

Tales From Here and There

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Abstract

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Tales From Here and There is a two part compilation that features fairy tales and poetics statements. The interconnected fairy tales provide the preliminary structure for a secondary fantasy world. They offer insight into the legends, history, values, and magic of that secondary fantasy world. The poetics statements describe the writing process I utilized and struggled with as I created the fairy tales. These statements particularly highlight the intersection of writing and faith. The poetics statements also reveal glimpses of my creative process as I attempt to construct a secondary fantasy world.

Index

Tales from Here and There

- 1- Abstract
- 3- The Legend of the Flower of Peace
- 5- The Converging Kingdoms
- 7- The Enslaved
- 8- The Bird
- 9- The Old Bag of Wind
- 12- The Story of Princess Grace
- 13- The Boy Who Lost His Voice
- 14- The Rock That Wanted to Move
- 15- The Happleboppers
- 17- The Immortal Prince
- 19- The Shadows
- 21- The Skipping Stones
- 24- The Accident
- 25- The Knight
- 26- The Three-Headed Giant
- 33- The Chain Boy
- 34- The Grasshopper Witch
- 36- The Little Bunny That Hopped Around His World
- 37- The Little Princess Who Fell Through a Square Hole
- 43- The Inn
- 54- The Sorcerer
- 57- The Cobblestone Road
- 68- The Final Passage
- 69- The Hummingbird Guide

A Personal Poetics

The Why And How of My Writing

- 70- Introduction
- 72- Part One: My Foundation of Faith
- 76-Part Two: Honest Oscillations
- 88- Part Three: From Fairy Tales to Fantasy
 - A Brief History Leading to Created Fairy Tales in a Secondary Fantasy World
- 100- Part Four: The Poetics of Tales from Here and There

The Legend of the Flower of Peace

Once upon a time many years ago a little yellow flower grew up in a gentle glade surrounded by a perilous forest. He blossomed into a lovely flower and followed the slanting rays of sunlight with his golden head day by day. As the little yellow flower followed the sun, he came to love the peaceful glade yet perceived the danger lurking in the forest shadows. The little yellow flower feared the shadows but knew not what to do. After all, he was but a little yellow flower.

Then one day an angry ant marched into the peaceful glade and maliciously chewed off a blade of grass. The angry ant then cursed the fleeing deer that wrecked his hill and attacked again. Again and again the angry ant marched on with rising anger flowing out as blade after blade after blade of dancing grass fell. The little yellow flower watched paralyzed in fear. Severed stalks glided down to earth. The dying grass rested upon the ground while the wind rippled through in lamentation. The little yellow flower finally saw this wanton destruction.

The angry ant marched toward yet another blade of grass the flower loved and the flower's heart moved his voice to call, "Peace! Be still ye ant and kill not that grass." The angry ant grumbled and cursed and threatened to chew down the flower. The little yellow flower shook in his roots. But the little yellow flower said, "Peace. Be still. Destroy no more." The angry ant cursed again. Then the angry ant turned away from the quivering grass and left the glade. The little yellow flower had spoken, and found his voice was strong.

Sometime later the little yellow flower spied a hawk circling above his glade. He looked and saw a mouse playing in the shade of nearby pinecones. Then he heard a shriek that froze the mouse and chilled his stem. But when the hawk dove to kill the mouse the flower cried again, "Peace! Be still ye hawk and kill not here." The hawk broke off her dive and landed at the top of

a barren tree. Her piercing eyes searched the glade. When she saw the defiant yellow flower staring back at her from the ground she went elsewhere to hunt her prey. The little yellow flower wilted in relief, then looked to the sun and found his gaze was strong.

So it was that the little yellow flower grew in stature if not in size. The little yellow flower was diligent, and the glade remained peaceful. Rumors spread throughout the dangerous forest about a magical glade. It emanated power and was filled with small golden flowers. Some creatures heard the rumors and sought out the sanctuary. Most malicious beasts feared the glade and avoided it ever after.

Converging Kingdoms

Once upon a time many years ago two worlds converged on an open plain when the sky met the earth in shuddering trepidation. Space aligned with space and time complied while swirling grey clouds illuminated the developing passageway. As it continued to form, the indistinct channel reached out of the ruptured sky like a tubeworm stretching toward the ocean's surface. Instead of a vacant mouth sucking in food an eerie door headed the forming passageway. It was looking for the only place it could solidify, and the king of the plain stood waiting as the wind whipped around him in protective fury.

Beneath the churning sky the king of the plain gathered his army in the somber light. He had seen this scene before. He knew why his forefathers sought to fully sever the passageway. He knew he could cross the threshold first. Most of all he knew too well the king of the other side. The passageway anchor itself to the bridgerock. The king of the plain watched the king on the other side paced back and forth behind the translucent door while ghostly soldiers stood in a single file line angling upward across the sky.

As the passageway solidified the veil separating the kingdoms grew increasingly thin. The king of the other side hurled insults through the translucent archway. The king of the plain heard him well but staunchly stood his ground. Passing through in pride was folly for surely his adversary was stronger on the other side. Instead he met the ire of the other king with a silent challenge tracking every single step. If he won the doorway duel he might master the passageway and seal it for eternity.

Stout soldiers stood behind the king of the plain in a sweeping arc of bristling steel facing the now transparent door. Most had never fought a battle with soldiers from the void. They had

bested trolls, defeated invasions, and slain dragons. Yet they quivered to see the veil recede and reveal the refracted forms of enemy soldiers stretching into the sky.

The door revealed its solid nature and the earthly king knew the duel was close. He could see the wooden planks held together by iron bars. The upper portion of the door had a small opening with iron lattice like a jailer's cell. The king on the other side looked through with a sinister smile.

