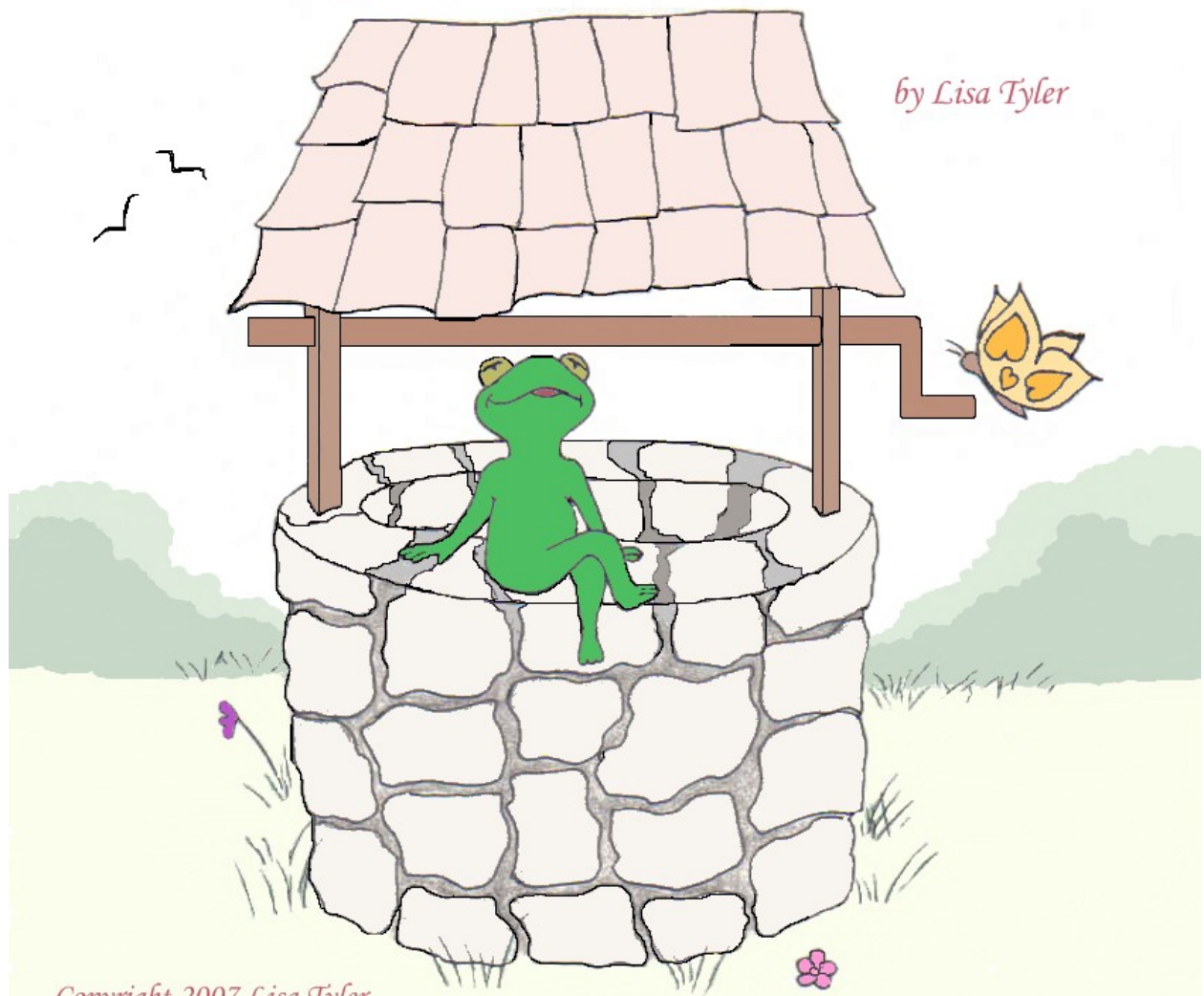


# *Once Upon An Enchanted Bedtime*

*by Lisa Tyler*



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## Satina's Ribbon

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Long ago, in the days when young men carried fair maidens away on their horses to marry, there lived a girl in the little village of Sun Sweet, which was surrounded by beautiful mountains and mist.

Her name was Satina, and she was very small for her age. The children at school teased her and her parents shook their heads with worry, wondering when she would ever grow. Her face was as round and perfect as a little doll, and her tiny feet had to be specially fitted for shoes at the cobbler's shop.

All the young maidens in the village who were being chosen as brides were strong and could work beside their men in the fields, lifting heavy bales of hay. The men who needed wives never seemed to want so small a bride.

Although Satina was small, her heart was happy and full of joy to be alive. Her greatest talent was a gift for sewing. Her fingers moved so quickly, weaving the thread in and out with perfect little stitches, that whatever she made turned out to be the loveliest ever seen. Naturally she was asked to make many of the other girl's wedding dresses.

It seemed that every week through the spring and summer, someone was getting married. A wedding was a noisy, gay event that lasted for days in celebration. The handsome groom would dress in his best riding clothes and tie blood red ribbons to his horse's mane and tail. He would wait until almost dark, and then ride as fast as the wind into the yard of his intended bride.

He would pretend to steal her from her parent's house, leaving behind a bag full of gifts and money for her family. Then he'd carry his screaming bride off into the night. Just for fun, the villagers would light their torches and run after them to the edge of town, yelling at them to stop.

After the couple were far out of sight over the mountain, the old men would begin to dance and sing. The children feasted on sweet breads and hot, lumpy puddings. Happiness was everywhere.

Satina was almost 16 and no one had approached her father to ask for her hand in marriage. Satina's father worked hard in the fields and because he had no son-in-law to help, he came in later than the other men. He was often cross and tired.

Satina spent most of her day carrying food and water to him in the field. It was a long walk and Satina's stride was short. By the time she returned home from the first trip, it was time to go again and carry the hot bread and bowl of fresh milk curd for lunch.

One night, as she sat by the fire, Satina found a way to sew her winter cape into a sling that she could wear over her shoulders to carry the food and pots of water in. Being able to hold more inside the sling, saved her many trips, and gave her time to enjoy the summer flowers on the way.

One day, just before lunchtime, she found a strange little man lying beside the ox path. She had packed her cape carefully with the loaves of bread and bowl of cheese, and was balancing a pot of water on top of them. The day was hot and the little man appeared to be in great distress. He wore a dusty little coat with golden buttons, and his shoes were worn right through to his feet in places. As Satina tiptoed closer, she saw that he was peering up at her with dark, glistening eyes. “That’s odd,” she thought, “he looks as though he’s afraid that I’ll bite him!”

