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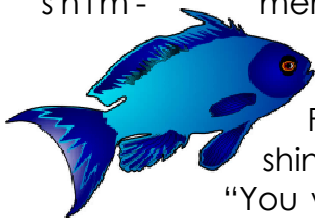
The Rainbow Fish

by Marcus Pfister



A long way out in the deep blue sea there lived a fish. Not just an ordinary fish, but the most beautiful fish in the entire ocean. His scales were every shade of blue and green and purple, with sparkling silver scales among them.

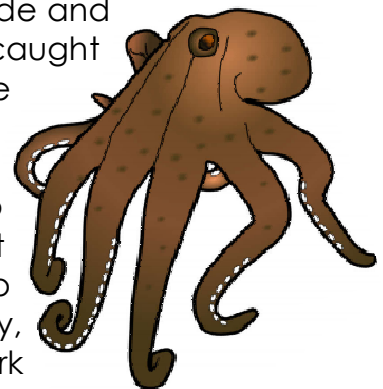
The other fish were amazed at his beauty. They called him Rainbow Fish. "Come on, Rainbow Fish," they would call. "Come and play with us!" But the Rainbow Fish would just glide past, proud and silent, letting his scales shimmer.



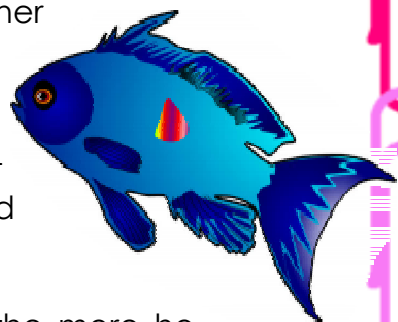
One day, a little blue fish followed after him. "Rainbow Fish," he called, "wait for me! Please give me one of your shiny scales. They are so wonderful, and you have so many." "You want me to give you one of my special scales? Who do you think you are?" cried the Rainbow Fish. "Get away from me!" Shocked, the little blue fish swam away. He was so upset; he told all his friends what had happened. From then on, no one would have anything to do with the Rainbow Fish. They turned away when he swam by.

What good were the dazzling, shimmering scales with no one to admire them? Now he was the loneliest fish in the entire ocean. One day he poured out his troubles to the starfish. "I really am beautiful. Why doesn't anybody like me?" "I can't answer that for you," said the starfish. "But if you go beyond the coral reef to a deep cave you will find the wise octopus. Maybe she can help you."

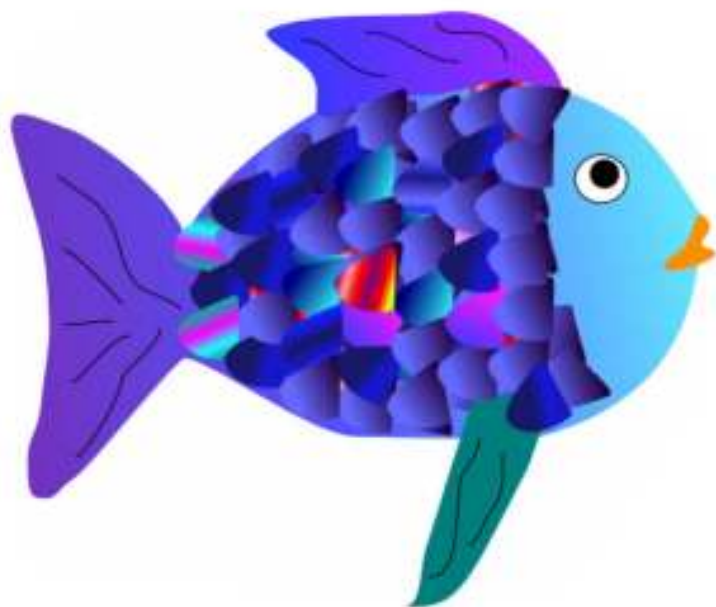
The Rainbow Fish found the cave. It was very dark inside and he couldn't see anything. Then suddenly two eyes caught him in their glare and the octopus emerged from the darkness. "I have been waiting for you," said the octopus with a deep voice. "The waves have told me your story. This is my advice. Give a glittering scale to each of the other fish. You will no longer be the most beautiful fish in the sea, but you will discover how to be happy." "I can't..." the Rainbow Fish started to say, but the octopus had already disappeared into a dark cloud of ink.



Give away my scales? My beautiful shining scales? Never. How could I ever be happy without them? Suddenly he felt the light touch of a fin. The little blue fish was back! "Rainbow Fish, please, don't be angry. I just want one little scale." The Rainbow Fish wavered. Only one very very small shimmery scale, he thought. Well maybe I wouldn't miss just one. Carefully the Rainbow Fish pulled out the smallest scale and gave it to the little fish. "Thank you! Thank you very much!" The little blue fish bubbled playfully, as he tucked the shiny scale in among his blue ones. A rather peculiar feeling came over the Rainbow Fish. For a long time he watched the little blue fish swim back and forth with his new scale glittering in the water. The little blue fish whizzed through the ocean with his scale flashing, so it didn't take long before the Rainbow Fish was surrounded by the other fish. Everyone wanted a glittering scale.



The Rainbow Fish shared his scales left and right. And the more he gave away, the more delighted he became. When the water around him filled with glimmering scales, he at last felt at home among the other fish. Finally the Rainbow Fish had only one shining scale left. His most prized possessions had been given away, yet he was very happy. "Come on Rainbow Fish," they called. "Come and play with us!" "Here I come," said the Rainbow Fish and happy as a splash, he swam off to join his friends.



That Book Woman by Heather Henson

My folks and me we live way up as up can get. So high we hardly sight a soul—'cept hawks, a-winging in the sky and critters hid among the trees.

My name is Cal, and I am not the first one nor the least one neither. But I am the oldest boy, and I can help Pap with the plowing and I can fetch the sheep when they take a-wander.

And I can bring the cow home too, come evening-time, which is right handy, seeing as how my sister Lark would keep her nose a-twixt the pages of a book daybreak to dusky dark if Mama would allow. The readenest child you ever did see—that's what Pap says.

Not me. I was not born to sit so stoney-still a-staring at some chicken scratch. And I do not fancy it one bit when Lark plays Teacher—the onliest school a jillion miles back down the creek. And even Lark can hardly spread her wings and fly. So now she aims to school us herself. But me, I am no scholar-boy.

That's why I am the first to hear the clippitty-clop and spy the sorrel mare—red as clay. I am the first to know the rider is no man at all, but a lady wearing britches for all the world to see.

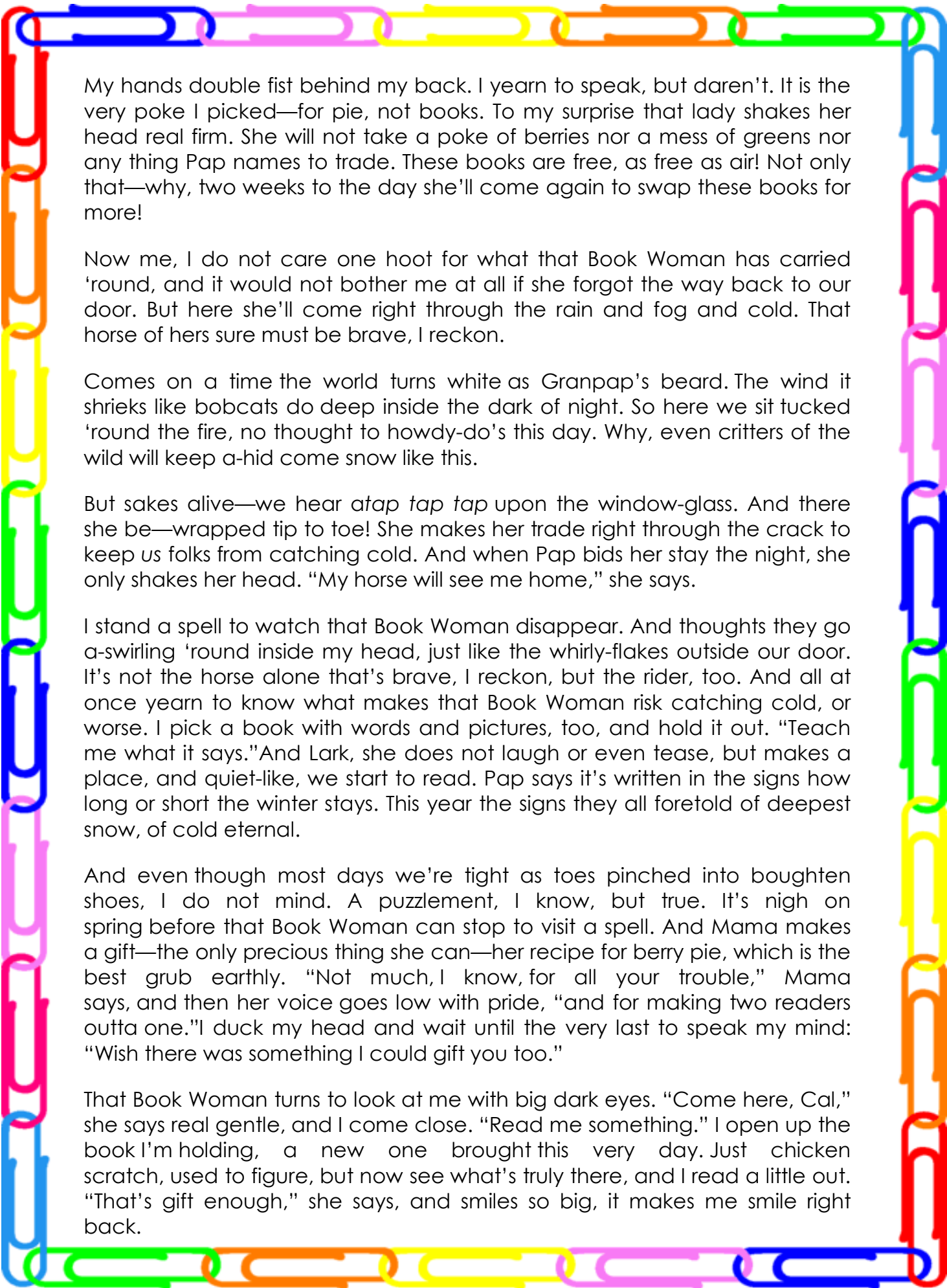
'Course we make that stranger kindly welcome and she's friendly as can be, and after sips of sassy tea she lays her saddlebag upon the table and what spills out might just as well be gold the way Lark's eyes shine penny-bright, the way her hands they won't keep still, reaching out to grab a treasure.



Now what that lady brings it's sure no treasure, not to me, but books! Would you believe? A passel of books she's packed clear up the mountainside! A hard day's ride and all for naught, I reckon. For if she aims to sell her wares just like the tinker-man who travels 'round with pots and pans and such, it's but a plain and simple fact, we have no greenbacks here, no shiny coins to spend. Least-ways not on dumb old books.

Well, Pap he takes one look at Lark and clears his throat. "A trade," he says. "A poke of berries for one book."





My hands double fist behind my back. I yearn to speak, but daren't. It is the very poke I picked—for pie, not books. To my surprise that lady shakes her head real firm. She will not take a poke of berries nor a mess of greens nor any thing Pap names to trade. These books are free, as free as air! Not only that—why, two weeks to the day she'll come again to swap these books for more!

Now me, I do not care one hoot for what that Book Woman has carried 'round, and it would not bother me at all if she forgot the way back to our door. But here she'll come right through the rain and fog and cold. That horse of hers sure must be brave, I reckon.

Comes on a time the world turns white as Granpap's beard. The wind it shrieks like bobcats do deep inside the dark of night. So here we sit tucked 'round the fire, no thought to howdy-do's this day. Why, even critters of the wild will keep a-hid come snow like this.

But sakes alive—we hear *atap tap tap* upon the window-glass. And there she be—wrapped tip to toe! She makes her trade right through the crack to keep us folks from catching cold. And when Pap bids her stay the night, she only shakes her head. "My horse will see me home," she says.

I stand a spell to watch that Book Woman disappear. And thoughts they go a-swirling 'round inside my head, just like the whirly-flakes outside our door. It's not the horse alone that's brave, I reckon, but the rider, too. And all at once yearn to know what makes that Book Woman risk catching cold, or worse. I pick a book with words and pictures, too, and hold it out. "Teach me what it says." And Lark, she does not laugh or even tease, but makes a place, and quiet-like, we start to read. Pap says it's written in the signs how long or short the winter stays. This year the signs they all foretold of deepest snow, of cold eternal.

And even though most days we're tight as toes pinched into boughten shoes, I do not mind. A puzzlement, I know, but true. It's nigh on spring before that Book Woman can stop to visit a spell. And Mama makes a gift—the only precious thing she can—her recipe for berry pie, which is the best grub earthly. "Not much, I know, for all your trouble," Mama says, and then her voice goes low with pride, "and for making two readers outta one." I duck my head and wait until the very last to speak my mind: "Wish there was something I could gift you too."

That Book Woman turns to look at me with big dark eyes. "Come here, Cal," she says real gentle, and I come close. "Read me something." I open up the book I'm holding, a new one brought this very day. Just chicken scratch, used to figure, but now see what's truly there, and I read a little out. "That's gift enough," she says, and smiles so big, it makes me smile right back.



Author's Note:

This story was inspired by the true and courageous work of the Pack Horse Librarians, who were known as "Book Women" in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky. The Pack Horse Library Project was founded in the 1930s as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration in order to bring books to remote regions where there were few schools and no libraries. High in the hills of Kentucky, roads were often just creek beds or rough trails. A Book Woman would travel, by horse or by mule, the same arduous route every two weeks, carrying a load of books—in good weather and in bad. To show their gratitude for what came "free as air," a family might make a gift from what little they had: garden vegetables, wildflowers, berries, or cherished recipes passed down through generations.

While there were a few men among the Pack Horse Librarians, the jobs were mainly filled by women, in a time when most people felt that "a woman's work was in the home." The Book Women were remarkable in their resilience and their dedication. They were paid very little, but they were proud of what they did: bringing the outside world to the people of Appalachia, and sometimes making readers out of those who had never seen much use for "chicken scratch."

In Kentucky, creek beds and trails eventually became roads. Horses and mules gave way to the kind of Bookmobiles that still exist today. All across the country, dedicated librarians continue to bring books to folks who need them.



Joey's Birthday Wish by Matthew Lambert



"If wishes were horses, beggars would ride," Mrs. Parker sighed, after Joey wished for the third time that morning for a new video game.

"What?" Joey asked.

"It's a quotation, Joey."

"What does it mean?" Joey asked again.

"Well, why don't you think about it a while and see if you can figure it out."

"Okay, Mom," Joey called over his shoulder as he ran out the door. "I'm going to Whippoorwill Hill."

Whippoorwill Hill was Joey's favorite place in the whole world. He could see more than a mile in many directions. It was a good place to play and to think. When he reached the top, Joey marveled at the blazing autumn scenery. The forest spread out below in a wild mosaic of crimson, saffron, and amber. As he gazed in awe at the view surrounding him, the ear-piercing shriek of a hawk caught his attention. Joey watched the red-tailed hawk gliding in the stiff breeze. Suddenly, the hawk swooped down to capture some unsuspecting prey.

"I wish I could soar like that hawk," thought Joey.

His mom's words echoed back to him. "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride." What *did* that mean?

During supper, Mrs. Parker said, "Joey, I'm going into the city tomorrow to shop for your birthday dinner. Would you like to come along?" "Sure, Mom," he replied eagerly. Joey loved going into the city — the sights and sounds of a busy place, airplanes overhead, traffic whizzing by, and people hurrying here and there. Joey wished he could live in the city. Once again, he recalled his mother's words, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride."

The next morning dawned bright and clear and crisp. As Joey and his mom approached the city after their long drive, Joey's excitement began to build.

They passed tall buildings, busy shopping centers, and superhighways. Mrs. Parker drove carefully through the city traffic, finally turning into a huge shopping mall. Joey knew that the first stop would be the big toy store. He couldn't wait to see all the toys. He knew that when he blew out the candles on his birthday cake, he would get to make a wish. For as long as he could remember, his birthday wishes had always come true. The brightly colored package that was saved for last was always what he had wished for.

As they entered the toy store, Joey's eyes sparkled. There were trucks and bulldozers, robots and cars, and much, much more. There were so many things he wanted to have. How would he ever make up his mind?

As he started down the last aisle, Joey stopped short. There it was! A bright yellow remote-controlled airplane. It was the most beautiful airplane he had ever seen. Now he knew exactly what he would wish for. When they completed their shopping and began the journey home, Joey couldn't stop thinking about the yellow airplane.



"Oh no!" exclaimed Mrs. Parker. "We've taken a wrong turn." Joey looked out of the window. The tall buildings were still there, but they looked different somehow. Instead of great shopping malls, small cluttered shops lined the streets. Mrs. Parker drove around the block to head back in the right direction. In a parking lot was an old van. A little girl was playing with a ragged doll. A man was standing nearby. He held a sign that said, "HOMELESS. WILL WORK FOR FOOD."

"Mom, do those people live in that van?"

"I'm afraid so, Joey."

"Why?" Joey asked again.

"Well," Mrs. Parker replied, "there could be many reasons. He may have lost his job or been ill."

Joey was silent for the rest of the trip home. He couldn't stop thinking about the homeless people. He had heard about them, but he had never seen any.

The day of his birthday, Joey was up early. Mrs. Parker was busy in the kitchen getting ready for the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who would come later that day. Joey kept thinking about his birthday wish. This time, he would cross his fingers as he blew out the candles. After the birthday dinner of all Joey's favorite foods, the lights were dimmed. Mrs. Parker came out of the kitchen with the birthday cake, candles flickering brightly. Everyone sang "Happy Birthday." Joey leaned over to blow out the candles. As he took a deep breath, he thought again of the homeless family he had seen. Suddenly, Joey knew the meaning of the quote, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride." He thought of the wonderful dinner he had just eaten, the presents waiting to be opened, his cozy room and warm, soft bed. He had never been hungry and never been without a place to live in his whole life.

Then he remembered all of the wishes he had made in the last few days: a new video game, to fly, to live in the city, and especially the big yellow airplane. Joey knew he needed none of these things. How could he have been so selfish? He realized that if all his wishes came true, soon nothing would have any meaning for him. There would be no reason to strive for anything. A wish should be saved for something really special.

Finally, Joey knew exactly what he would wish for. He closed his eyes tightly, crossed his fingers, and made his wish. He took a deep breath and blew out the candles. A slow smile crept across Joey's face. After all, his birthday wishes always came true.





The Gardener by Sarah Stewart

*"I've tried to remember everything you ever taught me
about beauty..."*

It's the 1930s, and when Lydia Grace's family can't make ends meet, she's packed on a train with her pockets and bags full of seeds and sent to live with her gloomy Uncle Jim—a baker in the city. Lydia Grace doesn't know much about baking bread, but she eagerly makes up for it with her green thumb. She's in pursuit of one thing: to make Uncle Jim smile.