The passageway ruptured like a breached dam. Soldiers from the other side leaped through the rift and seemingly grew half again as large. Giants nine and ten feet tall surged toward the king of the plain. He dispatched two in a flash and sliced open a third. Then a perpendicular thrust drove a blade through his chest and he sank beneath the swarm.

The king from the other side strolled through the solid door. He carefully stepped over his fallen troops until he reached the fallen king. He still smiled as he stooped down and claimed the royal crown.

The kingdom on the plain fell as rushing giants scattered stout bodies amidst the weeping grass.

The Enslaved

Once upon a time a wicked king enslaved his subjects and fettered them with iron chains. As time progressed, the subjects took pride in their chains. The ones with more chains boasted about their strength and some even collected particularly heavy chains. The ones with very few chains were mocked because, as everyone could see, they really didn't know much about carrying chains. After many years passed, the wicked king died and the new king sent out a royal decree releasing everyone from the chains. Many people rejoiced and had their chains removed. But others refused. They said the chains made them strong. Thus they kept their chains, and still proudly carry them wherever they go.

The Bird

There was once a bird who loved the movement of the trees and whistled whenever the wind blew. When the wind was soft the bird whistled softly and when the wind blew hard the bird whistled fervently. One blustery day another bird landed next to the whistling bird and asked, “Why are you whistling?”

The whistling bird replied, “I whistle so the trees will dance.”

The other bird said, “You silly bird. The wind makes the trees move. It has nothing to do with your whistling.”

Then the whistling bird created a stirring melody filled with the beauty of motion. The wind gusted and the trees swayed. The whistling bird turned and asked, “Are you quite sure?”

The Old Bag of Wind

Once there was a girl that never did anything right. Her mother told her to sweep the kitchen, but she never swept it right. Her father told her to clean out the barn, but she never cleaned it right. Her grandmother told her to hang up the wash, but she never hung it right. Her older sister told her to fold the clothes, but she never folded them right. And she was sad because she never did anything right.

After spilling the milk at breakfast one day, she left her house very sad. She wandered down the lonely path that lead to the little old lady who talked so much nobody ever visited her. When she got to the little old lady's house, the girl said, "I can never do anything right. I cannot sweep for my mother. I cannot clean for my father. I cannot hang up the wash for my grandmother. I cannot even fold clothes for my older sister. I cannot do anything right."

The little old lady and the girl talked and talked and talked. After talking together for a long time the little old lady wanted to help the girl so she said, "I have a present for you. It may not look pretty, but this old bag of wind will help you." With that the little old lady gave the girl a little old bag that looked like it had been tossed and tumbled through many fields. The girl took the bag and skipped home. She went to bed happy after talking to the little old lady all day but the next day she left the little old bag beneath her pillow and forgot all about it.

After breakfast the girl's mother told her to sweep the kitchen. She swept and she swept and she swept. Then her mother said, "You did not sweep right. Go help your father." Her father told her to clean out the barn. She cleaned and she cleaned and she cleaned. Then her father said, "You did not clean right. Go help your grandmother." Her grandmother told her to go hang up the wash. She hung and she hung and she hung. Then her grandmother said, "You did not hang up the wash right. Go help your older sister." Her older sister told her to fold the clothes. She

folded and folded and folded. Then her older sister said, “You did not fold the clothes right. Go talk to that silly old lady that talks too much.” So the girl went down the lonely path very sad because she did not do anything right.

When she got to the little old lady’s house, the girl said, “I can never do anything right. I cannot sweep for my mother. I cannot clean for my father. I cannot hang up the wash for my grandmother. I cannot even fold clothes for my older sister. I cannot do anything right.” She wanted to talk and talk and talk to the little old lady, but the little old lady said, “You silly girl. What happened to that old bag of wind?” Then the girl remembered the old bag of wind beneath her pillow and was sad that she had forgotten it. The little old lady told her to stop being silly and then sent her off saying, “Remember the old bag of wind.”

The next morning the girl tied the old bag of wind at her side and went to breakfast. After breakfast her mother told her to sweep. When her mother left, she swept and swept and swept, but the floor was still dirty. So she opened her old bag of wind and out rushed the roaring wind that swept the floor with pleasure. The girl was so happy that she went to her father. Her father told her to clean the barn. When he left she cleaned and she cleaned until she opened the old bag of wind and out sped the cleansing wind that blew away old straw with satisfaction. The girl was very happy and went to her grandmother. Her grandmother told her to hang up the wash. She hung up the wash until her grandmother left. Then she opened the old bag of wind. Out blew the whistling wind that flapped the wash dry with a smile. The girl was joyful and went to her older sister. Her older sister told her to fold the clothes. She opened the old bag of wind and started folding the clothes. Out breathed the gentle wind that folded the clothes with a loving caress.

The girl was very joyful. Every day she ran down to see the old lady who talked so much nobody ever visited her. They talked and they talked and they talked until one day the old lady

said she had to stop talking and go somewhere. She told the girl to let loose the old bag of wind. The girl untied the old bag of wind. Out poured the consuming wind that carried away the little old lady. She was never seen again but the girl always hoped to find her.

The Story of Princess Hope

Once upon a time a small kingdom descended into chaos while the king and queen slowly succumbed to sickness. Ogres and trolls assaulted the outer borders while wraiths boldly haunted the waking world. Greedy men rose in power and injustice raged unchecked. Yet in the midst of this descent rumors of hope spread throughout the kingdom. For in her fragile state the queen conceived and after months of anticipation the people rejoiced at the birth of a child.

Yet death followed life and celebrations mixed with mourning. The king was dead. Many said he had clung to life in this realm with an intense ferocity for the sake of his child. After all, the most learned healers of the kingdom expected the king to die months before yet each day he suffered the pain of existence so that he might bless his child face to face.