The little man was indeed frightened and would have rather been anywhere but there, seen by a human, but he was nearly dead from fatigue and hunger. He just barely cared how he should die. Perhaps being captured by a villager and kept in a crockery jar would be more pleasant than trying to continue on in search of his home.

“May I help you, my lord?” asked Satina in the most pleasant way she could imagine.

In a moment the traveler spoke. “Aye, would ye be so kind as to bring me a dipper of water from the nearest well, Lass?” The man held out his hand to signal her to hurry.

“I am carrying water to my father in the field, and I would be glad to give it to you. Also, I have in my cape some warm bread that my mother just baked and a bowl of her morning cheese. I can run back to my house and get more for my father.”

“Oh, thank ye so kindly! May heaven repay ye for your kindness!” The man would have finished the pot of water right there, but Satina stopped him.

“Please sir, let me help you to those trees there in the pasture, so you can eat in the shade.” Satina very slowly walked with him to the circle of trees that grew in the pasture, and then used her cape as a tablecloth to set the water, cheese and bread on.

“‘Tis a meal fit for a king, indeed!” said the little man.

“Please use my cape to lay upon and rest, while I go take food to my father. Later tonight I’ll return with more for you, and if you feel well enough, I’ll show you to my house.”

The traveler watched Satina run back up the hill as fast as she could, while her bright braids of hair sparkled like copper in the noon sun. Satina knew she would have to run very fast and make extra trips without her cape.

Finally her work was done, she was bathed and ready to carry supper to the little man. She headed out with her arms full of the best her mother could prepare. She let her hair hang loosely to dry in the late evening breeze, and it gaily danced behind her as she made her way carefully down the ox path.

The man sat upon her cape leaning against a tree and watched her return. Satina's small body was framed in the distance by the pale pink sunset behind her. He thought she looked like an angel of mercy and imagined he could already smell the good food she was bringing. His strength was returning and for the first time in months, he felt the prickle of his magic returning also.

At first the stranger ate in silence, only slowing up now and then to notice how good it tasted. Then with a sigh that sounded to Satina like a whispering wind through the forest at twilight, he sat upright and decided to tell this sweet girl his tale of adventure and woe.

Oh, what a fantastic tale it was to Satina! His name was Michael and he had been with a band of mischievous leprechauns and had fallen from his horse as they leapt from the earth to ride a silver moonbeam to their home. The horses were laden with jewels and gold. Since he had been the last rider, no one noticed that he had slipped off and fallen back to the mortal world. For months he walked searching for another night of perfectly pale moonlight with a lilt of magic in the air. His own magic dwindled daily and his strength had gone with it, until now.

"Dear Lass, if it weren't for your kindness to me, I would ha' been nay more than a mist upon that road tonight. I owe ye me life and that's quite a debt. How may I repay ye when I return t' my people?"

Satina laughed, and insisted he owed her nothing. "I am so glad that you are better, but shouldn't you stay at our house until you are all well?"

"Nay, I sense a full moon tonight and a stirring in me soul that pulls at me heart. I feel that tonight I shall find my way home again."

"Well, come with me quickly, then, to the top of this hill so we can look for a proper moonbeam." Satina noticed that Michael didn't need nearly as much support as he had earlier in the day, and she was glad.

On the way up the hill Michael learned about Satina's family. "Now, why is a fair and good hearted lass like yourself, not married yet and blessed with a dozen babes?"

"Oh!" Satina began, blushing slightly. "You see, I'm very small for my people. The others are large and strong. They can serve their husbands well. I am very small and slow, and some fear that I may be sickly."

"Sickly my foot!" growled the leprechaun, stamping his foot and sending sparkles of angry magic rippling around him in the night. "To my eyes you're the fairest bride I've ever seen, and I'd give me right leg to be your groom. But leave it to men to be blind as chestnuts!"

Suddenly they saw a glowing of light slowly settling downwards like fog in the valley. It lit up the ground and cast shadows behind them.

“There!” Michael shouted. “The ribbon of highway to me home!” Satina helped him up onto the beam and wished him a safe journey.

Michael bent down and tore off a shimmering length of the moonbeam and placed it in her hands. As it touched her skin, it became of solid strip of silver cloth, shimmering as if woven with magic pearl dust. “This is a magic ribbon, Satina. With it you can call me back to your side. If ye are ever in trouble and needin’ me, just hold the ribbon high above your head in the moonlight, and I’ll be back quick as a wink!”

“That’s wonderful Michael, I will cherish it always!” Satina waved goodbye as he faded with the darkening moonlight. Late that night, after Satina said her prayers, she turned the magic ribbon over and over in her hands dreaming about Michael. Where had he gone? Was he happy now? Would he ever come back?

Summer passed slowly. Satina continued to carry water to her father in the daytime and sew beautiful garments at night to fill the orders of the townspeople. Unfortunately, it looked like the few coins she earned wouldn’t be enough to help her family through the winter.

In the town there lived an old magistrate who had seen the clothes Satina could make. To him, Satina’s talent was a gold mine. He asked her father if he could marry her, planning to sell her work across the countryside and become even richer. Since the magistrate offered a large purse of gold coins for her, Satina’s father felt he couldn’t refuse. After all, it wasn’t likely she would marry at all if he didn’t accept Magistrate Brown’s offer.

The night that the old magistrate proposed to Satina, her heart nearly fainted with despair. Deep inside she had always hoped that someday a man would love her and she would return his love. The wedding was set for the first night of the harvest moon.

Meanwhile, King Michael returned home to his people, the Leprechauns, who greeted him warmly. They had been afraid that their king had been captured. He resumed his life on the throne, in that beautiful land of green meadows and mists. He was surrounded by laughter and treasure, but his heart had fallen in love with the fair mortal maiden who had rescued him. Everywhere he looked he thought he saw her face.

Soon he found a spell to keep watch over her through the face of a large crystal. His heart wrenched as he learned of her coming marriage, but he was powerless to go to her until the moonbeam fell in the right place again. He prayed night and day that Satina would use the ribbon he had given her, to open the magic highway and call him back to her side, but she did not. It just wasn’t a proper thing for a young lady to do without knowing that the man she cared for loved her too. Satina was sure that Michael had forgotten her by now. Harvest time had come and he watched his love pressing the ribbon to her heart every night, crying herself to sleep.

