



Struggling Authors

Children's anthology (Bedtime Stories)

2008



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*Please note that - other than the winner - these stories do not appear in any particular order.

HAMBONE'S NIGHT OUT

By Moya Green

Hambone could not believe his luck. The hook which fastened the hatch on the top of his cage had been broken for weeks. Every night, when she put him back after his evening run-around, Milly left a large book on top to hold it shut. Hambone hated that book. He was a very strong hamster. He exercised for hours every night to develop his muscles: climbing, and running in his wheel, and dragging his sleeping box all around the cage. It was no use. No matter how hard he shoved from below, he could not shift that book. But tonight it was not there - Milly had forgotten.

He dragged his sleeping box into position below the hatch, and climbed onto its roof. Stretching to his full five inches, he pushed as hard as he could. The hatch moved. For a moment his back legs swung in the air as he scabbled for a paw hold, then he was out. He sat on top of his cage, smoothing his whiskers and staring round into the darkness. All was quiet. The Big Ones had gone to bed. Hambone could never understand why they did this. All day, when he wanted to sleep, they would be up and about, making a noise and disturbing him. Then as soon as he was properly awake and wanting to play, they all went away and left him alone. It was very strange, not to say boring.

He climbed down from the cage onto the low table on which it stood. He was in the corner of the living-room. The arm of a chair was only a short jump away, and from there it was an easy scramble to the floor. Hambone sniffed. Food! The smell came from the corner where the Box Which Made Noises stood. The box was silent now. Yes, Milly had been eating biscuits. Chocolate biscuits!. There were crumbs all over the floor. He settled down for a good munch.

After his snack, it was time to explore. Hambone stowed the last of his crumbs in his cheek pouches for later, and set out across the carpet. He made himself very flat, as only a hamster can, and squeezed under the door into the hall. Ahead of him the stairs rose up into darkness. I could go up and say hello to Milly, he thought. She would be surprised. Only there are such a lot of stairs. It would take me ages to climb them. No, I'll try the kitchen. He met a spider scuttling along by the wall. 'Hello,' he said. 'Nice night, isn't it?' The spider just looked at him and rushed off. Spiders have no conversation.

The kitchen was a disappointment. Milly's mum must have swept the floor before she went to bed, for there was nothing around to eat, and there was no way he could reach the work surface. Disgusted, he went back to the living-room.

He climbed up onto the sofa. The corner of one of the cushions had come unstitched. That would make a good nest, he thought, if I could get inside. He began to gnaw at the thread. Then he heard a noise. It sounded like the time Milly dropped her drinking glass on the kitchen floor. 'Whatever's that?' He squeezed under the door again, and reached the hall in time to see the kitchen door open. A Big One that he had never seen before came out and started to go up the stairs. Funny time to have a visitor, thought Hambone. Still, there was no accounting for Big Ones.

There was no sound from upstairs. Perhaps he's decided not to bother them, as they're asleep, thought Hambone. All right for some. No one worries about disturbing me when I'm asleep.

He heard the strange Big One coming downstairs again. He came into the living-room carrying a bag. He dumped it on the sofa, nearly squashing Hambone.

'Oi, watch it!' cried Hambone.

The stranger did not answer. He went to the sideboard where Milly's dad kept the bottles of funny smelling stuff, and poured himself a glass. Then he came and sat on the sofa. Hambone watched from inside the cushion. This was a rather odd Big One. Mostly when they came into a room they would switch on horrible glaring lights, or the box in the corner which lit up and talked, or the other box which made awful howling noises, but this one simply sat in the dark, nice and quiet. Very civilised. Perhaps I should make him welcome, thought Hambone. After all, I am the host, in a manner of speaking. He clambered up the back of the sofa and ran along the top. How shall I introduce myself? he wondered. I know. I'll crawl down inside his collar. That always makes Milly laugh! The strange Big One did not laugh. Instead he made a very peculiar noise and jumped up, waving his arms. Hambone fell off and landed on the plastic thingummy with all the buttons, which happened to be lying on the sofa. A lot of things then happened all at once...

The box in the corner woke up and started shouting and the stranger fell over the coffee table with a tremendous crash!

Milly's dad yelled 'Who's there?' from upstairs.

The stranger didn't answer, he got up and rushed out of the room in a terrible hurry. The back door banged.

Oh dear, thought Hambone. He's forgotten his bag. Still, he can always come back for it. After that, things became very noisy. Milly and her mum and dad came downstairs and switched all the lights on, and charged around shouting to each other. Then a blue light started flashing outside the window. When the room filled up with some of the largest Big Ones Hambone had ever seen, all with enormous feet, Hambone decided it was time to call it a night. He went back to his cage and with some difficulty levered up the hatch. Luckily everyone was far too busy to notice him. He dropped back into the cage and crawled inside his sleeping box. He curled up and pulled his bedding firmly over his head. It had been an interesting night, but enough was enough. He went to sleep.