So it was that when the day finally arrived both parents endured its agony with the expectation of delivery. When the queen's labor was complete so too was the king's. He took the child in his hands and spoke a powerful blessing over her life naming her Hope, savior of her people. When the small princess slept for the first time, the king kissed her, passed her to his wife, and then looked into his final passage with peace. The queen soon followed her king, but not before completing their arrangements for Princess Hope, the hope of her people.

But the people never saw Princess Hope for she vanished when the castle fell. Some of the ones who escaped said fairies flew her away before the castle was overrun. Others said she must be dead, for the assailants slew everyone they found. So it was that most of the people thought Princess Hope was dead while some still looked to her for eventual relief. But weeks became months and months brought years and years rolled into decades until her story became a children's tale and, if someone had a foolish dream, another might say without really knowing why, "Don't wait for Hope."

The Boy Who Lost his Voice

Once upon a time there was a boy who lost his voice. All the people around him thought he was sick because he couldn't talk. Yet the truth of the matter is that he simply lost his voice. He wasn't sure where he left it. He might have left it outside in the cool evening breeze. He may have left it underneath a tree. He looked up in the cupboards and down in the cellar. He looked and he looked and he looked but he could never find the voice he lost. Then one day his voice found him, and both were glad to be together again.

The Rock That Wanted To Move

Once upon a time a rock wanted to move. But it couldn't move because it was a rock. Then one day a lonely boy walked by and saw the rock that wanted to move. He kicked it further down the forest path. The rolling rock loved the clicking clacking freedom of dizzying motion. It stopped. Then it was once again a rock that wanted to move. The amused boy came and kicked the rock further down the forest path. The spinning rock again enjoyed the clicking clacking freedom of dizzying motion. It stopped. Then it was once again a rock that wanted to move. The happy boy came and kicked the rock further down the forest path. The jumping rock loved the rumbling tumbling freedom of dizzying motion until SMACK! It hit a bigger rock and chipped. Then it was a rock wondering if it really wanted to move.

The worried boy came and picked up his kicking rock. He looked at the broken end with curiosity. Then he put the special rock in his pocket. The rock that wanted to move loved the gentle walk home. Then it sat on a shelf for many years and was once again a rock that wanted to move.

The Happleboppers

Once upon a time vengeful sprite guided a gangle of happleboppers into the forest. She knew, given the tendencies and magic of their kind, that the happleboppers were sure to bother that smug young sorcerer who thought he knew so much. And there he was, flouncing through the forest tossing that perfect lucky diamond back and forth between his cruel hands. The happleboppers were genius. He didn't notice their silent formation. He wouldn't like their game.

The young sorcerer whistled merrily and tossed his newest magical treasure high enough to catch a lingering shaft of sunlight. He admired his indestructible luck until...

WHACK!

The magical diamond flew skyward while rowdy hooting mocking laughter cheered the game's first whack.

Happleboppers rushed by faster than a falling rock in bouncing rolling swinging jumping acrobatic harmony.

WHACK! The diamond rose above the forest canopy.

The young sorcerer shouted and sprinted after the lucky diamond.

WHACK! WHACK!

The resounding sound of each successive hit rose above the gleeful laughter.

WHACK! WHACK! WHACK!

The happleboppers settled into a steady rhythm.

WHACK!

WHACK!

WHACK!

WHACK!

WHACK!

The young sorcerer conceded defeat and kicked a rock angrily. It clattered into the undergrowth and disappeared. His chest heaved. That's when the vengeful sprite flew by and stuck out her tongue.

The Immortal Prince

Once upon a time there was a prince who was pleased with life because he had everything his heart desired. He feasted with friends, defeated dragons, and loved liberally. One day he was riding through the forest and saved a young sorcerer from a terrifying wraith. The young sorcerer rashly promised to give the prince any one magical gift the prince desired.

The prince, already possessing all his heart desired, asked for magic to make himself immortal. The sorcerer begged him to choose something else, but the prince, who could see no wisdom but his own, steadfastly refused. He declared “My life lacks nothing save more time to enjoy it. Now fulfill your oath and give me magic that bestows immortality!”

“Had you asked for immortal life, I could not have granted your wish. But since you ask for naught but immortality, then I am honor bound to tell you secrets best left dead.”

The sorcerer then gave the prince secret spells and told the prince about a spring at the top of a mountain. Having fulfilled his oath, the sorcerer once again tried to dissuade the prince.

“The spring shall give immortality, but it grants no life. Forget my words and live on.”

The prince replied, “I shall do exactly as you say, and live forever.” Then he raced to the mountain and found the immortal spring that always flowed. There he performed the spells and drank deeply.

Then the immortal prince returned home and continued as before. He routed enemies and slew giants. He loved princesses and feasted heartily. He won the hearts of the people and, if he aged at all, it was but a slow drip of water compared to the rushing torrent of life flowing by. Soon all that he knew as a child lay centuries behind him and the feats of youth no longer satisfied. Years seemed like endless days as dark winters rose into spring before summer waned into autumnal twilight. He took to standing by the spring at the top of the mountain for years on

end. Then, one day, he grew weary and lay down to watch the stars. He arose from time to time to drink. Then he rose no more but placed his mouth at the edge of the spring. He breathed deeply in his immortal slumber and slowly turned into a rock with gnarled limbs sprouting from his sides. He sleeps there until this day waiting to wake and finally depart at the end of the world.

The Shadows

Now there are shadows and there are shadows, if you know what I mean. There are some shadows that gambol about in the light of the sun reveling in the joy between existence and extinction. Then there are the shadows that lurk in the dark corners of the world and haunt even the stoutest hearts. And, as is the case in all types of beings, there are those shadows that hover somewhere between the two by mostly keeping to themselves and going about their work with little joy and less gratification. But enough of such a broad description of shadows for this story is about one of the more malevolent sort.