August 27, 1935

Dear Uncle Jim, Grandma told us after supper that you want me to come to the city and live with you until things get better. Did she tell you that Papa has been out of work for a long time, and no one asks Mama to make dresses anymore? We all cried, even Papa. But then Mama made us laugh with her stories about your chasing her up trees when you were both little. Did you really do that? I'm small, but strong, and I'll help you all I can. However, Grandma said to finish my schoolwork before doing anything else.

Your niece,
Lydia Grace Finch

September 3, 1935

Dear Uncle Jim,

I'm mailing this from the train station. I forgot to tell you in the last letter three important things that I'm too shy to say to your face:

1. I know a lot about gardening, but nothing about baking.
2. I'm anxious to learn to bake, but is there any place to plant seeds?
3. I like to be called "Lydia Grace"—just like Grandma.

Your niece,
Lydia Grace Finch

On the train, September 4, 1935

Dear Mama,

I feel so pretty in your dress that you made over for me. I hope you don't miss it too much.

Dear Papa,

I haven't forgotten what you said about recognizing Uncle Jim: "Just look for Mama's face with a big nose and a mustache!" I promise not to tell him. (Does he have a sense of humor?)

And, dearest Grandma,

Thank you for the seeds. The train is rocking me to sleep, and every time I doze off; I dream of gardens.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

September 5, 1935

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I'm so excited!!! There are window boxes here! They look as they've been waiting for me, so now we'll both wait for spring. And, Grandma, the sun shines down on the corner where I'll live and work.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

P.S. Uncle Jim doesn't smile.

December 25, 1935

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I adore the seed Catalogues you sent for Christmas. And, Grandma, thank you for all the bulbs. I hope you received my drawings. I wrote a long poem for Uncle Jim. He didn't smile, but I think he liked it. He read it aloud, then put it in his shirt pocket and patted it.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

February 12, 1936

Dearest Grandma,

Thank you again for those bulbs you sent at Christmas. You should see them now! I really like Ed and Emma Beech, Uncle Jim's friends who work here. When I first arrived, Emma told me she'd show me how to knead bread if I would teach her the Latin names of all the flowers I know. Now, just half a year later, I'm kneading bread and she's speaking Latin! More good news: We have a store cat named Otis who at this very moment is sleeping at the foot of my bed.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

P.S. Uncle Jim isn't smiling yet, but I'm hoping for a smile soon.

March 5, 1936

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I've discovered a secret place. You can't imagine how wonderful it is. No one else knows about it but Otis. I have great plans. Thank you for all the letters. I'll try to write more, but I'm really busy planting all your seeds in cracked teacups and bent cake pans! And, Grandma, you should smell the good





dirt I'm bringing home from the vacant lot down the street.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

April 27, 1936

Dearest Grandma,

All the seeds and roots are sprouting. I can hear you saying, "April showers bring May flowers."

Emma and I are sprucing up the bakery and I'm playing a great trick on Uncle Jim. He sees me reading my mail, planting seeds in the window boxes, going to school, doing my homework, sweeping the floor. But he never sees me working in my secret place.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

P.S. I'm planning on a big smile from Uncle Jim in the near future.

May 27, 1936

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

You should have heard Emma laugh today when I opened your letter and dirt fell out onto the sidewalk! Thank you for all the baby plants. They survived the trip in the big envelope.

More about Emma: She's helping me with the secret place. Hurrah!

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

P.S. I saw Uncle Jim almost smile today. The store was full (well, *almost* full) of customers.

June 27, 1936

Dear Grandma,

Flowers are blooming all over the place. I'm also growing radishes, onions, and three kinds of lettuce in the window boxes.

Some neighbors have brought containers for me to fill with flowers, and a few customers even gave me plants from their gardens this spring! They don't call me "Lydia Grace" anymore. They call me "the gardener."

Love to all,
Lydia Grace

P.S. I'm sure Uncle Jim will smile soon. I'm almost ready to show him the secret place.

July 4, 1936

Dearest Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

I am bursting with happiness! The entire city seems so beautiful, especially this morning.

The secret place is ready for Uncle Jim. At noon, the store will close for the holiday, and then we'll bring him up to the roof.

I've tried to remember everything you ever taught me about beauty.

Love to all,
Lydia Grace
P.S. I can already imagine Uncle Jim's smile.

July 11, 1936

Dear Mama, Papa, and Grandma,

My heart is pounding so hard I'm sure the customers can hear it downstairs!

At lunch today, Uncle Jim put the "Closed" sign on the door and told Ed and Emma and me to go upstairs and wait. He appeared with the most amazing cake I've ever seen—covered in flowers!

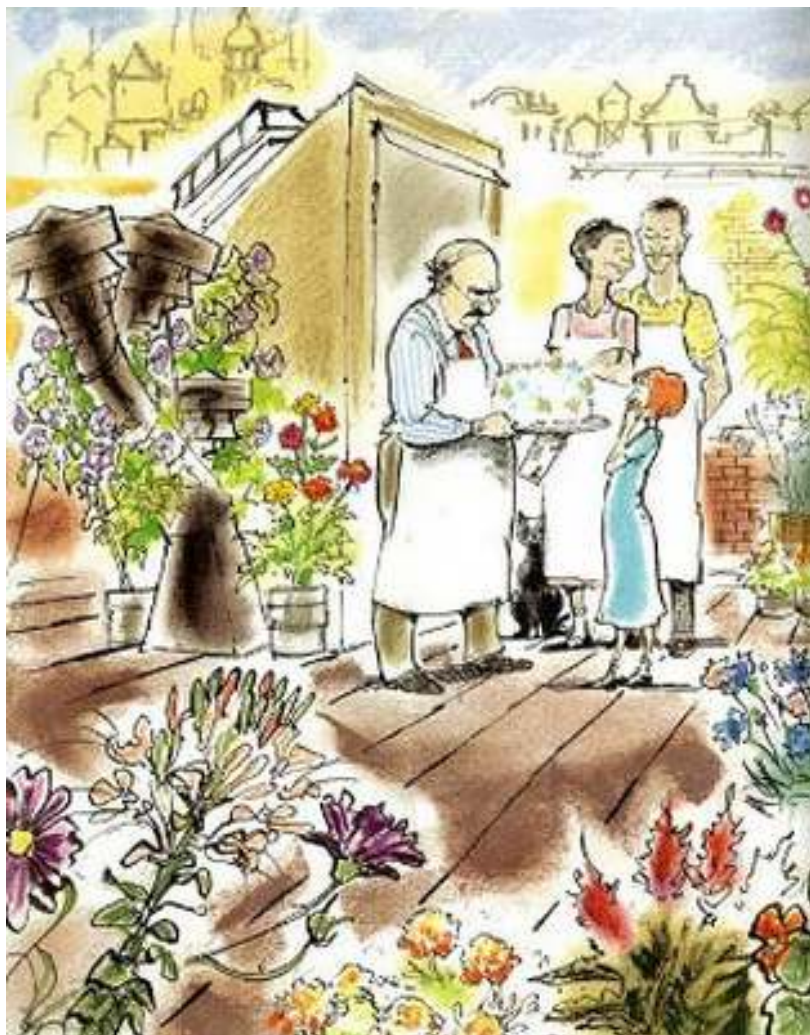
I truly believe that cake equals one thousand smiles.

And then he took your letter out of his pocket with the news of Papa's job.

I'M COMING HOME!

Love to all, and see you soon,
Lydia Grace

P.S. Grandma, I've given all of my plants to Emma. I can't wait to help you in your garden again. We gardeners never retire.



The Ring

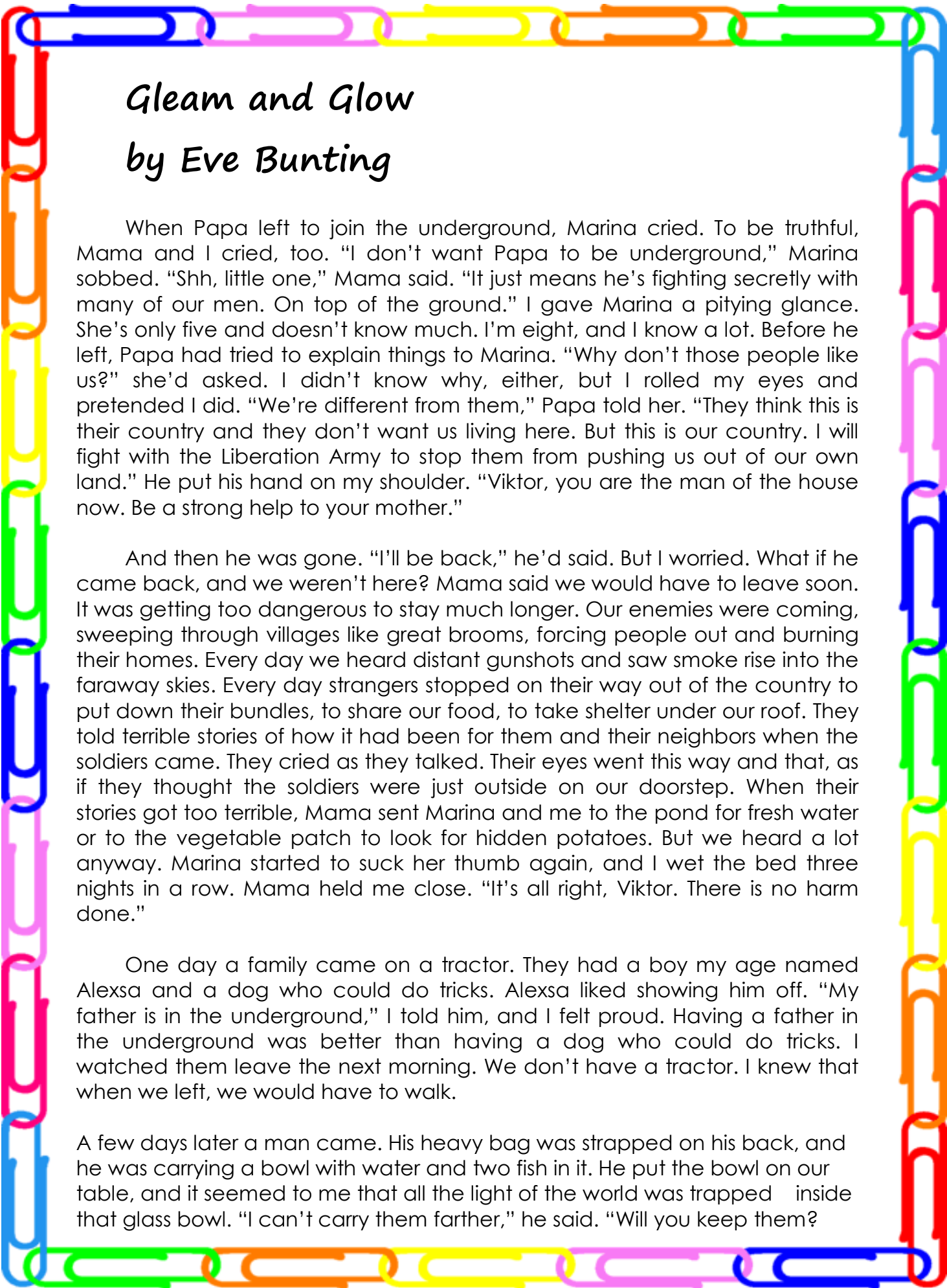
by Esther Bonilla Read



When I was growing up, my mother had a ring she never took off. It was the only ring I ever saw her wear during my childhood. It was made of a shiny silvery metal with an oblong penny-brown metallic piece upon which two hearts were attached in the center. She wore it when she swept, when she mopped, when she made her large mound of golden flour tortillas, when she sewed on her treadle Singer sewing machine and when she washed clothes on the rubboard. She didn't really have any other jewelry, and, in fact, I remember my father saying that he didn't even buy her a ring when they were married. He hadn't thought about it, and during the ceremony, they had borrowed her brother Charlie's ring.

The years passed. My father, who had come from Mexico in the 1920s to try to earn a living, worked long, long hours at the service station he operated. And my mother, who was also from Mexico, toiled at home, keeping house for her husband and eight youngsters. With his hard work and her thriftiness, they sent their first son off to college, then another child and then another. The older children helped with the expenses of the younger ones. Just as the last two children were graduating from college, my father died suddenly of a heart attack, but my mother lived on for another twenty-three years. Their children had become lawyers, businessmen and teachers. In the last years of her life, my mother was finally able to enjoy the luxuries that had always been denied her. She was even able to buy some jewelry, which, I was surprised to learn, she really loved.

A few years before she died, she told me that she wanted her jewelry to go to her granddaughters. And when she died, it was done. A diamond ring to this one, a pearl ring to that one, an opal ring to another, and so it went. Then I discovered it: her first ring. Now I could identify the metal. The ring was a thin, fragile thing by now, a small strip of stainless steel attached to two small hearts on either side of an oblong-shaped piece of copper. It had been worn so long that the copper had become unattached to the circle. Its value was naught. I took the ring, polished it with a cloth and carried it to the bank to place in a safety-deposit box. To me, it was a gem that symbolized the sacrifices my mother had made for us and the values that she lived. How many years had she worn it? How many times had she denied herself so that we might succeed? Why did she save this ring when it seemed worthless? Was it a symbol to her, too? The rest of my family doesn't quite understand this, but when I look at that ring, I see the priceless jewel of my mother's strength and the brilliance of the love that she showed us every day of her life.



Gleam and Glow

by Eve Bunting

When Papa left to join the underground, Marina cried. To be truthful, Mama and I cried, too. "I don't want Papa to be underground," Marina sobbed. "Shh, little one," Mama said. "It just means he's fighting secretly with many of our men. On top of the ground." I gave Marina a pitying glance. She's only five and doesn't know much. I'm eight, and I know a lot. Before he left, Papa had tried to explain things to Marina. "Why don't those people like us?" she'd asked. I didn't know why, either, but I rolled my eyes and pretended I did. "We're different from them," Papa told her. "They think this is their country and they don't want us living here. But this is our country. I will fight with the Liberation Army to stop them from pushing us out of our own land." He put his hand on my shoulder. "Viktor, you are the man of the house now. Be a strong help to your mother."

And then he was gone. "I'll be back," he'd said. But I worried. What if he came back, and we weren't here? Mama said we would have to leave soon. It was getting too dangerous to stay much longer. Our enemies were coming, sweeping through villages like great brooms, forcing people out and burning their homes. Every day we heard distant gunshots and saw smoke rise into the faraway skies. Every day strangers stopped on their way out of the country to put down their bundles, to share our food, to take shelter under our roof. They told terrible stories of how it had been for them and their neighbors when the soldiers came. They cried as they talked. Their eyes went this way and that, as if they thought the soldiers were just outside on our doorstep. When their stories got too terrible, Mama sent Marina and me to the pond for fresh water or to the vegetable patch to look for hidden potatoes. But we heard a lot anyway. Marina started to suck her thumb again, and I wet the bed three nights in a row. Mama held me close. "It's all right, Viktor. There is no harm done."

One day a family came on a tractor. They had a boy my age named Alexsa and a dog who could do tricks. Alexsa liked showing him off. "My father is in the underground," I told him, and I felt proud. Having a father in the underground was better than having a dog who could do tricks. I watched them leave the next morning. We don't have a tractor. I knew that when we left, we would have to walk.

A few days later a man came. His heavy bag was strapped on his back, and he was carrying a bowl with water and two fish in it. He put the bowl on our table, and it seemed to me that all the light of the world was trapped inside that glass bowl. "I can't carry them farther," he said. "Will you keep them?"



They are very wondrous fish." Mama shook her head.

"We are leaving ourselves in a day or two." Marina jumped up and down. "Please, Mama! Aren't they pretty? I've just thought up their names. Gleam and Glow."

The man sighed. "Let them stay behind when you go, then. An extra day or two of life is as important to a fish as it is to us. Here is their food." He gave Marina a twist of paper. "Sprinkle a little on top of the water each day." "I will," Marina promised. For two days she fed them and talked to them and even tried to pet them with her finger. "I love Gleam and Glow," she told Mama. "I love them with all my heart."

Three days later Mama said we could wait no longer. "I wanted to stay till it got warmer," she said softly, as if to herself "The cold will be hard on the little one." I knew she was remembering the pneumonia Marina had last year. "We will leave tomorrow early," she said to us. "We must make it to the border and the safe country beyond." "Is it far to walk?" I asked, wishing for a tractor. "It is. But we will get there."

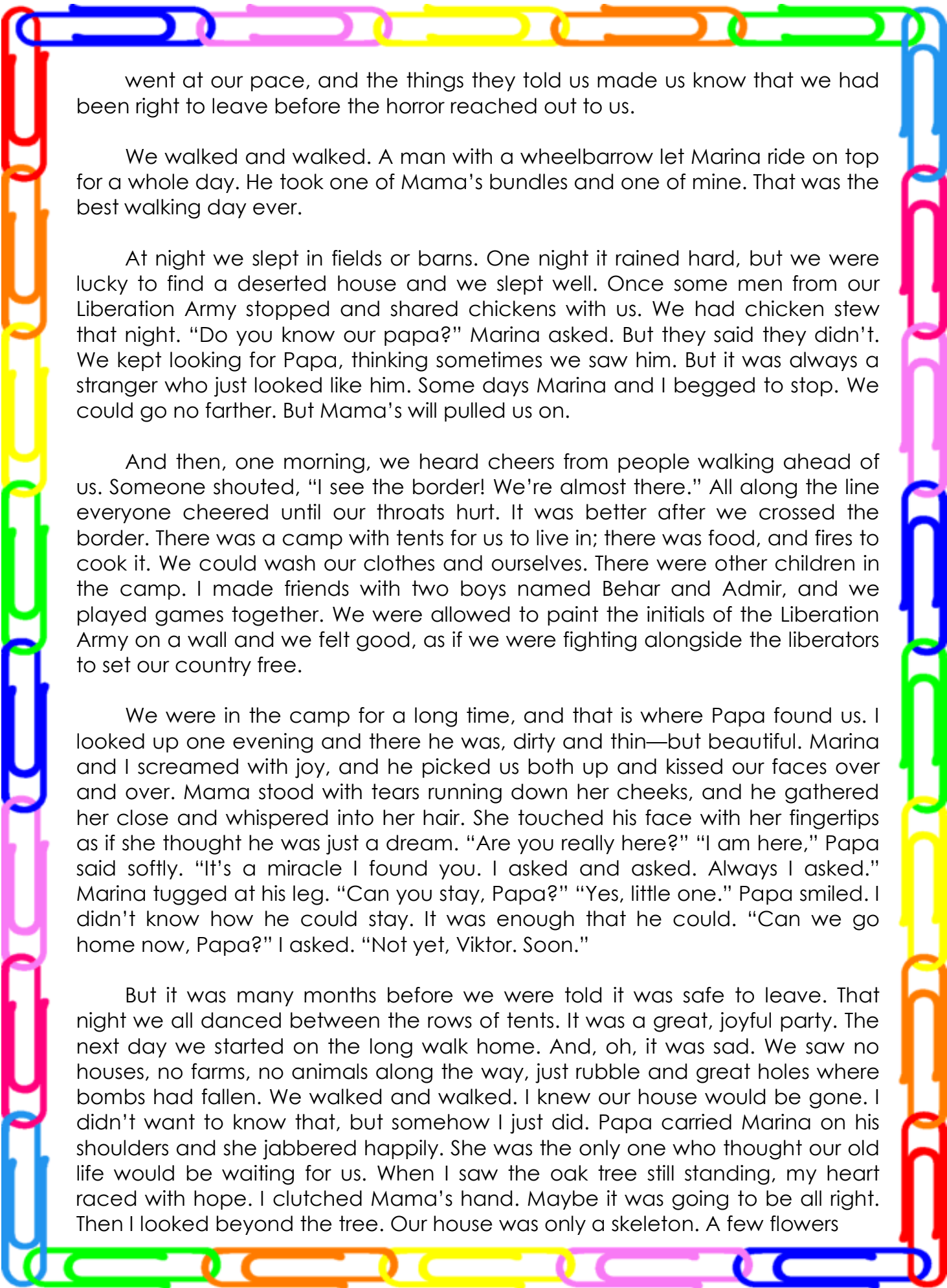
"Please, please, can we take Gleam and Glow?" Marina begged. "I'll carry them." "You couldn't, Marina," Mama said. "We will have to leave them. But think, we may be able to find your father. Won't that be good?" I thought maybe she was just trying to give us hope, but even the goodness of that hope didn't comfort Marina. She slept with Mama that night, and I heard her sobbing for a long time before it was quiet and I knew she was asleep.

