

THE

# Cooley's Anemia FOUNDATION



## STORYBOOK



by Craig Butler  
Illustrated by Tess Elliott

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**This book is published through an  
unrestricted educational grant from  
Novartis Pharmaceuticals.**

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# *The Cooley's Anemia Foundation Storybook*



Written by Craig Butler

Illustrated by Tess Elliott

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For more information about thalassemia/Cooley's anemia and the Foundation's efforts on behalf of those born with this genetic disorder, please contact:

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*Dedicated to all children  
with thalassemia...*

*...and to my family,  
Cathy,  
Ivory and Noelle*

## *Introduction*

Books get written for a lot of reasons.

This book was written because Craig Butler, the National Communications Director for the Cooley's Anemia Foundation, had a vision. A father himself, he knew of the important role that stories can play in the development of a child. Reading both classic fairy tales and contemporary children's books to his kids, he saw how they absorbed important lessons from the stories. He saw how such stories have an impact on children's growth and development, saw that children can interpret the stories on many different levels depending on where they are at any moment in the course of their development.

Craig wanted to create a book of stories for young children with thalassemia. Having worked for the Cooley's Anemia Foundation for several years, he knew of the many challenges facing a child with thalassemia - having to deal with regular blood transfusions, daily medical treatments, potential complications and so much more. Because he passionately believes in the power of stories, he wanted to write some tales that dealt - sometimes directly, sometimes in a very indirect way - with these challenges.

And so he did.

We think the stories in this collection will teach some important lessons to children with thalassemia. But equally important, we think that the children will be very entertained by them and that they will sense how much love went into the writing of these tales.

Enjoy.

Gina Cioffi  
National Executive Director  
Cooley's Anemia Foundation





## *THE THREE LITTLE PUPPIES*

Once upon a time, there were three little puppies. One day, as they walked along a riverbank, the first little puppy said, “My, I certainly am hungry!”

“Me, too!” replied the second little puppy.

“As am I,” agreed the third little puppy. “So let us do something about this.”

The three little puppies agreed to split up. Each would go off in search of food, which he would bring back to share with the others.

The first little puppy wandered along the riverbank. Although he was quite hungry, he did not feel very much like looking for food, especially when the cool water of the river looked so inviting.

“I can go for a nice swim and then look for food,” he said to himself. “Besides, if I don’t find anything, I’m sure the others will bring back more than enough for us all to eat.”

And so he jumped into the river and began splashing about. But the first little puppy had not counted on the current in the river being quite so



strong. Before he realized it, he was sucked out into the middle of the river and then carried far, far downstream, and just what became of him after that is certainly not known to me.

Now the second little puppy wandered until he came upon a small farm. There were several rows of delicious carrots and peas and broccoli and cabbage. The second little puppy clapped his paws with glee and danced a little jig at his good fortune. He then set about digging up some of these choice vegetables; however, this turned out to be much harder work than he realized.

After several minutes, the second little puppy had harvested only a few carrots and a handful of peas. Yawning, he said to himself, "I have plenty of time. I shall take a little nap, and then I will see what I can dig up. And if I do not get more than this, I am sure the others will be glad to share their food with me."

So saying, he lay down among the heads of cabbage and quickly fell asleep. Soon, however, he was awakened by a loud cry. Looking up, he saw an enormous hawk coming right at him. Quickly, the



second little puppy jumped up and ran away. The hawk chased after him, and the second little puppy raced away so quickly that, as far as I know, he may be running still.

And what of the third little puppy? Wandering along the riverbank, he found a nice sturdy stick to which he fastened a piece of string, and on the end of the string he attached a sharp wire, bent into a hook. He cast the line of this homemade fishing pole into the river and waited patiently. By and by, he felt a tug on his line, but when he pulled it up, no fish was to be seen. He again cast his line, and after a time, he again felt a tug and again lifted his pole only to discover no fish. But on the third cast, after a long, long wait, he was rewarded with a nice, large trout.

The third little puppy was very pleased with his catch and started walking back to meet the other puppies. As he walked, however, he passed a lovely garden being tended by an elderly field mouse.

“Good day,” the third little puppy said to the field mouse. “That is a lovely garden you have there.”

“Thank you,” the field mouse replied, pleased.

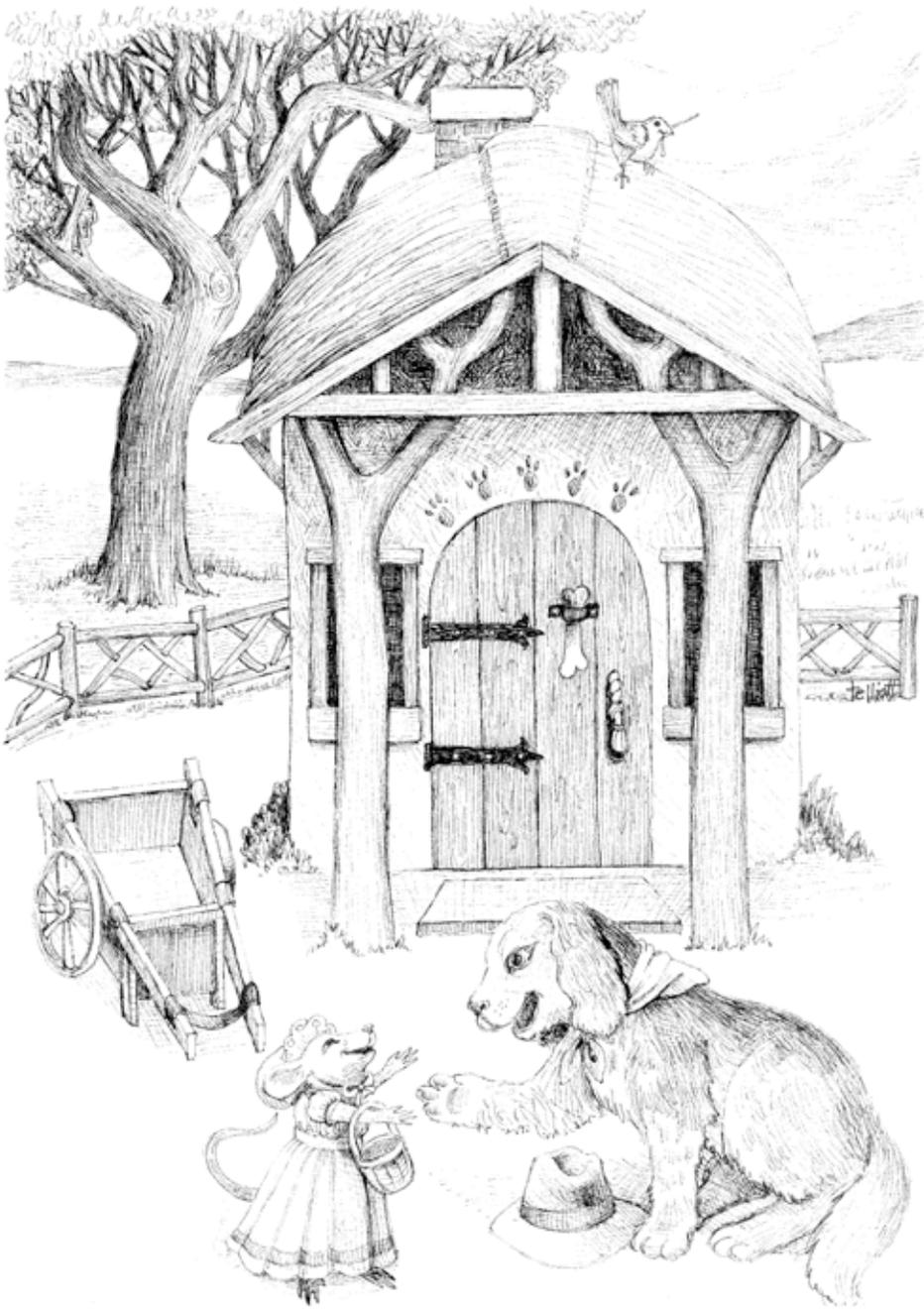


“I was wondering,” the puppy continued, “if I were to help you water and weed your garden, if I might have a few of your vegetables for me and for my companions.”

“Why certainly,” the field mouse replied. And after she instructed him on what to do, the third little puppy set to work. When he was finished, he was rather tired, but happy to have the fine vegetables that the mouse gave to him.

Although it was somewhat difficult to carry both the fish and the vegetables, the third little puppy hurried back to meet his friends. He decided he should go ahead and roast the fish so it would be ready when his friends returned. He poked a sharp stick through the trout, and then gathered some stray twigs to use in the fire. But he had no matches and knew not where to get some.

This did not stop the third little puppy. He walked all around the area, carefully examining the ground, and before long he came across a piece of glass. He picked up the glass and held it over the twigs as the strong heat of the afternoon sun beat down upon





it. After a time, the sun's rays caused a small flame to appear, and the little puppy carefully fanned it into a proper fire, one just right for the job at hand.

Soon, the third little puppy began to wonder when his friends would return. He waited until after sundown and then, assuming they had left for other parts, he ate the fish and the vegetables, both of which tasted especially good.

The third little puppy slept in a meadow that night. And the next morning, he set about building a small house for himself, for he had discovered that he quite enjoyed the area and that, though it took patience and a bit of work, he could make a nice life for himself there.

He worked hard but happily thereafter, quite content with his life and his little house. And, as far as I have ever discovered, he is living there happily still.





## THE GIRL WHO WISHED AWAY THE RAIN

Rain is a good thing.

And sun is a good thing.

Both together are a good thing.