Once upon a time a shadow attached itself to an aspiring youth. I say attached itself because, as we all know, shadows have not their own volition but must rely upon the movement of others. Thus shadows, if they desire a change of scenery or different sort of life than the one they currently lead, must hop from shadow to shadow in a mad dash of hop scotch. If they succeed they choose where to go. If they fail, they return to the Shadowland of their birth and await the summons of coming light. While youthful shadows prefer this game and, in fact, find it great fun to see whither such games lead, older shadows have a tendency to settle down with the passing of time. These older shadows find a sense of peace and serenity in their daily routine and therefore take great pleasure in waxing and waning upon the same ground day after day with only minor variations. But now for our story.

Once upon a time an aspiring knight took a midnight stroll in the castle courtyard. He had just passed the blacksmith's door when he heard the gruff voice of his captain and froze like a spotted rabbit. Creaking hinges told the young knight it was past time to melt into the shadows. He stepped quickly and quietly along the inner wall before vaulting the short gate leading into

the empty stables. Moonlight illuminated the stones on the back wall, so he hunkered down against the rough wooden gate.

The two men who walked out of the storeroom didn't see him. They were too busy locking the iron door. But the captain's shadow saw the young knight. He hadn't followed another for quite some time and his current project was dull. By the time the lock clicked, the shadow had hopped and jumped his way into the stables. The shadow slunk behind the young knight and listened with him as the captain spoke.

"Not that it really matters what we do."

"I know that and you know that, but it's these new blokes that don't know that. Grub and gold 's the same no matter what. No reason for 'em to show me up." The second voice belonged to a knight who looked like a forgotten barrel.

The captain answered quietly. "They'll settle. Just wait until they face a real dragon. Training's fun. But a dragon? They'll see it like us soon enough. Except the stupid ones that get all caught up in nobility. If they don't die on their own we might have to help them."

The forgotten barrel belched like he was filled with too much wine. "I want to help that cocky whelp first. Using all those fancy words like he's nobility. What'd he call you again?"

The gruff voice rasped a single word. "Mediocre."

The young knight heard them walk on in silence. He counted to three hundred before moving. When he finally got up, a new shadow followed him with twisted pleasure.

The malevolent shadow played many cruel games and put many things in the back of the young knight's mind, but his favorite stroke was whispering, "Does it really matter?"

The Skipping Stones

Once upon a time there was a lake deep in the forest filled with clear, deep water and unfathomed mysteries. On the shore, Calla walked to and fro collecting the prettiest, smoothest stones she could find. On a fallen log sticking into the lake, Arden kept glancing at Calla while he pretended to fish. He had his line tied around a stick but the empty hook in the water proved his head was lost in dreams. And so the day may have passed like many before except today a small glimmering fish bit the hook. Arden instinctively jerked the line and the small glimmering fish leapt out of the water. Then it flipped and flopped and wriggled on the hook. Arden placed one hand firmly around the fish's smooth coat of scales.

"Don't worry, little fish. Just hold still and I'll pull that hook out of your mouth and toss you back in."

The fish squirmed even harder.

"Now, if you don't hold still, I can't get out that hook."

The shimmering fish redoubled its efforts and Arden wobbled on the log. That's when he looked down. Three large eels circled below.

"So that's why you took my hook, is it? Had to escape the eels and now you don't want to go back in." The shimmering fish relaxed and went still.

"Well we'll give 'em the slip. I don't fancy they can walk on land, and if I give you a drink you'll do just fine for a bit. But we've got to get out that hook."

Arden carefully walked along the log toward rocky shore. The eels followed. Then He jumped off the log and onto the beach where he lowered the panting fish into the water's edge. There Arden gently removed the hook from the lower lip. The gills worked frantically but although Arden held it loosely, the little shimmering fish made no effort to swim away.

“Still afraid of those eels, eh? Well why don’t I show you off to a friend and then we’ll see if you’re ready to swim away.”

Calla saw Arden coming toward her along the shore. His gangly frame kept stooping down at the water’s edge, but she couldn’t see what he was holding. He was handsome but always got nervous around her. She started the conversation so he wouldn’t have to.

“What do you have there, Arden?”

“Just a little fish. She nabbed my hook all by herself because three big eels were trying to make lunch out of her. I thought I’d show her to you and then see if she wants to go.”

“She does look like a sweet fish, but that poor lip of hers. It’s bleeding.”

Calla stroked the fish’s glittering back.

“How do you know it’s a she? Is it the special markings that glimmer in the sunlight?”

“To tell you the truth I’ve never really seen a fish like her before, and I’ve been fishing at this lake for over fifteen years. I’m not sure how I know she is a she, but she is.”

“Oh. Well, should we see if she is ready to swim away yet?”

Arden knelt down next to the water once again. He held the small glimmering fish loosely, and she shot forward into the depths.

With the fish gone, Arden realized he didn’t really have anything to focus on except Calla. So he made small talk.

“So, did you see any ogres today?”

Calla shook her head. “No, but I think a harp is back in the hollow.”

“Yeah, I guess we’ll have to drive her out sooner or later.”

Arden didn't know what else to say. The sun brought little droplets of sweat to the back of his neck. Another reason brought them to his forehead. He looked for something to fidget with and saw a smooth skipping stone. He picked it and skipped it across the reflective lake. Fifteen little ringlets expanded into existence.

The little shimmering fish leapt from the center of the final ring. As water drops fell toward the lake, her body transformed. Fluttering fins turned into hands and the flipper morphed into two strong legs running across the water. Her shimmering scales became a sparkling flowing dress of foam streaming out behind her. Red blood trickled down her terrified face. Her bubbly voice lashed out in fear.

“RUN! You opened it! RUN!”

The lake behind her churned into a void of wreathing waters.