I lay looking around my room, putting it in my memory. My books on the shelves Papa made for me. The painting I had done that Mama had framed. I thought about how hard it would be for Marina to leave her fish. When the clock struck midnight I got up, carried the fishbowl outside to our pond, and slipped Gleam and Glow into the water. They flashed into the tangled weeds at the edge of the pond. I sprinkled what was left of their food on the water. "One or two extra days of life," I whispered. "Good luck."

We would need good luck, too. Mama woke us at dawn. When I told about the fish, we went out to see if they made it through the night. Marina clapped her hands and called their names, but Gleam and Glow stayed out of sight. "Maybe they're sleeping," she said. "I know they'll love our pond."

Our bundles were ready to carry. Two each for Mama and me and a smaller one for Marina. The road outside our house was filled with half-light shadows. I looked back once as we walked away. There was our oak tree, the vegetable patch, Mama's flower garden, where the flowers waited under the earth for spring. Would we ever come home again? Would Papa ever find us?

We walked and walked. We were slow and people passed us. But some



went at our pace, and the things they told us made us know that we had been right to leave before the horror reached out to us.

We walked and walked. A man with a wheelbarrow let Marina ride on top for a whole day. He took one of Mama's bundles and one of mine. That was the best walking day ever.

At night we slept in fields or barns. One night it rained hard, but we were lucky to find a deserted house and we slept well. Once some men from our Liberation Army stopped and shared chickens with us. We had chicken stew that night. "Do you know our papa?" Marina asked. But they said they didn't. We kept looking for Papa, thinking sometimes we saw him. But it was always a stranger who just looked like him. Some days Marina and I begged to stop. We could go no farther. But Mama's will pulled us on.

And then, one morning, we heard cheers from people walking ahead of us. Someone shouted, "I see the border! We're almost there." All along the line everyone cheered until our throats hurt. It was better after we crossed the border. There was a camp with tents for us to live in; there was food, and fires to cook it. We could wash our clothes and ourselves. There were other children in the camp. I made friends with two boys named Behar and Admir, and we played games together. We were allowed to paint the initials of the Liberation Army on a wall and we felt good, as if we were fighting alongside the liberators to set our country free.

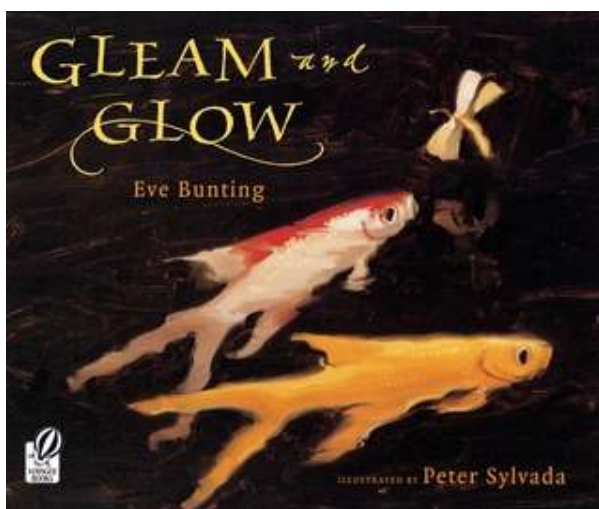
We were in the camp for a long time, and that is where Papa found us. I looked up one evening and there he was, dirty and thin—but beautiful. Marina and I screamed with joy, and he picked us both up and kissed our faces over and over. Mama stood with tears running down her cheeks, and he gathered her close and whispered into her hair. She touched his face with her fingertips as if she thought he was just a dream. "Are you really here?" "I am here," Papa said softly. "It's a miracle I found you. I asked and asked. Always I asked." Marina tugged at his leg. "Can you stay, Papa?" "Yes, little one." Papa smiled. I didn't know how he could stay. It was enough that he could. "Can we go home now, Papa?" I asked. "Not yet, Viktor. Soon."

But it was many months before we were told it was safe to leave. That night we all danced between the rows of tents. It was a great, joyful party. The next day we started on the long walk home. And, oh, it was sad. We saw no houses, no farms, no animals along the way, just rubble and great holes where bombs had fallen. We walked and walked. I knew our house would be gone. I didn't want to know that, but somehow I just did. Papa carried Marina on his shoulders and she jabbered happily. She was the only one who thought our old life would be waiting for us. When I saw the oak tree still standing, my heart raced with hope. I clutched Mama's hand. Maybe it was going to be all right. Then I looked beyond the tree. Our house was only a skeleton. A few flowers

poked up from Mama's garden. Except for that, we could have been on the moon.

Marina was the first to remember the fish. She took a stale slice of bread from Mama's bundle and ran toward the pond, calling out Gleam and Glow's names. We ran behind to comfort her. And there was our pond, as shimmering and dazzling as melted gold. It was filled with countless fish.

Mama pressed her hands to her heart. "Gleam and Glow and their children and their children's children," she said. "They found their own nourishment," Papa said. Marina clapped her hands. "Oh, what smart fish," she said. "In spite of everything, they lived," Mama whispered.



Like us, I thought. They lived. "Gleam! Glow!" Marina called, and tossed in crumbs of bread. Fish after fish came to the edge of the pond where she knelt. "Look!" She pointed. "There's Gleam and there's Glow." That made us laugh, because those fish were as identical as could be. "Did you miss me?" Marina asked them. "I missed

you." I leaned close to the water. "We're back, Gleam and Glow," I told the fish. "We've come home."

A note from the author:

There is a village called Jezero in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1990, before the Bosnian war, a villager named Smajo Malkoc gave his sons two golden fish in an aquarium. When the war came, Malkoc's family fled from the Bosnian-Serb forces. In an attempt to save the fish, his wife released them into a nearby lake.

In 1995, when the family returned home after the war, they found their house and village in ruins. The lake, however, was teeming with life—it was filled with shining golden fish. Left alone, the fish had fed on the underwater lake life, thrived, and multiplied. Hearing of the remarkable fish, people came to admire and to buy. The fish turned out to be not only beautiful but valuable. Prosperity and fame came to the Malkocs and their neighbors, and the village was rebuilt.

Gleam and Glow was inspired by this true and magical story. Yet my version is not only a story for a particular country or people—it's for people everywhere who have been forced from the lives they have known, and who find hope in the most unexpected places.



Ian's walk

by Laurie Lears

It's the perfect day to go to the park and feed the ducks with my big sister, Tara. Except my brother wants to come along, too. "Aw, Ian, why don't you stay here?" I say. Ian doesn't answer me, though, because he has autism. But he raps his fingers hard against the screen and begins to whine. "Oh, all right, Ian," I say. "Can he come?" I ask Mom. "Hmmm..." says Mom. "You'll need to watch him closely the whole time. Are you sure you want to do that?" "It's okay with me," I answer.

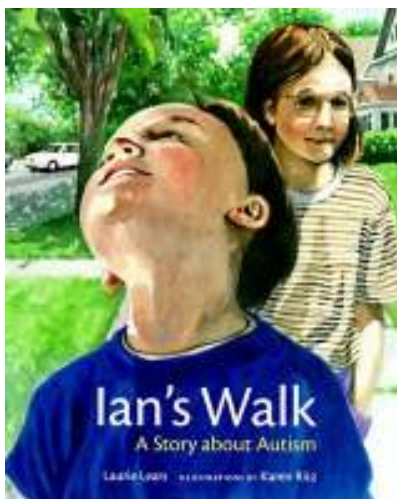
And Tara nods. "You hold his hand though, Julie" she tells me. Ian's brain doesn't work like other people's. Ian sees things differently... When we pass Nan's Diner, Ian steps inside to watch the ceiling fan move in slow circles. He doesn't look at the waitresses hurrying by with all kinds of sandwiches and ice cream. "Let's get a soda!" I say. But Ian keeps his eyes on the fan until I pull him out the door. Ian hears things differently... When a fire truck rushes by with its siren wailing and horn blaring, Ian hardly seems to notice. But he tilts his head sideways and seems to be listening to something I cannot hear. "Hurry up!" I say, tugging his arm. Ian smells things differently... At Mrs. Potter's flower stand, I hold a bouquet of sweet-smelling lilacs up to Ian's face. Ian wrinkles his nose and turns away. But when we go by the post office, Ian puts his nose against the warm, gritty bricks and sniffs the wall. "Stop that!" I say. "You look silly!" And I yank him away before anyone notices. Ian feels things differently... At the pond, I pick up a soft feather and tickle Ian under his chin. He shrieks and pushes it away. But while Tara and I toss cereal to the ducks, Ian lies on the ground with his cheek pressed against the hard stones. "Get up Ian" I say, taking his hand. "Someone might step on you!" Ian tastes things differently... When we go past the food booths, Ian won't even look at the pizza, hot dogs, or soft pretzels. But he reaches into my pocket for the bag of leftover cereal. "Tara and I don't want to eat cereal for lunch" I tell him. "Come with us while we buy some pizza." But Ian won't budge. He munches the Power Pops one by one.

Sometimes Ian makes me angry! "I'll get the *pizza*" says Tara. "You stay here with Ian, Julie." I sit down on the bench to wait. "Sit beside me, Ian" I say. But Ian flaps his hands and pays no attention. At last Tara comes back carrying

two slices of gooey pizza. "Where's Ian?" she asks. I look at the spot where Ian was standing... but Ian is gone! My stomach does a flip-flop, and for a moment I can't move.

Tara runs up to a lady. "Have you seen a little boy in a blue shirt?" she cries. The lady shakes her head. "Perhaps he's watching the baseball game across the park," she suggests. But Ian does not like baseball. A man walks by with a little girl on his shoulders. "Have you seen a boy who looks lost?" I say with a lump in my throat. "No" says the man. "But we're on our way to hear the storyteller. Maybe he's there listening to stories." But Ian does not like stories. Tara rushes off to look for Ian. I squeeze my eyes shut and try to think like Ian. Ian likes the balloon stand where the big machine hisses and stretches balloons into colorful, bobbing shapes. He likes the water fountain where he can put his face up close and watch the stream of water gush past his eyes. Suddenly the old bell in the center of the park begins to ring. *Bong, bong, bong!* And then I remember... Ian loves the bell best of all. I run full speed towards the bell. And there's Ian! He is lying under the bell making the big gong move back and forth. I hug him tightly even though he doesn't care for hugs.

I see Tara near the swings, and call to her. She rushes over, all out of breath, and puts her arms around us. "We'll walk home the way you like!" I tell Ian. We stop at the pond and let Ian play with the stones. He lines them up in a straight row along the edge of the walkway. I stand in front of him so no one steps on his fingers. We walk right past Mrs. Potter's flower stand and stop at the post office instead. Ian sniffs all the bricks he wants, and I don't



care who's watching. When Ian pauses at the corner and seems to be listening to something I cannot hear, we wait patiently, and I try to listen, too. At Nan's Diner, Ian and I watch the fan until I'm dizzy.

When we finally get home, I say, "It was a good walk, Ian." And for just a flash, Ian looks at me and smiles.



A Note about Autism:

Siblings of children with disabilities such as autism have extra challenges in their lives. They usually have responsibilities taking care of the brother or sister with autism, whether that sibling is older or younger. They may experience anger that autism has “happened” to their family, embarrassment regarding the way their sibling looks or acts, and feelings of isolation because other children do not have siblings like theirs. As in the case of Julie, the healthy sibling in this book, mixed with these negative feelings are strong feelings of loyalty, responsibility, and love.

Autism is particularly hard to explain to others. Very often the child with autism looks “normal” but reacts so very differently to ordinary situations. The difficulties of understanding autistic disorder and of dealing with the unpredictable behaviors that accompany it make the sibling relationship especially challenging.

It is important that parents acknowledge the negative feelings of brothers and sisters of children with autism. At the same time, parents should stress the strengths of the family and express their appreciation for all the extra things the siblings do. It is essential, too, that parents make sure siblings have time to themselves and time to spend with their own friends.

There are opportunities for personal growth in having a sibling with a disability. The healthy siblings learn valuable lessons of responsibility, compassion, and toleration of differences. They grow to understand that while life is not perfect, it is still good.

The Almond Tree's Birthday

by Leslie Daiken

Near the house, in the shrubbery, an almond tree grew. She was graceful and green and lovely to look at. Towards the end of summer, she shed all her leaves; and all through the winter she looked very bare. Indeed, she was cold and sad.



One winter's day a gust of wind blew across her branches and whispered a secret message into her ear. "Tomorrow," said the wind, "will be the almond tree's birthday..."

All the other trees began to wave their branches and to repeat to each other: "Tomorrow will be the almond-tree's birthday." Then a little bird, who heard the trees murmuring, flew over to the almond-tree, perched on one of her branches, and began to twitter: "Tweet! Tweet! Almond-tree, is it really true that tomorrow is going to be your birthday? Tweet, tweet! I'll collect all my friends together tomorrow, lots and lots of birds, and we'll come along to wish you a Happy Birthday..." Then a bee who was flying past, overheard this little chat. He flew over to the almond-tree and buzzed: "Zoom, zoom! Almond-tree, is it really true you're having a birthday tomorrow? I think I'll invite my friends in our beehive to come along and join in the celebrations..."

A little boy called Noam then came over to the tree and said: 'Tomorrow is *Tu Bishvat* (The 15th Day of Shvat), and that's Trees' Day', the New Year for all trees. I'm going to ask my friends to come along tomorrow to bring you special greetings...' The almond-tree just listened to all this, but didn't answer a word. She nodded her head and then muttered to herself quietly:

"So tomorrow is a holiday,
My birthday, in fact;
Crowds of visitors are going to come,
And I haven't got a dress to receive them in.
How can I face them?"

All day long she worried about the next day; all night long she worried. The other trees were sleepy and closed their eyes. The almond-tree alone wasn't able to sleep. It was at the dead of night when something happened.

The Angel of the Plants suddenly appeared, all dressed in green and crowned with flowers.

He approached the almond tree: "Whatever's keeping you awake? Whatever is making you so worried...? Do tell me, almond-tree..."

"How can I possibly sleep in peace, or be free from worry when tomorrow is my birthday, and lots of visitors are coming, but I've nothing to wear..?" "Stop being so sad, almond-tree," said the Angel, as he gently patted her, "I promise you that by tomorrow morning you will have a wonderful dress." "You really mean it?", she asked. "Why, of course," answered the Angel. "It is quite usual for every almond-tree to wear a pink and white frock in honour of her birthday. So, stop fretting, and get some rest now, so that when morning comes you will feel fresh and bright. Good night and sleep well..."

The Angel then stroked the almond-tree till she fell fast asleep. While she slumbered, the Angel bent over her and kissed her. And behold! Every single spot that his lips touched suddenly burst into flower—pink and white and delicate blossoms.

Next morning the almond-tree hardly knew herself, so beautifully covered was she with blossom. The trees looked admiringly at her new appearance and said: "Hello, almond tree." One said *BOKER TOV*; another said *SHANAH TOVA*; and in chorus they all said *TITHADSHI* (which means "We wish you well to wear it...").

A flock of birds arrived; they perched upon her branches and began singing her a Birthday Song. Then a great swarm of bees came, buzzing from bough to bough, from one flower to another, and saying: "Bzzz-bzzz — isn't this a pretty almond-tree? Bzzz-bzzz... And what a delightful dress... Bzzz-bzzz..."



Finally, Noam came on the scene. He had his playmates with him and they all danced and sang in a circle around the almond-tree.

The Last Jar of Jelly

by Andy Skidmore

Our children grew up on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Even my husband and I sometimes sneak one in late at night with a glass of milk. I believe that the Earl of Sandwich himself would agree with me that the success of this universally loved concoction lies not in the brand of peanut butter used, but rather in the jelly. The right jelly delights the palate, and homemade is the only choice.



I wasn't the jelly maker in this family. My mother-in-law was. She didn't provide a wide range of flavors, either. It was either grape or blackberry. This limited choice was a welcome relief in the days of toddlers, siblings and puppies. When all around me other decisions and choices had to be made, making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches was easy. And since we liked both flavors, we usually picked whatever jar was at the front of the pantry or refrigerator.

The only contribution I made to the jelly making was to save baby food jars, which my mother-in-law would fill with the tasty gel, seal with wax and send back home with us.



For the past 22 years of my married life, whenever I wanted to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for myself or my husband or one of the children, all I had to do was reach for one of those little jars of jelly.



It was always there. Jelly making was just a way of life for my mother-in-law. She always did it, following the same rituals - from picking the fruit to setting the finished jelly on the homemade shelves in her little pantry off the kitchen.

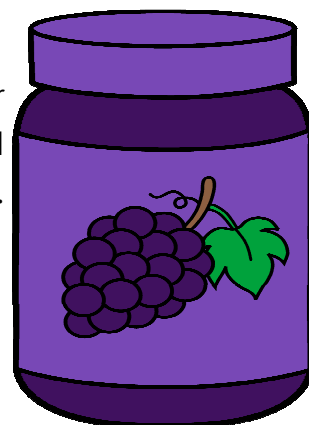
My father-in-law died several years ago and this past December, my mother-in-law also passed away. Among the things in the house to be divided by her children were the remaining canned goods in the pantry. Each of her children chose from the many jars of tomato juice, green beans and jelly. When my husband brought his jars home, we carefully put them away in our pantry.