THE END

Dopey's New Diet

By Oliver Eade

BRRRR!

Peter hated getting up in the morning.

With his eyes still closed he fumbled for his alarm clock on his bedside cabinet. No alarm clock!

BRRRR!

He opened his eyes, blinking, and peered over the edge of his bed. No alarm clock!

BRRRR!

Muttering to himself, he got up, shuffled round to the end of the bed, because that's where the alarm seemed to be...BANG! His face hit the ground. He'd fallen over Dopey, his large golden retriever, who was lying across the floor.

BRRRR!

Dopey looked at Peter with his big, sad eyes.

BRRRR, he went again.

"Dopey?" Peter pinched himself to see whether he was still asleep. "Ouch!" he said.

BRRRR! went Dopey. "Dopey, have you eaten my alarm clock?"

Dopey dropped his head to the ground, placing his paws over his ears.

"Oh Dopey! Dad's right. Your name really does suit you!"

BRRRR! Peter dressed quickly and woke up his parents. Rather, Dopey woke them up...for he was standing beside Peter going 'BRRRR!' with a guilty expression on his face.

"Dad, he's gone and swallowed my alarm clock!" Peter's dad rubbed his eyes, and looked at Dopey. BRRRR!

"Why did he do that?"

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "Why did you do that, Dopey?" BRRRR!

"Okay!" Peter's dad said wearily, "I'll get dressed and we'll take him to the vet!"

Dopey padded out of the room. He hated going to the vet because they did very undogly things to you there. Peter got dressed. When he was downstairs having breakfast he heard his dad call out from the bathroom.

"WHERE'S MY RAZOR!"

At the same time Dopey wandered into the kitchen. Not only was he going 'BRRRR' but he was also making a 'ZZZZZ' sound.

"Oh, Dopey, you didn't, did you?" BRRRR-ZZZZZ! Dopey looked up at his master with an even more guilty look on his face. Peter's dad appeared in the kitchen, his chin all stubbly.

"Have you seen my electric razor, Peter?" Peter nodded in the direction of Dopey.

BRRRR-ZZZZZ!

"Surely he hasn't?" his dad asked. Peter raised his eyebrows.

"Sounds like it to me, Dad." Dopey waddled off, going BRRRR-ZZZZZ.

Peter and his dad ate breakfast together.

"I'll just see what the weather's gonna do before we go, Peter," his dad said, getting up to switch the small kitchen radio on – the one with batteries, "Where's the radio, Peter?"

"Maybe Mum's got it somewhere."

Peter's dad peered out of the window.

"Looks like it could snow. Better find that radio!" Peter's dad went off to search for the little radio.

Dopey wandered back into the kitchen. "BRRRR-ZZZZZ-A DEEP DEPRESSION WILL BE SWEEPING THE COUNTRY..." Dopey looked up at Peter, giving the boy the weather forecast in a lady's voice, to a background of BRRRR and ZZZZZ!

"DAD!" Peter yelled.

"WITH A CHANCE OF DRIFTING SNOW-BRRRR-ZZZZZ..." Peter's dad reappeared.

"We're getting the forecast okay. It's coming out of Dopey."

"...ADVISE EXTREME CAUTION IF VENTURING OUT-BRRRR-ZZZZZ!" Peter looked out of the window. It was already snowing. Peter's dad shook his head disapprovingly at Dopey.

"Vet's not open till nine. Leave in twenty minutes. Okay?" he said.

"I'm not gonna let you out of my sight!" Peter said to Dopey, waving a finger at the dog. By the time they left for the vet the roads were white with snow, and it was falling quite heavily.

"You would have to choose today of all days to suddenly develop an appetite for electrical things!" Peter's dad said grumpily to Dopey. It was a difficult drive for him as he sat clutching the steering wheel, staring into a whirling whiteness of snow.

They had to wait some time at the vet's because the vet himself was late, but fortunately Dopey was the only animal there.

"Been swallowing electrical things, you say?" asked the vet, examining Dopey on the table.

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-THE FT INDEX CLOSED AT..." went Dopey.

"Interesting! Electrophilia, it's called. Not seen case for years!"

"...AND THE DOLLAR FELL AGAINST THE POUND AGAIN..."

"Extraordinary! A razor as well? Hmmm!"

"But what can you do?" asked Peter, anxiously.

"Well...he might pass them – if you're lucky. Mind you, they probably wouldn't work very well after that!" The vet chuckled.

"What if he doesn't?"

"An operation," came the reply.

Peter's father looked worried.

"How much?" he asked.

When the answer came he almost fell over from shock.

