

Tails Out of the Rabbit Hole:

New and Classic Stories with a Twist

By

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*To all the writers whose wisdom
Inspires and invites,
But most especially to my favorite author, my wife,
Who writes joy on my heart daily*

Introduction

This book started with telling stories to my nieces and nephews. They enjoy listening to fairy tales and fables, and I found, over the course of time, that they enjoy nontraditional endings. This book is for adults and children, but mostly it's for adults who can then decide which stories they want to share with their children.

I would not hesitate to read any of these to my own daughter, but some of these stories are mildly violent, so I think parents can make that choice for themselves.

The Author

The Polar Bear and the Conservationist

In a future far away, a polar bear, living near the shore of Ouikichugaa Bay, hunting for Steller sea lions is surprised to see a human coming up to him on a snowmobile. “Ahoy,” says the man as he shuts off his engine, “I am Neil MacArthur, world famous conservationist, here to protect the Steller sea lion. Do you by chance hunt Stellar sea lions?”

“Why, yes—they are quite a staple of my diet,” the polar bear replies.

The conservationist explains to the polar bear that carnivores like are hunting the Steller sea lion near unto extinction. He continues by describing his great quest to find polar bears and train them in types of fine dining other than sea lions. As he listens, the polar bear feels more and more guilty about his role in the destruction of an innocent species. He quickly assents to learn from the conservationist the new ways of the world.

Initially, the polar bear eats tofu and salad, but that quickly fails with severe intestinal repercussions since, as a carnivore, the polar bear lacks a sufficient quantity of pancreatic enzymes necessary to digest a diet high in plant products. And so they turned to fishing. There was initial success with the polar bear using his great claws to swipe fish onto the ice before gobbling them up. The conservationist quickly becomes quite proud of his work and spends most days relaxing in his tent, taking warm showers provided by his portable water heater, and occasionally checking on his new polar bear friend. He plans a departure after another day or so, convinced that here he has another success story—another notch in his belt—in his quest to save the Steller sea lion.

There are, however, small problems that arise with this particular polar bear eating fish. The polar bear doesn’t mind the taste of fish, but the small bones were sticking to the sides of his esophagus, exacerbating his gastroesophageal reflux disease. Despite this problem, the polar bear presses on, looking for ways to avoid eating the poor endangered Steller sea lion. Feeling the need for consultation from his conservationist friend, the polar bear seeks help finding other sources of food more agreeable to his digestive tract.

The conservationist is enjoying a hot shower and invites the polar bear in to discuss his progress. The kindly conservationist is instantly sympathetic to the polar bear’s plight. He suggests finding some kind of larger animal to eat—

perhaps a shark or other large fish—or, perhaps, California sea lions would be tasty, but that would require a move to the western United States. Several types of whale would be excellent, but for the fact that humans have hunted them near unto extinction.

The idea that humans have also hunted an animal near unto extinction piques the polar bear's curiosity. "Your people have hurt animals as well?"

"Why, yes," replies the conservationist, as he peaks around the shower curtain. "In fact, the species *homo sapiens* is responsible for more extinctions than any other animal." The polar bear notices the conservationist's bare, pink skin.

"Is that quite true?" asks the bear as saliva starts to obscure his speech.

The conservationist now closes his eyes and rinses shampoo out of his hair. "Certainly. We have possibly eliminated as many as a million unique species from the planet. It is a real travesty." Shortly after this exchange, the polar bear satisfies his hunger and feels a sense of relief at dispatching of a dangerous creature like this conservationist. The Steller sea lion population recovers quite nicely during the subsequent hundred years.

The moral of the story is: if you push against nature, nature will push back, so if you're in the shower and a bear is in the room, keep your eyes open.

The Stray Cat and the Rottweiler

In my neighborhood there once lived a stray cat that was fed by a kindly neighbor. That cat had a wonderful life—he could romp and play all he wanted but always new there would be warm milk or a kitty treat waiting for him at 10888 Regal Lane in Dallas, Texas. My neighbor loved the cat as well. She wanted to make the cat her own on a number of occasions, but she had no interest in having an unneutered cat in her house.

One day which began like any other found the cat looking around for squirrels and mice when, after little success, the pangs of hunger sat in and he went to Regal Lane looking for a snack. There he found no food but a Rottweiler greeted him there. Rottweilers were a ferocious, natural enemy of this stray cat ever since a traumatic experience he had as a kitten. Their terrible dark eyes looked for blood. Their teeth were specifically designed by some horrible Creator to tear cat flesh cleanly off the bone. All of this went through the cat's brain in an instant, and he raised his back and hissed with fury, "Keep away, murderous fiend of Hades!"

"Whoa, easy there," replied the Rottweiler. "I just wanted to let you know there is a bunch of nice raw meat over by the trash. I couldn't finish it all, but it's there."

The cat knew this was some kind of evil Rottweiler scheme and just hissed more horribly and showed more teeth. Fortunately, the Rottweiler quickly grew fearful and turned around, rhetorically asking, "Boy, you're a crazy one, aren't you?"

After the stray cat regained some composure, he decided it may be a good idea to start singing for his food—he had seen that work on some occasions for house cats. "MEEEEOOOWWW. . . MEEEEOOOWWW. . . MEEEEEOOOOOWWWWW," he sang over and over to no apparent avail. The moon was rising from the east, and the cat's hunger grew stronger and stronger.

With the moon overhead, the cat finally caught a whiff of something edible. Skulking around the corner of the house, the cat saw a narrow tunnel with sweet milk at the end of it. His clever human friend had obviously disguised the container to prevent the more dimwitted neighborhood cats from seeing the

milk. The stray cat approached the milk and drank to his heart's content with such vigor that he did not even notice the trap door close behind him on the way into the cage.

The next day, the cat awoke in the kind woman's apartment in great pain. He had been the victim of some cruel surgery, making him less aggressive and passionate. As he glanced around the room, he saw, through the window, a pile of rotting meat next to the trash—too late now even for a stray cat to eat.

The moral of the story is: just because someone looks like they want to kill you, that doesn't mean they aren't giving you a good tip on something. Also, just because someone has always been nice to you, that doesn't mean they don't want you surgically corrected so they can stand to live with you.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Once upon a time in a deep, dark forest there lived three bears who had just sat down for some porridge. Upon noticing that their porridge was a bit too hot, they decided to take a walk and wait for their meal to cool down. And so Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and the Baby Bear left their front door unlatched in order to get a nice breeze through the house and went for a walk.