Once, there was a girl who did not think that both rain and sun were a good thing. She liked the warmth of the sun and the shadow playmates it created and the way it made the flowers in the meadow grow tall and full and lovely.

She did not like the wetness of the rain or the darkness that came with it or the puddles into which she might fall and ruin her beautiful dress, which would make her mother angry and cause her to be put to bed with no supper.

No, she did not like the rain.

And so, one day, she declared there would be no rain. She told her friends, the birds, that they should use their wings to create a huge wind that would blow away any rain clouds that might appear, and that they should do so even at night, so that she need not fear





stepping into any puddles that might form while she slept.

Her friends, the birds, warned her against this wish, but such a look of sadness and distress appeared upon her face that they bowed to her wishes. Night and day they kept watch, and at the first sign of a rain cloud, they would rise as a group and beat their wings so fiercely that the cloud scampered away to a more friendly and inviting country.

Now the girl was quite happy and content. Every day she felt the warmth of the sun upon her face. Every day she played hopping, skipping and jumping games with her shadow. Every day she breathed in the lovely scent of the flowers that flourished in the meadow.

True, some days the sun was a bit TOO warm upon her face. And some days the heat tired her so that she couldn't play with her shadow as much as she wished. And one day she did notice that the heads of the flowers were drooping, and that their brilliant emerald green leaves were turning to brown.

She was pondering what had happened when a



small worm tapped her on her foot.

“If you please,” the worm said, “I have heard that the birds are chasing away the rain clouds because you asked them to.”

“Yes,” the girl said. “Isn’t it wonderful to have so much lovely sunshine?”

“The sunshine is lovely,” the worm replied, “but there’s rather too much of it. The plants are thirsty and need water. And we worms are thirsty and need water. Can’t you ask the birds to let the rain come?”

“I will not,” the girl replied. “If you want rain, you ask them yourself.”

“Birds do not listen to worms,” he said. “We are just food to them.”

But the girl put her hands over her ears and ran away from the worm and into her cottage, saying, “No! I hate the rain and I won’t have it!”

The next day, things were hotter still. The heat made the girl feel a bit sleepy and a bit grumpy, and the flowers were browner still. The worm again pleaded with the girl, and again the girl expressed her hatred of the rain and refused.



Things continued in this way for some time. As the days passed, more and more water simply dried up and disappeared. One day, the girl, suffering from extreme heat and thirst, went to her well, only to discover that it was completely dry - there was no more water even for her to drink.

“This is dreadful!” she thought to herself. “As much as I dislike rain, perhaps it is time to let the rain come.”

With this in mind, she tried to call to her bird friends. But her throat was so dry from lack of water that no sound could come out. She tried to run up to the big tree on the hill where they lived, but her feet were too tired to carry her that far. She tried to jump up and down and wave to the birds, to catch their attention in this manner, but she was so hot and thirsty that she collapsed in a heap.

“Whatever shall I do?” she thought, afraid of what this might mean.

Just at that moment the worm appeared. “Oh, worm!” she managed to whisper. “You were right. I want the rain to come, but I don’t have the strength to





call to the birds! Now I fear we are doomed.”

But the worm, though as tired by the excessive heat as the girl, shook his head and crawled, inch by inch, to the big tree on the big hill where the birds nested.

As soon as the birds saw the worm, they swooped down upon him. But the little worm drew himself up as tall as a worm can draw, and in a dry but firm voice yelled, “Stop!”

The birds, shocked that a worm would behave in such a manner, did indeed stop. And they listened as he told them that the girl now wished for rain - that she needed rain quite desperately. And hearing this, the birds immediately shot up into the air and flew until they found a rain cloud, which they then pushed into their own country.

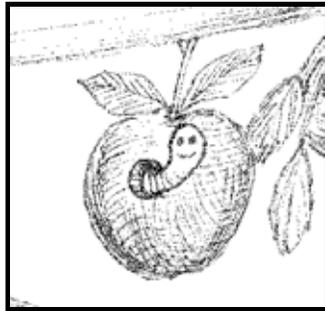
The rain fell in big drops throughout the land. The girl opened her mouth and drank the delicious rain, and let it thoroughly dampen her beautiful dress as she danced around.

And when she saw the brave little worm, she apologized to him again and again for what she had



done and thanked him again and again for his brave actions.

And from that day forward, she never again wished away the rain - even when it made her angry or sad.





## *A BABY BEAR STORY*

Once there were three bears. They lived in a little cottage in the woods.

You've probably heard stories about them.

There also was once a little girl named Goldilocks.

You've probably heard stories about her too.

This is another one.

One morning, the three bears sat down to breakfast but quickly discovered that the oatmeal which Mama Bear had made was much, much too hot, and so Baby Bear suggested they go for a long walk and give it time to cool. "I'll close the door," Baby Bear said as they left, but in fact he made sure he didn't close it all the way.

As soon as the bears were out of sight, a little girl - Goldilocks, of course - snuck into the house.

"Now let me see," she said to herself, "What did Baby Bear tell me to do first?" She had just met Baby Bear the previous day, when she was walking through the forest, and right away they had started talking.

"I never get to do the things I want to do," Baby





Bear had complained. “I have to eat my Ma's yucky oatmeal when what I really want for breakfast is potato chips.”

“Bummer,” Goldilocks said.

“I have to sit chained in my chair and do my homework,” Baby Bear said.

“Chained?” Goldilocks asked. “That's harsh.”

“Okay, not really chained,” Baby Bear admitted. “But even worse than that - I still have to take naps, even when I'm not even close to being tired.”

“We gotta fix this, kid,” Goldilocks said, and so the two had come up with this plan. Baby Bear would lead his parents from the house. Then Goldilocks would go in and pour his oatmeal out the window, break his chair and tear the stuffing out of his mattress, after which she would skip away without anyone noticing.

And so the next day, when Goldilocks got inside the house, she went right to work. At the table she found a huge bowl - “Must be Papa Bear's,” she said to herself - a medium bowl - “Mama Bear's bowl, of course” - and a little bowl - “Aha!” she cried. “Pee-yew!” she added as she sniffed the oatmeal, “This is really stinky!” She emptied the contents of the little



bowl out the nearest window.

Next, Goldilocks made her way into the den.

“Whoa! Guess nobody told Mama Bear not to mix plaids and stripes!” she said, shaking her head. She looked around and saw a big cushy armchair, a medium sized padded chair and a little wooden chair with a little table top attached to it. “Bingo!” she said and fell upon Baby Bear's chair with a screwdriver and took it apart in no time flat.

“Two down, one to go,” she said, wiping her hands off on Papa Bear's big cushy armchair. Spying the staircase, she climbed up to the bedrooms. In the first room, she pulled back the covers of the bed before realizing it was much too big and cushy to be Baby Bear's bed. In the second room, she had already jumped up and down on the medium sized bed before realizing it must be Mama Bear's. But in the third room, she found a nice small bed with dinosaur sheets.

“This must be the place,” Goldilocks said. She moved toward the bed with the intention of tearing it up, but as she did so she realized how tired she was. “Baby Bear may not like naps,” she said, “but I could sure go for one.”



“I'll just lie down for a minute, and then I'll get back to business,” she said as she crawled under his covers and immediately fell fast asleep.

Some time later, the three bears returned to their home. As they sat down at the table, Baby Bear cried out, “Oh, look! My oatmeal is all gone! Maybe a squirrel came in the window and ate it all up. How about if I have some potato chips instead?”

“No, your Papa Bear shall share his oatmeal with you,” Mama Bear said, but the very hungry Papa Bear had already gobbled his oatmeal down, and before Mama Bear could offer her own breakfast to her son, Baby Bear had eaten up a whole bag of potato chips.

“Now really, Baby Bear -” Mama Bear began, but Baby Bear jumped up, saying, “Can't talk now, gotta do my homework.”

“He WANTS to do his homework?” Papa Bear asked.

“On a Saturday?” Mama Bear added.

Just then Baby Bear yelled from the den. Rushing in, Mama and Papa Bear saw him standing before the remains of his chair, crying, “Oh, my favorite little



chair! It's all been taken apart, just as if a big... big...wolf or something broke into our house and crushed it! Oh, no!”

“Don't worry, son” said Papa Bear, “You can use my chair to do your homework.”

“Don't be ridiculous!” said Mama Bear, giving Baby Bear a big hug. “He's far too upset to do homework right now. And I must say I don't blame him. I TOLD you we needed to get new locks on that door!”

Believing that Baby Bear must be genuinely distressed, Mama Bear suggested that her son take a nap - and was surprised when he agreed. “But what if the wolf that broke the chair is upstairs?” he asked, in a scared voice.

So all three bears climbed the stairs. They looked first into Papa Bear's room.

“Hey!” Papa Bear said as he saw the messy covers. “Somebody's been sleeping in my bed!”

“No way!” Baby Bear said. That Goldilocks really knows her stuff, he thought.

They moved to Mama Bear's room, where she immediately said, “Oh my goodness! Somebody's been



sleeping in my bed!”

“What will we do?!” Baby Bear said. This is working out great, he thought.

They entered the third room.

“And somebody's been sleeping in my bed,” Baby Bear said, without even looking.

“And look, she's still here!” said Mama Bear.

“Say what?” Baby Bear said in surprise.

“All right, Blondie!” Papa Bear thundered, moving closer to Goldilocks.

Papa's Bear's stern voice awakened Goldilocks, who sat bolt upright in bed.

“Uh-oh!” she said, quickly analyzing the situation.

“Game's over!” So saying, she jumped from the bed, jumped out the window and ran away as quickly as her dainty little bare feet could carry her.

But as she ran, she called over her shoulder, “Sorry, Baby Bear!”