Arden grabbed Calla's hand. They fled as a drowning voice yelled one last time “RUN!”

The Accident

There was once a boy who grew into an older boy who then became a young man. He had a friend who grew up too. Then there was an accident. His friend died. The young man grew into a man who then became an older man. He often shared about losing a friend in an accident. It wrecked his life. He rarely shared that his friend was a girl who grew into an older girl who became a young woman that never grew older. He never shared that he loves her still.

The Knight

Once upon a time there was a knight who worked hard to become an excellent knight. He trained for hours on end with pleasure and hardened his muscles while honing his skills.

Although he was never the best knight in the land, he was more than adequate with all the knightly ways. Jousting, swordplay, horsemanship, diplomacy, courteous speech, and bravery were his. But then, with the slow progression of time, he fell flat. He no longer wielded his blade. His training all but ceased and only continued in sporadic spurts. He was no longer a skilled knight in truth. Only in memory. He wondered what to do.

The Three-headed Giant

Once upon a time a three-headed giant invaded a kingdom filled with mediocre knights. These lackluster knights enjoyed the privileges of their knightly positions much more than the daring adventures customary to their post. They sat around eating food and, occasionally, riding out for public appearances. At times they even cared enough to chase away small dragons, but only if the village was known for its generosity. Thus, when rumors of a three-headed giant ravaging villages near the old forest reached the king's court, all the knights quickly left for the northern plains on a very noble and prestigious golden roestarlope hunt before any such rumors were formally confirmed.

However survivors and messengers continued trickling into the king's city. There certainly was a three-headed giant living deep in the old forest, and he followed an ever widening trail of decimation into the countryside. He carried an enormous burlap sack over his back, and when he came to a village he destroyed it for pure pleasure. While he stomped on houses and tore up trees, he allowed victims to get away. But escape only lasted a moment. Two heads watched where people ran and decided which to chase while the third continued destroying. Then, when naught but rubble and smoke remained, the three-headed giant gave chase. He possessed surprising speed, and as he overtook the fleeing victims he tossed men, women, children, and animals into his sack. He preferred his food fresh, and never killed anything until suppertime. That's why the sack was always moving as the three-headed giant walked back into the old forest casually knocking down tree after tree.

Now the aging king, fearing the increasing loss of property and income less than the rising rumors of rebellion, decided his sons could easily replace the hunting knights. After all he figured the three-headed giant, who obviously had to travel further and further each day to satiate

his appetite, would soon wander into some other kingdom. People always said the old forest touched upon many lands. In the meantime he had more than enough sons given his many wives, and sending them one by one into the forest bought more time than sending in the lot of them. Besides, the tears of a grieving father were quite powerful in the public eye and one of the scoundrels might even get lucky and kill the brute.

Thus he summoned his many sons and, appealing to their princely nobility and the plight of the people, asked if any of them was brave enough to take on a quest to kill the three-headed giant. When, as he expected, none stepped forward the king berated them for their cowardly conduct and demanded an individual explanation starting with the oldest. Now the older princes, knowing the craftiness of their king, were well prepared for the question.

The oldest son gave an eloquent speech grieving the failing line of successors and lamenting the limp he earned fighting off a dragon many years ago. In the end he congratulated the second oldest son for his able body and expert swordsmanship.

The second oldest brother thanked the oldest brother for his compliments, but then pointed out that a sword alone is quite useless against a giant for everyone knows giant skin is hard as stone and can only be pierced with an enchanted blade. And, alas, even though he owns such a blade he lent it to a departing knight in a rash moment of fidelity. But, as they all knew, the third in line for the throne was an excellent archer and the armory still contained some enchanted arrows.

Well the third oldest brother offered his thanks and then said he'd need a battalion of archers because everyone knows that a single arrow into a giant is akin to a biting fly pestering a horse. He then in turn had an excellent reason why the next younger brother was really the one for the job and so it went until the second youngest prince concluded by cursing his allergies.

The youngest prince tried to explain why his cousin the young duke should really go to face the three-headed giant, but the king refused to send a boy who still rode a pony. Then the king, along with all the other princes, berated the youngest prince for the impertinence of trying to send a child to do a man's work. So the youngest son was stuck with the disagreeable task, and that afternoon royal messengers rode throughout the kingdom declaring that the young prince would ride forth tomorrow in pursuit of the ravaging fiend. That night the court made its usual preparations for the customary fanfare and the second youngest son hastily left to join the knights just in case the youngest prince died faster than expected.

The next morning the youngest prince left the king's castle in the midst of a royal procession led by the three oldest brothers. They each carried their weapons and, as they journeyed toward the old forest, each brother made sure the youngest prince knew they'd kill him if he tried to escape. Distraught villagers joined the procession along the way and gave the latest report. The three-headed had raided yet another village that morning and roasted an entire herd of cows over the wreckage. The three-headed giant had also captured a kind family and thrown them into his bag with every intention of eating them for dinner. The youngest prince greeted this news with a smile since the fiend was probably deep in the forest preparing his meal.

When they reached the old forest that afternoon, not even the youngest prince could pretend to miss the swath of broken and upturned trees that gave testimony to reckless destruction. The rest of the forest remained its usual self. Although the edges themselves were often explored by daring youth, the forest itself remained a mystery. The only certain thing about it was the path of the three-headed giant. Seeing a better chance of escape within the forest rather than without, the youngest prince spurned his jailors and proudly walked into the path of destruction as the villagers cheered his noble pretense.

As soon as he walked up and over the small rise at the edge of the forest, the youngest prince looked for a place to veer off the path of dislodged trees. He meant to hide himself and then emerge a week later looking dirty and hungry with a sorrowful tale of arriving too late at the three-headed giant's cave. However the youngest prince experienced the prevalent misfortune of inopportune timing. He had followed a path to the right which, as the forest paths were, turned out to be nothing more than a confusing series of twists and turns. He soon stumbled into the edge of the swath of destruction and, as chance would have it, in clear sight of six eyes he never wanted to see. For the three-headed giant happened to be hungrier than usual and had turned back to find dessert. The youngest prince was plump enough, and he soon sat smooshed in the burlap bag along with the peasants he never intended to save.