Not long after the bears left, a young girl with brown hair named Goldilocks showed up on the doorstep. Noticing that the door was wide open, Goldilocks stepped right into the Bears' front room and sat down to help herself to some of the delicious-looking porridge. She first tried the biggest bowl of porridge, which belonged to Papa Bear, but it was too hot. Next she ate a bite of the medium-sized bowl of porridge, but Mama's porridge was far too cold. Lastly, she took a bite of the smallest bowl of porridge, which, of course, belonged to Baby Bear, and she ate up all the porridge.

After this, Goldilocks moved into the living room, where there were three chairs around a fireplace. Goldilocks first tried the larger two chairs, one belonging to Papa, and one belonging to Mama. Papa's chair was too hard and uncomfortable. Mama's chair was so soft that Goldilocks felt like she was drowning in it. Baby's chair, the smallest on there, fit her just right, but Goldilocks leaned back on the chair and broke two of its legs off!

Feeling drowsy after the warm meal and relaxation, Goldilocks went upstairs to see if she could find a bed to sleep in. She saw three beds in a row. The first bed was Papa's, and it had sheets that were too dirty for Goldilocks' liking, and so she didn't get in but mussed up the covers. The second bed had flowers on it. It was Mama's bed, and Goldilocks got in, but she was overwhelmed by the perfumed pillow and got right back out. The littlest bed belonged to Baby, and it looked like it was just the right size. Goldilocks climbed in and was soon fast asleep.

Just then the Bear family came home. They looked at the porridge, and Mama and Papa complained that theirs had been picked through. Baby cried, "Someone at all my porridge!"

Next they went into the living room to look at their house. Papa noticed someone had been in his chair. Mama said, "I do believe someone has been

sitting in my chair as well.” Baby could not say a word because he was so upset that his chair had been broken.

Lastly, the Bear family went upstairs to look at their bedroom. Papa bear growled, “Someone has been sleeping in my bed, and I think she washed my sheets because they smell too clean.”

Mama Bear said, “My sheets smell just awful—it’s as if an animal tried to sleep in here.” Baby Bear passed out when he saw the frightful little brown-haired girl sleeping in his bed.

Well, all the commotion startled Goldilocks. She jumped up and looked around for an exit, only to find herself staring down the barrel of Papa’s shotgun. The bears put her in the freezer and had a nice Christmas dinner from Papa Bear’s hunting.

The moral of the story is: just because a house’s door is open, doesn’t mean you can walk in and act like you own the place. Additionally, it’s best not to hang around the scene of a crime, partly because the police will come arrest you, and partly because the homeowner may own a firearm.

Rapunzel

Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman who could not have any children. They lived in a beautiful valley next door to a walled-off garden that belonged to a woman only rarely seen. One night the woman had a dream that the apples of that garden would be delicious and allow her to have a child. In her dream there was a warning voice that told her she would raise many children of her own; however, she would have a terrible sacrifice to pay for the blessing of having children.

The next night, the moon was out, and the woman asked her husband to fetch her some apples from the garden. He grudgingly obliged. Night after night, the woman craved the apples, and her husband began climbing their mysterious neighbor's wall without a moment's notice.

After a few months, the woman became great with child. Her husband still climbed the wall and fetched her apples from the neighbor's garden, but one night everything changed.

The husband was picking apples as usual, when he was hit on the back of his head and was instantly knocked out. When he came to, he saw a warty old woman standing over him. This woman said that the price for the apples was the man's first-born child. The man cried, "No! No! Anything but that!" to no avail. The witch, for that is what the woman was, told him he had no say in the matter. She got what she wanted, and that was the price she set.

"Your pretty little wife knew there was a price," she cackled, "and there you have it. I'll be good to her, but you are through."

The man and his wife were terrified as the day of their child's birth neared. On the fateful day of the birth, they bolted the doors, shut the windows, and drew the curtains. The wife bore a beautiful baby girl in a relatively uneventful birth. The man and his wife drifted off to sleep together but for a few moments. When they awoke, Rapunzel was gone for good.

In many ways, the witch was honest when she said she would be good to Rapunzel. Rapunzel had pretty dolls and lived in a beautiful tower with a wonderful view of the Alps. She had a pet cat, a canary, jewelry, and many

other fine things. In other ways, Rapunzel was not treated well. Rapunzel didn't mind having the witch climb up her long, brown hair so much, but Rapunzel was terribly lonely. The witch, whom Rapunzel called "Mother," visited two or three days a week, but the rest of the time wishing for someone to love.

One day, her wishing paid off, and Rapunzel heard a prince singing as he rode through the nearby forest. Rapunzel knew he was a prince because she had read about wonderful men in her fairy tale books, and she was so hopeful for company, she simply knew it had to be a prince of some majestic kingdom.

Rapunzel called to him, "Hello! Prince, I am in the tower, come see me!" The man obliged, and, without so much as introducing himself, asked how to get into the tower to see her. Rapunzel quickly let down her hair, and the man climbed up swiftly and sure-footedly.

Once he got to the window, Rapunzel closed her eyes for her first kiss, and the prince walked past her, stole all her jewelry and clocks, took the gold comb out of her hair, kicked her cat, and jumped out the window onto his horse and rode away into the sunset. Rapunzel became more appreciative of her mother after that experience

The moral of the story is: don't let strange men into your room. They might just want to steal your jewelry, not save you from your horrible (step)parent(s)/witchy captor(s).

Little Red Riding Hood

Once there was a girl whose mother sent her to visit her grandmother. She sent her with only a basket of food to share with Grandmother and a little red riding hood. Her mother called out, “Goodbye, Little Red Riding Hood. Be safe and have a nice time.” Little Red Riding Hood skipped down the path into the deep, dark forest, eager to be on her own for the first time.

After a short while, Little Red Riding Hood heard leaves crackling. She stopped. She looked all around but could not see anything, so she started to walk again—this time a bit more slowly. She heard it again, turned around, and said, “Who is there? I can hear you, and I don’t like being followed!” Out from the shadows stepped a big, black wolf.

“Why, hello, but I think you must be mistaken,” the wolf said, “I am traveling in quite a different direction from yourself.”

“I am not to talk to strangers,” Little Red Riding Hood said. “I’d better be on my way, now.”

The wolf licked his lips and said, “Well, I’m not a stranger. In fact, I can be quite a friend.”

Little Red Riding Hood walked along, and the wolf walked along side of her, looking at her basket. “You have quite a lot in that basket there. You’re going to visit someone, aren’t you?” The wolf told it more than asked it.