The other day I reached in there to retrieve jelly for a quick sandwich, and there it was. Sitting all alone on the far side of the shelf was a small jar of grape jelly. The lid was somewhat rusty in places. Written on it with a black marker was "GR" for grape and the year the jelly had been made.

As I picked up the jar, I suddenly realized something that I had failed to see earlier. I reopened the pantry door to be sure. Yes, this was it, this was the last jar of "Memommie jelly."

We would always have store-bought jelly, but this was the last jar we would ever have from the patient, loving hands of my mother-in-law. Although she had been gone for nearly a year, so much of her had remained with us. We hardly ever opened a jar of jelly at the breakfast table without kidding about those thousands of little jars she had filled.

Our children had never known a day without their grandmother's jelly. It seems like such a small thing, and most days it was something that was taken for granted. But today it seemed a great treasure.



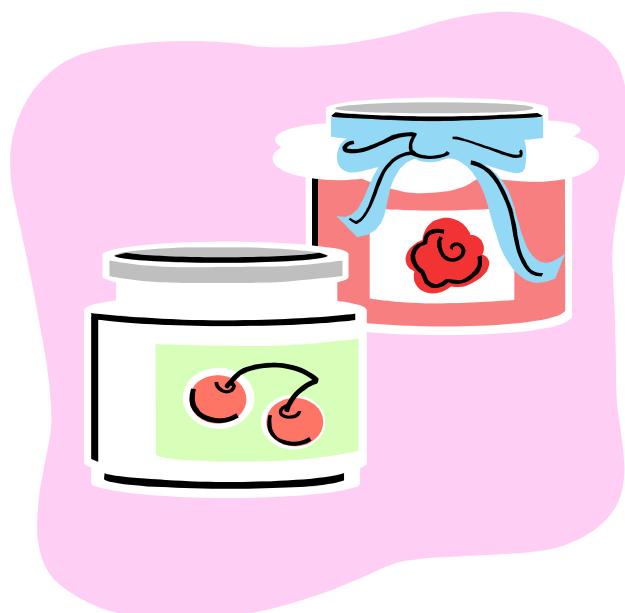
Holding that last jar in my hand, my heart traveled back to meeting my mother-in-law for the first time. I could see her crying on our wedding day, and later, kissing and loving our children as if she didn't have five other grandchildren. I could see her walking the fields of the farm, patiently waiting while others tended to the cows.

I could see her walking in the woods or riding the hay wagon behind the tractor. I saw her face as it looked when we surprised her by meeting her at church. I saw her caring for a sick spouse and surrounded by loving children at the funeral.

I put the jelly back on the shelf. No longer was it just a jar of jelly. It was the end of a family tradition. I guess I believed that as long as it was there, a part of my mother-in-law would always live on.

We have many things that once belonged to my husband's parents. There are tools, handmade sweaters and throws, and some furniture. We have hundreds of pictures and many more memories. These are the kinds of things that you expect to survive the years and to pass on to your children.

But I'm just not ready to give up this last jelly jar, and all the memories its mere presence allows me to hold onto. The jar of jelly won't keep that long. It will either have to be eaten or thrown out... but not today.





God is never wrong

A king who did not believe in the goodness of God, had a slave who, in all circumstances, said: My king, do not be discouraged, because everything God does is perfect, no mistakes!

One day they went hunting and along the way a wild animal attacked the king. His slave managed to kill the animal, but could not prevent his majesty losing a finger.



Furious and without showing his gratitude for being saved, the nobleman said "Is God good? If He was good, I would not have been attacked and lost my finger."

The slave replied: "My king, despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good, and he knows "why" of all these things. What God does is perfect. He is never wrong!"

Outraged by the response, the king ordered the arrest of his slave.

Later, he left for another hunt and was captured by savages who made human sacrifices.

On the altar, ready to sacrifice the nobleman, the savages found that the victim was missing one of his fingers, so he was released.

According to them, he was not complete to be offered to the gods.

Upon his return to the palace, he authorized the release of his slave that he received very affectionately.

"My dear, God was really good to me! I was almost killed by the wild men, but for lack of a single finger, I was let go! But I have a question: if God is so good, why did he allow me to put you in jail?"



"My King, if I had gone with you in this hunt, I would have been sacrificed for you, because I have no missing finger, therefore, remember everything God does is perfect. He is never wrong."

----- ***** -----



Often we complain about life, and negative things that happen to us, forgetting that nothing is random and that everything has a purpose.

Every morning, offer your day to God, don't be in a rush.

Ask God to inspire your thoughts, guide your actions, and ease your feelings. And do not be afraid. God is never wrong!

You know why this message is for you? I do not know, but God knows, because he never makes mistakes.

The path of God and his word is perfect, without impurities. He is the way of all those who trust in Him.

What you do with this message is up to you. May God put in your heart the desire to send it to someone.

God knows why He chose you to receive this message. Please bless someone with it !!



Bad Hop

by Steve Smith



The ball pinged off the aluminum bat and headed toward the hole between shortstop and third base, the sort of one-hop screamer that the high-school junior shortstop, my son Chris, had backhanded a thousand times. Only this time, the ball hit a pebble and caromed weirdly toward his head. With a sickening crunch, the ball caught him flush in his left eye, and he went down in a heap. Bad hop, and a bad break.

The ambulance came onto the field, and he was taken away, something that just doesn't seem to happen in the pastoral world of high-school baseball. At the hospital, Chris was diagnosed with a blowout fracture of the bones in the orbit of his eye socket - a classic sports injury easily resolved by a simple surgical procedure.

Except that things went wrong, and when the surgeon finally got the courage enough to tell my wife and me what happened - an undetected blood clot had cut off oxygen to the optic nerve - the long and short of it was that Chris would be blind in his left eye, probably for the rest of his life. In one instant, the college scholarships Chris had contemplated and the dreams of a professional baseball career vanished.

Chris was still groggy from the surgery when we went into his hospital room, his bandaged eye holding a secret we now had to share with him. We chatted about small things until he was alert enough to ask the inevitable, "Did everything go okay?"

My wife, Sue, gripped my hand as I told him that, no, it had not. That there had been complications. That the doctors had done their best, that medicine was still more art than science. Halfway through my semi-prepared speech, Chris interrupted me: "Dad, am I blind?"

"Yeah, son. I'm afraid so."

"Will I be able to see out of it at all?"

"We don't know - the doctors don't know. Maybe a little. Someday. Not now." It was the toughest thing I've ever had to do.

Chris sort of nodded and looked away toward the window. Outside it was spring, and we listened for a time to a robin's territorial song from a nearby tree.

"Can I have a Coke?"

The duty nurse brought Chris a soft drink in a can with a cup and some ice. His mother poured the drink and he sat up and drank some of it through a straw, and then peered at the can on his bedside table.

"Dad, could you see if they have a pencil and paper I can use?"

I walked outside to the nurses' station and borrowed a notepad and a pencil and returned to Chris's room, where his mother was talking with him in hushed tones. I handed him the pad and pencil, and we elevated his bed. He raised his knees and propped the pad against them, looked at the soda can, and began to draw. Sue and I said nothing as long minutes passed.

Finally, he tore off the sheet of paper and handed it to me. We looked at it - a photo-likeness of a Coca-Cola soft-drink can.



Chris had always had an uncanny artistic ability: if his eyes could see it, his hand could draw it. We had thought of art as his second love - right behind baseball. In those brief moments, Chris took a bad hop, made a decision and changed forever the course of his life.



"I'm okay, you guys. I can still draw."

With that, he lowered his bed, turned onto his side and fell asleep.

That was eleven years ago. Since then, about 40 percent of the sight has returned to Chris's left eye. Even with this handicap, which severely affects depth perception, he went on to hit .385 and shortstop a state-championship baseball team the very next season, earning all-state honors in the process.

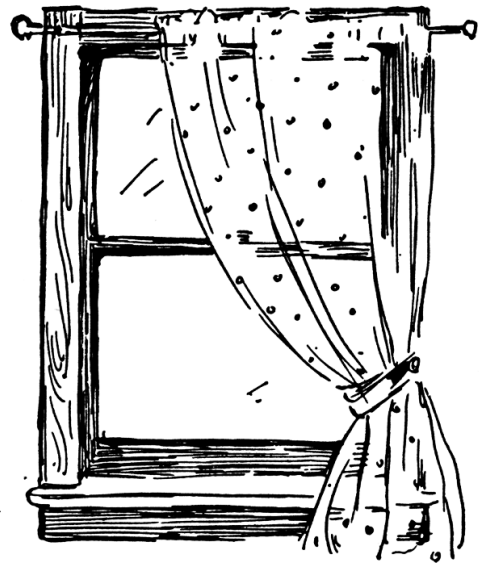
But his focus had changed. Chris took his college degree - with the help of an academic and not an athletic scholarship - in fisheries and wildlife management as a background for his career as a wildlife and sporting artist. Today, his paintings and pencil renderings grace the pages and covers of magazines and more than a dozen books, and they hang in galleries and museums in New York and Tennessee. The list of his clients awaiting oil and watercolor commissions is always at least a year long.

Human courage manifests itself in countless ways, countless times every day in every city and town and hamlet on every continent around the world. One bad hop, one routine ground ball, one instant of pain, and what could have been months of despair. But instead, that bad hop - and the courage to accept what could not be changed - altered the course of a life for the better. In sports we call such things great comebacks. I suppose in Chris's case, there is no reason to call it anything else. Proving, I guess, that some bad hops can be fielded cleanly after all.

The Windows We Look Through

(Anonymous Author)

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood. In the morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside.



"That laundry is not very clean", she said. "She does not know how to wash

correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent.

Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, finally she has learned how to wash."

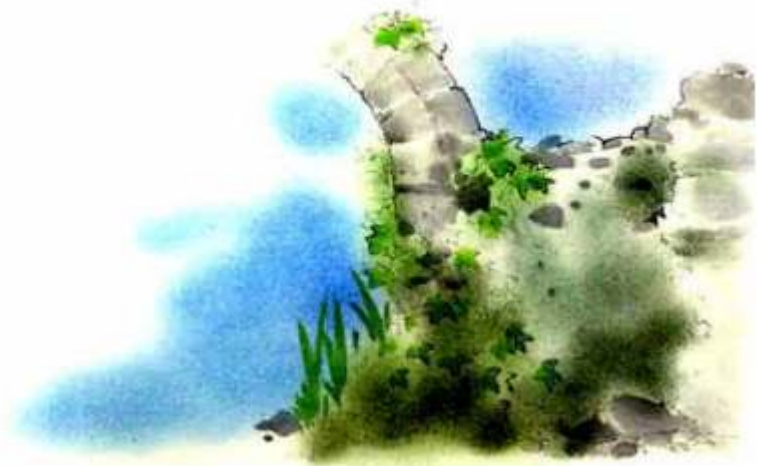
The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

*What We See When Watching Others Depends On How
Clear Is the Window Which We Look Through*

What hinders you from seeing reality for what it is?
What blocks your vision on a day to day basis?

A Story-less Wall

By A.Torrado



A wall in ruins asked me to tell its story.

What can possibly be told about a mossy and ivy-clad wall, bordering a pathway of almost no use?

At one end of the wall there is half a stone arch, suggesting the use of a door or gate of yesteryear.

At the other end, an upright stone marks the corner around which only a few loose stones witness the former existence of part of a house, which used to meet the old wall there. Yes, the wall had belonged to a house, a big house, a palace, we could say. Whoever had it made, had ambitions.

"I want my house to be the equal to a king's house." Workers came from the city to help with the construction. Ox-carts drew, painfully, huge stones from distant mountains.

Masons broke the big stones into blocks and started raising the walls. The man, who wanted to raise in the very heart of the plain, a king's house, went often there to visit the work.

He yelled with the workers, quarreled with the supervisor. He wanted speed and perfection. He had the road brought to that place. He had a well dug, which was springing the water, which was to water the future gardens around his future house.

He had to have his house built, so that he could inaugurate it with a great party, full of friends, music and fireworks.

However the work was delayed. It could also be the man's fault, as he sometimes wanted some things, and later he wanted some other things. A tower on the left of the entrance should, on second thoughts, be better on the right.

Where the salon was to be, there would be the kitchen, or maybe it would be better to demolish the walls of the rooms to enlarge the saloon... It became a raising and knocking down game. The supervisor of the work was growing dizzy.

"The man must be mad." He whispered. "He's squandering a fortune and the house won't be ready so soon."

So it happened. Without receiving their back pay, the workers abandoned the work.

With time, brambles and underwood took hold of the walls. Many years passed. Rain, floods, storms, destroyed whatever was left of the unfinished house.

Covered with moss and ivy, the wall withstood.

But how could I tell the story of a wall? Walls and ruins don't have a story to be told. Or do they?



The Most Beautiful Work Of All

By A. Torrado

There was a great stir in the sculptor's workshop. A squared stone had just arrived, and eight strong men had put it right in the middle of the room. Eight men, just think! That was heavy work. The sculptor paid them for their service and dismissed them. Then, he looked at the block, caressed the stone, walked about the room and followed the carriers out.

The room was then empty of people, but full of statues. Some had been finished and were ready to leave. Others were waiting for the sculptor's last touches. With no people around, it was their turn to speak. Do statues actually speak? They do, in stories they are allowed to. Listen to them!

The one, who was farther away from the block of stone, asked the others: "What kind of a phantom is that?"

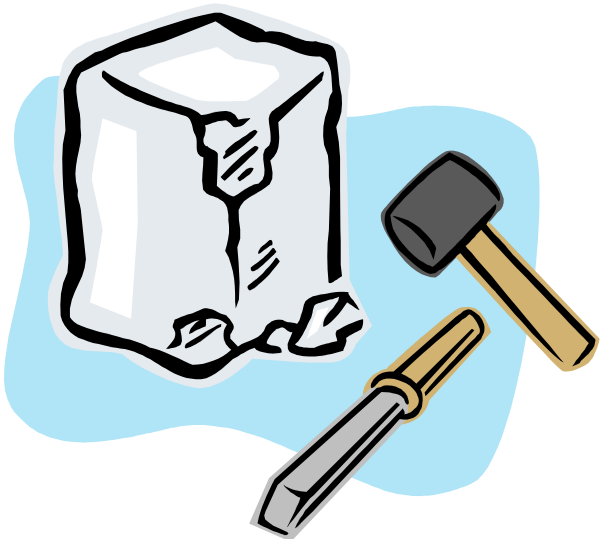
They sneered. Then, the one representing vanity declared: "That's the type of fellow we don't need to have around. It only obstructs the room and shades those who, like myself, need to be in the limelight." She was really vain, that statue of vanity.

"It's ME she's shading." Clarified the statue, which represented a sitting monk reading a book. "I've been here for ages, reading this old book and I can't get to the next page."

The statue representing harlequin also complained: "The air is so sultry here. I'd like to jump and run, but this stone always stands in my way."

The unfinished statue of an unknown king tried to mutter: "I order..." but, being so incomplete, he couldn't finish the sentence.

The following morning, the sculptor started working on the block of stone. He rough-hewed it. The rock started to take shape. The other statues looked at them suspiciously and in silence. As soon as the sculptor left, a statue inquired from far away in the room:



"What can come of this?"

The harlequin answered: "Well, an elephant. What else could you expect?"

In fact, it was intriguing. The sculptor worked day after day and, slowly, from the heart of the stone, a figure started taking shape. There were hints of two shoulders, a head and two knees. It looked like a seated person under a crumpled sheet.

The other statues wouldn't keep silent all through the night: "One of the shoulders is higher than the other." One of them noticed.

"What a monstrous head!" Another one added.

However, the art of the sculptor was slowly turning that monstrous head into the delicate head of a woman. It was a seated statue. With her hands on her lap, she seemed to be holding some strange thing.

"Maybe she's reading a book." Suggested the monk.

It was no book, after all. It was a child.

The sculptor had spent his entire day working on the baby's facial expression. At the end, before leaving, he enlarged the mother's smile and departed.

The other statues, jealous, went on gossiping: "What a squander of time!" Said the statue of vanity.

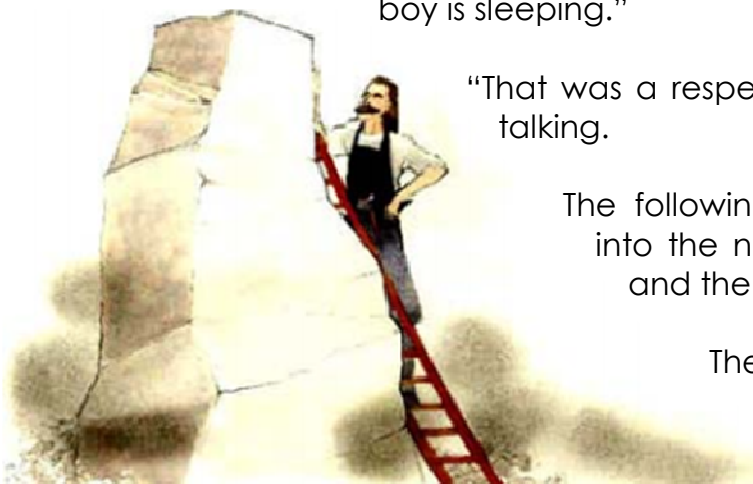
"What a silly puppet!" Laughed the harlequin.

That's when a clear, fresh voice in the room stood out from the poisonous uproar of the other statues, and pronounced these words: "Stop talking! My baby boy is sleeping."

"That was a respectful voice.' The statues stopped talking.

The following day, the sculptor worked late into the night on the statue of the mother and the child.

The most beautiful of all !!



Rose Blanche

By Ian McEwan

When wars begin people often cheer. The sadness comes later. The men from the town went off to fight for Germany. Rose Blanche and her mother joined the crowds and waved them goodbye. A marching band played, everyone cheered, and the fat mayor made a boring speech. There were jokes and songs and old men shouted advice to the young soldiers. Rose Blanche was shivering with excitement. But her mother said it was cold. Winter was coming.



Then there were lorries grinding through the narrow streets day and night, and lumbering tanks made sparks on the cobblestones. The noise was fantastic. The soldiers in the lorries sang songs. They smiled and winked at the children as if they were old friends. The children always waved back.



Rose Blanche often went shopping for her mother. There were long queues outside the shops, but no one grumbled. Everybody knew that food was needed for the soldiers who were always hungry. Many things did not change at all. Rose Blanche still played with her friends. She did her homework after supper and went to school early in the morning with her lunch in her satchel. And when school was over, she walked her favourite way home, along the river. At home her mother was always waiting for her with a hot drink.

Nobody knew where all the lorries were going. But people in the town talked about them. Some said they were going to a place just outside the town.