The three-headed giant thought the princeling rounded out his meal nicely since the villagers seemed a bit stringy, so he turned around to go make his dinner. Along the way he snapped trees in half and picked up large boulders to hurl through the forest. His favorite game was trying to hit any animal that might not know the giant was nearby. However, he could no longer play because all the forest animals, even the wicked ones, knew to stay away from the treacherous path of the three-headed giant. Thus he picked up a broken tree and swung it like a club until it snapped in half again on another tree.

Now the three-headed giant, having walked much more than he normally did because of his indecision about dessert, decided to lay down on a comfortable bit of boulders to take a nap before making dinner. After all, with three mouths to feed he could never really decide what he wanted to eat and sometimes it lead to arguments about how he should cook his dinner. But, as everyone knows, when you wake up after a long afternoon nap and are very hungry, everything sounds good.

Soon the peasants heard the awful sound of a three-headed giant snoring. They tried to get through the big giant sack. Some of the stronger men tried to open the top, and they all tried to cut through the sack with whatever they could find. But none of their knives were sharp enough because, of course, the three-headed giant had spent a good deal of money to buy an enchanted sack. After all, these were not the first peasants he'd captured and stuffed into a sack for dinner. He was tired of the little creatures scampering out after pulling out the scissors they really shouldn't have. Thus he'd done a few favors for a nasty witch to get the large sack and then paid lots of blood gold to a crooked wizard who performed the basic enchantments that stopped most ordinary blades from cutting the fabric.

Luckily for the prince, he always carried a small and thin enchanted back stabbing dagger tucked away between his shoulder blades. He'd drawn it more than once given his living circumstances, but the prince had never tested it fully. It was supposedly enchanted in such a way that no one could ever stab him in the back. What's more, the blade would always find its mark if he used it to stab someone's back. Whether it actually worked like that or not, the prince didn't know. Yet all his brother's knew the blade always stayed in the special sheath sewn beneath the back of the youngest prince's collar. And it was certainly enchanted beyond ordinary blades because it sliced through the fabric with the ease of a chicken walking across the road.

Now the prince, realizing that the peasants would surely follow him if he snuck out, told them all his true identity. He then told them that he would slip away and find some nearby help (being a prince he knew this forest like the back of his hand and would quickly find some reinforcements). The peasants didn't like his plan, but they agreed that the three-headed giant would likely wake up if they all tried to move about. So the prince made his escape and, with every intention to leave the peasants, crept toward the edge of the cave. That's when one of the

giant heads started laughing. For, as everyone knows, it is very difficult to sleep when a giant snores, and the last head to fall asleep rarely actually falls asleep. This head was hungry and had watched the bag all along. He really enjoyed seeing those little people squirm around and when he saw the prince emerge he was hoping the little idiot would try something heroic. After all, it was amusing to watch one of his brother's get stabbed in the neck. Instead, the little princeling was trying to run away. He knew the look of a coward. So he laughed, and it was an ugly rumbling laugh that, of course woke up his brothers. The giant sprang forward at an alarming rate and grabbed his escaping dessert. The giant decided life was too short to always eat dessert after dinner and took an arm and a leg in each thumb. He rumbled in pleasure and pulled slowly as the prince screamed.

Now this tale would have ended much differently if a mysterious sorcerer who lived in the forest had let the prince get what he deserved. As it was, the mysterious cloaked sorcerer emerged from the back of the cave. He had two swords hanging by his side and a bow on his back but used none of them. Instead he struck the side of the cave with his staff yelling some strange command. Stalactites fell from the ceiling while stalagmites shot up from the ground. The giant knew his real concern and tossed the screaming food on a ledge while dust filled the cavern.

The giant couldn't see his assailant, but he could certainly smell his courage. Then the giant heard the sound of pebbles scattering at his feet. Suddenly birds swarmed his head while tearing beaks and ripping claws raked his face. The giant swatted at the birds then screamed as two swords sliced off his big toes with a fluid strike. The giant crashed into the cavern floor and, in a moment of bravery, the discarded prince choose to enter the fray. The prince jumped onto

the giant's back and stabbed him with his enchanted blade which made swift and silent work. The giant was dead without a departing cry.

As the dust settled, the prince saw the mysterious sorcerer remove a necklace from the fallen foe. It had a strange pendant attached to a dark piece of rock filled with stormy ire. Then the mysterious sorcerer wiped his blades upon the giant's cloak. He strode over to the blood-covered prince and grabbed the prince's arm. The sorcerer whispered quickly, "I would have preferred sending him back from whence he came, but your strike was made in the midst of declared combat. Should that blade ever strike in the cowardly quiet it's forger intended, then I hear and now curse it. It will rebound upon the traitor and strike with doubled ferocity. Now listen closely for you owe me a life vow."

The peasants emerged from the slashed sack and saw the bloody prince held hostage by the mysterious sorcerer. They didn't hear what the mysterious sorcerer said and none of them fully agreed with what they'd heard during the battle. But every one of them saw the cloaked sorcerer stride off into the forest. Thus the tale of the giant's death spread far and wide with varying accounts. And although the youngest prince tried to change the tale from that day forth, it always ended with a mysterious sorcerer vanishing into the forest to thwart all evil and save the world from reckless hate.

The Chain Boy

Once upon a time a boy was born in chains. He never liked their sound. The constant rattle annoyed him and his knees buckled under their heavy load. He asked his family why he had to carry chains everywhere, but they just told him to toughen up. Then they held up the chains they carried and said he'd get used to it. He did the best he could, but he never liked the chains like his older brothers.