“Baby Bear!” Mama Bear exclaimed. “Did you know that little girl?”

“Yeah, well,” Baby Bear said, “I can explain!”

“I think that sounds like a good idea,” Papa Bear said sternly.

And so Baby Bear told his parents the whole story.



“I guess you're kind of disappointed in me, huh?”  
he asked.

“Well, yes,” Papa Bear said. “I know you don't like to do everything we ask, but we ask you to do these things for a reason.”

“My oatmeal helps you grow big and strong,” said Mama Bear. “Potato chips may taste better, but they're not very good for you.”

“Homework is hard,” said Papa Bear, “but it helps you learn and develops your mind.”

“And getting plenty of sleep is very important to your health,” Mama Bear said.

So Baby Bear said he was sorry and promised to try to do a better job of doing things that were good for him, not just the things that he wanted to do. It wasn't always easy, and sometimes he really had to struggle hard and make himself do the right thing. But in the end, he was much happier that he made the extra effort.

And Goldilocks? Her mother told her to stop going into the forest and getting into so much trouble. And you know what? That's just what she did.



# WAITING ROOM





## DOCTOR DAY

I have to go to the doctor today  
Even though the sun is shining  
And I'd much rather play.  
Please don't say I'm whining  
Or acting "that way."  
I know I must go to the doctor today.  
But that doesn't mean I like it - okay?



## *THE BEAUTIFUL PLANT*

Once, before the wind had learned to whisper and the sea had lost her anger, there lived a poor farmer whose land was rough and rocky. Though he and his wife watered the land and cared for the seeds with the greatest care, their crops never amounted to much. When corn did grow, most of it was eaten by crows. If squash somehow appeared, it was small and lumpy, and was as much brown as it was yellow. Peas, carrots, potatoes - great amounts of each were planted, but little made its way onto their table or to the market.

One day, when the sun wanted to show just how hot he could make the day, an old woman stopped by the farmer's cottage. She told the wife she was on a long journey and asked if she might have a tiny sip of water. The wife fetched a large cup and filled it to the brim and, though she had little in the cottage in the way of food, offered the old woman the stale bread and cheese she had been saving for her own lunch.

"That's kind of you," the old woman answered with a smile, "but you have already given me my heart's



true desire - a cup of water on a hot day.” She then placed one wrinkled hand upon the wife and asked, “And I wonder what would be your own true heart’s desire, Dearie?”

The wife opened her mouth to speak, but paused before finding the words. “It is foolish to wish,” she said, “but if our land could only grow a good supply of food...”

The old woman gazed into the wife’s eyes before shaking her head. “No,” she said, standing and moving to the doorway, “that is not your own true heart’s desire, whether you know it or not. But I thank you for your kindness.”

As the old woman stepped outside, she turned her cup upside down, and a large drop of water fell into the brown grass to the left of the door. She then returned the cup to the wife and resumed her journey, though what that journey was and where it led her remains a mystery.

When the farmer returned to the cottage, the wife asked him if he had seen the old woman, who had walked in the direction of their field. But he remarked





that he had seen no one, and the two gave no more thought to their odd visitor.

The next morning, as the wife was sweeping out the kitchen, she noticed that a small patch of grass by the side of the door was a very pleasing shade of green, though all the grass around it remained brown. She studied this spot whenever she passed by, and toward the end of the day, she noticed that a small green shoot had also appeared.

When her husband returned, she told him of the grass and the shoot. “It is a pity the same cannot be said of our fields,” he said, “but perhaps it means the rest of our crops will grow so well, too.”

The next morning, the wife saw that the shoot had grown considerably overnight. As the days passed, she carefully watered and cared for it, and it continued to grow. As it grew, it started to look rather strange and wonderful. The farmer admitted he had never quite seen a plant like this one, although exactly what it was about the plant that was so different he could not say. He also could not say why the plant was growing here, when the crops in the field were not.



“But it is so very unusual,” he said. “When it is fully grown, I shall take it to market. Such a special plant shall surely bring a hefty price.” He thought of the seeds he might buy with that money, and his wife dreamed of having enough food to satisfy their needs and more.

As the plant grew, a large flower bud appeared at the top. The bud grew larger and larger, and when the wife pointed it out to the farmer, he exclaimed, “Surely the flower of such an unusual plant will be equally unusual.” He thought of how such a flower might increase his asking price when he took the plant to market and wondered if perhaps he might have enough money to purchase a chicken to raise. For her part, the wife wondered if she might be able to obtain material to make new clothes or a blanket to keep them warm through the winter.

One morning as he left to work the fields, the farmer examined the plant closely and told his wife, “I believe today is the day the flower shall open. If so, I shall take the plant to market tomorrow.”

The wife was excited, though also a bit sad that



the beautiful plant would no longer be near her. She watched the plant throughout the day, waiting to see the bud turn to a flower.

When the husband returned for lunch, the wife saw the bud was unfolding, and she quickly drew her husband's attention to this fact.

"What will this flower look like?" the farmer said, wondering at the same time if he could possibly fetch enough money for the plant to buy a horse to make the plowing easier.

"It has almost opened," the wife exclaimed, and she hoped they could earn enough money to buy a cow to replace the old goat that gave them so little milk.

They looked eagerly at the flower bud as its petals slowly fell away, wondering what changes lay ahead and how their lives would be improved by the strange good fortune of this most unusual plant.

At last the petals opened, and the farmer and his wife gasped at the sight.

There, in the center of the flower, lay a tiny baby.

The farmer looked at his wife. The wife looked at the farmer.



Then they both put out their hands and gently, tenderly, plucked the baby from the center of the flower.

Immediately upon doing so, a great shiver went up through the plant, causing it to shake violently and fall into tiny pieces.

The farmer and his wife looked at the plant, which was ruined and would no longer bring them any of the things of which they had dreamed.

And then they looked at the tiny baby, who was gurgling softly and sweetly. This was not at all what they had expected. What is more, they knew that such a tiny thing, so different from other babies, would require special, tender care.

But they did not care that things had worked out quite differently than they had anticipated. All they knew is that they both felt very, very happy.

And so they smiled, and looked down at their new baby and knew in their hearts that this was a greater gift than any they could have purchased with money. They then stepped into their simple house where the three of them would live happily ever after, and quietly closed the door.



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## GET THE IRON OUT

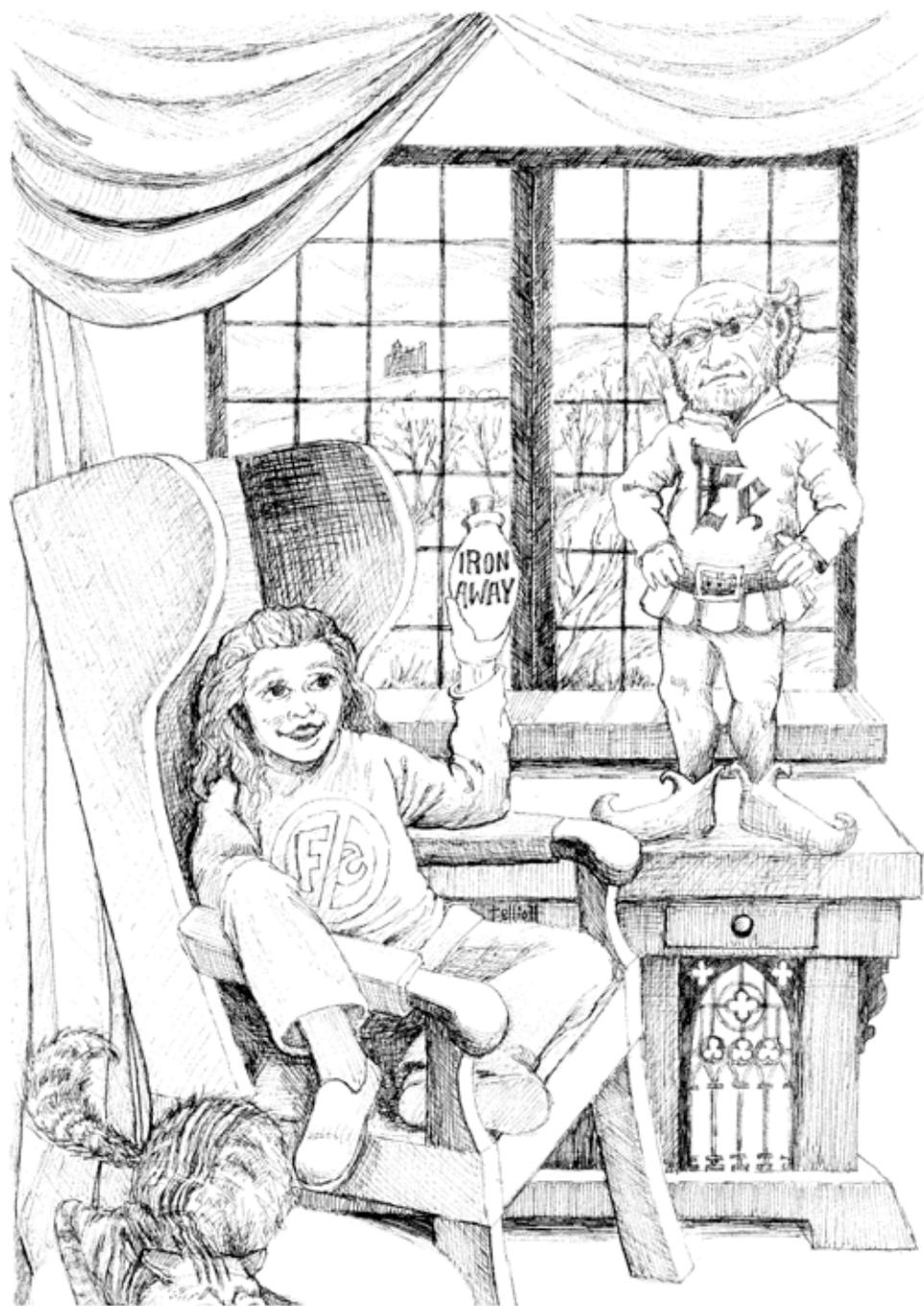
I have too much iron in my body.  
Now isn't that rude!  
I didn't ask that iron to drop in  
From transfusions and from food.