The day finally came that she was to marry Magistrate Brown. The sky was clear and the village was preparing the festival of the harvest they would enjoy that night under a huge golden moon.

Magistrate Brown had arranged a small wedding at the church, telling Satina that he was too old and dignified for the nonsense of carrying her away on a horse. She was to ride in his carriage to the church and begin her duties sewing and cooking the next day.

Little Satina had sewn a modest wedding gown for herself, and since she knew no one but her parents would attend the wedding, she made it a simple creamy white dress trimmed with several shades of green ribbons that she imagined would have pleased Michael.

At the last minute, when the carriage stood waiting outside under the heavy harvest moon, Satina decided to tie her long, curly hair up with the lovely silver ribbon Michael had given her. As soon as the moonlight touched the magic ribbon, a thick sparkling mist fell to the earth. Satina and her parents heard the sound of hundreds of horses' hooves riding like thunder across the mountains and were astonished when the countryside filled with a leprechaun wedding party led by a breathless King Michael.

No sooner had he reined his mighty white horse in beside them, than he tossed a large bag of his treasure to Satina's parents. Satina couldn't believe that she wasn't dreaming, as the handsome young king lifted her up into his saddle and the whole group galloped away into the night.

Before the magic moonbeam faded away into the sweet autumn evening, Satina grabbed a handful of the silvery light. It is said that she spends her evenings now on a little golden throne beside her true love, cleverly weaving the magic moonlight into lovely ribbons for young girls who dream of someday being loved. Perhaps you've heard of Satin Ribbons, maybe you're even wearing one now, to tie your own hair up under the moonlight.

The End.



## The Last Wishing Box

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Many years ago, in a far off land, a young orphan boy begged for pennies outside of the market shops. Hassan was only twelve years old; too young to have a real job, but he had lived alone in the alleys for a long time and earned his bread making people laugh with his songs and funny faces.

One day, the Maharajah ordered his soldiers to gather up all the beggars and take them far out into the desert to rid his city of poverty. Hassan was captured and carried out to the hot, dry desert to die. He had with him only a crust of bread and half of a pomegranate. He knew he could not last long without water, so when he saw the neck of a bottle poking up from the sand, he ran to it eagerly hoping for a last swallow of water.

When he removed the stopper and peeked inside, he was greatly disappointed that the bottle was empty. Laying it aside, he fell down onto the hot sand to cry.

While Hassan wept into his sleeves, a thin blue smoke began to pour out of the bottle and took on the form of an old man. His skin was parched with age and heat, and his eyes seemed like feverish dark jewels in their hollows. It was an ancient genie that stood there silently until Hassan looked up.

The kind-hearted boy thought the dry old man was another beggar who had been left in the desert to die, and he felt sorry for him. He appeared to be thirstier and hungrier than Hassan had ever been, so the boy offered the old man his last crust of bread and half of a pomegranate.

When the man had eaten the food, he was very quiet. Sitting beside Hassan, he asked the boy if he had a wish and it could be granted, what would he ask for?

Hassan thought for a while and answered that he wished he had a skill, some job to earn his living so that he wouldn't be a beggar anymore. The old man seemed very pleased with Hassan's answer and smiled to himself while nodding his head.

Standing up, the old man drew in a deep breath that went on and on as if he'd swallow up all the air of the earth. His chest grew large and his whole body expanded until he was as tall and wide as a mountain. Hassan fell back in terror. This was no ordinary man, but a genie full of magic!

The man let out his breath suddenly with such force that Hassan was blown in a great cloud of swirling sand back inside the Maharajah's city.

He landed in an alley behind the market where the shopkeepers threw their trash. All around him were boxes and bottles, broken glass and crockery and scraps of material. The old man appeared in the alley and told Hassan to use the materials in the trash heap to cover and decorate the boxes

there. He said he would put a spell on each one to grant the person who bought one from the boy one wish.

The boy worked fast to stack up a pile of suitable boxes. As he laid each scrap of material and piece of shiny glass over the boxes, they stuck fast to form beautiful patterns. The boxes were so beautiful that the people of the city wanted them to hold their trinkets, whether they believed in magic or not.

It soon became known that Hassan was builder of truly magic boxes and in less than a week all of the boxes were sold. The young beggar boy now carried a heavy purse of gold coins. He wanted to see the old man again to thank him but the genie was gone.

The Maharajah heard of the magic boxes and called Hassan into his presence. He was furious that they boy had sold all of the boxes and not saved one for his king. So he ordered Hassan to build him a magic box by sunrise or die.

The frightened boy was put into a room with many delicate boxes and fine materials. The door was locked and there was only one window high above his reach that led into an alley. That night as Hassan tried to make a magic box, the scraps of material and jewels would not stick, and the boy knew that it meant the boxes would not be magic. He began to cry again as he feared the dawn would be coming soon.

Outside in the alley, a small voice was heard calling for alms, a beggar in sore need of a meal. Hassan was moved with pity for the poor people who were always hungry, so he called the beggar to come to his window. He threw the bag of gold coins out to him and told the beggar to use it wisely, for he was soon to die and could not give him more.

Hassan didn't know that the beggar was the old man of the desert who had helped him. The old genie was so touched by Hassan's care for others, that he appeared in the room and granted the boy another wish.

Hassan wanted to ask for his freedom, but didn't want to cheat the king. So he asked to be allowed to give the Maharajah a magic box too for his release.

The old man considered what would happen to Hassan if the wish were granted. Suddenly he had an idea. The genie gave Hassan a very small, beautiful box with precious jewels and gold all over it. He told Hassan to say to the king that he had saved the best box for him, because its magic was more powerful. This box would grant not just one wish, but instead, whatever thing its owner most richly deserved.

You can imagine how that pleased the wicked and vain Maharajah. He was certain he deserved to rule the world and own all of its wealth. But when he opened the box, a dark hand reached out and pulled the king inside, down to the hidden depths of the world. The little box fell to the floor where the king had stood.

Hassan was frightened as the palace became silent in shock. He reached down and picked up the box to look inside for the king. Suddenly Hassan was transformed. His beggars' rags became rich, royal robes and on his head was the Maharajah's crown! He was made King of the land.

The very first thing the young king did, was to gather all of the poor and needy people, put them in fine clothing and give them good jobs in his palace which is of course the right thing to do if you are king.