“Well, if you must know, I am visiting my grandmother today.”

“Is she the old, kind woman in the cottage at the end of the west path? She and I are old friends, and she would love for me to come along. You had better bring some flowers to cheer her heart.” The wolf knew by the look on Little Red Riding Hood’s face he had struck a cord.

“You’re not welcome, and you’d better leave,” Little Red Riding Hood said. At that, the wolf ran back into the woods. Little Red Riding Hood stopped at a

small field of daisies and gathered some in her basket to take to her grandmother. When she was finished, she continued on to Grandmother's.

At Grandmother's front door, something was obviously not right. There were scratch marks along the entirety of the front door, and a pane of glass was missing from the bedroom window. Little Red Riding Hood knocked and went in.

Looking around, Little Red Riding Hood saw her grandmother at the dinner table. In front of her was a nice plate of meat. A man sat across from Grandmother, and he said, "Hello there, I am a friend of your grandmother's."

"Little Red Riding Hood, I want you to meet my new boyfriend," Grandmother said. "This may be difficult for you, but your grandfather has been gone for a while now, and I need company with you and your mother so far away." Little Red Riding Hood was confused and asked about the broken window and marks on the door. "There was a strange wolf that came by, but I shot him," Grandmother said.

They ate wolf that night, and Little Red Riding Hood developed her first crush on Grandmother's new boyfriend.

The moral of the story is: it may be difficult when your grandparents start dating again after the loss of a spouse, but quite a lot of good can come from it if you get past the initial shock.

The Squirrel and the Wolf

I once saw a squirrel in the backyard of my mountain home practicing what looked like karate. He scrambled and fought his imaginary foe like I have seen many a fighter on television or in a movie do so many times. I asked him where he had learned such skills and what purpose they had, and he told me the following story.

Once there was a wolf that had no large prey to kill, so he looked for small animals like squirrels. Squirrels were a difficult bunch to catch, however. No sooner would the wolf approach them, than the squirrels would bound up the nearest tree and escape. And so the wolf hatched a plan to lure a squirrel into the open. He set up camp on a golf course, where no trees could be seen for a hundred yards in any direction. He bathed himself in the golf course's creek, covered himself with leaves and grass except for his mouth, into which he put three succulent acorns as bait.

It took several hours of patience, but finally, a fat, greedy squirrel approached the wolf and tried to steal the acorn. The wolf snapped his jaws shut, and the squirrel shot off like a bullet from a gun toward the nearest thicket. The wolf pursued, but the squirrel was just a little too wily, jumping from side-to-side and avoided the wolf by only a hair or two.

Despite this bit of failure, the wolf tried again. This time, before he set himself up again as a leaf-covered acorn buffet, he ran around the perimeter of the golf course, picking up every acorn he could find and putting them in the fast-moving brook, out of all the squirrel's reaches. Now, if they were to eat, they would have to come to him or move far away.

Now, set up again, the wolf waited. A day went by—and then two more, but the wolf knew the squirrels were getting hungry. Some were forgetting the danger of the leaf pile with the only remaining acorns in the whole course. Some squirrels tried to find new territory, but squirrels, being very territorial by nature, weren't about to make room for a bunch of country club snobs who were down on their luck.

Finally, one squirrel, mad with hunger, ran to the wolf's mouth, convinced he could grab the acorn and run without being caught. After all, if his fat friend could escape the wolf, then surely he could too. Alas, the wolf made an

appetizer out of him. In the subsequent days, the wolf feasted on squirrels who were far too hungry to talk themselves out of trying for the delicious acorns in the wolf's mouth. The fact that the wolf let some get away once in a while didn't help things—those who succeeded once in snatching an acorn and getting away with their lives felt confident enough to return for more. Unfortunately, more often than not, their luck did not last them through a second attempt. It seemed the end of the world had come for the golf course squirrels.

But then, one day, after the wolf had eaten nearly half of all the squirrels that lived in the vicinity of the golf course, a new squirrel showed up, promising to save the troupe. He had a cool confidence bordering on arrogance. The immediate reaction of the remaining squirrels was to laugh this new fool to scorn, but one squirrel rallied the rest to listen.

“Let's give this man a chance,” he said. “Otherwise we are certainly doomed, for we have nowhere to go, and no way—at least no way apparent to any of us—to eliminate this monster who has taken over our world.” With that said, the group quieted down with the exception of some low-level grumbling from the back, and the stranger said the last words this group ever heard him speak.

He simply stated, “I am here to save you. I ask no thanks, and I ask for no help—may you be blessed.” With that, he ran onto the golf course and jumped head first into the leaf pile covering the wolf. Silence followed for a moment or two, and then the wolf screamed in pain and burst out of the leaf pile. The squirrel was on the wolf's back gnawing, pulling, scratching, and kicking. The wolf's nose was bloodied, and his eyes were scratched. Then, the squirrel jumped off the wolf's back in a forward flip and faced the wolf in a karate position—legs apart, knees bent, paws ready to chop, punch or claw their way through the wolf. The wolf snapped his jaws shut on the spot where he expected the squirrel to be, but the squirrel had leaped out of danger's way onto the bridge of the wolf's nose, and continued his scratching, clawing, biting, pulling and kicking. Finally, the wolf had had enough, and he ran away yelping, with his tail between his legs.

The squirrel ran away too, and where he went none knows but he. The observers were so thrilled with the wolf's demise, however, that they cheered with joy. In the subsequent days, a committee was organized to fish the acorns out of the stream, and a karate instructor was brought in to teach the squirrels how to protect themselves in the future.

This is the story told to me by a squirrel in my own backyard. His grandfather was a young squirrel on the golf course, who observed this wonderful stranger and subsequently took karate, passing down his knowledge to his children and grandchildren.

The moral of the story is: sometimes a stranger will save you, but you'd better not plan on it and learn your own karate in case a wolf takes over your favorite golf course.

The Tortoise and the Hare

Once there was a hare that was certain he was the fastest creature in the world. He loved flying down paths at top speed seeing all the creatures that were left in his wake. He boasted frequently, especially after he had recently outwitted some old hunter or fox, that no one could ever beat him. On one fateful day, a raccoon, whose regular profession was as a fight promoter between animals during mating season, approached the hare with an offer to promote the “race of the millennium,” as he put it. His plan was to open the race to anyone who wanted to race the rabbit. There would be an entry fee of \$10,000 and all kinds of income from race sponsors—the hare would stand to make a considerable amount of money, assuming, of course, that he won. The raccoon asked for only 20% of the gross receipts, and the hare said he would be glad to participate.