I didn't ask that iron to drop in,  
But it's there anyway.  
Now I gotta get it out of there  
So I can run and play.

That means I gotta chelate  
Just like the doctor said.  
Though sometimes what Doc tells me  
Kinda forgets to stick in my head.

But this here is important,  
'Cause that iron can make me ill.  
I'm gonna always chelate  
Whether with a pump or pill.

I'm doing it for my folks, sure,  
But really more for me.  
So I can grow up healthy  
And be the best that I can be.





## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE POND

Two little turtles lived near a very large pond. They enjoyed playing in the shallow water near the shore where they lived, but they were also very curious about what it was like way over on the other side of the pond.

“What do you think the grass on the other side tastes like?” asked one of the turtles, whose name was Soggy.

“Probably really tasty,” said the other, who was named Dripsy. “A lot better than the stuff over here. Yuck!”

Soggy and Dripsy really hated the grass on their side of the pond. It was dry and sharp and it tasted like dust.

“It may not taste good, but it’s really good for you,” said a voice behind them. It belonged to Sport, a teen-age turtle who was the best swimmer in the whole pond. “If you ever want to get to the other side of this pond, you’re going to need to eat a lot of this grass, so you’ll have strength and energy.”



“Wow!” said Soggy. “Do you mean that if I just eat some grass before I go swimming, I’ll be big and strong like you and can swim to the other side?”

“Not exactly,” Sport said. “I’m talking about eating all the grass you’re supposed to, and doing it every day. It won’t happen overnight, but if you eat it every day, you’ll get a little stronger and a little stronger - until one day you’ll be strong enough to swim like me.”

“But it tastes so awful!” Dripsy exclaimed.

“I know,” Sport said. “I don’t like it either. But I like what it does for me, and what it helps me to do, and so I eat it every single day.” So saying, he slipped into the water and, using his strong, powerful legs, swam out of sight.

“That’s it for me,” Soggy said. “If it will help me get to the other side of the pond, I’m all for it!”

So Soggy dug into a pile of nearby grass. But no sooner had he taken one mouthful than he gulped and said, “This grass is just gross. Forget it!”

“But what about-” Dripsy began, but Soggy was already walking away. Dripsy nibbled on the grass. It





really WAS gross, but she remembered what Sport said and took another bite, and another, and kept on until she had eaten her fill.

Dripsy came and ate the grass again the next day, and the day after that, and kept on. After each feeding, she went for a swim with Soggy, and she did notice that, slowly but surely, she was getting to be a stronger swimmer. And she felt livelier and had greater energy all around.

Dripsy and Soggy still kept talking about the grass on the other side of the pond. One day, Soggy said, “I just can’t wait any more! I’ve been doing a lot of swimming - I bet I can make it over to the other side of the pond right now!”

As he said this, he slipped into the pond and started swimming across.

“Soggy, don’t!” Dripsy cried.

“Stop worrying,” Soggy said. “I’m doing great! Look at me!”

But Dripsy did worry. Soggy had never tried to swim such a long way before, and he hadn’t been eating his grass the way Sport had told them to. She



was afraid something might happen.

And sure enough, when Soggy was only halfway across the pond, he started to run out of energy.

Dripsy saw her friend sputtering and flailing.

“Help!” Soggy yelled. “Help, I can’t make it!”

“Oh! Oh, dear!” Dripsy cried. She looked around for Sport or one of the other, bigger turtles, but they were nowhere to be seen.

Then, though she was scared, she knew what she must do. She bravely slipped into the water. “Hang on, Soggy!” she said, and she began swimming with all her might.

Dripsy swam as fast as she could - which turned out to be very fast indeed. Before she knew it, she had reached the center of the pond, where Soggy was. But now what was she to do? She wasn’t really strong enough to carry Soggy - was she?

Dripsy didn’t know the answer - but she knew she had to try. So she quickly swam under Soggy and lifted him up on her shell.

Soggy was surprised and amazed that his friend could lift him up like that. He was even more surprised



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when she started swimming ahead. Dripsy was moving very confidently forward; she wasn't moving so fast now that Soggy was on her back, but she was swimming with sure, strong strokes.

"This is awesome!" Soggy said, and Dripsy smiled at the compliment. In a few minutes, they had reached the other shore, and Soggy thanked his friend and gave her a big hug. "You saved my life!" he said. "How in the world did you get so strong?"

"I did like Sport said," Dripsy replied. "I ate my grass. All of it, every day. And look - now we're finally over here on the other side of the pond! Now you can have some of this delicious grass over here!"

Soggy started moving toward the tall green grass in front of him. But after a couple of steps, he stopped. Turning back to his friend, he said, "Yeah - but if it's all the same to you, this grass can wait for another day. I think I'd be better off eating some of the grass back on our side of the pond."

Dripsy smiled happily at Soggy, and after a few moments rest, she carried Soggy back to their home.



## ALL ABOUT WUFFLES

Wuffles, my teddy bear, really wears me out!  
When I have to take him to see Dr. Giraffe, he  
says, “No, no, I won’t go!”

And then he runs and hides under the bed, and I  
have to say “Young man!” in a really serious voice and  
pull him out by his legs.

And I get really tired of that, let me tell you!

Then, when I put him in my pretend car in his  
pretend car seat (‘cause he’s still just a little guy, you  
know) and start driving us all the way upstairs to the  
hospital, he sits there and pouts. He doesn’t say a  
word, but I can hear him pouting all the way up in my  
pretend front seat.

I get really tired of that, too.

Wuffles usually perks up a little when we get in  
my room - I mean, in the hospital - mostly ‘cause he  
likes Nurse Nelly-Delly-Bo-Belly. She’s a crocodile. But  
she’s a NICE crocodile, and Wuffles likes to tell her all  
about the things he does in kindergarten, which I can’t  
even get him to tell me about at all!





We always have to stay at the hospital for a really long time, because they have to do all their tests and get everything ready all the time. Wuffles gets pretty restless, let me tell you! He climbs all over the place and gets into everything, and I have to keep an eye on him to make sure he doesn't make any big trouble!

By the time he gets all hooked up, I've had to do so much, I could really use a nap!

But no nap for me, 'cause Wuffles needs me to read to him while he's getting his blood. It sure is a good thing I got a cup of pretend coffee to drink.

Then, after like a million books, Nurse Nelly-Delly-Bo-Belly takes out the needle, which usually makes Wuffles go "ouch" just a little bit, so I hug him and tell him how brave he is.

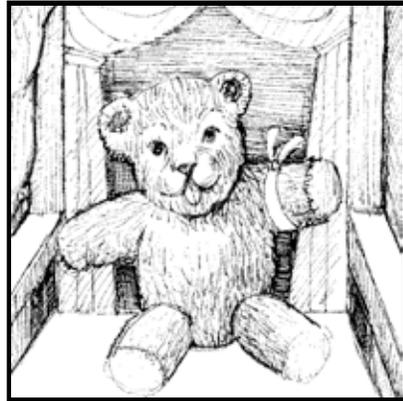
Then we wait around some more, and Wuffles wiggles and waggles and can't sit still, and he keeps asking, "Is it time yet? Is it time yet? Now is it?"

And when Nurse Nelly-Delly-Bo-Belly tells him he can leave, he's halfway out the door before I even get out of my chair.

Now Wuffles has all this energy stuff, and I can barely move!



But he's worth it. He's a good little teddy bear.  
Now if I could just get the little guy to take his  
medicine!!!





## THE TWO PIG FRIENDS

Jordy and Malch were two young pigs, and also best friends. They had been best friends ever since the day Malch and his family moved into the house next door to Jordy and his family. And they had promised that they would be best friends forever.

The two little pigs did everything together. They played “tag” and “hide and seek” and “space pigs and monsters.” They ran races and swam in mud puddles and rode bikes together. And they liked to sing “Itsy-Bitsy Spider” in Pig Latin, oinking “E-thay itsy-ay itsy-bay ider-spay” as loud as they could.

One day, Jordy and Malch were climbing a tree, which is something pigs should never do, and something their mothers had warned them about many times. They both climbed onto the same branch and Jordy had just started yelling “Look at me! I’m a bird, I’m a bird!” when suddenly the branch cracked, and both pigs tumbled to the ground, landing with a boom on their backs.

Their mothers heard the noise the two little pigs



made when they fell and rushed out. Jordy's mother quickly called the doctor, who hurried over to take a look at the piglets.

"Are we going to be okay?" Malch asked, a little fearfully.

"Yes, but it's going to take a long time for you to get all better," the doctor said. "You're going to be very sore for quite a while, and you'll need to take plenty of medicine. And you're going to need to keep your backs as straight and as still as you can until you're well."

"That means at nighttime, too," the doctor said. "And to make sure you sleep the right way, you'll have to sleep with a board tied to your back, so that you don't roll over or move around."

"Oh, man!" Malch said, and Jordy added "Yuck!" But nothing they said would change the doctor's mind. "I know it's hard," the doctor said, "but it's what you have to do to get better."

