmed.

"Uncle Fred did not," Little Sister's eyes were moist, so Buster stopped teasing.

They sat down on the porch and rolled the eggs to each other. The gray kitten hit the pink egg with her paw and knocked it off the porch with a crash.

Little Sister's face gathered into puckers, but she cleared as Buster suggested, "Let's eat it."

So they shared it. Buster and Little Sister and the kitten—the kitten coming for certain dived portions of the white, about which Buster, with 9-year-old wisdom, had his doubts.

"Wabbit's eggs," went on Little Sister, continuing the interrupted argument. Her face had acquired by this time a mustache of yellow, which gave her a rakish air.

"Who told you that?" asked Buster, unbelieving still.

"Uncle Fred. An' when the little wabbit went to get 'em they just stuck their ears up, and the shells go 'bo'."

Little Sister illustrated dramatically with a clasp of her hands.

"Huh," said Buster, "they just don't. Bunnikins never lay an egg, Bunnikins."

Bunnikins was the children's pet rabbit.

"Let's go and show him our eggs," suggested Little Sister.

So they went down the steps and across the green lawn to the edge of the garden, where Bunnikins lived in a very comfortable little house.

Bunnikins was eating some very green and very tender lettuce, but as the children approached he hunched himself so close to the side of his hut, working his little nose with an inquiring air.

Little Sister took the mottled egg out of her basket and held it up. "Look, Bunnikins," she said, and Bunnikins looked at the egg, and then at Little Sister, and then he winked deliberately.

"Now, what does he mean by that?" said Buster.

Again Bunnikins winked, this time bringing the thin white lid entirely over his pink eye and popping it open quickly.

"Did you ever lay an egg, Bunnikins?" asked Little Sister, anxiously.

Again, and for the third time Bunnikins winked.

Buster began to weaken.

"Do you suppose he knows anything about it?" he asked Little Sister.

"Of course he does," said that small woman, triumphantly. "Uncle Fred said so."

But after that third wink they could get nothing out of Bunnikins, for he went back to eat a small and yellow carrot, and would pay no attention to them.

That evening, however, just at dusk, in the hour which the children were allowed to play before bedtime, Buster and Little Sister sat in one corner of the porch, Buster with his soldiers and Little Sister with her doll, when across the lawn a little white figure came hopping, hopping.

"Bunnikins is out again," remarked Buster.

It was one of Bunnikins' favorite pastimes to push open the door of his house and take nightly rambles, and as he did so he pleased.

Instead of going straight for the garden as usual Bunnikins came up close to the porch, and then the two children heard a small, low whisper.

"Come on and find out about the Easter eggs."

"What?" asked Buster, loudly.

And "What?" said Little Sister, in a timid, tiny voice.

"Come on and find out about the Easter eggs," repeated the small voice, and then they saw that it was Bunnikins who was speaking.

"But—" began Buster, but Bunnikins was hopping away from them so rapidly that Buster, full of curiosity, took Little Sister by the hand, and away they ran after the rabbit.

Down the garden path they went, and up the hill beyond, and into the orchard. The peach trees were showing their small pink buds, and the grass was green and tender. Under a gray old apple tree Bunnikins stopped.

"If you will stay here and wait," he said, "I will go to your where the Easter eggs come from."

"I didn't know you could talk, Bunnikins," said Buster.

"There are a great many things you

don't know, Buster," said Bunnikins, and Buster felt very ignorant indeed.

"Rabbits can speak from 6 in the evening until midnight of the night before Easter Sunday," continued Bunnikins, "but as a rule they don't take the trouble."

While Bunnikins talked there was a rustling in the dried grasses along the edge of the fence. Once or twice the children thought they saw a flash of white. Bunnikins left them and went over to the fence, and soon he came out with a large Belgian hare. The two seemed to argue about something, but at last Bunnikins came back to the children.

"You can stay," he said. "Only don't talk."

Then again he went away, and they heard his voice calling.