In all the world there has never been a city so full of laughter and plenty for its people, as King Hassan's New City.

The End.

## The Chicken Tweed Coat

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Rusty Dobson was a leathery old peddler in that old Wild West town of Carson City. He had a small wagon with crooked wooden wheels, pulled by a weary old, dapple-gray mare. Together Rusty and his mare, Penelope, had traveled hundreds of dusty miles, between raiding Indians and robbing bandits. No one much bothered old Rusty Dobson, because he sure didn't look like he owned anything worth stealing.

On the other hand, you might say Rusty Dobson was the richest man in the entire west. He didn't own any gold nuggets, didn't even own a gun, but Rusty had three laying hens and a vivid imagination, which carried him through the chilly winters and long hot summers. Lucky for him, there were plenty of both of those seasons out there in the Nevada territory.

Rusty used his imagination every day in his business matters, and even just for recreation. He liked to sit in the village saloon telling stories for the delight of the cowhands that rode into town in the evenings to spend their pay.

He liked to tell wild Indian stories to the children after church on Sunday. In return for his imagination, the cowhands shared some of their "sarsaparilla soda" with him, and the families of the children shared some of their Sunday dinner with him. It was a pretty fair trade.

Business took Rusty and his old weathered wagon far out of town along the stagecoach trails to the ranches and out posts where the people needed him most. He sold them pots to cook in, axes to chop with, and cloth to make new clothes from. At each stop, Rusty invented a delightful story to help him sell his goods.

For instance, the Huckleberry family needed a bathtub. Their old tub had rusted right through to the floor, and they set it outside near the barn to feed the horses their hay in. Rusty Dobson came by the following day on his regular route, and happened to have in his wagon, a real European style bathtub with heavy claw feet and pretty designs all over it.

The Huckleberry's didn't feel they needed such a fancy tub, and would have gone into town the next week to buy a plain tin tub from Crest Meyer's General Store. But Rusty needed to sell his tub, so he quickly thought up a lively tale of how that tub had saved the lives of the Governor of Nevada and his lovely wife. He even showed them the bullet marks, where the outlaw Josh Casey had fired on them, and couldn't get through the tough iron sides where the Governor and his wife were hiding.

The Huckleberry children were fascinated with the tub, and Mrs. Huckleberry was a little impressed with the idea of bathing in a European tub that had soaked the Governor's wife clean.

After Rusty and his wagon were far down the road, Mrs. Huckleberry looked to her husband (who was sliding their new tub into place), and said, “Really, Dan, I don’t believe a word of it!” Mr. Huckleberry winked at her and smiled.

Now Rusty’s old wagon was quite a sight to see. It creaked as the wheels turned, which was music to Rusty’s ears. It bounced and rattled over the rough road, which made it hard for the three chickens to sit still up on top.

Henrietta, Josephine and Mable liked to perch on the back of Rusty’s seat, or on top of a heavy crate in the back. They kept a neat little nest tucked down in the back right behind the seat, and deposited warm, brown eggs into it every day.

As the wagon rolled, it would bounce up and down. With every upward motion, the three hens would crouch down on their narrow perch. With every downward motion, the hens would let out a small squawk as they fluttered their wings a little and settled back down on their feet.

So the song of Rusty’s wagon went like this: Penelope’s dusty hooves clacking on the hard ground, creaking wheels with rattling hardware, loose boards bouncing up and down, accompanied by the three fluttering squawking hens.

Sometimes Rusty would add to that the sounds from his dented harmonica as he played an old cowboy song, and played it almost in tune. Like I said, you might say Rusty Dobson was the richest man in all the west! There just wasn’t a better life on the frontier.

Now one day, Rusty was at the undertaker’s shop. The undertaker was a very proper man who was quick to arrive at the scenes of gunfights and yellow fever victims, to measure for coffins. He went back to his shop and picked out one that would do, promptly collected his client, and set to work. Mr. Snyder, the undertaker, had always worn a dark black suit with a tall stovepipe hat, but today his coat had been ripped wide open on a nail that stuck out from a new coffin.

Rusty Dobson just happened to have in his dusty, weathered, musical wagon a lovely new tweed coat. It might have looked gray to the distant eye, but up close you could see there were strands of all colors of thread woven in to make the fabric. Rusty liked it a lot himself, but it would have quickly gotten dirty and ruined if he wore it on the trail.

Now he knew the undertaker was a man of old habits and wouldn’t be interested in any coat that wasn’t absolutely black. So he called upon his fantastic imagination once more.

With a wriggle of his long gray mustache, Rusty said to the undertaker, “You know, Mr. Snyder, an undertaker with a ripped coat just don’t seem properly attired for sendin’ off a Heaven bound soul. Now I have here in my wagon, the latest thing from Europe in undertaker-wear.”

Rummaging through his packing crate in the back of the wagon, Rusty pulled out the lovely tweed coat. He shook it out and held it up to the sun for the undertaker to inspect. Right away, Mr. Snyder shook his head and turned his nose high into the air.

“It’s not black, Mr. Dobson”, said the undertaker.

“Of course not, Mr. Snyder!” Rusty said with a smile. “This is an original, ceremonial, genuine undertaker’s chicken-tweed coat!”

“What? Humph!” Snorted Mr. Snyder. “Chicken-tweed indeed!”

“That’s right, why look right here and tell me if you don’t see at least three colors of thread woven so clever it almost appears to be gray to the distant, mourning eye.” Mr. Snyder looked closer.

“And then, Mr. Snyder, when the grieving family gets up close at the funeral and notices the colors running all through your coat, they’ll ask you what manner of coat this is. And you can say, you ordered the latest official coat for their loved one, to properly show your respect and hopes for their future on the other side.”

Mr. Snyder thought about it for a long time. He held the tweed coat up to the light and then asked, “What does a chicken have to do with this coat, Mr. Dobson, and why are there colored threads in it?”

“Well that’s the best part! I’m glad you asked. See, chickens when they’re making their nests, sort out the straws and pack them just right for the most comfortable fit. So the manufacturer thought a chicken could pick out the different threads and be trained to pack them into the weave of the fabric just right. In fact, I was hopin’ to train my own hens for making chicken-tweed, so I could retire pretty soon. I hear everyone in Europe wants one!” Rusty wriggled his mustache again, as he got into the spirit of his story.