Then one day when he was older the chains fell off. He left them on the ground and went off to find his fortune.

The Grasshopper Witch

Once upon a time there was a wicked and ugly two-bit witch who particularly despised princesses. She had no real ambitions in life apart from her vindictive pleasures and, as such, journeyed far and wide looking for princesses to harass. After all, she could only bother one princess for so long before some meddlesome knight or noble peasant decided to do something. And that was only for the princesses who didn't quickly take matters into their own hands. The wicked and ugly two-bit witch really disliked those princesses.

Over the years the witch became very good at harassing princesses. Her favorite trick was to feign a dreadful injury on the side of the forest road. She'd moan and wail and clutch her right knee with a jousting's grip whenever she heard light royal hoofbeats approaching. Then she cursed any princess who stopped to help for being presumptuous and jinxed every princess that rode past for being impertinent. But whenever a particularly beautiful princess came by the witch used her best worst magic. She turned them into grasshoppers and put them in an unbreakable magic jar which stank from all the dead grass and molted grasshopper skins stuffed inside.

One day the witch heard a royal horse upon the forest road and started her usual act. She wailed and she moaned and she clutched her right knee. A princess from a distant kingdom reigned in her horse with difficulty. She was beautiful. She was so beautiful that the diamond on her forehead sparkled less than her eyes.

She was so beautiful that the witch didn't even draw it out. As soon as the princess reached down to help, the wicked, ugly witch grabbed her wrist with a python's strength. The princess struggled but the witch struck her with an emerald necklace and screamed with all her hatred, "GRASSHOPPER!" Then it was over. The princess seemingly vanished and the cackling witch scooped a grasshopper into her unbreakable magic jar.

The Little Bunny that Hopped Around His World

Once upon a time a little bunny lived in a little world. His world was so small that he could hop all the way around it and be home in time for dinner if he kept hopping in a straight line. In fact, he loved hopping all the way around his world and had many favorite paths. Then one day he went outside to hop around his world in a different direction.

Mother Rabbit said, “Keep hopping straight forward and be sure to make it home in time for dinner.”

The little bunny said, “I’ll hop and I’ll hop and I’ll hop straight on until I’m home.”

The little bunny started hopping in the new direction. He hopped through a forest and he hopped through a meadow. He hopped over a creek and he hopped under a bush. Then he saw a colorful rock off to the right and forgot all about hopping in a straight line. He hopped towards it. If he tilted his head to the left and closed one eye, the colorful rock looked like his neighbor the Peacock. She wasn’t very nice. He hopped away from the rock.

Then he saw a frog. The little bunny liked frogs so he hopped closer. The frog was scared of little bunnies so he hopped away. Then the little bunny hopped closer. The frog hopped away. The little bunny liked to play so he hopped faster. The frog was very scared so he hopped and hopped and hopped while the little bunny hopped and hopped and hopped until Plop! The frog jumped into a pond. The frog climbed onto a lily pad and smiled. Then he caught a fly.

The little bunny thought about dinner. He had to get home! The little bunny hopped and he hopped and he hopped. But the more he hopped, the farther away he got from home. Finally, the little bunny admitted he was lost. He started to cry. That’s when a hummingbird zipped right in front of his nose. The little bunny was very relieved because he knew the hummingbird would

lead him home. So it was that they zigged and they zagged all the way home. But the little bunny was late for dinner and he didn't get to eat dessert.

The Little Princess Who Fell Through the Square Hole in the Courtyard

Once upon a time, a little girl as small as a leaf found a square hole left by a large overturned pavement stone in her courtyard. She squatted down next to the hole and saw a tiny world way down below. She looked and she looked and she looked until she leaned a bit too far and tumbled down like a raindrop going over a waterfall.

The problem was not that she fell. She often lost gravity's game. But most falls at her tender age are shorter than a bald man's hair. The problem with falling into the square hole left by the large overturned pavement stone was that she kept falling and falling and falling as the miniscule world grew and grew and grew. She flapped her arms like a fledgling bird until a motherly wind took pity upon her mistaken flight and gently carried her to the ground. The little girl breathed the air of the humming country and fell into a deep enchanted sleep.

Now there was a boy playing back in the courtyard who was bigger than a leaf but shorter than a stick. He was skinnier than a tree trunk but rounder than a branch. He watched the little girl fall into the hole and expected to hear her cry. He heard nothing and was curious because the only little girl he knew was his baby sister and she always cried. So he went over to the square hole in the courtyard left by the large overturned pavement stone. He expected to see one of those dark, damp dirty things filled with squiggly worms and crawling bugs. But this hole was quite different. It was a square hole of blue light with little bits of fluffy clouds playing above circling birds and bumpy hills far below. He looked around for help but the courtyard was strangely empty. So he did the only sensible thing a small boy in his situation could do. He jumped into the square hole left by the large overturned pavement stone.

While he was falling and falling and falling a playful cloud caught up to him.

“Why are you falling?” the cloud asked.

“I jumped through the square hole to save the little girl,” the small boy replied.

“That is a good reason to fall” said the cloud. “But how will you land?”

“I don’t know,” said the boy. “But I’m sure it will work out somehow.”

“I will help.” said the cloud, for the cloud was fond of playing catch.

The cloud turned into pelting rain and raced ahead of the small boy as he fell and he fell and he fell. Then a dense fog caught the boy and placed him down upon the soggy ground.

“Goodbye!” said the cloud.

“Thanks for catching me!” said the boy.

The sun came out and soon the cloud was once again playing high above.

“I wonder where the little girl went,” said the boy.

“Who?” said an owl.

“Aren’t you supposed to be sleeping?” said the boy.