Jordy and Malch were not happy with this news, but their mothers told them they must do as the doctor said. It was difficult, especially at first. The two little



pigs wanted to run and jump as they had before, but instead they had to walk carefully and keep their backs straight. Still, being as creative as they were, they found things that they could do, whether it was playing a board game or making up scary stories about ghosts who wanted bacon. As long as they were together, they had something to do.

But nights were not so easy. When each of them got strapped down onto the boards in their beds, it was uncomfortable and boring. They really couldn't move, and it was hard to sleep well. And each being in his own house instead of together made it even worse.

One day, a month or so after they had fallen from the tree, the doctor looked them over and said, "You're coming along very nicely, Jordy. I think you can stop using the board now."

"Yahoo!" Jordy yelled, clapping his hands together happily.

"But I am going to give you a new medicine to take, okay?" the doctor said.





Jordy nodded. He didn't care about the new medicine, as long as he could throw that board away.

"What about me?" Malch asked, excited. "Do I get to stop now?"

"Not yet, Malch," the doctor said. "I wish I could say yes, but you're just not ready for that yet."

"But that's not fair!" Malch said.

"I know it's not," the doctor said. "But fair or not, we have to do what's best for you."

"Don't worry, Malch," Jordy said as they left the doctor, "I bet you'll be off the board really soon!"

Malch nodded, but he didn't say anything.

That night, Jordy enjoyed the deepest sleep he'd had in weeks. But Malch had the worst sleep he'd ever had. He woke up feeling grumpy and when Jordy came over, Malch said he didn't feel like playing. Instead, he stayed inside most of the day, not doing much of anything. Even when his mother insisted that he go play with Jordy and get some fresh air, his heart wasn't in it. He played with his friend, but the whole time he felt angry. It wasn't fair that he still had to sleep on that stupid board!



Things went on like this for a few more days. Malch played with Jordy, but he didn't have much fun. He didn't talk any more than he had to, and he felt both sad and angry all the time.

Jordy did everything he could to cheer his pal up, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, after he told his best joke and Malch didn't even smile, he said, "Malch, are you mad at me because I don't have to use the board any more?"

"No," Malch said grumpily, "I'm just tired because I never get any sleep any more." But Jordy wondered if that was the whole truth.

That night, while Malch was trying to get to sleep, he thought he heard noises outside his window, like someone scratching. With this board on his back, he couldn't move to see, but he was sure someone was there.

"Who is it?" he called out. There was a moment of silence, then some more scratching.

"I can hear you!" Malch called again. "Who is it?"

The scratching stopped, and Malch listened to see if whatever it was had gone away. But as soon as it



stopped, he heard a voice, oinking very loudly, “E-thay itsby-ay itsy-bay ider-spay...”

“Jordy!” Malch said, glad that it wasn’t some sort of bacon-eating monster outside his window.

“Hi!” Jordy said, his head popping through the open window.

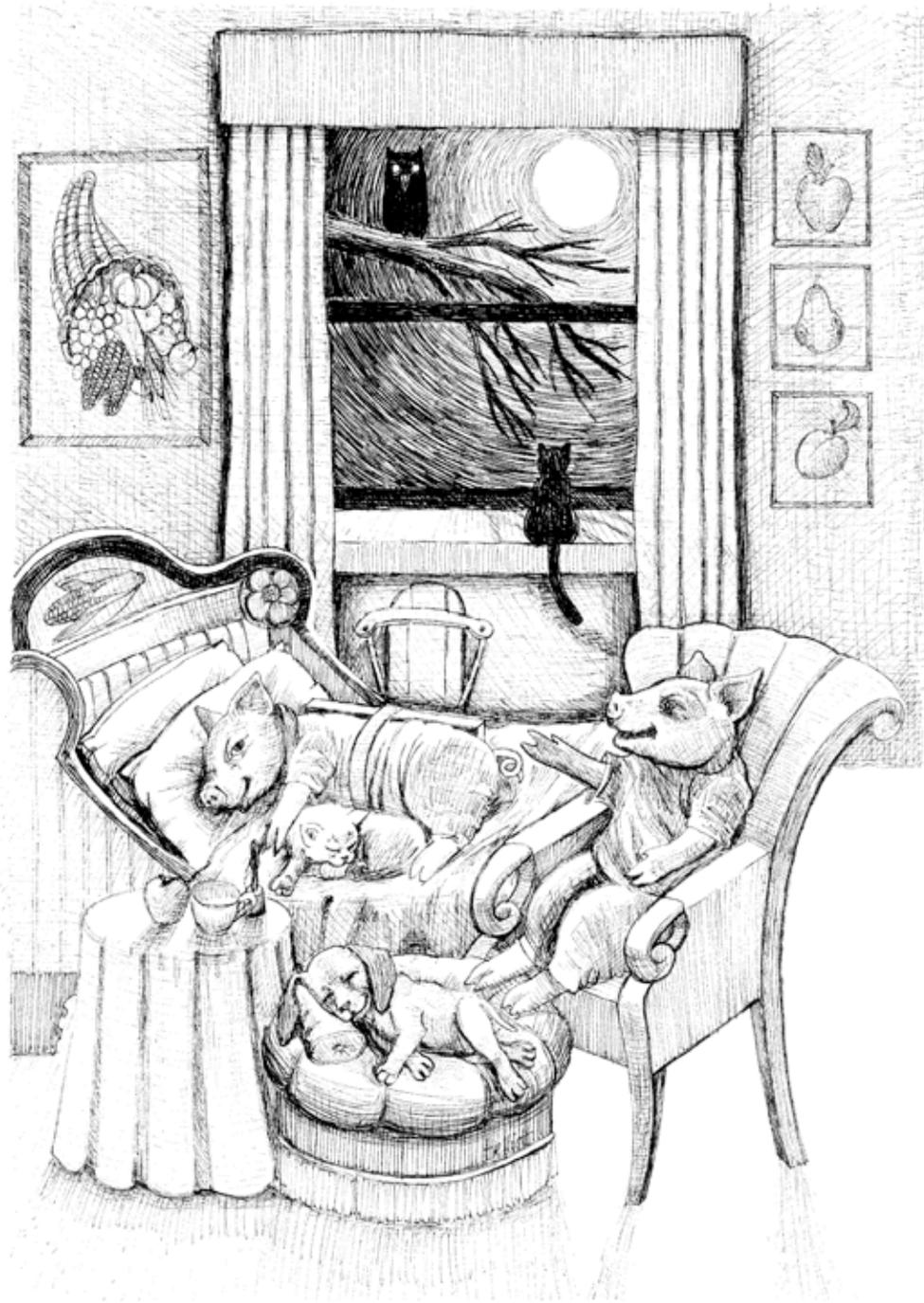
“What are you doing here?”

“Well, I know how boring it is trying to get to sleep with that stupid board on your back. So I snuck out of my house to come over and keep you company until you get tired. Then maybe you’ll sleep better.”

Malch felt a little lump in his throat when Jordy said that. He felt so happy that he had such a good friend. And at the same time, he felt a little guilty that he had not been nicer.

“Jordy,” Malch said, “I wasn’t telling the truth today. I did feel mad at you. I hate this board and it’s not fair that I have to use it, but I shouldn’t be feeling angry at you because of it.”

“That’s okay,” Jordy said. “I’d feel angry too if I was still on the board and you were off. You can’t help how you feel. Just tell me the truth next time, okay?”





“Okay,” Malch promised.

“Hey, I have a great ghost story to tell,” Jordy said. “Once there was this old, creepy, rundown pig pen that everyone said was haunted...”

Malch smiled as he listened to Jordy’s story and thought about how lucky he was. He didn’t know when he would be able to stop using the board at night, but he knew one thing: even if using the board wasn’t fair and made him angry sometimes, it didn’t change the fact that he had one heck of a great friend.





## THE STRINGS OF THE KITE

**M**y Daddy taught me how to fly a kite. Now I can fly it all by myself, almost.

I even know how to put new string on my kite when it needs it.

String is very important. If I didn't have the string, I wouldn't be able to fly my kite. And if the string broke, my kite would fly away.

Sometimes I wonder how my kite feels about the string. Does he like it, because it lets him go soaring way up high in the sky, but also keeps him safe so he won't get blown away?

Or does he wish he could cut the string, so he can go sailing far away, without the string to tie him down and hold him back?

Of course, if that happened, if he went flying away and didn't have a string so I could pull him back in, he'd get in a lot of trouble, sooner or later.

He'd get stuck in a tree or get hit by lightning or an airplane would run into him. Or if the wind just stopped all suddenly, he'd fall into a lake or crash to





the ground, and then a dog might chew him all up.

So the string is a good thing, I think.

I'm kind of tired today, but I still wish I could go fly my kite. But today Daddy has to take me to get blood, so we'll do the kite flying tomorrow.

I tell Daddy about how I wonder how the kite feels about the string.

He says I'm a pretty good thinker.

Then I tell him that I kind of know how my kite feels, 'cause I have to go get blood so often. So I don't like it when they put the needle in and I have to sit there with the tube in me, getting my blood and not being able to run around and have fun. And sometimes I wish I could just pull the needle and tube out and be free, like my kite might want to be.

But I also tell him I wouldn't even be ABLE to run around and everything if I DIDN'T get my blood. I sure wouldn't be able to fly my kite, or play baseball, or swim.