Still holding up the suit, he added, “See there’s a dark color in there for mourning, and a real light color thread to show you hope they make it to Heaven. And the pretty red thread is for the blood shed for them by the Lord himself!”

Mr. Snyder was a church going man, and quick to realize the value of letting his customer’s families know it. So he proudly took the chicken-tweed coat and paid Rusty Dobson a fair price. He put it right on and sent a boy over to Crest Meyer’s Store to buy some light gray material that his wife could make into trousers to go with the new coat.

Everybody was happy with Rusty’s new and used goods. Everybody was happy with Rusty’s fine imagination, even though they didn’t believe a word of it! Usually.

Rusty wasn’t a rich man, he didn’t even own a gun, but what he had made him the richest man in all the west. Well, that’s what he told himself as his old, dapple-gray mare pulled the musical wagon down the dusty trail that night. Henrietta laid him a fine brown egg for supper too.

The End.

## The Very Last Smile On Earth

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Aye, and it's a good thing that there be the little people, or 't would like as not be a dismal world where nobody ever smiled.

What? Have ye not heard of the terrible black hour when all of the happiness ever made for this Earth was used up? Well, pull up a toadstool and fluff up your mossy pillows, my lads and lassies, while I spin the oddest tale to cross the Irish Sea.

Well, now, as you know, Ireland is a collection of islands surrounded by misty, salted waters. And in them blackened waters there be sea creatures. Yay, they were spotted, and slimy, great beasties of the nether world. Ooooo, and a terrible thing they are to behold, too! Why, it makes me shiver just to consider sailin' on them waters!

But many's the brave and able man to haul the ropes and nets that harvest the fine fishies t' feed the masses. And the families that live near the sea would starve if it weren't for their hard labor. Y' see, the land in them parts is harsh and unkind. You should see the tons of gray rock that the farmers have pulled from the fields over the years and stacked so neatly into hundreds of miles of fences that separate each little field. Why, you'd need three countries' armies to carry such a burden.

Ah, but to be back t' me story. Y' see, the sailors would go out in their little boats, and on the way home, when the sun was goin' down fast, there'd be one o' them beasties blockin' their way. He'd either eat the sun burnt sailors and crush their boat like just so many paint-peelin' toothpicks, or he'd take his payment for lettin' the men reach shore again.

Well, after a while, the sailors got tired o' losin' their long day's catch to the monsters, and bein' Irish as they was, and knowin', o' course, that there ain't an Irishman alive without a song in his heart...they figured that music would soothe the ugly beasts. In fact, not just music, but gaiety and laughter.

So the sailors played the harps and pipes, danced long jigs with tappin' feet, and laughed from the bottoms of their bellies. The sounds, echoin' down through the murky waters o' the deep, lulled the mighty giants t' sleep beneath them.

Now things was goin' fine for a long time with the sailors, but up there in the heavens, the angels went t' worryin'. Y' see, there was only a certain number of smiles made up there, before the Earth was ready t' come up out o' the birthin' mists. There was plenty t' go around, o' course, but them greedy sea monsters was takin' more than anyone had planned on.

Then one day it happened! Mrs. MacGillicuddy's fifth baby arrived, and everybody who come t' see the new babe brought a little somethin' for good luck. But as they each bent over the darlin'

little cradle that had rocked for hours with the four other little MacGillicuddy children, they each found that no matter how hard they tried, no smile would come t' their lips.

Sweet Mary knows, an Irishman's few joys in this world include cooin' over a new little babe just comin' in. It just isn't right not t' lend it a smile in welcome.

Well, a terrible wailin' went up from the folks, and word of the disaster spread from county to county. Other babes were met with stony faces all over our dear land, and the sound of it was more than any ear could bear.

That includes, of course, the ears of the leprechauns, the wee folks. They live in the fairy forts, ancient mounds in the emerald glens. Y' might see them stretchin' out under the blankets of gently wavin' ferns, restin' on the cool moss beds at the feet of trees, or dancin' barefoot across the rollin' fields at dusk.

King Ethin of the little people called for his sprightly young men, and they rode to the mountains of Wicklow to converse in the mist and clouds that hung low in the morning. It was decided that the mortal Morgan O'Connor would be instructed to build them a fine boat to sail out amongst the beasties and put them to rest.

Ethin himself stood by while O'Connor and his men hewed the great tree, and he gave them orders about the measurements of the thing. It was sanded and polished, tarred, and fitted with sail and rudder. Aye, a finer craft has never been seen as King Ethin's ship.

At last the wee sailors climbed aboard, carryin' each a parcel wrapped in golden cloth, tucked under their wee little arms. The ship was pushed out on its way upon the sea, and the people o' the villages along the coast stood at the ready, wavin' and watchin' and holdin' their breaths.

The leprechauns sailed out for half o' the day, marvellin' at the beauty of the swellin' green sea. So much like their homelands, the gentle green waters spread out before and beneath them like the green spring pastures, and the rollin' sea like the hills and valleys of Ireland.

There was a danger, though. Quiet and unnoticed, the rockin' of the boat and the slappin' o' the waters against the hull could lull the wee folk to sleep and play them into the claws of the sea monsters.

Finally the sun swung downwards in the sky, and the rounded horizon shone gold and rose, and then splashed across the sky its purple finale. The leprechauns opened up their golden packages, takin' out their instruments of harp and pipe.

Together, first so quietly you couldn't hear it above the wind slidin' off the waves o' the sea, a sound lifted up towards the heavens that could ha' been born there with the angels. The sweetest sound ever heard on Earth. A mellow, hauntin' melody that built and swayed and filled the night breezes, driftin' back to the coast to the ears of the mortals.

Now if you've never heard an Irish melody, you've just got to imagine a sound so sad and so joyful both at the same time, that babies laugh and grown men weep. It's the sound you feel



when y' hold your true love for the first time, and when you feel the breath of your newborn babe on your cheek as he sleeps.

It's the sound of your young men comin' home from faraway wars, and the shouts of joyful greetin' among brothers and sisters, mothers and sons.

It's the quiet reverence of a Holy Day meal with all o' your kin gathered under your roof. And the slow drippin' of early spring rains upon the peat black earth, drawin' out the sweet, rich smell of it.

Such was the song of the leprechauns in that fine, timbered ship. The song was played without end, 'til it reached the depths o' the sea and the ears o' the creatures below. In wonder and awe, they raised their hoary, spiked heads and sought the pleasant sound. One hundred and forty-three sea monsters surrounded the wee little boat, their great bodies broke the surge of the waves, creatin' a peaceful course of water. Together they bobbed and swayed, great moans of delight and anguish wrenched from their throats by the magical symphony.