The raccoon and his crew posted flyers all around the forest, but nobody wanted to challenge the hare. The entry fee of \$10,000 was too much for most animals, and even the deer and the birds believed they could not beat the hare in a race. The raccoon was getting nervous after several weeks of promotion with no apparent interest. The race sponsors—a shoe company and a sports drink corporation—felt like they would have to pull out of supporting the race unless someone came forward soon.

The week before the race, the raccoon finally got that fateful phone call with a taker for the race. It was a tortoise—a tortoise of all creatures—that wanted to face the hare. The raccoon was shocked, but he was so happy to have something in the race against the hare, that he kept his surprise to himself and expressed only great pleasure that the tortoise wanted to be part of the race. The raccoon told the tortoise he was going to get a limousine for the tortoise and take great care of him.

The sponsors were not happy that a tortoise was going to be in the race. It would be a blowout for sure, they thought. How can this have happened? The “race of the millennium” was looking more and more like an expensive dud. So what did they do? They approached the hare, and told him to make the race close. They knew he would win, but they just wanted it to look competitive to please the television audience.

And that’s what the hare did. He kept it close. The cameras were everywhere. The crowd clamored for a glimpse of the hare. The tortoise ran his hardest, and the hare was ahead of the tortoise most of the time, but once in a while, for

dramatic effect, he dropped behind for a few paces, making sure cameras captured the action, before sprinting ahead again. The hare thought that if this race went well, it might open some possibilities for future, more competitive, races.

Finally the two of them neared the end of the race. The rabbit was ahead and then behind and then ahead again. The tortoise plodded along at his same steady pace, not wavering a bit, but the hare went back and forth, and the crowd cheered and looked nervous. Finally, they crossed the finish line—the hare was sure he had won, but it was a photo finish. The winner of the race had to be decided by the race’s referee.

The referee stepped into the photo booth, looked at the race, and declared the tortoise the winner. The hare could hardly believe it. He had been so sure that he was the real victor. The photographers all looked to the hare as he was weeping in defeat, huddled under a tree in a pile of defeat. Their attention was so focused on the pitiful scene, that they didn’t notice the tortoise pulling out a wad of hundred-dollar bills from his shell and slipping it into the hand of the referee.

The moral of the story is: you’d better run up the score while you have the chance because they might bribe the judges; or, just because someone fights dirty, doesn’t mean everyone won’t think you’re a failure

Roger and Ol' Petey

Once there was a seagull named Roger. Roger Seagull loved summer. He loved that it was always warm. He loved that there was always food left around at swimming pools, picnic areas, beaches, and backwards.

But as the weather cooled down and people went inside, there were fewer dining options. In fact, food was restricted to garbage cans and schools for a few months of the year, and that was very difficult for Roger. You see, Roger was neither the biggest nor the toughest seagull. Big, tough gulls with cracked beaks and scars on their bellies picked through even the dirtiest trashcans before Roger could get beak on a single scrap. Roger, being small and sensitive, was left to picking through the sparse remnants that the bigger gulls left behind.

Besides trash cans, the other option for winter food, school debris left by students, was also picked through in a similar manner. However, there was one exception—one type of school that even the bravest of gulls steered far away from: high school.

Even Roger, with hunger pains setting in, steered away from high schools. This winter, however—a particularly harsh winter, mind you—even high school food began to tempt Roger. You may wonder why high school leftovers were so disdained by seagulls. Roger didn't understand the reasons behind it either . . . that is until he met Ol' Petey one day.

Ol' Petey kept watch over Skyline High School and kept other gulls—starving gulls, that is—away for the most part. Some gulls, the sparse few that neglected Ol' Petey's warnings, swept down anyway to try and grab a morsel. Most of them got food without harm, but a few mean students put seltzer tablets in their bread slices or alongside some peanuts and laughed with sick delight as some unfortunate, starving gull, having gulped down some of the seltzer tablets, exploded and fell to the ground. Whenever something like that happened, Ol' Petey would shake his head and squawk with sadness.

Roger met Ol' Petey not long after one of these seagull murders. “Aargh and Avast, Matey!” he exclaimed “stand aside, ye son of a puffin. There be violence stormin’ below.”

“Well, yes, I saw the death, but I think there is a way around it, good sir,” Roger said.

“Mutiny, I say,” replied Ol’ Petey. “’Tis all accursed, this food from the high schools. ’Tis dangerous and foolhardo to think ye’ll see the difference between the poison and the pure.”

Roger heard Ol’ Petey’s warning, but he was already busy watching the parking lot and the habits of the students. Certainly, there was bread intentionally set down by the students. But there was also food that was more casually discarded. This food, Roger suspected, was not toxic—that is, it did not contain the seltzer tablets that might blow him up—but he was afraid to try.

Roger was overcome with hunger, however. He felt compelled to try his theory. It would not be solely for himself; rather, it would be for all starving gulls that he would risk his life to find a new source of food.

Sweeping down with speed that—to Roger at least—approached the swiftness of a peregrine falcon, he grabbed a discarded piece of tomato from an unsuspecting freshman’s leftovers and flew over to the parking lot to eat it. The slimy vegetable—or, fruit as it may be—slid down easily, and as Roger prepared to lift off, he knew he had succeeded. He had won. He felt no fizzing in his belly—no uncomfortable bloating to portend his imminent doom—yet he felt satisfied spiritually and physically.

And then, Roger heard a rumble. He wondered for a moment if it might have come from his stomach, but then he turned around just in time to see the passenger’s side wheel as it started to roll over him, leaving his lifeless, yet-warm body with a smile in his eye.

The moral of the story is: listen to the old crazy-looking people in your life. They know a lot of things, and, even if they’re not exactly right in their advice, their ideas of what’s dangerous is usually in the ballpark.

The Nutcracker and the Christmas Tree

The family's favorite nutcracker was a little soldier nutcracker that Grandmother had brought with her as a little girl from Germany. Every November or December, on the same day that the family put up the Christmas tree, the little soldier nutcracker was put out on the mantle as well.