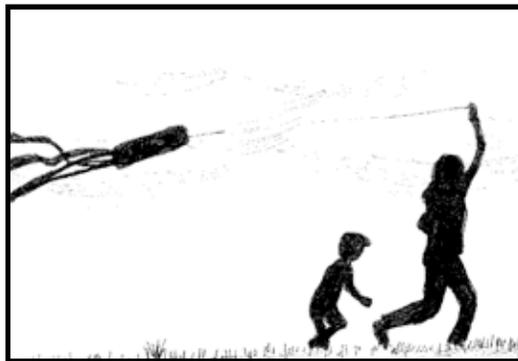
So I tell him I'm like my kite - I may not like my tube any more than my kite likes his string - but I sure like the things it lets me do, so it's worth it.



Daddy smiles real big then, and he said he was wrong. I'm not a pretty good thinker, he says, I'm a REAL good thinker.

So I asked him if a real good thinker gets to have an ice cream before dinner.

Oh well - it was worth a shot!





## *THE KING OF THE RIVER*

**I**n a far off land, there lived two sisters who looked exactly the same. The birth of the first sister was without incident, but the birth of the second had been difficult and so this sister was quite sickly.

Their mother, who was wise in these things, knew that the second sister needed special nourishment and every day prepared for her a stew that was terrible to taste and horrible to smell, but that helped keep her lovely younger daughter healthy.

As they grew, the sisters became the dearest of friends and played together all day. Their favorite game was for one to hide; the other would seek her with her eyes closed, calling out a word. The hidden sister would echo the word, and the seeking sister would follow the voice until she found her.

The first sister also had an important responsibility: she was charged with making sure the second sister ate the terrible tasting stew every day. The first sister was at first careful about this duty, but grew tired of it as it time passed. For her part, the



second sister often resisted eating the stew, despite knowing that it was for her own good.

One beautiful warm day, the two sisters decided to take their meal into a meadow by the river and eat it there. As they spread a cloth upon the ground, the older sister saw a most lovely swan gliding by and cried out in delight as it made its way down the river.

“Oh, I do wish he would come back,” she said. “I should so like to watch him a bit longer.”

“Why do you not follow him, then?” asked the younger sister. “I shall be perfectly fine here.”

And so the older sister jumped up and chased after the swan. It was not long until the first swan was joined by another, and the pair retired to their nest in the tall, narrow reeds. After watching for several minutes, the older sister returned to the younger sister.

“Did you find him?” the younger sister asked.

“Oh, yes,” she said, “and I saw his mate and also where they make their nest, but I could not tell if they had a child.”

Then the older girl noticed the empty bowl that lay at her sister’s feet. “My word!” she said, “Have you



eaten your stew already?”

“It is all gone,” the younger sister replied. “Not a drop left. Now, do let us play our echo game, sister.”

And so they did.

The next day, the two sisters again took their lunch to the river. Almost immediately, the younger sister suggested the older sister go find the swans’ nest, which she eagerly did. And again upon her return, the older sister was pleased to see the younger sister’s bowl of stew had been eaten.

Things continued like this for some time. The older sister was delighted on days when the swans appeared, and especially delighted on the day she saw a young swan follow them out of the nest. She quickly ran back to fetch her sister, so that she might share in her joy.

When she arrived at the picnic spot, she was surprised to see a strange, ugly little man sitting next to her sister. His hands were lifting her bowl of stew up to his lips, and he was gulping greedily.

“Stop that!” the older sister cried, but the little man had already swallowed every last drop of the stew.



Tossing the bowl to the ground, he laughed loudly and with surprising speed hurled his twisted body into the water, where it disappeared.

“Sister! Whatever does this mean?” the older sister asked, angrily.

“The King of the River requires food,” the younger girl said simply.

“But that food keeps you healthy,” the older sister scolded. “Do you mean he has been eating it all this time?”

The younger sister nodded and the older began to scold her. However, when she looked carefully at her sister, she could see that there was a vacant look in her eyes. The older sister guessed that the King of the River must have been slowly placing a spell on her every day, and she grew worried that perhaps her sister was already in his power.

That this was true quickly became clear. Determined to keep her sister away from the evil being, the older sister stopped their visits to the river. But this did not help; the younger sister simply refused to eat her stew. The older sister told her mother what



had happened, but even the mother's stern warnings and pleas could not make her younger daughter eat one bite of stew.

"It is meant for the King of the River," is all she would say, in a voice that grew weaker with each day that passed.

The mother, fearful for her younger child's health, wept. The older sister was distressed and determined that she must find some solution to this horrible problem.

The next morning, the older sister rose before the sun and made her way to the bank of the river. As she expected, she found the King of the River waiting for her.

"Give back my sister to me," she said in what she hoped would sound a brave voice.

"There are rules about these things," the King of the River replied. "I do not care to give her back, and so you must be willing to win her back."

"I am willing," the girl answered.

"Know that if you fail to win her back, you will also become mine," the King said, a cruel smile on his lips.



“What must I do?”

“I will ask you one question on the morning of each of three days. You will have until the setting of the sun to give me your answer. If your answers to all three questions are correct, your sister will be returned to you. If your answer to even one question is incorrect, you will both come to live with me forever.”

The sister was frightened but said only, “What is the first question?”

“It is this: I have a little house in which I live all alone. It has no doors or windows; if out I wish to go, I must break through the wall. What am I?”

So saying, the King of the River laughed a wicked laugh and threw himself in the river, crying, “Return here with your answer at the setting of the sun.”

The girl was very worried, for though she was good and brave, she was not clever at riddles. She had been wandering up and down the river, puzzling over the strange words for quite some time, when she heard a noise. Looking up, she saw that the swan that she had admired the first day she came to the river was nearby and was stuck in a net that a careless fisherman



had left behind.

“Oh, do be careful!” she cried, running over to him. “Let me help you.” So saying, she untangled the net from the beautiful bird and was then surprised to hear the swan speak.

“My deepest thanks, young maiden,” he said. “I owe you a favor.”

“I was glad to be able to help you,” she said. “I wish I could only be of such help to my poor sister.”

The swan encouraged the young girl to tell him her story, and she did. When she had finished, she cried, “But, unhappy me, I am no good at riddles, and I fear my sister and I are doomed!”



“Then please allow me to assist you,” the swan said, “for by a stroke of luck, this is a riddle that strikes home with me. A little house in which one lives all alone, with no doors and windows, and the only way out is by breaking through the wall - that sounds very much like the egg out of which my own baby swan hatched not long ago.”



“Then the answer is a bird in an egg!” the girl cried. “Oh, thank you, kind swan, thank you!”

Her heart happy, she hurried back to wait for the King of the River, who was quite annoyed when he discovered that she had answered the first question correctly.

“Very well,” he said, “but tomorrow will bring a new riddle, one that perhaps will not be so easily solved.”

The girl was thankful that the swan had been able to help her, and the next day as she left the house, she brought with her a crust of bread dipped in gravy to give the swan in thanks.

The riddle presented by the King of the River the next day was even more difficult: A man was pulling a cart that contained a large load of wood. Yet curiously this wood was neither straight, yet nor was it crooked. What kind of wood could it possibly have been?

Again, as the girl walked along the riverbank, she grew very worried, for surely any piece of wood must be either straight or crooked. Yet, anxious as she was, she still looked for the swan so that she might give him



food in thanks for his help.

The swan for his part felt that no thanks was needed, but was delighted with the tasty bread. They spoke of the new riddle as he ate, but he confessed that he was as confused as she.

“However,” he said, “there is a carpenter who often on a fine day such as this will travel beside the river to do his work. Perhaps he is here today.”

After asking where she might find this carpenter, the girl thanked the swan and hurried away. The carpenter was a kindly man and, upon hearing the girl’s story, said he wished he could help her, but that he too knew only of wood that was either straight or crooked. As he spoke, he continued with his work, which at the moment consisted of sawing in half a very large plank of wood. The girl’s eyes, watching the saw blade slicing through the wood, suddenly grew large and round.

“Oh, but that is it, sir!” she said, pointing at the small mound of sawdust that was gathering at his feet. And when she met up with the King of the River at sundown, she was pleased to tell him that a load of



sawdust was neither straight nor crooked.

The King of the River was even more annoyed this time, and stamped his feet and cursed. But the sister was very pleased, and she went away thankful and relieved that there was but one more test to come.

When she arose the next morning, she took with her another crust of bread dipped in gravy for the swan, as well as a delicious muffin for the carpenter. She hastened to the riverbank and discovered the King of the River awaiting her. He was in a dark mood and said when he saw her, “You may have been lucky, or perhaps you had some help. But today you will not be so fortunate. Listen to me: Who am I? I live, yet I have no body. I hear, yet I have no ears. I speak, yet I have no mouth, and the air alone gives me my birth.”

“Try and solve that riddle, my pretty,” the evil creature said, then vanished into a mighty wave which had appeared in the middle of the river.

The girl was quite puzzled by this riddle and set off walking, hoping she might find the swan and enlist his aid. When she approached the area where his nest lay, she called out for him but he was nowhere to be found.



“Do not be searching for your bird friend,” a sinister voice said, and turning she saw the King of the River. “I have hidden him from you today, so that he may not interfere.”

“Please do not hurt him,” the girl started to say, but the King vanished. Worried, she rushed to where she had met the carpenter the previous day, but he was nowhere to be seen - though the King of the River was.

“The woodmaker is busy selling his tables and benches at the market today. You are left with nothing but your own wits to help you,” he said as he sank into the water.

Alone, the girl paced back and forth, turning the riddle over and over in her head. “Who am I? I live, yet I have no body. I hear, yet I have no ears. I speak, yet I have no mouth, and the air alone gives me my birth.” She repeated this to herself over and over, but no answer was forthcoming.

The hour slipped away, and as sunset approached, she began sobbing. She had failed not only herself but her sister as well. As enchanted slaves of the King of the River, their lives would not be their own. They



would no longer feel the same love one for the other, no longer enjoy each other's presence. They would no longer spend long mornings playing hide-and-seek, with one sister calling out a word and the other responding back like an echo.