"As much as that?"

"Big operation! And he'll need an X-ray first. Altogether we're talking about..."

"Is there an alternative?" interrupted Peter's dad.

"Well there is the other thing. Painless, of course."

"NO!" shouted Peter. "You can't have him put down!" Peter knew they weren't well off, with his dad now unemployed, but he'd do anything to save Dopey. Although the dog did silly things at times, he was the boy's greatest friend, after all.

"Bring him back in two weeks, or sooner if he gets ill," said the vet, "We don't have to decide just now."

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-MORE HEAVY SNOW FORECAST..." went Dopey as he was lifted down from the table.

In the car, on their way home, Peter and his dad didn't say a word to each other, and Dopey just went BRRRR-ZZZZZ together with whatever was on the radio. The snow was really deep, having drifted in the strong wind. Suddenly the car went into a skid and careered off the road right into a large drift.

"Great!" said Peter's dad, "Now we're really stuck!" And with the snow still coming down the car was soon covered in a thick white blanket.

Peter's dad phoned the police with his mobile phone. Peter, now frightened, climbed into the back and put his arms around Dopey.

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-AND NOW FOR AN EXCITING NEW RADIO DRAMA..." continued Dopey. They waited and waited, Peter and Dopey huddled together to keep warm. "BRRRR-ZZZZZ-WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME BEFORE?" Just when Peter was beginning to despair that they would never get rescued, he heard a scraping noise above him. The snow fell from the window, and the friendly face of a policeman peered at them. Peter's dad wound down his window.

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-I'LL KILL MYSELF, I WILL!"

"Madam, it's okay! Don't do anything drastic!" the officer said, squinting into the car.

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-DARLING, I REALLY LOVE YOU!"

"Uh?" The officer looked puzzled.

"It's the dog," explained Peter's dad.

"He can talk?"

"No! He swallowed the radio. And the alarm clock and my razor!"

"Well, we'd never have found you under this snow if hadn't been for the alarm and that woman's voice. You were completely covered, you know!"

Back home, Peter had a warm cup of cocoa, and he gave Dopey some warmed-up dog food, which helped to muffle the sound of the alarm a little. All afternoon Peter was forced to listen to the radio as he kept a watch over Dopey. Perhaps they wouldn't have much longer together, he thought sadly, hugging the dog.

"BRRRR-ZZZZZ-WHAT AN AMAZING GOAL!" Peter awoke early the following morning. The BRRRR and the ZZZZZ had gone silent, but Dopey was reciting the 'prayer for the day'...at least his tummy was. Peter took him out for a walk to see whether the razor and alarm clock might come out of his back end, but they didn't.

"Batteries flat!" he told the dog, sadly, "You know what'll happen if those things don't come out, you silly old thing!"

"...AND THE LORD BE WITH YOU TODAY..." replied Dopey.

Peter was preparing himself for the worst. They'd never be able to afford the operation. But he simply wasn't prepared for what happened later that morning. First came the news...from Dopey: "...THE AMAZING RESCUE OF A YOUNG BOY AND HIS FATHER ALL BECAUSE OF A DOG CALLED DOPEY..." Later, the house was full of journalists and TV reporters. A crowd, eager to catch a glimpse of Dopey, had formed outside, and on hearing that Dopey might have to be put down because the family couldn't afford his operation, a 'Save Dopey Fund' was set up. The radio's battery soon ran down, and those electrical things never emerged from Dopey. Two weeks later Dopey had his operation, paid for from his special fund. Of course, Peter, his family and Dopey were all famous by then, and it wasn't long before Peter's dad was offered a job, for the whole country was touched by the story of the father who braved a snowstorm to help his son's dog.

Dopey never swallowed any more electrical gadgets, but Peter's mum did make him special biscuits, which he loved, decorated to look like alarm clocks and radios. "It was probably his way of telling you he needed a change in diet," the vet said when they took Dopey for a check-up later. Dopey gave the vet a rather doleful look. "That's okay, then," said Peter, winking at Dopey. "He's getting lots of clocks and radios now!"

THE END

DANIEL'S DREAM

By Nicola Berg

'Good night Son, sweet dreams,' said Dad.

'Night, night Dad,' said Daniel giving his father a big hug, 'Dad?'

'Yes?'

'What does 'sweet dreams' mean? Does it mean I'll have dreams about sweeties?' he asked. Dad laughed.

'No, darling, it just means that I hope you have good dreams, you know, nice ones where good things happen.'

'Oh, okay, sweet dreams to you too then,' said Daniel curling up under his Formula One duvet with his blanket in one hand and Robbie Rabbit in the other. Dad smiled at the little boy as he shut his eyes.

'I love you Daniel,' he whispered.