The Christmas tree was always the highlight of Christmas for the little nutcracker. He enjoyed learning about the forest from whence the tree came. He shared stories about the black forest and the tree he was cut down from. Once in a while, the trees knew some relatives of his who were taken as seeds or seedlings far away. When the family was around, the nutcracker stood straight up with his arms at his side—at attention, if you will. But when no one was around, he and the trees shared old stories and enjoyed the month or so they had together. After the holidays were over, the tree was thrown in the dumpster, and the little nutcracker went back into storage—sad at losing yet another Christmas-tree friend, but eagerly awaiting next year as well.

One Christmas, however, was totally different. The nutcracker came out of his protective box to discover that a new type of tree was in the living room. The tree didn't look quite right. It seemed somehow unnatural—it was too uniformly green, and there was no smell of the forest. When everyone left the room, he walked over to it and discovered the tree wasn't even made of wood—it was some kind of plastic. The nutcracker was shocked.

He tried to talk to the tree, but it obviously thought it was too good to talk to him because all he got back was snotty silence. The nutcracker tried telling a joke—again there was nothing but silence. He tried the rest of that day to get the tree to talk, heard nothing but silence, and then decided to give up for the rest of the season trying to talk to the tree.

A week went by, and the nutcracker was still brooding. After another week, he was fuming at the sight of the tree and all its presents, decorations, bulbs, and even that silly little star on top. He hated the tree. The nutcracker wanted the tree gone . . . but how in the world could he get rid of it? It was far too heavy to move, and even if it could be moved, to where would he move it? It wouldn't fit out a window. There had to be another way. He had to destroy it. It was as simple as that. He couldn't stand how it stood there smugly day after day without a care in the world. It was an awful, horrible tree. Just when he was getting to this point, his best idea came to him. That night, when Father

put down his lighter on the coffee table, the nutcracker would go over to it, pick it up, and burn down the tree. The plan was set.

All went according to plan for the nutcracker—at least up to a point. He had the lighter at the base of the tree, but because he had no fingers, he was having difficulty spinning the striker. He opened his mouth wide and put the lighter in and bit down at just the right angle. At last, he had a flame! He walked around trying to light the lower branches of the evil Christmas tree to no avail. He began jumping with the lighter to see if something higher up would burn. He jumped higher and higher, flailing his arms until he fell on his back and the lit lighter landed on him.

The fire engine came quickly and put out the fire. Luckily for the family, they had bought a flame-retardant tree, but the heirloom nutcracker didn't make it. Fortunately, they got a replacement sent from Germany before the next Christmas.

The moral of the story is: if something doesn't talk back to you, it may be an inanimate object instead of being snotty.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves

Once there was an old, wrinkly, warty queen who had a stepdaughter named Snow White. The queen became jealous of Snow White when her hallucinations changed. You see, the queen had a mirror (and it was a regular mirror, not a magical mirror), and the queen asked the mirror questions like, “Who is the most beautiful woman in the world?” For a long time, the old, wrinkly, warty queen hallucinated that the mirror talked back, praising her beauty, telling of the endless loveliness in her sweet face. As long as the queen hallucinated in this manner, she was indifferent to Snow White, but one day she hallucinated the mirror spoke back with things like, “Snow White is the most beautiful, you old, wrinkly, warty queen.” These hallucinations are the reason the queen decided to have Snow White killed by her royal chef.

The royal chef led Snow White into the woods, where he pulled out a butcher knife and said, “Snow White, I can’t kill you like the queen told me to. Go deep into the forest and never come back, or she’ll have both our heads.” In response, Snow White turned and fled.

After more than two days of wandering, Snow White came upon a tiny cottage, where everything was in miniature. She was so exhausted, that she crawled into the cottage and grabbed a morsel of food before falling asleep on the wood floor.

Snow White awoke to the sound of singing coming from outside the cottage. There were high-pitched voices singing Broadway show tunes from Gershwin, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and others. Looking out of the tiny windows, Snow White saw seven tiny men singing and dancing. They formed kick lines, human—or dwarf, as the case may be—pyramids with remarkable synchronicity and perfection. These little men were better than most of the professional performers who had come to perform for the royal family at the palace. She listened intently to the mellifluous music until they broke out in the music from the show, “Seven Brides for Seven Brothers,” when she burst out in laughter and ran out of the cottage to meet these happy little men.

Snow White frightened the little men, and three of them passed out, while the other four darted for the forest, hiding in the forest so all she could see was their little eyes peering out from behind or underneath bushes. Then Snow White spoke, “Oh no, don’t be afraid, I was enjoying your performance so much, please continue.” The dwarves were so astounded to have an audience

appreciate their work, that they continued their song and dance, saving their introductions for later.

That evening, Snow White told the dwarves of her story, and the dwarves told Snow White of their plight to find work in show business. Snow White felt sorry for them, as she was well aware of the competitive nature of professional singing and dancing. She promised that if they would help her, she would make sure and help them with their careers when her stepmother died and Snow White could again live in peace in the castle.

And so the days went on from there with Snow White helping around the house and the dwarves entertaining her when they weren't traveling, looking for work. Things were quiet until, one day, the queen showed up at the door with a poisoned apple.

"Hello, dear," the old, wrinkly, warty queen sneered. "I have an apple for you, if you'd like it."

"No, thank you, evil Stepmother," Snow White replied. "I can see it's you in your old, wrinkly, warty self. You did not even try to disguise yourself. You should eat the apple yourself."

Upon this suggestion, the stepmother thought she heard one of the voices in her head tell her to eat the apple, and so she did. She died. Snow White was rightfully returned to the castle and became the queen, living a nice long life full of material delights and easy living. The dwarves wrote her letters asking her to fulfill her promise to help their careers, but she ignored these letters, pretending not to know from whom they came.

The moral of the story is: show business can be a real beast to break into, even if you have connections to royalty. Also, next time someone is trying to kill you, maybe you should wonder if they're not just hearing things.

The Scarecrow and the Crow

Once there was a scarecrow in cornfield that loved frightening crows. Day after day crows came to look at the corn, but none dared trespass where this frightening scarecrow ruled. But whenever it rained, the scarecrow became saggy and sad and, instead of looking frightening, he just looked cold and miserable. It was on these days that the crows willing to brave the bad weather feasted on corn, but most summers there were only a few rainy days.

One summer, there appeared a new, magical crow with white eyes and a blue head. This crow had the power to make it rain whenever he wanted it to. The poor scarecrow spent day after day soaked through to his straw while the crows feasted on corn. The scarecrow wished for this crow to go away and disappear. He wished day after day for the crow to go away, disappear, or die, so that he could do his job again. After weeks of wishing and nothing happening, he decided to try something else.