Still fiercer the leprechauns played, and more passionately, until emotion burst the hearts of the sea monsters and killed them in their breasts. When their hearts burst, the laughter and smiles o' the mortals that were taken for payment from the sailors were released into the heavens. They took on the form of rain and fell back again t' the earth, all over the globe, nourishin' the hearts of the people who had grown silent without hope.

A mighty celebration was begun in all the world, the happiest bein' in Ireland, where both great and small men alike toasted the leprechauns in every pub from Bantry Bay to Ballycastle.

'Tis an awesome thing t' be an Irishman, and t' feel the pull o' the fairies in your blood. Aye. But you can thank the leprechauns yourself for every laugh and giggle. The next time a baby coos or a toddler titters. When your older sister goes t' courtin' with her starry-eyed smiles all tucked up under her curls. And when your granddad laughs when y' learn how to ride without your trainin' wheels. You can appreciate the little people too.

Why not peek your head outdoors one night when the late summer moon shines full overhead. Whisper under the nearest bush and listen carefully to see if a wee little voice whispers back.

The End.

## Donkey Toes and Horse Feathers

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One warm summer day, a young donkey stood in the town square, weighed down with heavy bags of corn that he had carried for his master into the marketplace. The master unloaded the bags of fresh corn one by one, and the old donkey sighed with relief. He patted his donkey on the rump kindly before he walked into the market to collect the money for the corn.

The donkey's name was Diddlepuss, and it was his first trip to town. He was very interested in the village around him. He listened to the voices of the sellers who called to the crowds of people to come buy from them. Nearby, some children were laughing and playing tag. It was a lovely day and the sun was very hot.

A short way down the dusty street, a very tall workhorse stood hitched to a wagon. He nibbled at the grass that tried to sprout up from the hard, sun baked earth. The horse's master was an old farmer who was arguing nearby with a store owner over the price of the wagon load of wood that they had brought to sell.

The farmer finally accepted the few coins he was offered, and angrily walked toward the busy tavern for lunch. Diddlepuss brayed hello to the horse, and asked him his name. The horse was called Old Boss. They moved together over to a thicker clump of grass and shared the tender green stalks as they talked.

After awhile, the heat of the day drove the people away from the market square. Wagons rattled down the road, harnesses jangled on the dusty horses, and the children went inside to avoid the hot sun. Diddlepuss and Old Boss would have been alone, except for a jolly round gentleman who had just walked out of a store. He was walking close to Diddlepuss, counting his money, when he suddenly stopped and exclaimed "Oh, Donkey Toes!" He had forgotten his packages and returned to the store to get them.

Diddlepuss was a kind donkey, but he was young and not very clever. He didn't know that the man had just made up the saying. He began to examine his hooves, and not finding anything wrong with them, asked Old Boss in a worried voice if he saw something wrong with his toes. Old Boss chomped loudly on the grass, and looked up. "You don't have any toes," he answered. Diddlepuss thought that was certainly what the man had found upsetting. It was surely upsetting to Diddlepuss. He had heard that if a man was born without toes, he couldn't walk, and that thought began to bother him. The more he thought about it, the less steady he became. Soon he couldn't keep his balance at all, and had to sit down with a plop.

Oh what a terrible thing it was, how could he carry his master home tonight? Old Boss was concerned for his new friend, and offered to take him in the back of his wagon in search of help. He knew of an old man who lived in the hills that was considered very wise.

It was a funny sight to see Diddlepuss on his knees crawling into the old wooden wagon, and even funnier to see the old workhorse pulling a donkey down the road without a human driver. Off they went, enjoying the sweet summer smells all around them.

At the first crossroads, a cart coming toward Old Boss from the west, was going too fast. The horse pulling it was young and eager to get some exercise. Its master could barely control him, but didn't mind because he liked to think he owned the road anyway. He hated to stop for anyone else, and when his strange speeding cart and the wagon carrying Diddlepuss nearly ran into each other, the driver of the cart shouted at Old Boss to stop.

When Old Boss kept going, the man was angry and said to himself loudly, "Horse feathers, anyway!" Soon Diddlepuss and his friend were down the road out of the man's sight, and Old Boss was puzzling over what the man had said. What indeed could he have meant, "horse feathers?" Anyone knows that horses don't have feathers. Do they? Old Boss couldn't quite remember, but he did remember that the man's horse ran faster than he did. Maybe it was because he had wings to help him fly. Old Boss was very sad. He didn't have any wings and had to move as slowly as any donkey.

Diddlepuss tried to comfort his friend, and finally said that perhaps the old wise man could help them both.

Before they had reached the end of the valley, they came upon one nervous woolly sheep running along the road as fast as he could. When the sheep heard Old Boss' hooves tapping the ground, and the sound of the wagon wheels creaking in their strange musical way, he jumped into the bushes beside the road.

The two friends thought this was surely an odd way for a sheep to behave so they stopped to ask what was the matter. The sheep finally peered out from the bushes and said he had overheard his master that morning talking about a wolf in sheep's clothing. The trouble was, he didn't tell the sheep in the field which sheep was really a terrible wolf hiding among them.

Old Boss said he understood how frightened all of the sheep must be, and invited him to go along with them to the wise man, who might be able to teach him how to find the wolf. The sheep's name was Percy and he talked half the way about the delicious grass of his field and how he missed his friends.

Old Boss and Diddlepuss were beginning to miss their homes and masters too, but the hills were in sight now, so maybe they could get back to the village in the early afternoon, before they were missed.

The land near the mountains looked different than the land of the valley. Strange and fragrant plants grew alongside the roads, and they all wished they had time to nibble on the tempting fresh stalks. The air was cooler here and they could see thin streams of smoke drifting up from between the trees wherever a cabin fire was lit. Diddlepuss was sure he'd never forget such a lovely trip as this.

Around a curve the road passed very close to a farm. In the road was a flock of chickens that scattered as the wagon rattled closer, all except for one hen that was cackling loudly, and peeking under every bush. She looked very worried. The sheep called out to the chicken, asking her what she was looking for.

The chicken replied that she couldn't find all of her eggs. Old Boss said "I thought chickens laid eggs in nests and sat on them until they were ready to hatch." The chicken replied with a cluck that she had always done it that way in the past, until a week ago, when she overheard her farmer's wife scolding him saying that he shouldn't have put all of his eggs in one basket.