'I love you too Dad,' Daniel murmured back before cuddling in tighter and drifting off to sleep.

Daniel was woken up by a strange thunderous noise. He found himself standing on the side of a huge race track with crowds of people all around cheering, shouting and waving flags. He could hear car engines roaring loudly close by and could smell the fuel as it wafted towards him.

'Daniel, Daniel, c'mon mate, hurry up, we're all waiting for you.'

Daniel turned towards the voice and saw Dad standing by the side of a gleaming red racing car. It had a huge number seven painted in white on the front and Daniel's name in big letters emblazoned down the side. He ran towards the car.

'Dad, where are we? What's going on?'

'We're at Silverstone. It's so exciting. It's the biggest race of the season and everyone's waiting for you to get in your car. You're in the race.' Dad pointed to the racing car in front of him.

Daniel looked at it again and saw a row of men standing next to it waiting patiently. There were four men and they all wore bright red mechanics suits with ear muffers to protect their ears from the noise. They also had walkie talkies and tools. Daniel stared at the men then back at the car. It was amazing and he wondered how would he be able to drive it especially wearing his Star Wars pyjamas? But he wasn't wearing pyjamas, he was wearing a shiny red racing driver suit, just like the ones the men were wearing. 'Wow,' he thought, I can't wait to tell the kids at school about this.

'Daniel, what are you waiting for?' Dad shouted, 'the race is about to start.'

Daniel sprang into action. He ran to the car and got in. He was excited and scared all at the same time and had no idea how he was going to drive this fantastic car. He imagined the dashboard would have all kinds of different buttons and knobs and things to push.

Once Daniel had sat down in the car, the top canopy closed over his head and everything became quiet. Inside, it was small. The seat was hard and there wasn't much room to do anything except touch the steering wheel.

To his surprise the dashboard looked the same as the bumper cars at the fair; a couple of lights, the wheel and a key ignition. He checked the floor and saw two pedals for his feet. He guessed one was for stop and the other for go.

A key appeared in Daniel's hand. He put the key into the ignition and turned it until the engine growled into life. A flow of excitement ran through him. This was much better than a PlayStation game.

Dad banged his hand on the roof and gave him the thumbs up. Daniel gave him the thumbs up back. He was ready to go.

He pressed his foot gently onto the pedal and the car lurched forward slowly, when he pressed a bit harder it went faster. With his foot in control, Daniel grasped the steering wheel and guided the car out onto the race track. In front of him he saw the other cars waiting patiently in a line, a man stood at the front making sure all the drivers were in the right place. He waved his hand at Daniel and beckoned him to the front. Daniel steered the car around the others, careful not to crash into any of them, and took his place at the front of the grid.

His heart thumped loudly and his hands shook as he sat waiting for the race to begin. He gripped the wheel tightly and concentrated as hard as he could. He imagined himself driving quickly around the bends just like in his game. Some of them were sharp and some were wide. He would need to stay calm if he was going to make it without crashing off the track.

He glanced in his mirror at the car behind him and saw a face he knew sitting there. It was Fernando Alonso. Daniel quickly looked at the car next to him. It had a number one on it. Oh no, he thought, when he saw Lewis Hamilton waving at him. He couldn't beat them, they were the best in the world.

Daniel didn't have any more time to worry, as the man moved away from in front of the cars and the lights lit up to signal the start of the race.

Daniel counted the lights as they came on, one...two...three...four...five...and then he was off. Daniel pressed his foot hard onto the pedal, and the car shot forward. But he wasn't quick enough, Lewis Hamilton blasted to the front.

Daniel quickly positioned his car behind Lewis and followed him around the track. He swerved this way and that to stop anyone from overtaking him and made sure he concentrated when taking the corners so that he didn't lose control of the car.

'Got to win, got to win,' he chanted to himself while he was driving, his foot still pressed to the floor, his hands clutching the steering wheel. He forgot all about the other drivers and even forgot it was Lewis Hamilton in the car in front. He just wanted to win!

When the sign said one lap to go, Daniel knew this was his last chance. He suddenly swerved to the right and took Lewis Hamilton by surprise. Daniel's car inched closer to the front, getting faster and faster. But then the car in front injected some speed and began to pull away.

No, thought Daniel, no, I'm not going to lose and he pushed his foot down with all his strength. Magically, the car went faster, so fast it seemed to fly and he swiftly pushed it beyond Lewis Hamilton's car and into the lead just as he saw the chequered flag. He flew past the flag in first place.

Daniel punched the air with his hand. He'd won. He'd beaten Hamilton, Alonso and all the others. He was the champion now. He drove the car into the pit, dove out and jumped up and down.

'I'm the Champion, I'm the Champion,' he shouted excitedly.

'Daniel, what are you doing?' Dad said. A light came on and Daniel realised he had been in the dark.