The scarecrow began observing the crows. He learned all about them. He even found the strength in the rain to ask the crows questions about their eating habits, history, and so forth. He sought all the learning about crows he could find. He asked the deer mice in the fields what they thought about the crows and their habits. The scarecrow was not sure what all this learning would bring—maybe inspiration or something akin to it—but after weeks of learning, the magic crow and the rain still came.

The farmer was displeased with the scarecrow, and he came out to talk to him. The farmer asked, “Why are all these crows eating our corn?”

The scarecrow replied, “When it rains, I don’t do well. I’m cold and grumpy, and they aren’t scared of me. It’s all because of that magic crow with the white eyes and the blue head. He brings the rain.”

“Well, we’ll have to get rid of him, won’t we?” asked the farmer. The farmer went into the house and came back out with a shotgun. He fired away at the crows, taking particular time shooting at the white-eyed crow. Some crows fell down dead, but none of the shots even scared the white-eyed crow. It couldn’t be shot.

The farmer and the scarecrow both felt like failures. They had visions of the farm being repossessed by the bank, the meager corn crop failing to pay for

anything. As their fears were running wild, a tiny deer mouse came up and said, “If you want to get out of the rain, scarecrow, why doesn’t the farmer put an umbrella above you?” Then the mouse ran away, leaving the farmer and the scarecrow staring at each other.

Later that evening, with an umbrella above his head and the farmer using a blow dryer on an extension cord to dry him off, the scarecrow felt happy for the first time in a long time. The scarecrow began inciting terror in the hearts of all the crows again. Eventually, the white-eyed crow flew away, taking the rain with him. Things were back to normal, but the scarecrow kept the umbrella in case of regular, not magic-induced rainy days.

The moral of the story is: sometimes something as simple as an umbrella can counter the most magical crow; or, wishing and thinking doesn’t make things so—take some action.

The Dolphin and the Sharks

Not long ago, off the coast of southern California, there lived a pod of dolphins. All of the dolphins in the pod were related. Some of the dolphins were quite old, most were young and spry, and a few were in their first year of life. One of these youngest dolphins, named Trevin, loved to laugh and play—sometimes too much. Trevin laughed and played so much that it sometimes got him away from the pod. He loved breaking away from the pod to get close to a surfer or boat, only to be called away from his fun by his mother or older sister. They warned him that his fun and games would one day get him in trouble.

One eventful morning, the sky was beautifully clear, but some of the older dolphins sensed bad weather was coming. They warned the rest of the pod members to take particular care in avoiding dangerous situations today. Most of them listened, but Trevin did not. He was certain that today would be a perfect day to play.

Trevin snuck away when no one was watching, and he went looking for surfers to swim with. He saw some and jumped out of the water over and over, enjoying the amazed looks on their faces and the clapping he heard in return for his acrobatics. Truly, it was a beautiful day for playing. But Trevin had not noticed how the clouds had rolled in from the west while he had been jumping around in the water. The sea was ferociously churning, but Trevin just loved the extra push the high waves gave his jumping. Finally, when all of the surfers and boaters had left the water, he decided to try to find his family again. He dove deep into the water, where he knew they would be avoiding the storm. He called around and listened for answers. He called and listened again, and then he saw a silvery dorsal fin he thought was his sister's in the distance, so he went after it.

Trevin called out, "Sister! Wait for me. I want to tell you of all the fun I've had today." Trevin drew closer and closer to the figure until he saw that it was not his sister at all. In fact, he saw it was not even another dolphin. It was like a dolphin in that it had fins, eyes, teeth, and a tail; but the tail was horizontal and there were many more teeth than Trevin had ever seen in any animal. Quickly—out of instinct if nothing else—Trevin bolted in the other direction. The animal followed. Trevin dodged in and out, up and down, but he was followed and could not shake his pursuer.

After a long distance, suffering from exhaustion, the shark called out to Trevin, "Hello young dolphin. I do not want to hurt you. I am only chasing you

because I think you are lost. Can you not stop so we can talk, and I can help your family? I am not going to hurt you. I only wish to help you.” Trevin, out of sheer exhaustion, decided to listen. *This creature does look quite a bit like myself*, he thought to himself. *He may be some sort of strange whale I have never seen. Perhaps he knows where mother is.*

They stopped, and the shark swam around Trevin in circles while Trevin kept his beak facing the strange animal, ready to attack in case he really did want to harm him. “Why, I do believe something is right behind you,” the shark said. Trevin looked around, giving the shark all the time he needed to make dinner out of the poor dolphin.

The moral of the story is: do not ever fall for the silly trick where someone tells you to look at something and they poke you in the belly or eat you—it’s the oldest one in the book; or, just because someone resembles you, that doesn’t mean they don’t want to harm you.

The Lion and the Cockroach

Once in Africa there lived a mighty lion who considered himself King of all the beasts. Most of the other animals considered him a mighty creature. The most hated living thing in all of Africa was the cockroach. The cockroach was dirty, smelly, and pesky. All it was good for was to be squished, thought most animals. That's what the lion thought as well.

One day a cockroach walked in front of the mighty lion, and the lion moved a paw forward to step on the pest. "No! No!" cried the cockroach. "Please don't step on me. I am good luck, and I will bring great things to pass if you let me be."

The lion replied, "You? What could you do but portend filth and squalor. I shall stamp you out and do the rest of animal kind a good service."

"I tell you, that I will save your life if you let me live," the cockroach solemnly promised. The lion laughed, but because the little insect entertained him, he let him pass. From that day forward, the cockroach lived near the lion, watching for his opportunity to pay back his new friend. As for the lion, he enjoyed the humor the presumptuous bug brought into his life and let the cockroach eat the scraps of meat he left after his meals.

The lion and the cockroach lived in harmony until a great drought came. The dry season had not ended, and food and water became scarce. The lion became weaker and weaker as the antelope he usually fed on disappeared. The cockroach, using words of encouragement and praise, told the lion of the great success he would have at a watering hole—now quite nearer a mud hole—where all the remaining animals had to find water. Because of his friend's encouragement, the lion found the strength to head to the water along with his little friend, and the cockroach saved the lion's life for the first time.

Once at the watering hold, the cockroach jumped off the lion's back and coughed and flapped his wings in the faces of a Grant's Zebra and a springbok. For fear and dread of the horrible sight, the Zebra fainted, and the lion dined on striped meat. This is how the cockroach saved the lion for the second time.