One day a lorry broke down. Rose Blanche saw two soldiers trying to repair the engine. Suddenly a little boy leapt from the back of the lorry and ran down the street. A soldier shouted, "Stop or I'll shoot". The boy ran straight into the arms of the fat mayor. The mayor was immensely pleased with himself. He dragged the boy by the scruff of the neck back to the lorry. One of the soldiers was furious and shouted at the boy who burst into tears.

The boy was thrown back into the lorry. Rose Blanche saw other pale faces in the gloom, when the door banged shut and the lorry drove away in a cloud of diesel fumes. Rose Blanche was furious at the way they had treated the little boy. Where were they taking him? She followed the lorry right through the town. She was a fast runner; she knew all the short-cuts. Winding streets forced the lorry to go slowly. She ran along rutted tracks, across fields, over ditches and frozen puddles. She climbed under fences and barriers in places she wasn't meant to go.

Rose Blanche took a short-cut through the forest where bare branches scratched her face. The road was below her, the lorry was a long way ahead. She was so tired, she felt like giving up. Then she stumbled into a clearing and could hardly believe what she saw.




Dozens of silent, motionless children stared at her from behind a barbed wire fence. They hardly seemed to breathe. Their eyes were large and full of sorrow. They stood like ghosts, watching as she came close. One of them called for food, and others took up the cry. "Food, food, please be our friend. Please give us something to eat, little girl".

But she had nothing to give them, nothing at all. The cries died down, the silence returned. The winter sun was setting, the chilly wind made the barbed wire moan. Rose Blanche turned for home. Their sad and hungry eyes followed her into the forest.

Rose Blanche told no one, not even her mother, what she had seen. All through the bitter winter she took extra food to school, jam and apples from the cellar. And yet she was growing thinner all the time. At home she secretly saved the food off her own plate.

In the town people were no longer patient when they waited in the queues. No one had enough to eat. Rose Blanche slipped away from school as early as she could and, clasping her heavy bag, headed towards the forest. The children were always waiting for her by the fence. When they took the food, careful not to touch the electrical wires, their thin hands trembled. Rose Blanche learned their names, told them hers and told them all about her school. The children said little in reply. Huddled together, they stared through the fence into the distance.





Even at night Rose Blanche made her journey to the forest. The snow was melting now and the track was muddy. Others travelling under the cover of dark — soldiers, thousands of them, exhausted, wounded, dispirited — poured back through the town and on into the night. There was no singing or waving now.

Then one morning the whole town decided to leave. People were frightened. They carried bags, and furniture and pets, they loaded wheelbarrows and carts. The mayor was one of the first to leave. He had taken off the bright armband he had once been so proud of.

That was the day Rose Blanche disappeared. Her mother searched frantically for her all over the emptying town. She asked everyone she met if they had seen her daughter. "She's probably with friends, ahead", they told her. "Don't worry. Pack your bags and come with us".

Thick fog shrouded the forest and it was hard to find the way. Rose's feet were muddy and frozen. Her clothes were torn, and at last she arrived at her usual place. She stood by the clearing as though in a dream. Everything was so different it was hard to think clearly.

Behind her were figures moving through the fog. Tired and fearful soldiers saw danger everywhere. As Rose Blanche turned to walk away, there was a shot, a sharp and terrible sound which echoed against the bare trees.

Meanwhile there were different soldiers passing through the little town. Their language was strange, their uniforms unfamiliar, and though they were tired, they were cheerful. The war was almost over.

Rose Blanche's mother never found the little girl. As the weeks went by, another, gentler invasion began. The cold retreated, fresh grasses advanced across the land. There were explosions of colour. Trees put on their bright new uniforms and paraded in the sun. Birds took up their positions and sang their simple message. Spring had triumphed.

The Son



A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art.

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands.

He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art." The young man held out this package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?" There was silence.

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted. "Will somebody bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?"



Another voice angrily. "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!"

But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

'We have \$10, who will bid \$20?'

"Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters."

'\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?'

The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!"

A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

'What about the paintings?'

'I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!'

----- ***** -----

Moral of the Story:

God gave His son 2,000 years ago to die on the cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is: "The son, who will take the son?" Because, you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.

'For God so love the world he gave his only begotten Son, who so ever believeth, shall have eternal life.'

Now that is love !!

Are we nearly there?

By Joan Stimson

Today was the day for Daisy and Dad's journey. Daisy had been staying with her grandparents. But now Dad had come to collect her, and to take her somewhere even more special! Daisy couldn't wait to set off. So, as soon as they had said their goodbyes, she began to run along the twisty



track... At first Daisy ran as fast as she could. But, little by little, she began to tire. "Are we nearly there?" asked Daisy. "It's Rabbit," she explained. "He's too tired to go any further." Dad shook his head. But he tucked Rabbit on top of their rucksack. And Daisy padded off along the twisty track...

Daisy and Dad padded side by side. But suddenly something rumbled. "Are we nearly there?" shouted Daisy above the noise. "It's my tummy," she explained. "It's too empty to go any further!" Dad shook his head. But he rummaged in their rucksack and found the food.

Daisy ate all her own picnic and most of Dad's. For a while she was too full to go any further. So Daisy had a little snooze. And before long she felt light enough to dance along the twisty track... But Daisy wasn't looking where she was dancing. She didn't see the bed of nettles! "OW, WOW, WOUCH! Are we nearly there?" wailed Daisy. "It's my paws," she explained. "They're too hot and stingy to go any further!" Dad shook his head.



But he blew and he blew until Daisy's paws were cool again and she could bounce – along the twisty track...

Dad was just getting into his bounce when there was a crackle of lightning. Next there was a crash of thunder. And then as soon as the thunder and lightning had stopped it began to pour with rain. Daisy didn't like getting wet.

"Are we n-n-nearly th-th-there?" she shivered. "It's my fur," explained Daisy. "It's too soggy to go any further!" Dad shook his head. But he rummaged in their rucksack and brought out a towel. "Rub-a-dub-dub. Rub-a-dub-dub," went Dad, until his arms ached and Daisy was warm and dry. "Ooooh, look!" cried Daisy. "It's a rainbow!" And she skipped towards it – along the twisty track...

The sun grew warm, then hot. "Phew! Are we nearly there?" panted Daisy. "It's meee," she explained. "I'm too floppy to go any further." Dad flopped down, too. "So am I!" he said.

"Oh, no!" cried Daisy. "Now we'll never get there!" But Dad was already rummaging... right to the bottom of their rucksack. At last he found what he wanted... "It's a bottle of Grandma's Famous Fizz," he beamed. "She told me to keep it for emergencies."

Dad held the bottle in a stream to cool it. "Mmmm!" said Daisy and Dad. And they drank exactly half each.

As soon as they'd finished their fizz, Dad swung Daisy onto his shoulders. Then he carried her – round the final twist in the track... And suddenly Daisy could see for herself.

"Look, Dad, look," she cried, "WE'RE NEARLY THERE! WE'RE NEARLY THERE!" Dad set Daisy gently on the ground. "Come on!" she told him. And together they ran the rest of the way to the end of the twisty track...

HOME !



Edward Goes Exploring

By David Pace

Edward loved animals and more than anything else in the world he wanted to be the first to discover a new animal. So one day Edward set out into the wild to see what he could find. He hadn't gone very far when he heard a **SQUEAKING** and a **RUSTLING** in the big green bush... "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered some Weenynibbles." "SQUEEAK! SQUEEAK! We aren't Weenynibbles, we're mice!" squeaked the mice. So Edward wrote a note in his book: mice.

A little further on Edward heard a **CROAK, CROAK, CROAKING** from down by the pond. "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered some Croakyjumpers."

"CROAK, CROAK! We aren't Croakyjumpers, we're frogs!" croaked the frogs.

So Edward wrote a note in his book: frogs.



Next Edward heard a **HISS, HISS, HISSING**, high up in the branches of an old apple tree. "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered a Slitheryslip." "HISSSSSSSSSSSS, I'm not a Slitheryslip, I'm a snake!" hissed the snake. So Edward wrote a note in his book: snake.

Then Edward heard a **QUACK, QUACK, QUACKING** from down among the reeds. "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered some Puddle-quackers." "QUAAACK, QUAAACK! We aren't Puddle-quackers, we're ducks!" quacked the ducks. So Edward wrote a note in his book: ducks.

A little further on Edward heard a **MEWING** and a **MIAOWING** from behind a tree. "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered a Tiggamog." "MIAOOOOOW! I'm not a Tiggamog, I'm a cat!" miaowed the cat. So Edward wrote a note in his book: cat.

Then Edward heard a **WOOF, WOOF, WOOFING** from behind a wall. "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered a Waggywoof." "WOOF, WOOF! I'm not a Waggywoof, I'm a dog!" barked the dog. So Edward wrote a note in his book: dog.



Then Edward heard a very, very, very soft **CHOMP, CHOMP, CHOMPING**. "Ah-haaa!" whispered Edward. "What's this? I have discovered a Leaf-chomper!" "CHOMP, CHOMP! I'm not a Leafchomper, I'm a caterpillar," said the caterpillar in a small voice. So Edward wrote a note in his book: caterpillar.

Suddenly Edward heard a SQUEAKING, a RUSTLING and a CROAK, CROAK, CROAKING. A HISS, HISS, HISSING and a QUACK, QUACK, QUACKING. A MEWING, a MIAOWING and a WOOF, WOOF, WOOFING and a very, very, very soft CHOMP CHOMP CHOMPING. And the strangest sound of all. **EED-WAAARDDD!** "Ah-haaa!" said Edward. "What's this? I have discovered a Splosherwasher!" "I'm not a Splosherwasher! I'm a Mum!" said Edward's mum. "And I have discovered an Edward who needs a bath!" Then Mum wrote a note in Edward's book: BATH!



Handa's Surprise

by Eileen Browne

Handa has put seven delicious fruits in a basket for her friend, Akeyo.



She will be surprised, thought Handa as she set off for Akeyo's village.

I wonder which fruit she'll like best?

Will she like the soft yellow banana...

or



the sweet-smelling guava?



Will she like the round juicy orange...



or the red ripe mango?



Will she like the spiky-leaved pineapple...



the creamy green avocado...



or the tangy purple passion-fruit?



Which fruit will Akeyo like best?

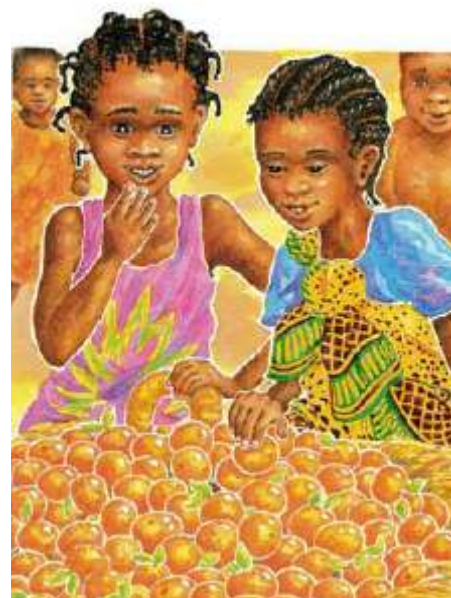


"Hello, Akeyo," said Handa.

"I've brought you a surprise."

"Tangerines!" said Akeyo. "My favourite fruit."

"TANGERINES?" said Handa. "That is a surprise!"



Just One Wish

By Margaret E. Mack



The capacity to care is the thing that gives life its deepest meaning and significance. —Pablo Casals

Fox River gave life to the country town of Colby Point, for the road and the river ran alongside one another. Colby Point was really the name of a road that crept between the hills and valleys of McHenry, Illi-

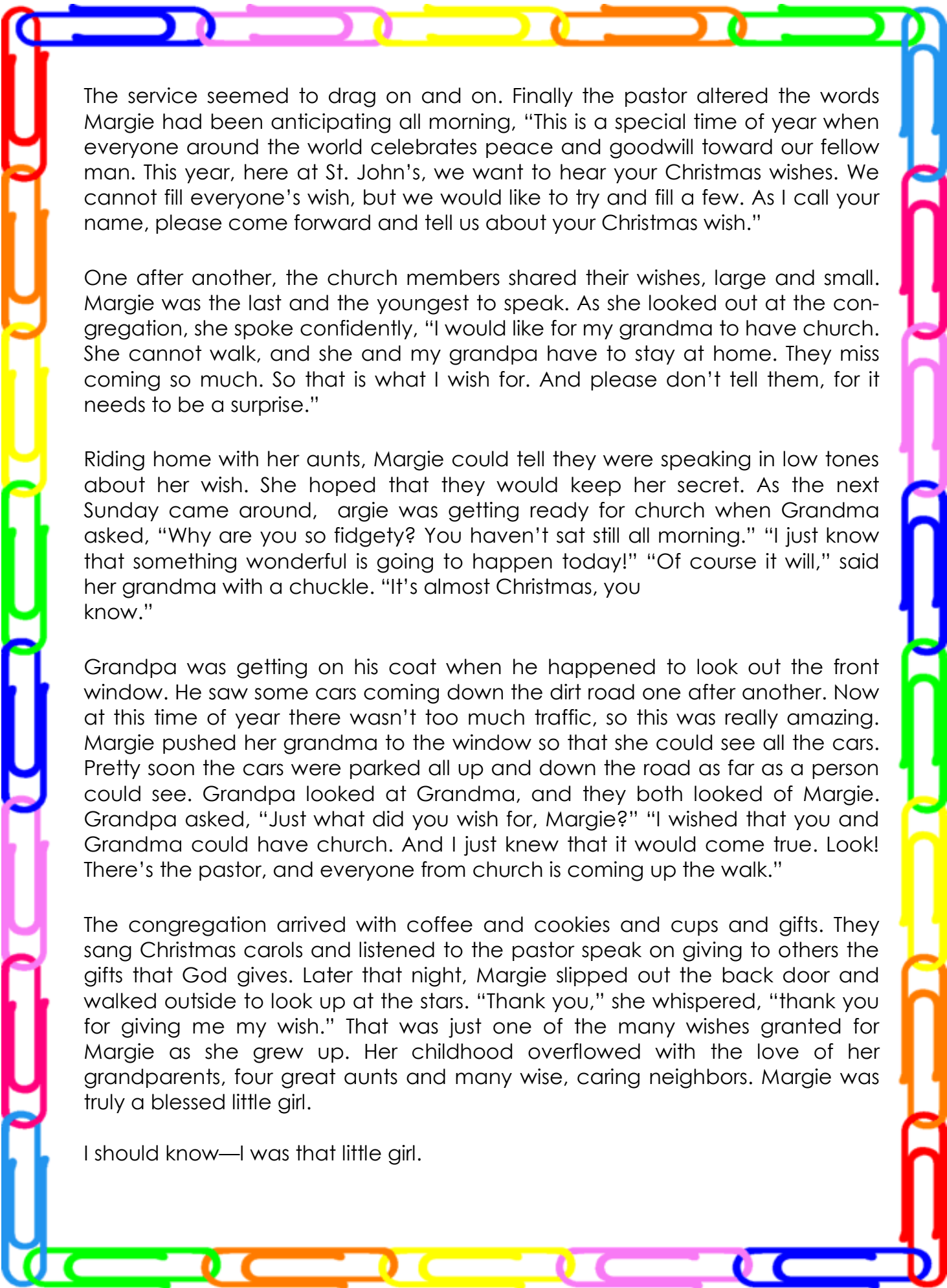
nois. Homes were scattered here and there—mostly summer homes and retirement homes. At the very end of the road three houses all faced one another. Three sisters—all single, all seniors—lived in one of the homes. Across the way their widowed first cousin lived in a yellow house. Next to her lived their brother, ill, and his wife, Cleo.

Cleo had multiple sclerosis, so the pair had moved to Colby Point seeking a quiet, relaxed life. Little did they know when they relocated to this serene area that they would end up rearing their granddaughter, Margie. Before long, the once-quiet neighborhood became active with the sounds of a child.

Margie always looked forward to the arrival of Christmas, and this year was no different as winter began to settle like a warm blanket around Colby Point. Everyone was in a flurry, for at the church Margie and her family attended, the congregation was preparing to share their Christmas wishes with each other. Since Cleo couldn't make it to church, and Bill didn't like to leave her alone for too long, he was in the habit of dropping Margie off at church early on Sunday mornings; the aunts would bring her home.

As Margie sat in church that morning, she rehearsed in her mind over and over what she would say.

She wasn't afraid, for she knew what an important wish this was.



The service seemed to drag on and on. Finally the pastor altered the words Margie had been anticipating all morning, "This is a special time of year when everyone around the world celebrates peace and goodwill toward our fellow man. This year, here at St. John's, we want to hear your Christmas wishes. We cannot fill everyone's wish, but we would like to try and fill a few. As I call your name, please come forward and tell us about your Christmas wish."

One after another, the church members shared their wishes, large and small. Margie was the last and the youngest to speak. As she looked out at the congregation, she spoke confidently, "I would like for my grandma to have church. She cannot walk, and she and my grandpa have to stay at home. They miss coming so much. So that is what I wish for. And please don't tell them, for it needs to be a surprise."

Riding home with her aunts, Margie could tell they were speaking in low tones about her wish. She hoped that they would keep her secret. As the next Sunday came around, Margie was getting ready for church when Grandma asked, "Why are you so fidgety? You haven't sat still all morning." "I just know that something wonderful is going to happen today!" "Of course it will," said her grandma with a chuckle. "It's almost Christmas, you know."

Grandpa was getting on his coat when he happened to look out the front window. He saw some cars coming down the dirt road one after another. Now at this time of year there wasn't too much traffic, so this was really amazing. Margie pushed her grandma to the window so that she could see all the cars. Pretty soon the cars were parked all up and down the road as far as a person could see. Grandpa looked at Grandma, and they both looked at Margie. Grandpa asked, "Just what did you wish for, Margie?" "I wished that you and Grandma could have church. And I just knew that it would come true. Look! There's the pastor, and everyone from church is coming up the walk."

The congregation arrived with coffee and cookies and cups and gifts. They sang Christmas carols and listened to the pastor speak on giving to others the gifts that God gives. Later that night, Margie slipped out the back door and walked outside to look up at the stars. "Thank you," she whispered, "thank you for giving me my wish." That was just one of the many wishes granted for Margie as she grew up. Her childhood overflowed with the love of her grandparents, four great aunts and many wise, caring neighbors. Margie was truly a blessed little girl.

I should know—I was that little girl.



Moonbird

By Joyce Dunbar &
Jane Ray

Moonchild was blowing bubbles. Big, pearly moon bubbles they were, floating off into outer space. Some burst upon the spikes of stars. Some floated all the way to earth and burst wherever they landed. One landed by an earth baby's ear. "Pop!" it went, wrapping the child up in silence. But this was no ordinary silence. This was the silence of the moon. "What's wrong with our child?" said the earth baby's father, who happened to be a king. "My baby doesn't smile when I sing," said the earth baby's mother, who happened to be a queen. "He doesn't listen for his name."