The chicken thought the farmer's wife was very wise, and that she should also divide up her eggs, believing they would be safer from weasels and possums that way. So far it had been a hard job for her to run from nest to nest all day trying to keep the eggs warm. Today she had finally forgotten where one of the nests was hidden.

Diddlepuss suggested to the hen that she could go with them to the wise man and get help, and return home before evening became too cool for her eggs. She was grateful and climbed into the wagon with the donkey. It was a bumpy ride, but she was happy to get some help.

So the four new friends arrived at the cabin of the wise man in the woods, and found him sitting on his porch whittling on a piece of wood.

He was certainly surprised to see the animals and scratched his hairy head underneath his large black hat. The sheep was shy and hid behind the wagon, but the nosey hen climbed right out and strutted up to the porch to get a better look at the man. Old Boss spoke for the group, and asked the man to please hear their problems, and tell them what they should do. He said he would be glad to help if he could.

The chicken told the man how she had hidden all of her eggs in different places, so they wouldn't be in the same basket. The wise man explained that she had overheard a human saying that was really about managing money wisely. He said she should gather her eggs together again and that he'd be glad to lend his hound dog to help her find the missing eggs. She was delighted and stepped to the side.

The sheep found the courage to speak next. He also was told that he had heard a human saying about another human, and that no wolf really wore a sheep's costume. He said Percy had nothing to fear, and the sheep was greatly relieved. He lay down on the grass and dreamed of his lovely green field.

Old Boss wanted Diddlepuss to ask for his help next, but Diddlepuss wanted Old Boss to go first, because they really liked each other. Diddlepuss settled it by saying that Old Boss had made the whole trip possible and therefore was more worthy of being next.

The wise man was very surprised that Old Boss wanted feathers. He felt the horse would feel very bad that he too had misunderstood a human saying, so he told the horse to examine the chicken's feathers and see if he really wanted them. Old Boss poked and sniffed at the chicken.

Her stiff, scratchy feathers smelled very strange and tickled his nose, making him sneeze. He liked their color, but thought his soft brown coat was warmer and more comfortable.

The wise man said that no real horse had feathers, and that a horse's speed was in his powerful legs, not in wings to beat the air. He told Old Boss that his legs and hooves were in very good shape and there was no reason he couldn't run very fast if he wanted to. Then he told the animals the story of the tortoise and the hare. They all agreed that sometimes being fastest was not as important as doing a good job.

Next the man went to the wagon to look at Diddlepuss. He chuckled to himself and then told the animals something about human nature. He said that sometimes a person believes that they are sick, and they really seem to get sick because of the power of their minds. He told Diddlepuss that he actually must be very smart, because the power of his mind was strong enough to deceive him. He said of course donkeys and horses don't have toes. They have what is best for them. Hooves. They had all suffered from hearing human sayings and not understanding what was being said. He had Diddlepuss test his legs carefully, then hobble down out of the wagon to walk on his own.

The animals thanked the man kindly and started off down the road for their homes, the hound dog going along to the hen's farm to look for her eggs. They were laughing to themselves, feeling a little embarrassed and very much relieved to hear that they didn't have any problems at all.

Suddenly they came upon a group of boys having an argument. One of the boys left his friends, and angrily called back to them saying, "Oh, why don't you just go jump in a lake!" As soon as the boy had spoken, there was a loud splashing sound in a nearby pond and the animal friends looked just in time to see a family of fish dive for the bottom in terror. They had heard the boy and believed that danger was coming. The animals looked at each other and ran as fast as they could away from there, all the way home!

The End.

## The Weeping Moon

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Long ago, when the world was young, and children played beneath the shimmering waterfalls that flowed down from glorious mountains, there was happiness in every heart. Mankind had lived together in peace since the Great Master had spoken them into existence with His loving words. The animals of the deep green forests had no fear of man, and the deer's small fawns played beside the human children.

But there came a time on earth when an evil rose up from a deep pit. It had heard the sounds of laughter for a long time and would listen no more. The evil's shadowy feeling of discontent and greed entered into the hearts of man, and for the first time wars appeared among men. No longer was there peace, and even the animals fled from the violent humans that were once the glory of the earth.

During one particularly fierce war, the steel of swords clashed and spears found their mark, while foolish men cried "Onward into the battle!" The familiar plows had been hammered into instruments of death, and from early dawn until after dark, there was only death and hate.

Somehow during this clamor, a young man and woman betrothed their love for each other beside a tranquil pond. Tatiana wove for her beloved a chain to wear around his neck from her own long chestnut hair. Mark gave to Tatiana a silver needle for her wedding chest, and promised that when the war was over, he would build her a house of their own where she could sit by the fireside in the evenings and sew with the needle the tiny clothes for their babies.

Once again, the evil couldn't bear to hear such words of happiness spoken, and caused the young man to be called to war. Quickly he fell to the sword, and word of his death reached the young maiden by nightfall.

Her heart was broken and no one could comfort her. Tatiana ran back to the lovely pond. It was a sad and beautiful place where other young girls had drowned themselves when their own husbands had been killed. The souls of those girls remained there to keep others from the same fate. Sometimes villagers saw them and called them water pixies. Tatiana planned to throw herself into the water and join her beloved in death.

Bending out over the water preparing to jump, she saw a group of faces beneath the surface. They shook their heads wildly and begged her to stop with anguish in their eyes. Tatiana knew they were the water pixies, the maidens of lost love.

"I can't bear this pain, let me join you here where I belong, forever," Tatiana cried out to the faces below.

The long watery bodies of the girls rose up from the pond and floated before her. They seemed lovely to her even in death and despair.

"No sister! Your love is not here! We found not our own loves, but only cold and darkness. We must be the last of the foolish to drown here. Go back and comfort the sisters and the mothers," they begged her.

"I cannot!" Tatiana knelt on the moist green grass and wept with all her soul.

Above them the pure white moon was just rising. It watched in silence, and then it too began to weep. At first the light dimmed and then began to rain down in shimmering tears that fell into the pond. The pixies stared in horror as the glow spread like silver blood on the water. Tatiana didn't understand their alarm.

The pixies shouted to the moon, "No! You mustn't die beloved moon! The world will forever be without love without a moon to inspire the young at heart!" Tatiana was puzzled.