"Molly Cottontail, Molly Cottontail."

From all the cranberries and nooks of the orchard hundreds of voices took up the cry.

"Molly Cottontail! Molly Cottontail!"

The sound grew louder and louder, until at last a sprightly brown hare bounded out into the orchard, his little white tail showing plainly in the young light of the moon. Instantly she was surrounded by rabbits, wild ones and tame ones, all crowding and pushing and asking questions.

"Now do be still," said Molly Cottontail, and she closed her eyes.

"But Molly, Molly Cottontail, tell us about the hens," shrieked a small maise rabbit, which Buster recognized, as belonging to Teddie Smith of the next farm.

"The hens, my dear Bluette, are all standing on one leg, sound asleep, with their heads under their wings, dreaming. Even the rooster is quiet at last."

"Then we can go now," was the excited question.

"Yes," answered Molly Cottontail, "get in and then—on to the hill."

In a moment every little rabbit was whisked into line, and away they went, hopping and humming down the hill and into the henhouse door.

Several minutes passed and the children talked together in awed tones, and then a little brown head peered out of the henhouse door, and another, and another,

"I'm afraid you won't be able to stay. We have to let them cool before we dare

it was full of cold water, and there was a board set up against it, and up this the rabbits pushed the eggs and dropped them very carefully into the water.

When all were in, they lit the sticks under the kettle and then they sat down to wait.

Bunnikins came over to Buster and Little Sister.

"There's my four pennies in my bank. I'll buy her," he said.

Buster thought of a cherished quarter, saved for a fishing line, but he knew Little Sister's four cents were just as precious to the little girl.

"I'll buy her," he said.

Then he spoke to Soft Paws: "Do you think Master Vandervoort would sell you for a quarter?" he said. "You could live with Bunnikins, and we really feed him very well, and he comes and goes when he likes."

"Or," said Little Soft Paws, rapturously. Her big brown eyes were moist with tears and she trembled with joy.

"I know he will sell me if you ask him. I heard him say he would like to get rid of me," she said.

By this time most of the eggs were painted and they lay in great brilliant piles, of pink and violet and yellow and green and red.

Then the funny procession was formed, and each rabbit began to roll a bright egg down the hill.

Soft Paws was near the end of the line. She looked at Little Sister and Buster with grateful, beseeching eyes, and Little Sister threw her a kiss.

"We won't forget, 'little Soft Paws,'" she cried.

When the rabbits reached the long, white road the children could see them rolling, rolling, the young rabbits having great sport, and the older ones proceeding with great solemnity.

As they came to a turn in the road there was a shriek, and the sound of a smash.

Bunnikins had broken her green egg," shouted Mr. Jackrabbits.

"Oh, Molly, Molly Cottontail," laughed all the rabbits, and Bunnikins rolled another green one down to her, and the procession again started on its way.

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DOWN THE HILL

Thinking to Bunnikins.

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eggs," said Sir Sable in a worried way.

"It is so easy in the seeds and there are no red flowers to be had."

"There are some fine red tulips in old Master Vandervoort's garden beds," said a shabby little lap-eared rabbit.

Sir Sable looked at her kindly. "And he should grow lettuce for you, Soft Paws," he said. "It would punish him well to have his tulips taken, for he is not good to you."

So several rabbits went in the direction of Master Vandervoort's garden, while others brought ferns, and violets, and arbutus, and dandelions. These were arranged in piles, and four rabbits, each with a brush and palette, grouped themselves about each pile and began to paint the eggs at a great rate.

When Soft Paws came back with the tulips she sat near Buster and Little Sister, and they watched her put on the red color with broad, sure strokes.

"Oh, dear," said Little Soft Paws to the rabbit who sat next to her. "I wish I did not have to go back tomorrow morning."

"Do you have a very hard time?" asked the green and white rabbit.

"Yes," he looks me up, and sometimes for days I don't have anything but dry bread, and if it had not been for dear Sir Sable I should have starved."

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