Louder and louder she called "Orla! Orla! Orla!" They sent for the royal soothsayer. She shook a silver rattle by the baby's ear. Orla did not turn his head. "Your child cannot hear us," said the soothsayer. "Can't hear!" said the Queen. "You mean the royal prince is deaf?" "Oh no, not deaf," said the soothsayer. "This child can hear, but not earth sounds with his ears. He hears different sounds, in a different way."



"That can't be so," said the King and Queen.

"Of course he can hear us." But no matter how the King and Queen shouted, their son did not hear them. Because he could not hear, Orla did not learn to speak. The King and Queen were heartbroken. How could their child ever be a king? Orla became known as the silent prince. His parents sent far and wide for people to help him, but nothing worked.

Until one day, when Orla was five years old. He was playing in the palace gardens alone when he spied a moonbird in a tree. The moonbird spread his patterned wings and spoke to Orla. "Follow me," said the bird.

Orla was so surprised to hear a voice that he could only do as he was told. There was magic in the moonbird's song.

Whoever heard it found themselves in a moon garden, where fruit and flowers grew never seen on earth, and where animals had magical powers.

At first Orla slept in the moon garden. When he awoke, he found a soft-eyed gazelle staring into his face. Just like the moon bird, the gazelle spoke so that Orla could hear.



"As I speak with my eyes, you can listen with yours," she said. "It is a gift. You will be able to share it with your mother and father." A silver monkey helped to care for the young prince. With his hands and the movement of his body, the monkey talked to him. Soon, Orla could talk with his hands as well as any of the young silver monkeys. They could send messages across great distances as they leaped along the treetops. They made mischief and played jokes. With the gazelles he heard the music in the trees when the breeze blew. "Eye music," they called it. They heard voices in pools and laughter in leaves and singing in waving grass.

The moonbird appeared again. "It is time to return to your family," he said to Orla. Orla was so excited. "Will I be able to talk to my parents?" he asked. He followed the moonbird's song out of the moon garden and burst into the palace. "Mother! Father!" he called.

He went rushing over to greet them, listening with his bright clear eyes, talking with eloquent hands. The King and Queen were amazed at the change in their son. "Orla, where have you been?" they asked him. Orla did his best to tell them but they could not read his eyes. They watched the strange and beautiful dance of their son's talking hands and his silent mouthing. "He seems to be talking to us, but we don't know what he means. We don't know how to talk back to him," they said to the soothsayer. "We can learn," said the soothsayer, who had been very quick to pick up the boy's sign language.



"I don't know how," said the Queen. "Kings don't talk with their fingers," said the King. Orla felt so sad.

He so loved his mother and father and he wanted to share what he knew. Just then, the moonbird flew in through the window.

"Listen to the song of the bird," said the soothsayer. "Then you shall have your answer."

The moonbird sang his song. He sang of the stillness of mountains and the sounds beneath their silence. He sang of the shining earth as it turns in space. He sang of the moon and stars and of worlds beyond this world. "What's it all about?" said the King. "I can't hear anything," said the Queen. But Orla heard.



Watching all the while was Moonchild. He hadn't meant to cause so much trouble. What could he do to put it right? He blew an enormous moon bubble which floated off into space and landed right over the Kingdom.

Everyone was wrapped in the moon silence. And what did they hear in this silence? With their eyes they heard the moonbird's song of the earth. In their hands they held the moonbird's song of the moon and sun. In their hearts they felt the moonbird's song of the stars. They saw and heard and understood as never before. The King and Queen put their arms out to their son. "How could we have been so blind? And deaf!" "Pop!" the moon bubble burst.

Orla had something else to show his parents – a pip from the moonfruit in the moon garden. Together they planted the pip in the royal garden. Now the moontree is a million years old and the moonbird sings from its branches. Its song is the pictures in your mind.



A Glass of Milk (True Story)



One day, a poor boy who was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school, found he had only one thin dime left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water.

She thought he looked hungry so brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness."

He said, "Then I thank you from my heart." As Howard Kelly left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and man was strong also. He had been ready to give up and quit.

Year's later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease. Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation.

When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case.

After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room.

She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read the words over and over again:

"Paid in full with one glass of milk"

The Cracked Jar

By Paolo Coelho

An Indian legend tells of a man who carried water to his village every day, in two large jars tied to the ends of a wooden pole, which he balanced on his back.

One of the jars was older than the other, and had some small cracks; every time the man covered the distance to his house, half of the water was lost.

The younger jar was always very proud of its performance, safe in the knowledge that it was up to the mission it had been made for, while the other jar was mortified with shame at only fulfilling half of its allotted task.

It was so ashamed that one day, while the man got ready to fetch water from the well, it decided to speak to him, 'I want to apologize, but because of the many years of service, you are only able to deliver half of my load, and quench half of the thirst which awaits you at your home.'

The man smiled, and said, 'When we return, observe carefully the path.'

And so it did. And the jar noticed that, on its side, many flowers and plants grew.

'See how nature is more lovely on your side?' commented the man. 'I always knew you were cracked, and decided to make use of this fact. I planted flowers and vegetables, and you have always watered them. I have picked many roses to decorate my house with, I have fed my children with lettuce, cabbage and onions. If you were not as you are, how could I have done that? All of us, at some point, grow old and start to acquire other qualities. We can always make the most of each one of these new qualities and obtain a good result.'





A Doll and a White Rose



On the last day before Christmas, I hurried to go to the supermarket to buy the remaining of the gift I didn't manage to buy earlier.

When I saw all the people there, I started to complain to myself, "It is going to take forever here and I still have so many other places to go. Christmas really is getting more and more annoying every year. How I wish I could just lie down, go to sleep and only wake up after it..." Nonetheless, I made my way to the toy section, and there I started to curse the prices, wondering if after all kids really play with such expensive toys.

While looking in the toy section, I noticed a small boy of about 5 years old, pressing a doll against his chest. He kept on touching the hair of the doll and looked so sad. I wondered whom was this doll for. Then the little boy turned to the old woman next to him, "Granny, are you sure I don't have enough money?"

The old lady replied, "You know that you don't have enough money to buy this doll, my dear."

Then she asked him to stay here for 5 minutes while she went to look around. She left quickly. The little boy was still holding the doll in his hand.

Finally, I started to walk toward him and I asked him whom did he want to give this doll to. "It is the doll that my sister loved most and wanted so much for this Christmas. She was so sure that Santa Claus would bring it to her."

I replied to him that maybe Santa Claus will bring it to her, after all, and not to worry. But he replied to me sadly. "No, Santa Claus can not bring it to her where she is now. I have to give the doll to my mother so that she can give it to her when she goes there. His eyes were so sad while saying this. "My sister has gone to be with God. Daddy says that Mummy will also go to see God very soon, so I thought that she could bring the doll with her to give it to my sister."

My heart nearly stopped. The little boy looked up at me and said, "I told daddy to tell mummy not to go yet. I asked him to wait until I come back from the supermarket."

Then he showed me a very nice photo of him where he was laughing. He then told me, "I also want mummy to take this photo with her so that she will not forget me." I love my mummy and I wish she doesn't have to leave me but daddy says that she has to go to be with my little sister."



Then he looked again at the doll with sad eyes, very quietly. I quickly reached for my wallet and took a few notes and said to the boy, "What if we checked again, just in case if you have enough money?"

"Ok," he said. "I hope that I have enough."

I added some of my money to his without him seeing and we started to count it. There was enough for the doll, and even some spare money.

The little boy said, "Thank you God for giving me enough money." Then he looked at me and added, "I asked yesterday before I slept for God to make sure I have enough money to buy this doll so that mummy can give it to my sister. He heard me. I also wanted to have enough money to buy a white rose for my mummy, but I didn't dare to ask God too much. But He gave me enough to buy the doll and the white rose."

"You know, my mummy loves white roses." A few minutes later, the old lady came again and I left with my trolley. I finished my shopping in a totally different state from when I started. I couldn't get the little boy out of my mind.

Then I remembered a local newspaper article 2 days ago, which mentioned of a drunk man in a truck who hit a car where there was one young lady and a little girl. The little girl died right away, and the mother was left in a critical state. The family had to decide whether to pull the plug on the life-assisting machine, because the young lady would not be able to get out of the coma. Was this the family of the little boy?

Two days after this encounter with the little boy, I read in the newspaper that the young lady had passed away. I couldn't stop myself and went to buy a bunch of white roses and I went to the mortuary where the body of the young woman was exposed for people to see and make last wish before burial.

She was there, in her coffin, holding a beautiful white rose in her hand with the photo of the little boy and the doll placed over her chest. I left the place crying, feeling that my life had been changed forever. The love that this little boy had for his mother and his sister is still, to that day, hard to imagine. And in a fraction of a second, a drunk man had taken all this away from him.



Now That Is God !

It was one of the hottest days of the dry season. We had not seen rain in almost a month. The crops were dying. Cows had stopped giving milk. The creeks and streams were long gone back into the earth. It was a dry season that would bankrupt several farmers before it was through.

Every day, my husband and his brothers would go about the arduous process of trying to get water to the fields. Lately this process had involved taking a truck to the local water rendering plant and filling it up with water. But severe rationing had cut everyone off.

If we did not see some rain soon, we would lose everything. It was on this day that I learned the true lesson of sharing and witnessed the only miracle I have seen with my own eyes. I was in the kitchen making lunch for my husband and his brothers when I saw my Six-year-old son, Billy, walking toward the woods.

He was not walking with the usual carefree abandon of a youth but with a serious purpose. I could only see his back. He was obviously walking with a great effort, trying to be as still as possible.

Minutes after he disappeared into the woods, he came running out again, toward the house.


I went back to making sandwiches; thinking that whatever task he had been doing was completed. Moments later, however, he was once again walking in that slow purposeful stride toward the woods. This activity went on for an hour; walking carefully to the woods, running back to the house.

Finally I could not take it any longer and I crept out of the house and followed him on his journey (being very careful not to be seen as he was obviously doing important work and didn't need his Mommy checking up on him).

He was cupping both hands in front of him as he walked, being very careful not to spill the water he held in them, maybe two or three tablespoons were held in his tiny hands. I sneaked close as he went into the woods.

Branches and thorns slapped his little face, but he did not try to avoid them. He had a much higher purpose. As I leaned in to spy on him, I saw the most amazing site.

Several large deer loomed in front of him. Billy walked right up to them. I almost screamed for him to get away.



A huge buck with elaborate antlers was dangerously close. But the buck did not threaten him he did not even move as Billy knelt down. And I saw a tiny fawn lying on the ground; obviously suffering from dehydration and heat exhaustion, lift its head with great effort to lap up the water cupped in my beautiful boy's hand.

When the water was gone, Billy jumped up to run back to the house and I hid behind a tree.

I followed him back to the house to a spigot to which we had shut off the water. Billy opened it all the way up and a small trickle began to creep out. He knelt there, letting the drip, drip slowly fill up his makeshift "cup," as the sun beat down on his little back.

And it came clear to me: The trouble he had gotten into for playing with the hose the week before. The lecture he had received about the importance of not wasting water. The reason he did not ask me to help him. It took almost twenty minutes for the drops to fill his hands. When he stood up and began the trek back, I was there in front of him.

His little eyes just filled with tears. "I'm not wasting," was all he said.

As he began his walk, I joined him with a small pot of water from the kitchen. I let him tend to the fawn. I stayed away. It was his job. I stood on the edge of the woods watching the most beautiful heart I have ever known working so hard to save another life. As the tears that rolled down my face began to hit the ground, other drops and more drops and more suddenly joined them. I looked up at the sky. It was as if God, himself, was weeping with pride.

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Morale of the Story:

Never loose the Faith even in the worst of situations. If God gets you to it, he will guide you through it !

The Old Phone on the Wall

When I was a young boy, my father had one of the first telephones in our neighbourhood. I remember the polished, old case fastened to the wall. The shiny receiver hung on the side of the box. I was too little to reach the telephone, but used to listen with fascination when my mother talked to it.

Then I discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device lived an amazing person. Her name was "Information Please" and there was nothing she did not know. Information Please could supply anyone's number and the correct time.

My personal experience with the genie-in-a-bottle came one day while my mother was visiting a neighbour. Amusing myself at the tool bench in the basement, I whacked my finger with a hammer, the pain was terrible, but there seemed no point in crying because there was no one home to give sympathy.

I walked around the house sucking my throbbing finger, finally arriving at the stairway. The telephone! Quickly, I ran for the footstool in the parlour and dragged it to the landing. Climbing up, I unhooked the receiver in the parlour and held it to my ear.

"Information, please" I said into the mouthpiece just above my head.

A click or two and a small clear voice spoke into my ear. "Information."

"I hurt my finger..." I wailed into the phone, the tears came readily enough now that I had an audience.

"Isn't your mother home?" came the question.

"Nobody's home but me," I blubbered.

"Are you bleeding?" the voice asked.

"No," I replied. "I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts."

"Can you open the icebox?" she asked. I said I could.





"Then chip off a little bit of ice and hold it to your finger," said the voice...

After that, I called "Information Please" for everything.. I asked her for help with my geography, and she told me where Philadelphia was. She helped me with my math.

She told me my pet chipmunk that I had caught in the park just the day before, would eat fruit and nuts.

Then, there was the time Petey, our pet canary, died.. I called, 'Information Please,' and told her the sad story. She listened, and then said things grown-ups say to soothe a child. But I was not consoled.

I asked her, "Why is it that birds should sing so beautifully and bring joy to all families, only to end up as a heap of feathers on the bottom of a cage?"

She must have sensed my deep concern, for she said quietly," Wayne, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow I felt better.

Another day I was on the telephone, "Information Please."

"Information," said in the now familiar voice. "How do I spell fix?" I asked.

All this took place in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. When I was nine years old, we moved across the country to Boston . I missed my friend very much. "Information Please" belonged in that old wooden box back home and I somehow never thought of trying the shiny new phone that sat on the table in the hall. As I grew into my teens, the memories of those childhood conversations never really left me. Often, in moments of doubt and perplexity I would recall the serene sense of security I had then. I appreciated now how patient, understanding, and kind she was to have spent her time on a little boy.

A few years later, on my way west to college, my plane put down in Seattle, I had about a half-hour or so between planes. I spent 15 minutes or so on the phone with my sister, who lived there now. Then without thinking what I was doing, I dialled my hometown operator and said, "Information Please."

Miraculously, I heard the small, clear voice I knew so well. "Information." I hadn't planned this, but I heard myself saying, "Could you please tell me how to spell fix?"

There was a long pause. Then came the soft spoken answer, "I guess your finger must have healed by now."

I laughed, "So it's really you," I said. "I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time?"

I wonder," she said, "if you know how much your calls meant to me.

I never had any children and I used to look forward to your calls."

I told her how often I had thought of her over the years and I asked if I could call her again when I came back to visit my sister.

"Please do", she said. "Just ask for Sally."

Three months later I was back in Seattle. A different voice answered, "Information." I asked for Sally.

"Are you a friend?" she said.

"Yes, a very old friend," I answered.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this," She said. "Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was sick. She died five weeks ago."

Before I could hang up, she said, "Wait a minute, did you say your name was Wayne ?"

"Yes." I answered.

"Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you."

The note said, "Tell him there are other worlds to sing in. He'll know what I mean."

I thanked her and hung up.

I knew what Sally meant. Never underestimate the impression you may make on others.

Moral of the Story:

Life is a journey... NOT a guided tour !!!



Teddy Stoddard

Mrs. Thompson was an elementary teacher. As she stood in front of her 5th grade class on her very first day of school, she told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. And Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

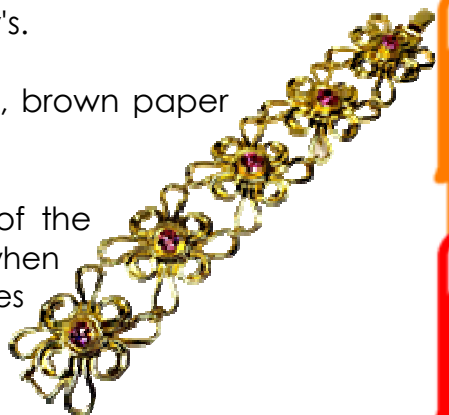
His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's.

His present which was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume.





But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left she cried for at least an hour.

On that very day, she quit teaching reading, and writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children.

Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one her "teacher's pets."

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer-the letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D.

The story doesn't end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place at the wedding that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back.

She said, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

Who Packs Your Parachute ?

Charles Plumb was a US Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience!

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!"

"How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb.

"I packed your parachute," the man replied. Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude.

The man shook his hand and said, "I guess it worked!"

Plumb assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."

Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man.

Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he had looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat; a bib in the back; and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor."

Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know. Now, Plumb asks his audience, "Who's packing your parachute?"

Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. He also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory—he needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute.

He called on all these supports before reaching safety.

Moral of the Story:

Sometimes in the daily challenges that life gives us, we miss what is really important. We may fail to say hello, please, or thank you, congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, give a compliment, or just do something nice for no reason.

As you go through this week, this month, this year, recognize people who pack your parachutes. You might find out that you are actually packing someone else's parachute !

The Wooden Bowl

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year-old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered

The family ate together at the table. But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. 'We must do something about father,' said the son. 'I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor.'

So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl.

When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, 'What are you making?' Just as sweetly, the boy responded, 'Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up'. The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.

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Moral of the Story:

Treat your elderly with respect.

Treat others in the same way that you wish to be treated.

This Is What Love Is All About !

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80's, arrived to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had an appointment at 9:00 am.

I took his vital signs and had him take a seat, knowing it would be over an hour before someone would be able to see him. I saw him looking at his watch and decided, since I was not busy with another patient, I would evaluate his wound.

On exam, it was well healed, so I talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound.

While taking care of his wound, I asked him if he had another doctor's appointment this morning, as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman told me no, that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife.

I inquired as to her health. He told me that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's Disease. As we talked, I asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late. He replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now.

I was surprised, and asked him, "And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?"

He smiled as he patted my hand and said, "She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is."

I had to hold back tears as he left, I had goose bumps on my arm, and thought, "That is the kind of love I want in my life."

True love is neither physical, nor romantic. True love is an acceptance of all that is, has been, will be, and will not be.

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Morale Of The Story:

The happiest people do not necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything they have.



Two Travelling Angels

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead the angels were given a small space in the cold basement.



As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest.

When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears.

Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped him, she accused. The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die."

"Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied.

"When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it."

"Then last night as we slept in the farmers' bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

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Morale of the Story:

Sometimes that is exactly what happens when things do not turn out the way they should. If you have faith, you just need to trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You just might not know it until sometime later.



Some people...

Some people
come into our lives
and quickly go.