Suddenly the sister stopped in her tracks. A smile spread across her lips and she hurried to her final meeting with the King of the River.

The King was waiting for her, and he was not alone. He had called the little sister to his side, so that he might lead both sisters away as soon as the older one failed to answer the last question.

"Your sister is ready to go with me," he said. "Are you?"

"How can either I or my sister go with you when I have solved your riddle?"

"Do not try my patience," the King warned. "You cannot fool me. If you know the answer, tell it to me now."

"You asked me: 'Who am I? I live, yet I have no body. I hear, yet I have no ears. I speak, yet I have no mouth, and the air alone gives me my birth.' The





answer,” said the girl, gazing into her sister’s eyes as she spoke, “is the echo.”

“Echo?” repeated the sister, and as she did, her eyes took on a bright shine that had been absent for quite some time. The spell broken, she fell into her sister’s arms, and the two hugged each other tightly.

The King of the River sputtered and fumed, but the sisters knew he could no longer do them harm. Arm in arm, they walked away from him and to their home, to tell their mother the happy news.

And from that day on, the younger sister always ate every drop of her stew - and if by any chance she ever hesitated, the watchful eyes of her older sister encouraged her to finish the task.





## NIKKI AND GOMMY

Nikki loved stuffed animals, and her very favorite stuffed animal was a monkey that she called “Gommy.” Gommy was almost as old as Nikki, and he had been with her through colds and chicken pox, bruised knees and sprained ankles. When Nikki was sad, she could hug Gommy close to her and feel a little better. When Nikki was happy, she could toss him high up in the air. When she had secrets, she could tell them to the little monkey and never have to worry that he would tell anyone else.

One day, Nikki went out to play at the house of her friend, Lulu. When she came home, she ran to find Nikki, because Lulu had told her a very funny story and she had to share it with Gommy before she burst.

But she couldn't find Gommy. He wasn't hiding behind the pillow on her bed. He wasn't taking a nap underneath the big comfortable chair in the living room. He wasn't having tea with Nikki's favorite doll or playing in the big closet or hanging by his tail in the shower.





Nikki looked and looked and looked. Her Mommy and Daddy looked and looked and looked. But Gommy wasn't anywhere. Not in the house. Not in the yard. Not anywhere.

It wasn't possible, but he was lost. He was gone. And so Nikki began to cry.

Nikki's Mommy and Daddy tried to make her feel better. They gave her big hugs and stroked her hair and told her they knew how sad she felt. They let her cry for a long time. Her Mommy told her about when she was a little girl herself, and how sad she felt when her favorite doll was eaten by her dog. Her Daddy told her that his lucky baseball glove fell in a river and was washed away, and that made him sad for a long time.

Nikki felt comforted and loved by her parents and their stories. But she still felt sad when she went to bed. And she still felt sad when she woke up the next morning.

When she came down to breakfast, she climbed into her Mommy's lap and asked, "Will I be sad forever?"

"No, Sweetheart," her Mommy said, giving her a



little kiss on the head. “But it sometimes takes a little while to get to feeling better.”

Later, Nikki played with Lulu, and that helped. But she still felt sad a lot of times during the day. Sometimes she felt it in her stomach, sometimes in her chest, sometimes in her head. Sometimes she felt it in her whole body. Sometimes it was a really big sadness that made her cry. Sometimes it wasn't so strong and just felt like a little extra heaviness that she was carrying around.

Around the middle of the day, Nikki said she wanted to take a nap, even though she hadn't taken naps in a long time. It was a very warm day, but her sheets felt nice and cool on her skin, and before long she had fallen into a deep sleep.

While she slept, Nikki dreamed. In her dream, Nikki was in a very thick forest. The trees in the forest were very old and very tall, and the leaves near the top were so thick that they seemed to form a roof. But even with all the trees and all the leaves, the forest wasn't dark. It glowed with a very pale blue light.

Nikki moved into the woods, where the light



seemed to be the brightest. As she walked along, the space between the trees grew larger and larger, until she reached a little clearing. In the middle of the clearing, there was a little wooden house, brightly painted and with each window shutter a different color.

Seated at a small work table outside the cottage was a little old man. On the table was a toy soldier, whose legs had come off, and the old man was trying to put it back together.

Nikki walked toward him. As she did, the man looked up and said, “What you look for is inside.”

“Thank you,” Nikki said, but the old man had returned to fixing the little toy soldier and didn’t seem to notice her as she opened the door and walked into the house.

Although the house was small on the outside, inside it was enormous, with very high ceilings and more rooms than Nikki could count. There were also more toys than Nikki could imagine - teddy bears, trains, rag dolls, jacks-in-the-boxes and everything else you could think of.

And Gommy was there. He was standing in the



middle of the floor, with his arms stretched out toward Nikki. The little girl ran to him with a cry of delight, and the two friends fell into a big hug.

“Nikki,” Gommy said, “I didn’t get a chance to say good-bye!”

“What is this place?” Nikki asked.

“It’s a place where lost toys go,” Gommy answered. “It’s a place for me now.”

“But WHERE is this place?”

“It’s in your heart. It’s in the hearts of all boys and girls who have lost something they love. That’s why it’s such a big, big place.”

“It’s in my heart?”

“Yes,” Gommy said.

Nikki looked at her monkey pal. “I miss you, Gommy,” she said.

“I miss you, too,” the little monkey answered. Then he took Nikki’s hand and the two had a wonderful time playing all of their favorite games.

After a while, Nikki could tell - without really knowing how - that it was almost time for her to go. She hugged her little friend and said, “Gommy, I’m





worried about you. Will you be happy here?”

“I’ll be with you forever in your heart. What could make me happier than that?”

“But Gommy, I’m afraid of something. What if I forget you some day?”

“You can sometimes forget what’s in your head. You can’t forget what’s in your heart.”

And Nikki knew that this was true.

A moment later, when she woke up, Nikki put her hand over her heart and smiled. She still felt sad and knew that it would take time for the sadness to disappear. But she also felt a warm little glow in her chest.

Nikki knew that Gommy might be gone, but she also knew that her love for him would never go. It would be with her for as long as she lived.

And so she got out of bed and walked down the stairs. She opened the front door and stepped outside into her world.



## THE STORY OF SCRITCH AND SCRATCH

This didn't happen here, or even near here, but I'm told that once there were two squirrels. One of the squirrels was named Scratch, and the name of the other was Scritch.

Scritch and Scratch were friends.

Scritch and Scratch often studied together. Most of the time, their studying went something like this:

"Hey, Scratch!" Scritch would say. "Did you read that paper the teacher gave us?"

"No way," Scratch would say. "She said it wouldn't be on the test."

"But it's all about - " Scritch would start to say.

"Boring!" Scratch would say.

Scritch, on the other hand, was always interested in learning everything he could that might come in handy. And sometimes it did.

Like one time when Scritch and Scratch decided to play "tag," their favorite game. "Can't catch me!" Scratch said, and ran right up a nearby tree.



Scratch started to follow him, but stopped when he saw a note posted on the tree.

“Hey, Scratch, did you read this note?” Scratch asked.

“Saw it, didn’t read it. Who cares?” Scratch said. “Can’t catch me!”

“But the note says -” Scratch began.

“Who cares?” Scratch repeated. Then he started jumping up and down on the branch he was standing on. “Can’t catch me! Can’t catch me! No, you can’t catch me!”

“No, Scratch!” Scratch yelled. “The note says this tree is rotten and the branches may-”

Suddenly, there was a big cracking sound, and in a second, Scratch came tumbling to the ground, the branch following right behind him.



“-May break,” Scratch said.

“Now you tell me!” Scratch groaned.

Another time, Scratch went by Scratch’s tree, just



as he did every school day, so the two could walk to school together. Scritch knocked and knocked, but got no answer. A chipmunk who lived nearby saw Scritch knocking and said, “Is he not back yet? He went to get his breakfast a long time ago.”

“Do you know where he went?”

“Well, it’s garbage day. On garbage day, he usually likes to get his breakfast from the bags that those people on the other side of the street put out.”

“Oh dear!” Scritch said. “Didn’t he read the DAILY ANIMAL NEWS?”

“I doubt it,” the chipmunk said, but Scritch was already too far away to hear him. The little squirrel ran all the way to the street. Sure enough, when he got there, he found his friend standing in the road, pulling on his legs and trying to get them to move.

“Having a little problem, Scratch?” Scritch asked.

“I’m totally stuck!” he cried. “How was I supposed to know they were going to pave the street this morning?” The squirrel pulled on his legs again, but they were stuck in the wet tar.

“If you’d read the newspaper -” Scritch began.



“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Scratch said. “I’ll read it from now on. I’ll read everything. But please, help me get out of this before a car comes!”

After Scratch was free, Scritch reminded his friend of his promise. “You don’t have to read everything,” he said, “but you DO need to make sure you pay attention to the important things!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Scratch said. “I’m a changed squirrel. I mean it.”

Scritch hoped this was true. But he wasn’t too sure.

Some time later, Scritch went away to visit his favorite aunt for a few weeks while school was on a winter break. Before he left, he asked Scratch, “Have you been storing food away? Snow will be here soon, you know.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Scratch said. “I got it all taken care of.”

Scritch enjoyed visiting his aunt, but he missed his friend while he was away. When the first snow of winter came, he worried that maybe Scratch had not stored away food as he was supposed to. As soon as he



got home, he ran over to Scratch's tree.