'Dad, I beat Lewis Hamilton and I beat Alonso,' he cried, 'I'm the champion of the world.'

'Of course you are Son, of course you are. You're always my champion,' replied Dad, 'Now back into bed with you. It's too late to be jumping like that and you've got school tomorrow.'

Dad switched the light back off and it was dark again. Daniel closed his eyes and went back to sleep dreaming about Lewis Hamilton, the red shiny racing car and his well earned victory celebration as he sprayed coca-cola onto everyone from the top of the podium.

THE END

The Robin who didn't like Heights

by Michele McGrath

Rory was happy until his sister, Rosie, began to strut around the edge of the nest.

"Look at me!" she shouted.

Rory had always done everything his sister did. So he tried to jump up beside her and fell.

"You can't do it," laughed Rosie.

He tried again. For a moment he stayed there.

"Well done, Rory!" said Rosie, who wasn't a bad sister.

It was nice here with the warm sunshine on his back. Then he looked down!

"Oh!" He shouted and slipped.

Luckily he fell into the bottom of the nest.

"What happened?" Rosie asked.

"I looked down." Rory wailed.

"Try again." She marched round, showing him how to do it.

"No. My bottom hurts."

When his mother came home, Rory told her all about it.

"We all fall." Mother Robin said, "Tomorrow you will be able to do it."

But when Rory tried again, he was afraid. He squawked and fell. He kept trying but he could never stay on the rim. One day, Rosie hopped onto a nearby branch and hung there, shrieking with delight. Mother Robin was very pleased.

"Well done! Flap your wings and jump from branch to branch."

That night, Mother Robin said to Rory, "I am worried about you, son. Your sister can fly now and you can't. Will you try with me tomorrow?"

"It's horrible up there, Mama, I feel dizzy when I look down."

"Don't look down, look up! I will help you." Mother Robin stayed with Rory.

"Jump! I won't let you fall!"

Rory jumped. His claws hooked onto the edge of the nest and he held on, swaying. By the end of the morning, Rory could jump up and down and walk around. Then his mother perched on a branch and said,

"Jump to me."

"I can't Mama!" The leap seemed huge.

"You can! Do it now!"

Rory closed his eyes and jumped. He was falling! A twig brushed his toes and he grabbed it.

"Why did you close your eyes?" His mother asked.

"I didn't want to see the drop, Mama."

The nest was a long way above them.

"I'll never get up there!" He cried.

"You will have to jump from twig to twig. Follow me."

Rory followed her up the tree and at last they reached the nest.

Next morning, Rosie tumbled out backwards. She flapped her wings and rose up in the air.

"Well done, you're flying!" said Mother Robin.

"What a clever girl!" said Father Robin.

Rory could now hop from branch to branch but he knew that he would never be able to fly like Rosie.

"Robins are great flyers." Father Robin told Rory, "It's just you don't know you can fly yet!"

"Can't I try another day?"

"No. The cat is away. It's the best time. Jump when I call three! One! Two! Three!"

Rory felt the air flow past him, but he had closed his eyes again! Something hit him hard and he rolled over and over. He was in the middle of the lawn. His parents fluttered down beside him.

"What are we going to do now? Mother Robin asked in dismay.

"You teach Rory to take off." Father Robin said, "Thank heaven that cat is away!"

Mother Robin taught Rory to take off, but he always glided back again.

"I'm tired!" he wailed.

Mother Robin was worried. She told the other robins, "Rory's on the lawn. He can't do any more today."

Father Robin gave Rory his supper. It was raining and getting dark. His father snuggled up to him. The rain dripped down and they were cold, wet and stiff in the morning. Father Robin went to find breakfast. Rory stamped his feet trying to get warm. Then he saw a huge pair of eyes looking at him and a wet red mouth coming right towards him. For a moment, Rory could not move, looking into the deep golden eyes. The animal started to leap. With a squeal of fear, Rory spread his wings. He felt pain, as a claw scratched the tip of his wing. He flapped madly. Rory was flying at last! He kept going. He didn't know how to turn round! There was a dark opening ahead of him!

Next minute he was rolling over and over on the dusty floor of Farmer Jones' hayloft. Rory was shaken but not badly hurt. One of his wing feathers was broken and he had a long scratch, but he had been very lucky. He went and looked through the hole onto a muddy yard. Raindrops were going past his nose without making him wet. Last night he had been very wet indeed.

"Good," he thought, "the rain isn't wetting me. I like it here."

Then he began to get hungry. He wondered when his mother would come to find him, but his parents had found blood and torn feathers on the lawn. They thought Rory had been eaten. So they did not look for him. Rory was hungry and cold.