Oooo
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oooO
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Some people
become friends
and stay awhile..

leaving beautiful
footprints on our
hearts..

Oooo
()
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oooO
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_)

and we are never
quite the same
because we have
made a good
friend !!

The Dancing Lass of Anglesey

By Heather Forest

In Scotland long ago, a king was ashen pale with fright.
He trembled to think that fifteen men would claim his lands that night.
They were coming to dance his lands away,
with pounding steps and graceful sway.
Each was a dancing champion with steps so firm and strong
that none of the king's own champions could dance as fine or long.

"I'll lose my gold. I'll lose my lands,"
the king worried and wrung his hands.
"I cannot gain the victory
unless I find the lass from Anglesey.
None can dance as well as she."

He sent north and south and east and west
to find the one who danced the best.

"Go forth, my Lords, and bring to me
The Dancing Lass of Anglesey.

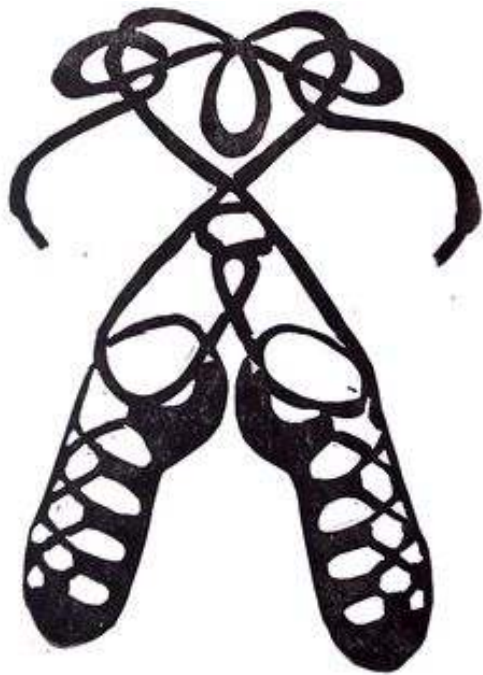
They say she dances the time away
till flowers bloom and wheat crops sway,
till everything dies and fades away,
till nothing can stand anymore.

She dances the seasons,
she dances the time,
she dances the tides,
the ageless rhyme.

With delicate feet she keeps the beat
till none can stand anymore.
She'll dance them to the floor."

Well ... they found her on a distant hill and
brought her before the king.
"If you'll dance for me," he said,
"I'll give you anything.





I'll give you a mill and lands," he said,
"and my bonniest knight for you to wed."

She replied, "I'll take your mill.
I'll take your land.
I care not for a knight to take my hand.
So keep your bonny boy
...I'll dance just for the joy."

And so came them all
to the great king's hall,
and she danced them
one by one.

With delicate feet she kept the beat
till none could stand anymore.
She stepped, she twirled in a dancer's world,
till they lay in a heap on the floor.

When the fifteen knights were all undone,
she danced the king's men one by one.
And then she took the king
and danced him to the floor.
She leapt about the heap of men,
who could not fight anymore.

So she gathered their swords and their silver buckles
and out the door went she.
For none could dance as long or strong
as the lass from Anglesey,
the Dancing Lass from Anglesey.

Oh, I wish that it were in modern times
a battle could be fought,
and yet none would be killed.
The champion would be
chosen by dancer's skill,
and not by the measure of most blood spilled.



The Red and Blue Coat

By Heather Forest

There once were two childhood friends who were determined to remain close companions always. When they were grown, they each married and built their houses facing one another. Just a small path formed a border between their farms.

One day a trickster from the village decided to test their friendship. He dressed himself in a two-colour coat that was divided down the middle, red on the right side and blue on the left side.

Wearing this coat, the man walked along the narrow path between the two houses. The two friends were each working opposite each other in their fields. The trickster made enough noise as he travelled between them to cause each friend to look up from his side of the path at the same moment and notice him.

At the end of the day, one friend said to the other, "Wasn't that a beautiful red coat that man was wearing today?"

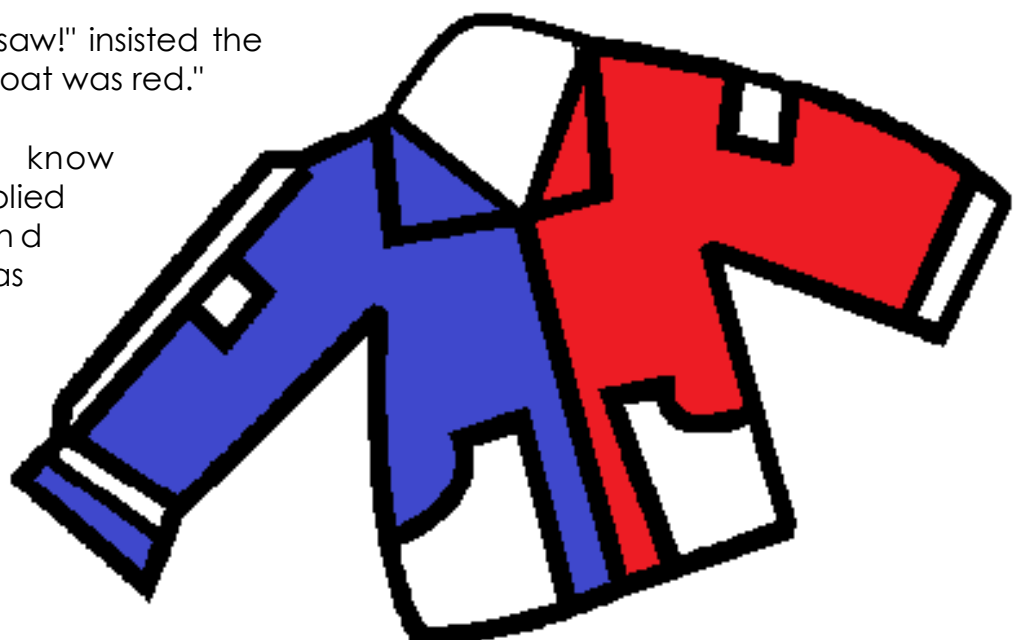
"No," replied the other. "It was blue."

"I saw that man clearly as he walked between us!" said the first. "His coat was red."

"You are wrong!" the second man said. "I saw it too. It was blue."

"I know what I saw!" insisted the first man. "The coat was red."

"You don't know anything," replied the second angrily. "It was blue!"



"So," shouted the first, "you think I am stupid? I know what I saw. It was red!"

"Blue!" the other man said.

"Red!"

"Blue!"

"Red!"

"Blue!"

They began to beat each other and roll around on the ground.

Just then the trickster returned and faced the two men, who were punching and kicking each other and shouting, "Our friendship is over!"

The trickster walked directly in front of them, displaying his coat. He laughed loudly at their silly fight. The two friends saw that his two-colour coat was divided down the middle, blue on the left and red on the right.

The two friends stopped fighting and screamed at the man in the two-coloured coat, "We have lived side by side all our lives like brothers! It is all your fault that we are fighting! You started a war between us."

"Don't blame me for the battle," replied the trickster. "I did not make you fight. Both of you are wrong. And both of you are right. Yes, what each one said was true! You are fighting because you only looked at my coat from your own point of view "

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Moral of the Story:

There are always two sides of a story. Learn them both before you say anything or judge someone.

Also never take any decision when you are angry as you might say or do something that you will regret forever.



A Cloth Full Of Memories

By Glenda Carol Lee

It was an old white sheet discarded and thrown in the back of the linen closet. I was a young mother with two small children and a very small budget. We didn't have a lot of money for Christmas and we definitely didn't have money for any elaborate decorations. But I wanted to make something for my family.

Something that could be used year after year as a family tradition. I had already handcrafted matching Christmas stockings from red felt appliquéd with Christmas trees, teddy bears, baby dolls and tin soldiers, but I wanted something else for my family.

Then I remembered the sheet. Could I possibly use that white sheet to craft a Christmas tablecloth?

My sewing abilities were amateurish, but my love for family and tradition was strong. I got out my sewing machine and started hemming the material in red and green thread. I wrote the words "Merry Christmas" in the middle of the tablecloth and spread it across the dining room table.

I was so proud!

My daughter was two and a half and my son was only seven months, but I wanted to include them in this tradition. I traced their little hands and feet on the cloth, wrote down their names, ages and the date and then I penned a message for my family. I told them how much I loved them, wished them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I signed my name and wrote down the date.

Now, over thirty years later that tablecloth is full of messages, greetings, small handprints from my children and grandson Layton, large handprints and food stains.

Each message is precious and contains sentiments of love, cute poems, and comical sayings.

Four years ago I had to add a white border to allow more room and it's already filled with words from family and friends.



As I sit down to look at each handwritten message, my eyes tear as I come across signatures from my precious mother Bonnie, my stepfather Joseph, my friend's daughter Lindsay, my aunt Olyne, my sweet cousin Karen, all gone but never forgotten.

I see the small handprints of my two children and grandson and I remember the day that I traced around their little hands for the first time. I see the messages they wrote as small children, silly teenagers and young adults. I read about snowstorms, cold weather, pecan season, new bikes, new love, old friends and departed loved ones and I remember.

I see how my writing has changed as I've gotten older, the scribbles of young children and the squiggly drawings they made when I wasn't looking. All the messages are important and treasured as each one signifies a part of their lives and a journey into mine.

I realized after I made the tablecloth, in fact many years later, that this tablecloth can't be divided into squares. Some of the signatures are written so close to one another that if cut apart, a word or two would be lost forever.

I know this tablecloth is old, stained and ugly, but it's full of love and laughter and is a priceless heirloom to me.

I look forward to digging it out each year, spreading it out on the table and sitting down to read and remember. I enjoy writing my message each year—it really never deviates.

I ask for God's blessing, good health, happiness and a wonderful new year. I savour each written word from my family and friends knowing that one day most of the messages written will be from loved ones gone but never forgotten.

This old white sheet has been transformed into a beautiful gift from that young mother, me, who only wanted a tradition for her family, a simple tablecloth full of memories.



The Folded Napkin—A Trucker's Story

I try not to be biased, but I had my doubts about hiring Stevie. His placement counsellor assured me that he would be a good, reliable busboy. But had never had a mentally handicapped employee and wasn't sure I wanted one. I wasn't sure how my customers would react to Stevie.

He was short, a little dumpy with the smooth facial features and thick-tongued speech of Down's Syndrome. I wasn't worried about most of my trucker customers because truckers don't generally care who buses tables as long as the meatloaf platter is good and the pies are homemade.

The four-wheeler drivers were the ones who concerned me; the mouthy college kids travelling to school; the yuppie snobs who secretly polish their silverware with their napkins for fear of catching some dreaded "truck stop germ," the pairs of white-shirted business men on expense accounts who think every truck stop waitress wants to be flirted with.

I knew those people would be uncomfortable around Stevie so I closely watched him for the first few weeks. I shouldn't have worried. After the first week, Stevie had my staff wrapped around his stubby little finger, and within a month my truck regulars had adopted him as their official truck stop mascot.

After that, I really didn't care what the rest of the customers thought of him. He was like a 21-year-old kid in blue jeans and Nikes, eager to laugh and eager to please, but fierce in his attention to his duties. Every salt and pepper shaker was exactly in its place, not a bread crumb or coffee spill was visible when Stevie got done with the table.

Our only problem was persuading him to wait to clean a table until after the customers were finished. He would hover in the background, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, scanning the dining room until a table was empty. Then he would scurry to the empty table and carefully bus dishes and glasses onto his cart and meticulously wipe the table up with a practiced flourish of his rag. If he thought a customer was watching, his brow would pucker with added concentration. He took pride in doing his job exactly right, and you had to love how hard he tried to please each and every person he met.

Over time, we learned that he lived with his mother, a widow who was disabled after repeated surgeries for cancer. They lived on their Social Security benefits in public housing two miles from the truck stop. Their social worker, who stopped to check on him every so often, admitted they had fallen between the cracks. Money was tight, and what I paid him was probably the difference between them being able to live together and Stevie being sent to a group home.

That's why the restaurant was a gloomy place that morning last August, the first morning in three years that Stevie missed work. He was at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester getting a new valve or something put in his heart. His social worker said that people with Down's Syndrome often have heart problems at an early age so this was not unexpected, and

there was a good chance he would come through the surgery in good shape and be back at work in a few months.

A ripple of excitement ran through the staff later that morning when word came that he was out of surgery, in recovery, and doing fine. Frannie, the head waitress, let out a war hoop and did a little dance in the aisle when she heard the good news. Marvin Ringers, one of our regular trucker customers, stared at the sight of this 50-year-old grandmother of four doing a victory shimmy beside his table.

Frannie blushed, smoothed her apron and shot Marvin a withering look. He grinned.

"OK, Frannie, what was that all about?" he asked.

"We just got word that Stevie is out of surgery and going to be okay."

"I was wondering where he was. I had a new joke to tell him. What was the surgery about?" Frannie quickly told Marvin and the other two drivers sitting at his booth about Stevie's surgery, then sighed: "Yeah, I'm glad he is going to be OK," she said. "But I don't know how he and his Mom are going to handle all the bills. From what I hear, they're barely getting by as it is." Marvin nodded thoughtfully, and Frannie hurried off to wait on the rest of her tables.

Since I hadn't had time to round up a busboy to replace Stevie and really didn't want to replace him, the girls were busying their own tables that day until we decided what to do. After the morning rush, Frannie walked into my office. She had a couple of paper napkins in her hand and a funny look on her face.

"What's up?" I asked.

"I didn't get that table where Marvin and his friends were sitting cleared off after they left, and Pete and Tony were sitting there when I got back to clean it off," she said. "This was folded and tucked under a coffee cup."

She handed the napkin to me, and three \$20 bills fell onto my desk when I opened it. On the outside, in big, bold letters, was printed "Something For Stevie."

"Pete asked me what that was all about," she said, "so I told him about Stevie and his Mom and everything, and Pete looked at Tony and Tony looked at Pete, and they ended up giving me this." She handed me another paper napkin that had "Something For Stevie" scrawled on its outside. Two \$50 bills were tucked with in its folds.

Frannie looked at me with wet, shiny eyes, shook her head and said simply: "truckers." That was three months ago. Today is Thanksgiving, the first day Stevie is supposed to be back to work.

His placement worker said he's been counting the days until the doctor said he could work, and it didn't matter at all that it was a holiday. He called 10 times in the past week, making sure we knew he was coming, fearful that we had forgotten him or that his job was in jeopardy. I arranged to have his mother bring him to work.

I then met them in the parking lot and invited them both to celebrate his day back.

Stevie was thinner and paler, but couldn't stop grinning as he pushed through the doors and headed for the back room where his apron and busying cart were waiting.

"Hold up there, Stevie, not so fast," I said. I took him and his mother by their arms. "Work can wait for a minute. To celebrate your coming back, breakfast for you and your mother is on me!"

I led them toward a large corner booth at the rear of the room.

I could feel and hear the rest of the staff following behind as we marched through the dining room. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw booth after booth of grinning truckers empty and join the procession. We stopped in front of the big table. Its surface was covered with coffee cups, saucers and dinner plates, all sitting slightly crooked on dozens of folded paper napkins. "First thing you have to do, Stevie, is clean up this mess," I said. I tried to sound stern.

Stevie looked at me, and then at his mother, then pulled out one of the napkins. It had "Something for Stevie" printed on the outside. As he picked it up, two \$10 bills fell onto the table.

Stevie stared at the money, then at all the napkins peeking from beneath the tableware, each with his name printed or scrawled on it. I turned to his mother. "There's more than \$10,000 in cash and checks on that table, all from truckers and trucking companies that heard about your problems. "Happy Thanksgiving."

Well, it got real noisy about that time, with everybody hollering and shouting, and there were a few tears, as well.

But you know what's funny? While everybody else was busy shaking hands and hugging each other, Stevie, with a big smile on his face, was busy clearing all the cups and dishes from the table.

Best worker I ever hired.

Plant a seed and watch it grow !!

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Moral of the Story:

Never judge a book by it's cover.

Never judge a person at face value always give them the chance to prove themselves before you rule them out.



Rain School

By James Rumford

In the country of Chad, it is the first day of school. The dry dirt road is filling up with children. Big brothers and big sisters are leading the way.

"Will they give us a notebook?" Thomas asks,

"Will they give us a pencil?"

"Will I learn to read like you?"

"Stop asking so many questions and keep up," say the big brothers and big sisters. Thomas arrives at the schoolyard, but there are no classrooms. There are no desks. It doesn't matter. There is a teacher.

"We will build our school," she says. "This is the first lesson."

Thomas learns to make mud bricks and dry them in the sun. He learns to build mud walls and mud desks. He gathers grass and saplings with the other children, and they make a roof. Inside it is cool. It smells of the earth. It smells of the fields ready for planting. Thomas helps bring in little wooden stools. Everyone sits down. This is the moment they have been waiting for. The teacher brings in the blackboard. On it she writes a letter.

"A!" says the teacher.

"A!" says Thomas with the other children.

The teacher writes the letter with big strokes in the air. The students do the same, over and over.

"Wonderful," says the teacher.

She hands out, notebooks and pencils. "Page one," says the teacher. Thomas opens his notebook to the first page and holds his pencil ready and waiting.

"Now write the letter A. Beautiful!" says the teacher as she looks at the students' work.

Every day Thomas learns something new. Every day the teacher cheers him and the other children on. "Excellent job," she says.

"Perfect, my learning friends!"

The nine months of school year fly by.

The last day has come. The students' minds are fat with knowledge. Their notebooks are rumpled from learning.

Thomas and the other children call out, "Thank you, Teacher."

She smiles and says, "Well done, my hard-working, friends! See you next year." Thomas and the other children race home.

The school is empty, and just in time. The big rains have started. The drops come down hard and fast. Strong winds tear at the grass roof. The rain finds its way inside. The school's mud walls are soaked and start to slump. The mud desks, too. Slowly, the school disappears until there is almost nothing left.

It doesn't matter. The letters have been learned and the knowledge taken away by the children.

Come September, school will start over. Thomas will be a big brother then, leading the children on their first day to school. They will stand in front of their smiling teachers, ready to build their school again.

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Note about the Author:

Award-winning author and illustrator James Rumford taught school along with his wife, Carol, in Chad.

One day, during summer vacation in the middle of the rainy season, they came upon the mud ruins of the town's primary school.

Many years later, the memory of that school and the desire of Chadians to get an education no matter the obstacles gave birth to Rain School.

Once upon an everyday

By Toby Forward



I have never gone to sea in a pirate ship, or worn a golden ring in my ear, or had a parrot on my shoulder, or dug up hidden treasure from a secret map here † marks the spot. But I once went fishing with a net, and I didn't catch a single fish, but I found a frog, as green as grass and wet as soap, and I tried to pick him up but he slithered through my fingers and splashed into the pool.