"Come out and play!" Scritch called out, but the only answer he got was a moan. Worried, he quickly climbed up the tree and into the hollow. There he found his friend, who was pale, thin and lifeless. His fur was dull, and his tail drooped.

"Scratch! What's wrong with you? You don't look well."

"I feel sick. And tired, too."

"What happened? Scratch - did you forget to store enough food?"

"I had plenty of food - look!" he said, pointing at the floor, which was covered with peanut shells. "I met this old guy who gave me peanuts every day - as many as I could carry."

"You mean you've eaten nothing but raw peanuts all this time?" Scritch asked. Scratch nodded weakly. "But, Scratch, our teacher gave us that whole list of good foods and bad foods for squirrels, and raw peanuts were way up at the top of foods that are bad for us! What did you do with that list?"

"I kind of...left it at school."

Scritch shook his head. He was mad at his friend,





but that would have to wait. Eating nothing but raw peanuts had made Scratch a very, very sick squirrel. Scritch took charge of things, and started feeding him a healthy diet of acorns, sunflower seeds and other foods that are healthy for squirrels.

He was afraid that maybe it was too late, but gradually Scratch got better. After a time, he was able to get out of bed, and then was able to go outside. By the middle of spring, Scritch's care and attention helped get Scratch back to his old self.

With one change. From that time on, Scratch always made a point of reading anything that might be important - and of remembering what he read as well.

And he never ate a raw peanut again - not ever!





## THE LONELY MERMAID

It used to be that a land with much water would surely have at least a mermaid or two, and in one of these lands there lived a young mermaid named Esmerelda, who was quite beautiful. Her hair was golden as a summer sun, her skin was the blue of a moon-kissed night, her eyes were as grey as a thundercloud and the scales on the lower part of her body shone like fireflies and sparkled like diamonds.

The lake in which Esmerelda lived was a beautiful home for a mermaid - crystal clear and large, with many caves and hiding places, and with trees on three sides to give shade. Delicious berries grew on bushes next to the shore, so that Esmerelda always had plenty to eat.

With all this, you might think Esmerelda would be very happy and content. But the truth was that she was very, very sad. There were whole days when she would do nothing but rest upon her favorite rock, sighing and flipping her tail slowly in and out of the water. Many nights were filled with her sweet voice



singing a wordless song that ached with pain.

Esmerelda was sad for a good reason: She was lonely. There were no other mermaids or mermen she could share her magnificent lake with.

The sad little mermaid was not totally alone, of course. There was a little cottage in the woods not too far from the lake, and the children who lived in that cottage would sometimes come and visit with her. Esmerelda liked these children, but she didn't speak human talk, and the children didn't speak mermaid talk, and this was a problem. The children also didn't swim, and Esmerelda couldn't walk, and this also limited the fun they could have together.

There were many fish in the lake, but Esmerelda knew only a few words in fish talk. She could swim with the fish, but they didn't really like to play games. And although a mermaid can hold her breath longer than a human, she still must come up for air often.

And so Esmerelda felt very lonely.

One day, an old man came walking by the lake. He was a peddler - a person who goes from place to place selling things - and he pulled a small cart, loaded





with pots, pans, cloths, needles and odds and end. Tired, he came to a rest right beside a large rock, where Esmerlda lay napping. As he set his cart down, it made a large clattering noise that awakened the mermaid.

Esmeralda did not usually trust grown-up humans, and when she saw the peddler near her, she started to dive into the water.

“Wait, little fish girl!” the peddler called, and Esmerelda stopped where she was. The peddler was speaking in mermaid talk!

“How do you know my language?” Esmerelda asked, looking at the peddler with great curiosity.

“When you are as old as I,” the peddler explained, “you find you know many things.” He then told her how, when he was a young man, he had sailed the seas and had met and befriended many a mermaid. “They taught me your language,” he said, “and once learned, it is not easy to forget.”

“Come closer,” the peddler said. “It is hard for me to see, and I would like a better look at you.” Esmerelda swam closer and as she did, she saw that the



peddler had only one eye. “Ah,” he said. “That is better. You are indeed beautiful. But even a man with one eye can see you are sad.

What troubles you, my child?”

And Esmerelda told her story to the peddler, who listened quietly. “It’s a difficult thing to be alone,” he said with a sigh.



“Tell me about the mermaids you met in your youth,” Esmerelda begged, happy to be able to talk to anyone, but especially to someone who had once known other mermaids. And so the peddler spoke with the fish-girl far into the night, until after the moon had fallen back to sleep and the sun was beginning to yawn its way into the dawn.

“You know,” the peddler said as the sun began to rise, “there is a stream not too far from here. If you had legs, you could walk out of the lake at the south end there, walk down that steep hill, and walk right into it. And that stream leads to a river, which leads into the sea. And, at least when I was a young man,



that sea was home to a good number of your people.”

The mermaid was excited to hear this. Having lived all her life in the lake, she did not know that there was a stream so close by.

“I may not have legs,” she said, excitedly, “but I will find a way to get to this stream!”

The peddler looked at the mermaid and smiled. “I believe you will,” he said. He rose and took from his cart a large coil of rope, which he handed to Esmerelda. “Here. This will help you.”

“Thank you,” Esmerelda said, “but how exactly will it help?”

“You’ll know when the time comes,” the peddler said. Then, saying his good-byes, he reached for his cart and slowly walked away.

Esmerelda was sad that her new friend had to leave, but she was also excited to know about the stream at the bottom of the hill. She swam to the middle of the lake, then dived down deep and swam quickly toward the south end. When she neared the shore, she burst out of the water, flying as high up in the air as she could. Looking out, she could just barely



see the bottom of the hill and the stream before she fell back into the lake. It really was there!

From that day, Esmerelda spent all of her time trying to find a way to the stream. She first tried dragging herself out onto the shore and down the hill, but with no legs, she could only go a few feet. And being a mermaid, she couldn't stay out of water for more than a few minutes, so she had to quickly drag herself back into the lake.

She next tried swimming quickly to the shore, then leaping high into the air and landing as far inland as she could. But landing on the ground was painful, and she found herself still very far away from the stream. Yet she kept on trying.

One day as she was leaping onto the shore, the young children from the cottage saw her. Worried, they ran to her. She motioned toward the stream, and the little children understood that she needed to go there. They picked her up and tried to carry her, but they were too small, and could only move her a few feet.

They struggled and were able to pull Esmerelda



back into the lake, where she felt frustrated and disappointed. She swam to a rock, lay her head down and cried herself to sleep.

That night, the moon was covered with huge storm clouds. With a loud crash of thunder, they emptied their rain upon the lake, waking the mermaid from her sleep. Never before had she seen such a storm. Rain fell so fast and in such great amounts that the water in the lake begin rising quickly. In a few moments, the rock she had been sleeping on was covered, and in a few more, the lake began spilling over its banks.

Excited, Esemereida quickly swam to the south end of the lake, where she saw water flowing out of the lake and tumbling down the hill. The water rolling down the hill was not wide enough or deep enough for her to swim in, but perhaps between it and the rain, she could find her way to the stream at the bottom of the hill.

Using all of her strength, and bringing along the rope the peddler had given her, she pulled herself out of the lake and began sliding and rolling and pulling



herself down the wet, muddy hillside. It was hard work, and it required all of her strength, even with the rain and the water helping her. She slid over rocks and fallen branches, cutting and bruising herself in many places. She struggled mightily, but after a while, her strength began to fade. To make matters worse, the rain began to stop, and looking around, she saw that she was only halfway to the stream. She was too far to return to her lake, and yet she knew she could not



make it to the stream either.

As she worried over what she should do, the mermaid glanced up and saw before her a large, grey wolf. Esmerelda gasped in fright, but as

moonlight spilled across it, she looked into its face. It had but one eye, but the eye seemed kind and gentle.

Quickly, knowing what to do, Esmerelda uncoiled her rope, made a loop and threw it around the wolf, who seemed to be waiting for her to do this. Then, as Esmerelda tied the other end of the rope to herself, the wolf began moving down the hill toward the



stream, pulling the exhausted mermaid behind him.

By now the rain had stopped completely. Without water, the already weary mermaid grew even weaker. As she was dragged down the hill, her eyes closed and the exhausted mermaid fell into a deep sleep.

When she opened her eyes, the sun was shining brightly. Esmerelda looked around, and saw that she was no longer on land but had been placed in the cool waters of the beautiful stream she had longed for.

“Ah, you are awake now, friend,” said a gentle voice. Esmerelda turned around and was astonished to see another mermaid. “I had just left your side long enough to gather these berries, Esmerelda.”

“Who are you?” Esmerelda asked, happily. “How did you know my name? And what became of the wolf who brought me here?”

“Wolf? There was no wolf when I found you. As for my name, I am called Margareta. And I know your name because the peddler told it to me.”

“Peddler?” Esmerelda asked.

“Yes. An old, old man told me we should come here and wait for you. We have been here some time





and were beginning to fear you might not come!’

“We?” Esmerelda asked. “Please, who is ‘we?’”

Margareta moved aside, and Esmerelda could see further down the stream a group of mermen and mermaids - perhaps a dozen or more.

“We’ve come to take you back to our home in the sea, as soon as your strength returns,” said Margareta.

“That is, if you would like to come with us.”

“Oh, please, let’s go now!” Esmerelda said.

“Are you sure you’re strong enough?” Margareta asked. “Perhaps we should wait a while.”

“I’ve been waiting for this my whole life!”

Esmerelda said, giving Margareta a big hug. “I’m ready.”

And so Margareta took Esmerelda to meet the rest of the fish people, and together they swam away, laughing and singing. And no one sang louder or laughed more happily than Esmerelda.

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