When the rains finally came, the time neared when the cockroach knew he would die. He thanked his friend for a good life, the scraps of food, and the company. The lion misses his friend dearly to this day.

The moral of the story is: a little thing you can squish may end up saving your life—twice.

The Galapagos Tortoise and the Mayfly

The oldest tortoise on Galapagos, George, spent his days worrying about his death. He played cards every day with his old tortoise friends. His friends shared stories about the past—how they’ve loved and lost, shared and taken, laughed and moaned—but all he talked about was the last year of his 267-year-long life. He complained about his gastrointestinal tract—it didn’t work as smoothly as it used to. He complained about his heart—it seemed to skip out on a lot of beats. His feet were cold, his eyes cloudy, his family ungrateful, his beak chipped, and his ears too full of wax. His shell felt heavier than it used to as well. Life was truly miserable for George.

One morning, George woke up to the usual gorgeous sunrise peering up from the Pacific, when his eyes were greeted by a little fly. “Hello there. I’m a mayfly. How are you? Life is short—just one day for me. There’s a lot to do, but what a sunrise? Isn’t that great? You are great. Will you be my friend? I have a lot to do, but we can do things. What do you do for fun? This is going to be a great day,” said the mayfly—all in one breath.

“Well, if you’ve got one day, you don’t want to spend it with me,” the tortoise replied. The tortoise closed his eyes and felt the pain of 267 years of life, wishing it would all end.

“If you want me to leave, that’s okay,” said the mayfly. He flew away, but George suddenly wished the mayfly would come back. He felt a glimmer of the past—of his childhood, of discovery, of happiness—and he liked it. To George’s great surprise, when he opened his eyes, the mayfly was back. “I thought you might change your mind,” he said, “so I came back to see if you wanted to see some flowers. They’re amazing, and I have to take it all in right now.”

George agreed, although somewhat reluctantly, to spend the day with the mayfly. At first, George hesitated in looking at flowers. He didn’t even know what to do with a flower besides eat it. The mayfly showed him how to smell it, enjoy it, look at the colors—and then the both took a bite.

They spent the day mostly looking at things like rocks, water, and sand. They talked about the past as well. The mayfly didn’t have much past to tell, as it was his only day on earth, but he was fascinated by George’s past. He learned about George’s childhood friends, his wife (who died almost 100 years ago), and he

heard George tell how much he missed his children—but he was proud of them too. As George spoke, happiness was in his eyes most of the time, and tears came up once or twice. It was a full day in every way.

In the morning, the mayfly was gone. George passed away a few days after, and each of the last few days of his life were filled with a lifetime of sensation and memories.

The moral of the story is: no matter how long life is, love what you're given.

The Football Player and his Teddy Bear

Jeremiah, the best high school running back in the state of Florida, had a secret. His secret wasn't part of his family's past. It wasn't a secret about cheating in football. His secret had to do with his teddy bear. He slept cuddling the teddy bear his grandma gave him when he was born. No one in the whole world knew he slept holding his teddy bear. He did not even tell his parents or his brothers and sisters. No, Jeremiah kept his teddy bear in his closet, turned out all his lights, and after everyone thinks he is asleep, he goes and takes his teddy bear off his top closet shelf, and then he can fall asleep.

In the locker room, Jeremiah was worried someone would find out something was wrong with him. He was sure something was wrong with himself, but he knew he could never sleep without his teddy bear—and even if he did sleep, he would feel like he'd abandoned his little partner. There was no way he could stop.

Not only did Jeremiah not stop cuddling with his teddy, rather he became even more attached to his teddy bear as time went by. Jeremiah was a top recruit to several colleges in Florida, and he eventually picked University of South-Central Florida State Tech to play football and major in consumer economic design. His roommate was Moose, a lineman who shaved first thing in the morning and had to shave again after breakfast and every two hours after that to keep from having a beard by the end of the day. At football practice, Moose hit the other players hard, fast, and late—the coaches got after him for being violent and a little dimwitted. Each night, Jeremiah reached under his bed for his teddy bear and fell asleep right away, making sure to be awake before Moose so he could re-hide his teddy bear.

One night, Jeremiah reached for his teddy bear like always, but Moose jumped out of bed, turned on the lights, and said, “Ah-hah! I knew something was weird about you!” Moose turned out the light and snickered loudly. Jeremiah, embarrassed, put his teddy under the bed and buried his head in the pillow. He lay awake all night.

The next day, after classes, Jeremiah went to his locker to dress for football practice. His locker was packed with teddy bears and there was paint on his locker that read: *Love your teddy. Keep him close.* Jeremiah cried and ran out of the locker room, and, as he read, he thought about how mean Moose was—Moose ruined his life. Jeremiah couched down in a patch of grass and cried.

After a minute or two there, a little girl, no older than four, came up to him, and offered Jeremiah a few candy-covered chocolates from her bag. The girl's mother stood about twenty yards away, calling for her daughter. The little girl said, "You don't need to cry. You'll be okay, I think." After that she left.

Jeremiah went back to practice and ignored the jeers and jokes. That night, with the lights still on and Moose laughing, he took his teddy bear out, hugged him tightly, and never slept better.

The moral of the story is: the fear of losing your secret is often much worse than the reality losing your secret. Little kids are great at comforting, too.

Rumpelstiltskin

There was a miller who wanted to be important in the eyes of the duke. In hopes of accomplishing this, the miller told the duke that his daughter could weave straw into gold. The duke locked up the miller's daughter in a tower with straw and warned her she would be killed in three days if she did not produce gold. If she did what her father promised she could do, she would become the duke's wife.

The miller's daughter knew she would die without a miracle, for her father had made a hasty promise in vain. She leaned over her spinning wheel and wept. As she cried, the miller's daughter said to herself, "If there were only some way. Some way—I'd give anything if I could only live through this." When she looked up, there stood in front of her a little man in a green suit.

"I will help you in your plight," the little man said, "but you must give me your firstborn child if you live."

"Never could I pay such a ransom," replied the miller's daughter.

The little man in the green suit walked away and said, "Then you will die alone when the duke finds you have produced no gold for him."

The miller's daughter stopped the man, assented to his price, and the little man began weaving. He made piles of gold straw all through the night. The miller's daughter fell asleep on stack of straw in a corner and in the night, the little man yelled at her to get up and move off the straw, as he wanted to turn it into gold. The miller's daughter wept.

In the morning the little man was gone. The duke allowed her father to come up for a visit. The miller's daughter told him of all that had happened in the night—the little man, the piles of gold, and, last of all, of the promise she made to give up her firstborn child. The miller's heart was heavy, but he was delighted his daughter would live.