I have never chased a ghost along a haunted passageway or seen bats spread leather wings and flap through cobwebs while owls hoot. But I once walked my grandma to the shops all on my own, and I was so careful when we crossed the road, and she bought me a glass of milk and a cake in the big store.



I have never run away from home to join the circus, or painted my face like a clown, or driven in a car that falls to pieces or squirted water at my sister. But I once stood close to a bonfire, as hot as holidays and as big as a house, and I saw the rockets burst above me in the autumn sky and I heard the thunder cracks and I watched the coloured sparks pour down like painted fountains, and smelled the smoke and tasted the explosions.

I have never run with wolves through forests, or climbed with bears in woods that hang above your head like arms stretched up, or seen the moon ride through the night. But I once camped in the garden in a tent, and Dad slept next to me. He was startled when a rabbit woke us up and he thought he was in bed, but we laughed and went back to sleep.



I have never breathed the smoke from a dragon's mouth, or seen his silver scales, or heard his claws scrape on the grey stone floor of a gloomy cave, or cut the ropes held his prisoner and watched the dragon circle overhead. But I once made my mum a ring out of silver paper and the smoothest button of glass, as red as lips and clear as day, and she wore it to a party.

I have never surfed the ocean on a board and looked down through the rippling water to the world below and seen the jellyfish with streaming friends, or swum with dolphins or heard the whales calling to each other through the deep. But I once picked up my little brother, and he held my finger tight as tight in his tiny fist and rocked him gently and I sang to him. I made him go to sleep when nobody else could do it.





I Will Remember

By Shelley Ann Wake

Until I was eight I thought Sunday was called Sunday because you had to spend it in the sun. I thought that because I spent every single Sunday outside in the garden with Nana. The zucchini plants quickly became my favorite.

It was the way the tiny little delicate tendrils reached out and wrapped around the lattice, like tiny fingers holding on as tightly as they could. They seemed so helpless. I would sit on the ground and tend to them, sensing that they needed me. Nana would sit there, perched on her gardening stool, looking at the tomatoes in the same way.

"Nana," I asked one day, "should I take off all these little yellow flowers?"

"Why would you take the flowers off?" she asked gently.

"Well, I thought they might attract the bugs and then the bugs might eat them."

"No, darling," she said with a little laugh, "those flowers will turn into zucchini soon."

"Really?"

"You just wait. Soon you'll see that little things can turn into wonderful things. You should remember that."

"Little things can turn into wonderful things," I repeated.

"That's right," she said.


Every Sunday I returned to the garden to check on the zucchini plants, and each time I saw more and more zucchini.

"Do you think there are so many because I take good care of the plant?" I asked.

"Yes," Nana said, "when you look after things, good things tend to grow. You should remember that."

"When you look after things, good things tend to grow," I repeated.

"That's right," she said.



I looked after the zucchini plants even better after that. I removed brown leaves, and if one of those tiny tendrils couldn't reach the lattice, I moved it a little closer. Nana did the same to the tomatoes.

Then one Sunday I watched as she took the clippers and cut off one whole branch of the plant.

"Nana!" I put my hand over my mouth in shock. "What did you do that for?"

"The plant isn't strong enough to have two good branches full of tomatoes," she said. "I had to get rid of one so the plant could make the most of the other one."

"Oh."

"You might have to make the same kind of choice some day," she said.

"What do you mean, I'll have to get something chopped off?"

"No dear," she said with a giggle, "but you might have to make some decisions, because sometimes you just can't have everything."

"I'll remember that," I said.

For months I returned every week to Nana's to see how my plant was doing, and each time I was proud to see more zucchini. Until one day, when they stopped appearing, and a few weeks later, there were none.

"Nana, what's wrong with my plant?" I asked tearfully. "It's not growing anymore."

"That's what happens, darling. Things grow but then they stop. Nothing lasts forever."

"But I was so good to it."

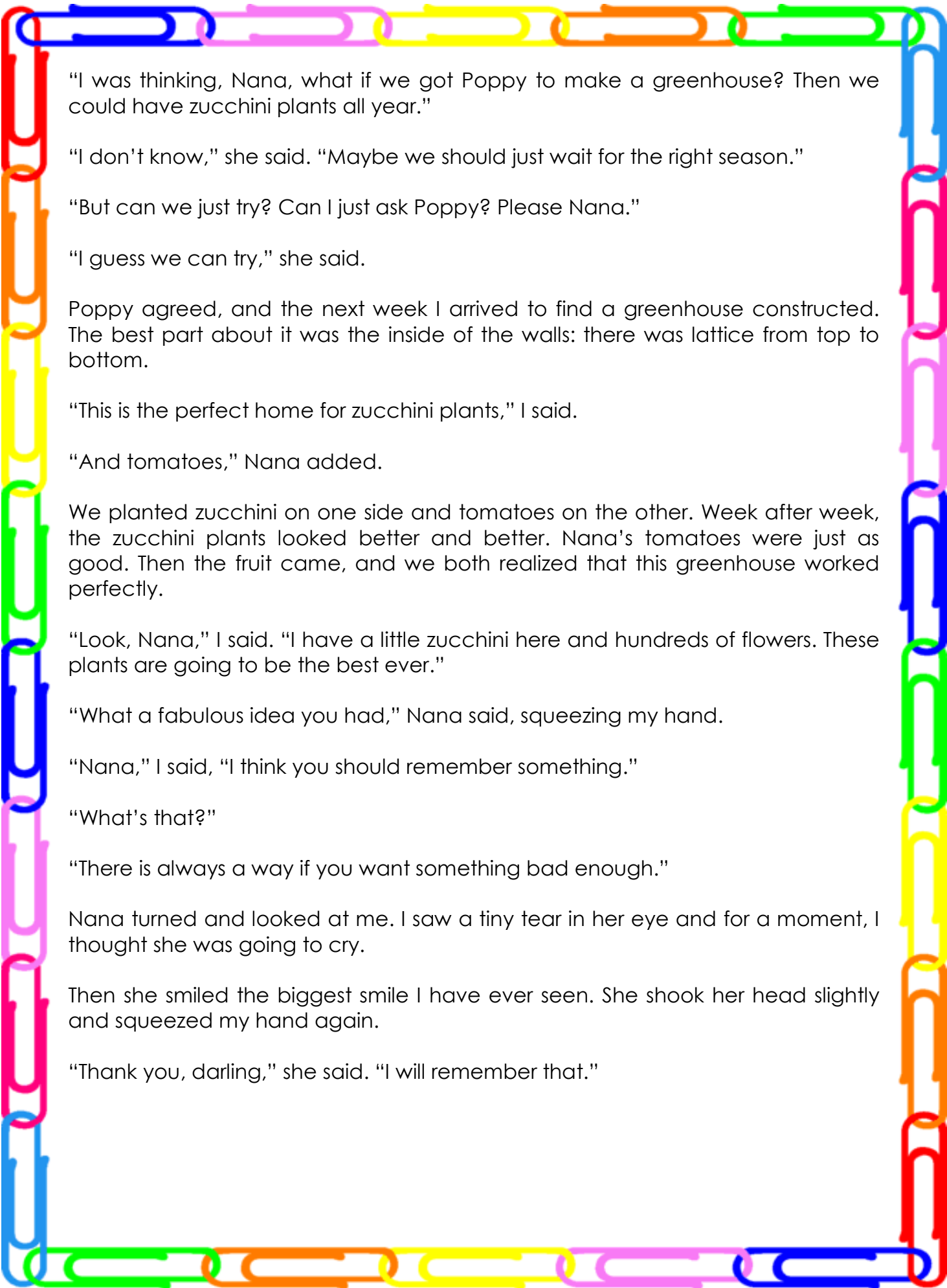
"Yes," she said, "but things end so new things can start."

"And is there something I should remember?"

"Yes," said Nana. "Seasons change, but for everything that ends, something new will take its place."

"I'll remember that," I said.

I helped tend other garden plants, but one day I admitted, "I really miss the zucchini plants."



"I was thinking, Nana, what if we got Poppy to make a greenhouse? Then we could have zucchini plants all year."

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe we should just wait for the right season."

"But can we just try? Can I just ask Poppy? Please Nana."

"I guess we can try," she said.

Poppy agreed, and the next week I arrived to find a greenhouse constructed. The best part about it was the inside of the walls: there was lattice from top to bottom.

"This is the perfect home for zucchini plants," I said.

"And tomatoes," Nana added.

We planted zucchini on one side and tomatoes on the other. Week after week, the zucchini plants looked better and better. Nana's tomatoes were just as good. Then the fruit came, and we both realized that this greenhouse worked perfectly.

"Look, Nana," I said. "I have a little zucchini here and hundreds of flowers. These plants are going to be the best ever."

"What a fabulous idea you had," Nana said, squeezing my hand.

"Nana," I said, "I think you should remember something."

"What's that?"

"There is always a way if you want something bad enough."

Nana turned and looked at me. I saw a tiny tear in her eye and for a moment, I thought she was going to cry.

Then she smiled the biggest smile I have ever seen. She shook her head slightly and squeezed my hand again.

"Thank you, darling," she said. "I will remember that."

New York City's Greatest Underground Secret

By Maureen C. Bruschi

I was four months pregnant, violently ill, and wished I was at home in bed. Unfortunately, I was at work in New York City. My home in Long Island was forty-five minutes away by train. I thought I had morning sickness. The company nurse set me straight.

"You have a forty-eight-hour virus. Go home and get some rest," she said.

I trudged downstairs and grabbed a cab to Penn Station where I could catch a train home. It was lunchtime and Penn Station was mobbed. Crowds of commuters and shoppers dashed to trains and subways. I shuffled out of their way and leaned up against the wall. My legs felt like rubber. Before I knew it, my knees buckled and sank to the floor.

There I was, dressed in my sharpest pantsuit and long winter coat sitting on the floor of a train station. Some commuters stepped around me. Others tripped over my legs. Almost everybody looked at me in disgust. I couldn't blame them. I was a mess. I'm sure they were thinking that alcohol and drugs had done me in. I closed my eyes. Maybe I'd wake up and be home in bed. I felt a tug at my sleeve and looked up. A toothless bag lady hovered over me. She had a ratty wool cap pulled over her hair. She smelled like a mixture of dirty clothes and rotten food. Not a good smell for someone who's pregnant. First I cringed; then I gagged.

"You don't look so good," she said.

I could have said the same thing about her. She waved over a fellow homeless lady and together they lifted me to my feet.

"You got to get out of the way," said the lead bag lady. "People stepping on you."

The two ladies stood on each side of me. One grabbed my handbag, the other my briefcase. I was too sick to panic. We staggered out of the lobby and headed down a flight of stairs. They led me through a maze of passageways. What had I gotten myself into? Finally we stumbled into a dimly lit tunnel. A shopping cart filled with their worldly possessions sat to the side. For them, this was home, below Penn Station. The two escorted me to a wobbly wooden stool.

"Don't worry, you're safe here, honey," said the second bag lady.

Her kind smile showed me several missing and chipped teeth. She certainly wasn't worried about her appearance. Surprisingly, she seemed more concerned about how I felt. The head bag lady disappeared for a moment. She returned with three cups of tea. I'm not much of a tea drinker, but this was by far the most delicious tea I had ever tasted.



"You lookin' better. Where you live?" she asked.

"Long Island," I said.

"We'll get you back to the trains, no problem. But first, you rest."

We chatted about the weather and family, as subways and trains overhead rattled the walls and ceiling. For a moment I felt like I was experiencing an Alice in Wonderland tea party moment with some major differences. While Alice fell down a rabbit hole into a fantasy world populated by outlandish creatures and conversations, I plunged into an underground tunnel populated by two unbelievably caring people. After tea, my two saviours led me to my train and waved goodbye. I hadn't felt this good all day.

After resting for two days, I headed back to work. It was rush hour and the subway was jammed. As I waited for my train to arrive, I stood back on the platform away from the crowd of commuters. I wasn't alone for long.

"How you feeling?" asked my bag lady friend. She wore the same ratty wool cap.

I smiled. I couldn't believe she found me down here in the subway.

"A little tired, but much better. Thanks again for your help."


"No problem. Today, you need a seat on the subway," she said. "No standing for you." She displayed a mischievous grin.

Subway commuters traditionally jockey for the best spot on the platform, which is where the train doors open. Once the doors open, the subway riders push and shove their ways into the train and grab a seat, even while exiting commuters try to leave the train. As my homeless friend approached the coveted spot on the platform, the commuters backed away. (It's an unwritten rule that commuters always keep their distance from the bag ladies.) It was like the parting of the seas. She stood alone. She waved for me to join her. Heads turned as I walked over to her. My new friend put her arm around me. I forced myself to stifle a laugh.

"You gonna get a good seat this morning," she said with a wink.

I didn't doubt her for a moment. The train riders were furious. They had lost their coveted position... and there wasn't anything they could do about it. The train arrived; I scooted on board and grabbed a seat. My nomadic friend quickly stepped back from the tracks and angry riders swarmed the train. The train doors closed and I waved goodbye to my wool-capped helper.

I never saw her again. But for those special couple of days, we shared some laughs, some smiles and some tea. And I realized how lucky I was to receive the gift of kindness from two extraordinary strangers. Sometimes good fortune comes to us when we need it the most and least expect it.



A Lesson in Ugly

By Bobbie Shafer

One of my earliest memories is being all dressed up to have my picture taken. I remember Mother bathing me, putting lotion on my hair and curling it around her finger as she blew on it. I twisted and squirmed and she patiently told me a story as she worked on my hair.

"This will make you pretty," she explained. "You're going to have your picture taken and you want to look pretty, don't you?"

I was a child in the late 40s and early 50s, and that was the time when ladies wore hats and gloves and nylon hose. Men wore three-piece suits, hats, and carried handkerchiefs. Whether it was to church, shopping, or to a special event, everyone dressed their best. There was no jeans, sweatshirts, tennis shoes, or baggy anything.


We lived in an antebellum house in Palestine, Texas, on a large two-acre lot. For some reason, we attracted the discarded and homeless pets of the area. If it was a stray, it ended up in our yard. In the evening Grandpa would fill a half dozen tin pie plates with leftovers and some cheap cat food and take them out into the backyard. He would bang a couple of plates together, yell "kitty, kitty, kitty." After he went back into the house, a dozen feral cats would creep out from the bushes, the sheds, and the storage building and chow down. Sometimes there was even a stray dog or two. If they were tame, Grandpa would try and find homes for them.

It was 1950 and just after Christmas when I came in from school, changed clothes, and grabbed a sandwich before heading across the hall to see my grandparents. I was surprised to see my grandmother sitting alone sipping coffee.

"Where's Grandpa?" I asked.

"Oh, he's in the basement working on an old stray cat that snuck in the basement window. The cat is badly burned, but you know your grandpa, he's determined to doctor that old cat up."

I headed for the cellar. In the past we had sewn up an old hen that had been attacked in the hen house, bandaged dozens of cuts, scrapes, and injuries of assorted cats, dogs, pigs, horses, and even a cow or two. Grandpa could not stand by and let any creature suffer. Grandpa's back was to me and I couldn't see the cat that Grandma had mentioned. I saw a bottle of salve and one of



Grandma's aloe vera plants sitting on the table, along with two large rolls of gauze and some adhesive tape. I thought the cat had probably blistered a foot or maybe his tail and hurried over to see if I could help.

As I reached his side and got a good look at his patient, I felt all the air sucked from my lungs. My gasp was loud and my grandfather looked at me and smiled a sad smile.

"Not very pretty, is he?" he said softly.

I couldn't answer. I had never seen anything so horrible. One side of the cat's face was totally devoid of hair and skin, his right ear was completely burned off and one eye was seared shut. There were large burns along his side and back, and his tail was missing. His legs and feet were blistered and raw, and the cat just lay in my grandfather's arms trembling.

"Is he going to die?" I whispered.

"Not if I can help it," Grandpa said with tears in his eyes.

"How did this happen?" I asked.

"He must have gotten cold and tried to get into the cellar. I figured he slipped when he got through the window and fell behind the furnace. I kept hearing this faint cry so I came down and found him. He had managed to climb out from behind the furnace."

"But, he is one of the wild ones, isn't he? How come he's letting you hold him?"

"He knows, my dear. He knows I wouldn't hurt him. He needs help. His pain is stronger than his fear."


"Grandpa, even if he lives, he's going to be so ugly," I commented as I looked at the damage the furnace had done.

"So what?" my grandpa said harshly. "Would you love me less if I were burned and ugly?"

"Of c-course not," I stammered.

"Are you sure?" he stared at me. He was smearing the burn cream from the jar over the cat's face and stubble of an ear. "You know, I was always told not to judge a book by the cover. Do you know what that means?"

I nodded. "It means sometimes a book is really good even if the cover isn't."



"That's right," he smiled. "It's important to look good because most people are too quick to judge by appearances. Still, it's even more important to take the time to get to know people and find out if the person is a good person, a kind person, and a person who might enrich your life. You mustn't associate with people who are mean, have no respect, and disregard the law, but those people usually have a reputation that is well known."

"Mother always wants me to look pretty," I argued. "All the most popular people at school are pretty."

"That's for now," he explained. "Now is what young people think about, but now isn't all there is to life. Animals don't care who's popular and who's not. All animals care about is staying warm in the winter, cool in the summer, food to keep them from being hungry, and friends to share their lives with. They don't ask for a lot and they only judge by actions, not looks." Grandpa doctored the poor cat, smearing ointment on his burns, bandaging his wounds, and all the while murmuring soft comforting sounds. We spent an hour in the basement that day. We bandaged and wrapped and squeezed out the cooling sap of the aloe vera plant and applied it to the places that were the most severe.

Every day for the next month, Grandpa and I changed bandages, reapplied medication and hand-fed the injured cat. He did recover, but his injuries had taken their toll on his appearance. He lost the use of his right eye and it grew shut and his ear was little more than a bald stub. His fur never grew back over the burn scars on his face or his body. What I discovered, what my grandfather had tried to tell me, was that the sparkle in his good eye, the soft purr from his scarred chest, and the gentle rub of his mangled head against my leg gave me a feeling that I had never experienced before.

When I gathered Lucky, his new name, into my arms, I didn't see an ugly cat. I saw a cat full of love and appreciation, and happy to be alive.

It may sound fake, unbelievable, and mushy, but that cat changed my outlook. That cat, my grandfather, and the advice he gave me opened doors I didn't know existed. I started looking at my classmates differently. The beautiful people didn't stand out so much anymore and I discovered lots of new friends who made my years in school the best. I never made the most popular list, but I didn't care. I wasn't the prettiest, but that didn't matter. My friends, like Lucky, knew how to be friends, how to love, laugh, and appreciate life. None of them were ugly, nor beautiful, but I discovered that there is a fine line between the two and that fine line is deep inside.

I still like to look my best, but now I look deeper, beneath, inside. After all, that's where real beauty lies. Ugly is a word that defines a person's action, feelings, and lifestyle. As far as I'm concerned it had nothing to do with looks.