There was an old box in one corner, filled with straw. Rory climbed in and pulled the straw over him. He was even hungrier when he woke up, but there were lots of seeds scattered round and juicy woodlice. This was a feast for a robin. There was even a big puddle to drink and to wash himself. Rory had food, shelter and something to watch. The farmyard was a busy place. He liked the shiny new tractor which made funny noises, putt, putt, roar. There were big horses that clanged their hooves on the frosty ground and cows that mooed. He tried to make the same sounds and so he began to sing. One day, when he sang, someone answered him!

"I'm over here!" He shouted.

A young female robin landed beside him. She was much prettier than his sister! Her feathers were glossier and she had a lovely voice.

"I'm Rhoda," she chirruped, "who are you?"

"Rory." he said.

"Do you live here? It's nice."

"Yes."

Rhoda flew round the hayloft.

"Do you live here alone?"

"Yes." Rory wanted to be clever and witty, but he could not say anything except "yes" and "no".

"It's lovely to have so much space!"

"It's lonely sometimes."

"Why?"

"There's no one to talk to."

"Lots of birds live close to you! I saw thrushes and jackdaws and magpies!"

"They don't come and talk to me."

"Why don't you go and talk to them?"
"I suppose I could." Rhoda heard the doubt in his voice.
"Have you always lived here?"
"No I used to live with my parents and my sister."
"What's your sister's name?"
"Rosie."
"I know her! Rosie told me her brother had been eaten by the cat!"
"I didn't get eaten. I flew here and I'm lost."
"Oh," said Rhoda, "your family were so upset!"
"They never looked for me!"
"They did! They found your feathers and blood. They will be so happy that you are safe." Rhoda smiled "Let's go and tell them!"
"I don't think we should do that."
"Why not?" Rory did not know what to say. He didn't want Rhoda to know he was a coward. Then Rhoda remembered something.
"Rosie said you couldn't fly well." Rory nodded.
"I keep thinking I might fall"
"I see," she said thoughtfully, "Can you fly from this beam to this bucket?"
"I've never tried."
"Why don't you try it now?" Rory flew.
"You did it!"
"I knew I could put my feet down if I wanted to."
"OK. Try from the pail to the windowsill." Rory managed that too.
He could fly six feet from the ground.
'I must get Rory home,' Rhoda thought. 'Maybe we can fly low enough so he can put his feet down.' Rhoda coaxed Rory into the barn and out of the door. It felt good to be flying with Rhoda.
"I'm really flying," Rory chirruped happily.
"Yes," she replied, "and you fly so gracefully too."
"Do I?" he asked in amazement.
"So many robins flutter and fuss but you sweep the air." Rory swelled with pride.
"You are so pretty," he thought and then he said it aloud.
"Thank you!" Rhoda said, "Look we're almost there!"
Rory could see the nest. It did not seem so high any more.
"Mama, I'm home!" He shouted.
"Who is it?" she exclaimed.
"It's me, Rory!" The next minute Mother Robin was hugging him.
"We thought you were dead! Everyone come here! Rory's home!"
His father arrived to hug him too.
"Where have you been, son?"
"In a hayloft."
"Why didn't you let us know you were all right?"
"I flew away but I didn't know the way home. Rhoda showed me." He smiled at her.
Rory and Rhoda built their own nest in the hayloft. Rory never had problems flying again. He never flew high but it was high enough to keep away from cats and it was Rhoda who taught their babies to fly.

THE END

THE NEW FLOWER

by Margaret Rayson

Long, long ago, dear children, when flowers were still being made and names given out, there was a very unpleasant old woman who lived in a cottage with a beautiful garden. But the flowers in it were very unhappy.

"I can't understand why you have to have so many thorns, Rose Bush," she'd complain, "you always make my fingers bleed when I try to pick you. And I know you do it on purpose."

Rose Bush had a very loving heart. She wouldn't hurt a soul, and spent a lot of her time providing homes for millions of insects, and breathing a beautiful perfume into the garden. But it made no difference; the old woman still hated her. Many a time Rose Bush sat in her part of the garden and cried. Hollyhock fared no better.

"And why do you grow so tall, I'd like to know?" the old woman would shrill. "I know you only do it to make me cross. I hate you too! You're tall, ugly, and what's more, you positively stink!" Poor Hollyhock did not think she stank. Perhaps her perfume was not as nice as Rose Bush's, but she always dressed in her prettiest colours, and did her best to bring beauty into her area of the garden. Hollyhock also was kind, and often sheltered the insects when it rained.

In the springtime the old woman would shout at the peonies.

"You think you're so pretty," she would sneer at them, "but look at the dreadful mess your petals make when they fall. You're disgusting!" And so she went on. Grumble, grumble, and grumble from dawn to dusk. If the garden were dry, she'd complain it was too dry, and if it rained, she'd yell at the poor inoffensive puddles. If she came across a spider's web, she'd shout so loud that the spider would run away and hide, shivering with fear until she went away again. Nothing was ever right for the old woman.