"You must stop the moon's sadness! Please tell us about the man you loved, tell the moon so it will shine again over this pond for someone else one day." The pixies picked some clover and rubbed the tears from Tatiana's face. They sat down on the bank beside her and waited.

Tatiana didn't know how to begin. She remembered a love song with a sweet melody and tried to sing it, but it seemed a betrayal now to sing those words. In their place she sang about her true love, about his soft hair; his warm, strong hands that would build their house. And about his uncommon courage and kindness that would lead their children into their own paths. Carefully, trying hard not to falter, she told the moon about love as it should be.

The moon stopped its weeping, but it was too late. Only an empty space now hung in the black sky, surrounded by tiny pearls of light from distant stars. The lovely round moon was destroyed.

The emptiness was so horrible that the pixies' shock turned to fierce anger. Their anger grew, filling the forest around them. Suddenly a flash of lightning broke into the night from clouds that had slipped in quietly out of the south.

Terribly violent eruptions of light speared the night and woke the soldiers where they had fallen exhausted at dusk. The men jumped to their feet and ran about wildly as thunder crashed all around the camps. Soon the men were mixing about on the battlefield from both camps. It became impossible to tell who was friend or foe and the issues of the war were forgotten in the fury of the storm.

Hands joined hands in preparing shelters from the pelting hail and flaming tree limbs that fell from the lightning. Shields and swords were laid up as barriers to the storm, and soldiers clung to soldiers beneath them in terror.

It didn't end until the last whimper of the evil beast fled from the mouths of every man, and the war was over forever. No real evil can live in us, when we recognize such an intense need for each other.

As the clouds cleared from the sky, and people looked out from their hiding places they saw the wounded moon. Not knowing what had caused the terrible blackness they just stood and stared.

Tatiana came out from the cave where the pixies had led her for safety. Still there were the moon's tears, spread like innocent blood upon the storm-churned waters of the pond. The pixies couldn't bear the sight of it, and turned away to fade into the heavy mist.

"Wait!" Tatiana cried. "Can't we do something? Can't we catch up the glow in some jar at least and not let it waste until a time that we know how to fix it?"

"We can try," the pixies said.

Tatiana reached into the water and took hold of the edge of the light. It was as solid to the touch as a fabric of cloth. She pulled and the whole light came up out of the pond into her arms. Shimmering, vibrant and lighting up the night, it was the softest thing Tatiana had ever touched.

"It feels like cloth and if it's cloth, it can be sewn! And if it can be sewn, with what better thing to sew it than a needle given in love by my beloved? Tatiana pulled the precious silver needle from her bodice and thread it with her own long hair.

A short while later, the pixies were lifting her and the delicate fabric high up into the sky. She did the best she could to stitch the moon back smoothly into place, but a few tiny wrinkles remained. Down they flew again, in a whirl.

It was truly beautiful. It was round and whole, heavy and glorious again, as the moon ought to be. But now as she stood on the cool wet grass looking up, the wrinkles in the moon appeared to her like the face of her beloved, sewn into the face of the moon. Tatiana spent every long night gazing up into that face and feeling close to her true love again.

The pixies helped Tatiana build a cottage beside the pond in case a stitch should come loose and her needle would be required again.

Even now, centuries later, the sadness comes back over her lingering spirit once each month and as the moon stares down into its own reflection in Lover's Pond, it weeps with her again, spilling its ethereal light into the pond. Each month, the pixies lift the eternal spirit of Tatiana back into the sky with her silver needle and the long flowing moonlight to mend the moon once more.



Slowly, the earth tries to forget the blood that it has drank, and the small animals venture out of the forest and curiously watch mankind again. Now each young man and woman must tell their children and their grandchildren, that mankind needs his brother and his sister, of every color and race to survive. If we forget, the evil may take hold of us again and destroy all that we love. Will you promise to do your part?

The End.

## Doggy In The Tree

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If a dog could fly a tree,  
I wonder where he might not be.

He might start his leafy engine with a bird's nest for a key,  
and steer his green contraption with a kite tied to his knee.

If he could he'd surely try to soar among the birds.  
But his CB would be useless unless he understood their words.

I'll be that if he had a map, he'd mark out a quick route,  
to get to Barney's Hot Dog Stand, and land there on the roof.

Old Barney'd be so frightened, that he'd run right down the street,  
and let that flying doggy have all the hot dogs he could eat.

I hope that dogs and trees never leave the safety of the ground.  
It sure would scare my granny to see a doggy flying 'round.

Not to mention how upset I'd be if I came home one day,  
to find my supper eaten and that doggy planned to stay!

The End.

# The Fabulous Flying Fledgling Finches of Farmer Ferdinand's Farm

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One, two, three, four,  
the fabulous finches fly out the barn door.

Five, six, seven, eight,  
still fledglings they land on the pasture gate.

Nine, ten, eleven and more,  
only one is too small so he lands on the floor.

The mother and father finch  
fly by their side,

encouraging them with  
their wings held out wide.

So graceful they dip and they  
flutter with ease,

like daring young birds  
on a wireless trapeze.

Now the farmer comes out to  
feed cattle and pigs,

hurry away little finches  
to the tree's safest twigs.

The pails how they clatter  
and the animals call,

but not one little finch  
misses tree limb or falls.

Off Farmer Ferdinand goes  
to plow in the pasture,

while the smallest of finches  
practices flapping wings faster.

The sun stretches and skims  
the east sky to the west,

and the fledglings are flying now  
better, then best.

The baby to earn his mother's pride,  
has taken to wing and has learned how to fly.

Its daddy is preening,  
like proud daddy's do,

and soon all of the finches are chirping  
"I flew!"

Back comes the farmer for supper  
and chores.

Back go the finches  
back through the barn door.

Now peaceful and purple the sunset will close  
the curtain on this day and all that it holds.

Tonight all the fledglings sleep cozy and warm,  
beneath their good mother, safe from all harm.

The End.

~ A Message From The Author ~

I hope you have enjoyed my stories. It has been my joy for as long as I could remember to entertain and uplift people, to give them hope and new ideas, new vision for their lives. I also want to empower people so that they know without a doubt they can do and be anything they choose.

On my websites, listed below, I have several things to offer you. There is also a collection of stories for grown ups, there are several “How-To” type ebooks and countless articles and essays on my websites.

Please look for them (and me) here below, and email me if you like. Please write “Once Upon An Enchanted Bedtime” in your subject line. Thank you and God bless you!

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