Years went by, and the miller's daughter was now the duchess, and she had a child. One night, several weeks after her child had been born, the little man appeared in her window and demanded the child. She begged him to leave her

alone. She commanded him to leave. Nothing deterred him—nothing, that is, until she turned to flattery and a game.

“Surely a wise man such as you must listen to reason,” she said. “Have you no interest in a game to let me keep my child?”

“A game?” he said. “A game! Yes, let’s play a game. I worked three days for you, and now I give you three days to guess my name. If you succeed, you may keep your child. If you do not guess my name, you will not only give me your child, but I shall tell the whole world of your weakness and the fraud you committed in becoming the duchess.” The miller’s daughter assented reluctantly.

The duchess sent a spy around town asking after the little man. No one had ever seen or heard of him. The spy traveled to neighboring villages and asked everyone he could find over the course of two days, but during the night before the duchess’ time was about to expire, the spy finally struck proverbial gold.

The little man was rapping and dancing around a bonfire. “Rumpelstiltskin is my name . . . stealing babies is my game,” the little man was beatboxing and repeating the phrase over and over while he wore a shirt that read: *Detroit Hip-Hop 4-Ever*.

The next day, when Rumpelstiltskin came to collect his reward, the duchess was ready. She said the little man’s name, and, just the word escaped her lips, the door burst open and representatives of Child Protective Services took her child, arrested Rumpelstiltskin and the duchess, and carted them off to jail. The little boy beat the odds in foster care and became a physician. The duchess spent five years in jail, during which time the duke had remarried, so she went back to the mill and lived with her father. Rumpelstiltskin escaped from prison during his first night and was never heard of after that.

The moral of the story is: don’t offer your child up to a psycho. Don’t try to steal children. Child Protective Services is full of tough agents.

The Politician's New Clothes

Once there was a politician—I won't tell you the party of which he was a member (it matters not)—who was looking to make a big splash in the media in hopes of his future presidential aspirations. He thought about policies or introducing new legislation. He thought of charities to support and babies to kiss. He thought of all these things and more, but in the end he settled on what his third highest ranked aide advised him: a new wardrobe.

This couldn't be any old wardrobe—it had to be avant-garde. He searched high and low for a tailor to produce his wardrobe. First he went to all the big-name designers, but they refused to help the politician, shying away from politics because, after all, everyone buys their clothes and they wouldn't want to offend by becoming too closely involved with any one party. He went to giant discount chains for his clothes, but then he was worried his support of sweatshops might hurt his chances at the political big-time. Finally, his sixth highest ranked aide found two up-and-coming tailors, Tim and Tub Flub, to produce the new wardrobe.

Tim and Tub used a brand new fabric designed from research that began in the Soviet Union to make their clothes. This special fabric could only be seen by those who loved animals and the environment, wanted freedom for all but the bad, money for schools, lower taxes for themselves, and higher taxes for all those richer than they. In short, it was quite nearly magical. To the politician, however, it was invisible, but he was too afraid to let on.

Aides one through thirteen kept quiet about their reservations regarding the fabric. Aides one through four knew this was going to be a big mistake, but they were concerned about losing their jobs if they spoke up. After all, health insurance was hard to come by these days, and they weren't about to give that up just to keep their boss from making a big mistake. Aides five through thirteen each were certain that everyone else could see the fabric but they. They spent most evenings in the library in Washington trying to mend their shortcomings by pouring over the words of Madison, Monroe, and Tippecanoe.

Aide number fourteen was the only aide with any guts. On the day before the politician was to go onto the national scene in his new outfit, aide number fourteen finally spoke up. He quickly lost his job, but the politician fired his tailors Tim and Tub, bought instead some Armandiogiovannici suites, and announced a new platform aimed at saving tube socks from cluttering the

nation's land fills. Two years later, he won his bid for the presidency by the largest margin in forty years.

The moral of the story is: sometimes the most powerful people take good advice, save themselves from themselves, and bite the dog that bites them. You can either be upset about it or let it slide, drink a fruit smoothie, and enjoy another sunset.

The PC and the Dust Mite

There is an old computer in the basement of my house. It is a PC from 1984. For a while it thought it was all alone among the old books and shelves. It lived such a lonely life, as I only went down once or twice a year to put decorations away or to look for an old book.

After years of this loneliness, PC noticed that if he looked very closely, he had very small company: dust mites, that is. One dust mite looked like he was trying to talk to PC. PC listened very closely, and he heard the mite ask what PC was doing in the basement. PC explained that he was down there because he no longer provided the processing power required by me and my family. The dust mite listened in awe at the stories of word processing, spreadsheets, video games, and—most intently listened to—the stories of attention.

During the discussion, the PC learned of the dust mite's desire to be noticed, to become something important, to become somebody. PC revealed that he longed for the old times. He wanted to be loved again, and so PC proposed he and the dust mite collaborated to gain recognition—even fame if destiny willed it.

Destiny willed nothing at first—their collaboration to study the effects of darkness on old broom bristles yielded slow results. They abandoned their aspirations for the Nobel Prize and looked for information in books to write a research paper for a minor journal.

Problems in this effort arose when they realized the dust mite could neither carry my books and scientific journals nor write. They found themselves again at square one.

They turned to fiction writing. The only things they knew were the dark. They wrote a 700-word paper about a spider that lived in a basement and befriended a typewriter, but upon reading the third draft, they found it unrealistic and abandoned the effort. It was shortly after this that my wife went to the basement, looking for an old dress to wear to one of our formal engagements with the mayor and the city planner. She began sneezing, as she is allergic to the mites. PC wondered aloud what she was sneezing at, and the mite explained the allergic effect he had on the family. Immediately, PC became jealous that the mite had so much influence on the family, and he accused the mite of having false sympathy for his plight. The mite became indignant and roared

back accusations of jealousy and rage. My wife, taken aback by all the anger—and particularly surprised by some of the vulgar language being used by the PC—fetched me to settle the situation.

I interviewed them both, and we settled that if I put them in my book, we would have an end of all the commotion. Thus, there came peace and quiet, once again, to my basement.

The moral of the story is: be grateful for your past glories or your present endeavors. Even if you are but an allergen, you mean something to someone.

A.G. lives in Dallas, Texas, where he studies medicine full time and writes in his spare time. He enjoys people, reading, and taking his dog to the park with his wife.