"It's no good," cried Rose Bush one day. "I really can't stand any more of her. We must get rid of her, she's making our lives so miserable."

"But what can we do," piped up little Daisy, who had been shouted at because she was so small. "How can we get rid of her?"

Just then it began to rain. The raindrops got bigger and bigger and came down faster and faster, and soon everywhere was covered in puddles. Then the sun came out and a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky. This seemed to infuriate the old woman even more and she stormed out of the cottage and shook her fist into the air.

"Even you make my life miserable," she shouted at the rainbow. "I hate you!" She turned to the flowers. "In fact I hate all of you," she said furiously, and with that she stormed up the path, slamming the cottage door behind her. The flowers couldn't believe their ears. How could anyone hate a rainbow?

Suddenly, something strange happened in the garden. The lovely colours of the rainbow drifted down to earth and filled the garden with a wonderful presence. A dove also flew into the garden and began to wash itself in the birdbath. Hearing the noise, the old woman stormed out.

"Just stop making all that mess," she shouted at the bird, but it took no notice and continued washing itself. On seeing the colours that filled the garden, she stopped short and a voice which seemed to come from the centre of them, said gently, "Tell me, why are you so unhappy?"

"Unhappy?" the old woman asked crossly, "Why should I be unhappy?"

"Only unhappy people are disagreeable and unkind. Happy folk laugh and are full of joy. Why are you so unhappy?" the voice repeated.

There was so much love and understanding in the voice that the old woman felt she was drowning in it, and to her surprise she broke down and cried.

"I hate the flowers because they are beautiful and I am so ugly," she replied. "Ever since I was a child people have been cruel about my looks. I'd love to be beautiful too, but everything around me seems to mock my ugliness, and makes me feel so wretched and unhappy."

"Instead of being an old lady," the voice said kindly, "would you too like to become a beautiful flower?"

"Is that possible?" asked the old woman, wiping away her tears.

"Of course it is," replied the voice.

"Then I'd love to be a flower," she said.

"I'll call you 'Antirrhinum,'" said the voice, "but remember if you are unkind again, you'll become known as 'Snap Dragon.'"

"I promise I'll be kind," said the old woman gratefully, and with that she disappeared and in her place grew the new flower.

Of course Antirrhinum did occasionally forget to be nice, and was sometimes even a little unpleasant, until of course the rest of the flowers reminded her of her possible nickname.

THE END

Elfink and the Baked Bean

By Oliver Eade

Elfink was a sad little elf who lived by himself at the back of a compost heap. His house was made from sticks and stones and stuff like potato peel that Mr McLean would dump there. He had no real friends, for the worms and slugs were always too busy looking for food to be bothered with him, and the big black birds that fed on the worms were too scary beyond words. He often wondered whether there was another elf somewhere on his compost heap, but the journey to the top would have taken too long, and one of those black birds would surely mistake him for an insect and gobble him up if he were to try and make it up there. For his own food, Elfink had to content himself with scraping around in the compost heap for things that Mr McLean had thrown away: bits of bread, apple cores, bacon rind...anything that took his fancy. A crust of toast could last him a good two weeks. And then he would think...if only I had a friend to share this with!

One morning he smelt something different as he searched for food. The smell came from a piece of bacon rind. Stuck to the bacon was something he'd never seen before. A baked bean! It smelt wonderful. It had a dollop of tomato ketchup on it, and the very sight of it made his little mouth water. He tied a rope around it and, using all his strength, dragged it round to his house at the back of the compost heap. He wasted no time. He tapped the baked bean with his knife, then dug into its soft flesh and stuffed handfuls of bean into his mouth. It was gorgeous! He'd never before tasted anything so delicious, and he couldn't understand why Mr McLean had thrown away a whole baked bean!

Quite soon his little tummy was ready to burst, and he sat down thinking what a pity it was there were no other elves with whom to share his prize. It wasn't long before he felt a strange rumbling in his bloated tummy. It was as though hundreds of bubbles were doing a dance in there, and they seemed to be getting bigger and bigger. He stood up to see if this might ease the feeling, but it only got worse. Just when he thought he would explode, a jet of pongy gas escaped from his bottom. It was a great relief, but a most extraordinary thing happened. He shot forwards, propelled by the emission of gas. When he came to a standstill, he was halfway across Mr McLean's lawn, and it took him the rest of the morning to get back to his compost heap.

That afternoon he had an idea, and the idea led to a plan – but first he would have to practice. He would eat handfuls of baked bean, wait for the rumbles, point himself in a particular direction, then...WHOOSH! Off he'd go! He soon got the hang of controlling the release of gas so that he could shoot forwards in little bursts, rather than end up across the garden again.

He was a bit tired from all that whizzing around to put his plan into action that evening, but the following day he was up bright and early, and ready for the big journey: to the top of the compost heap! And there was another thing. There was still a rather powerful smell around the place, and this seemed to be keeping the birds away. Just what he was hoping for! He stuffed as much baked bean flesh into his waist-pouch as he could, essential for the return journey, stood at the bottom of the compost heap looking up at its steep slope, and ate what he reckoned to be just the right amount of baked bean to get him to the top.

He waited...

A bubble began to move around inside him. Then another and another, and his tummy got bigger and bigger, and the bubbles started to dance around like crazy. He had eaten rather more baked bean this time, for he thought he'd need an extra boost to get him up the steep hill of the compost heap. His bottom had great difficulty holding on to the gas, but he felt it was really important not to let

it go too soon, or he'd only get half-way up the slope and would then have insufficient fuel for the return journey as well.

Just when his tummy was so bulging that he thought all his buttons would pop, or he might even go bang, he let the gas out. WHOOSH! Off he shot, up the slope, whizzing past the surprised worms and slugs. On and on...and up and up...he went. "WEEEEEE!" he exclaimed. It was the happiest moment of his otherwise rather dull little life. He flashed past huge bits of orange peel, mounds of rotting cabbage and old, dead flowers; past banana skins and grass from the lawn mower. And as he swept past these things the usual compost smells were replaced by a new and overpowering odour which caused the spiders to scuttle away in all directions!

Before reaching the summit he slowed down and then came to a halt right at the very top.

"Who are you?" someone asked.

The words came out funny because the pretty little lady elf standing there and staring at him was pinching her nose. For Elfink it was love at first sight! He'd never seen a lady elf before.

"It's the fuel, you know," he remarked, flapping his hand in front of his own nose.

"You didn't answer my question!"

"Oh...Elfink! My name's Elfink."

She smiled. He liked her smile.

"That's funny," she said.

"My name's Elfinka!"

"You live up here?" Elfink asked.

"Oh no! I live in the big house. Was looking for food in Mr McLean's waste bin when he decided to empty it."

"I arrived just in time, then! The birds might have got you."

"Birds?" Elfinka looked puzzled.

"Huge, scary, black things that fly and gobble up anything on the compost heap that moves. The smell of my fuel is keeping them away just now, but you'd better come with me."

"Where?"

"To my home down there. It's a great house, but it's missing something."

"What's that?"

Elfink was about to say 'a lady elf', but he blushed instead.

"You'll like it," he said, "Plenty of room for two elves. But we must hurry. There's a bit of a breeze up here, and once the smell of the fuel's gone the birds'll return. I'd better give you a piggy-back."

"What's that. Can I eat it?" Elfink laughed.

"Not exactly! You climb up onto my shoulders, I point myself down the slope, take three mouthfuls of baked bean fuel and then..."

"What then?"

Elfink paused, "We go sort of 'WEEEEEE', and in no time we're at the bottom of the compost heap."

"Will I have to hold my nose again?"

"Definitely!"

So Elfinka climbed onto Elfink's back and pinched her nose whilst he took another dose of baked bean. She giggled when his tummy began to make loud, rumbling sounds.

"Hold on tight," he warned after a little while, "Here we go!"

"WHOOSH...WEEEEEE!" Off they went, down the slope, at an amazing speed. Elfink realized they were going even faster because it was downhill. They overshot the bottom of the compost heap, and ended up sprawled out on the lawn. Elfinka was laughing, and Elfink thought her laughter was the nicest thing he'd ever heard. Both holding their noses, he took her to his little house at the back of the compost heap.

"What a mess!" Elfinka exclaimed on entering the house. Elfinka must have seen the look of disappointment on Elfink's face.

"It's okay," she said, smiling. "I'll soon have it nice and tidy for us."

Elfink liked the 'us' bit. And from then on he was no longer a sad little elf, but a happy little elf. His house became like a new house, always spotless, and before long the compost heap was alive with the sounds of excited baby elves. When Elfink suggested looking for another baked bean to make the compost heap a safer place by driving away the birds, Elfinka put her foot down!

"Don't you dare!" she said. "Once was enough for my poor nose!"

Luckily Mr McLean got himself a big black cat, for he too was in need of company. The elves were far too small to interest Sammy the cat, but whenever Sammy sat beside the compost heap the birds wouldn't venture anywhere near it. The cat made sure it was a safe place for the baby elves to play on. So Elfink never got to go 'WHOOSH...WEEEEEE!' again, but that didn't trouble him for he was just so pleased to have such a lovely elfin family!

THE END

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