“In the middle of the day? Nonsense.” said the owl. “Do you sleep in the middle of the day?”

“Sometimes.” said the boy. “But not all the time.”

“Well, that explains it.” said the owl. “I saw a little girl sleeping in the middle of the day. I thought it was very strange but if you sometimes sleep in the middle of the day you must be looking for her.”

“I am looking for her!” said the little boy. “How do I find her?”

“She is sleeping in the flower meadow across the rushing river. Can you fly?” asked the owl.

“I can fall,” said the boy.

“Well you can’t get there by falling” said the owl. “Go and talk with the robin.”

The small boy walked over to a round tree with pointy green leaves. A soft nest perched between two branches. Three baby robins played hide and seek while the mother robin swayed on a slender branch singing gentle lullabies.

“Hello,” said the boy.

“Hello sweetie,” said the robin.

“Can you help me find the little girl who fell through the square hole?” said the boy.

“Of course, dearie,” said the robin.

Then she sang. She sang a lovely little tune that caught the sound of spring and soon the small boy was a small sound dancing upon the wind. He danced to the robin’s song, and as a gentle breeze carried him across the rushing river, he turned and called, “Thank you, Mrs. Robin!”

“You’re welcome, dearie,” said Mrs. Robin.

The gentle breeze placed him near the enchanted little girl who slept surrounded by flowers. He ran through the flower meadow as a small sound with a spring in his step.

“Wake up.” said the small sound (who was actually the small boy).

The little girl stirred in her sleep, but she was still enchanted and even snored.

The small sound (who was actually the small boy) thought and thought and thought.

“I must have to break the spell,” he said. So he sang the wake-up song his grandmother always sang to him when he spent the night. “It’s time to get up, it’s time to get up, it’s time to get up, it’s moorrrn-ing.”

“Who said that?” A colorful rooster landed next to the sleeping girl. His feathers shimmered in the light between red and green and brown and grey. “It’s not morning and I should know.”

“I said that.”

Now the rooster could not see the small sound (who was actually the small boy) resting by her ear. So the rooster decided the little girl was talking with her eyes closed. Roosters think it is very rude to talk with your eyes closed.

The rooster scolded the girl, “I have never met such a rude little girl. Sleeping in the middle of the day and talking with your eyes closed. Humph! I shouldn’t tell you, but I’m a fine rooster so I will. There is an ugly wicked witch nearby and I’ll bet she wants to turn you into a grasshopper with crazy eyes and little pinchers for a nose.” Then the rooster turned around and started preening his feathers.

“Oh no!” gasped the small sound (who was actually the small boy). “We have to wake her up!”

Now the rooster was even more confused because he could only see the sleeping girl and now she wasn’t even making sense when she talked with her eyes closed. “I don’t know why the wind pointed me in this direction!” the rooster stormed.

The owl landed nearby. “Perhaps the wind directed you here because we need a bit of your magic to break the spell. After all, you’re very good at waking people up.”

“But I don’t want to break the spell,” said the rooster, “She hasn’t looked at me the entire time we’ve been talking and she says it’s morning in the middle of the day. She is such a rude little princess and I don’t think I want to help her.”

The owl hopped up and down in irritation. “Who do you think you are to pick and choose who to help? All you need to do is crow and she’ll wake up.”

“Preposterous.” said the rooster. “No one hears a rooster’s crow in the middle of the day.”

“Then I’ll do it!” volunteered the small sound (who was really the small boy). And with that he tried to crow like a rooster.

“Cock-a-deedle-dee!”

“Cock-a-diddle-dum?”

“Cock-a-doodle-dop!”

“Dock-a-coodle-coo?”

The rooster couldn’t take it anymore.

“You’ve got it all wrong!” he bellowed. “It’s COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!!!”

The little girl sat up.

“Hello everybody” she said.

Just then a white cat with black boots and blue eyes walked over. “Why does the rooster think it’s morning?” the cat asked. The rooster was too frustrated to speak.

“He was waking up the little princesses who fell through the square hole in the courtyard” said the small sound (who, as we all know, was actually the small boy).

“Well,” said the cat as she flicked her tail, “Now that she is awake they should go back home since the ugly wicked witch will wonder why the rooster crowed in the middle of the day.”

“But we don’t know the way and we can’t go home yet,” said the small sound, “because I’m actually a boy.”

“Come dance between my ears and say nice things,” said the cat. “Then we shall see what magic happens.”

The small sound (who was actually the small boy) danced between the cat’s ears and said nice things. The white cat with black boots and blue eyes began purring a rhythmic purr and before anyone knew what happened a small boy (who used to be a small sound) twirled into existence holding the cat and petting her between the ears.

The little girl clapped her hands and laughed to see such a fine piece of magic and all the little fairies that lived in the meadow flowers finally came out of their flower homes because, as we all know, fairies love the sound of children’s laughter.

The owl told them the whole story and asked if they could take the small boy and little girl back home through the square hole in the courtyard left by a large overturned pavement stone. The fairies were happy to take the children home, but fairies don’t always understand the urgency of a situation and they wanted to play a bit before their long flight. Luckily the mother robin swooped in.

She quickly said, “Best be going now, dearies. That ugly wicked witch is almost here.”

So the children said goodbye to their new friends and quickly joined hands with the fairies. The fairies used their magic to fly upwards while the robin whistled and the wind blew up up up above the playful clouds until the laughing children tumbled back through the square hole in the courtyard left by the large overturned pavement stone.

The Inn

Once upon a time there was a poor but clever youth who, with the coming of spring, discarded the chains of his forefathers and set off to find his fortune. Now it so happened that he had not been on the road long before he joined a group of onlookers watching a rare happlebopper game. The happleboppers, which look somewhat like monkeys with exceptionally large feet, kept bouncing off the trees along the edge of the forest and whacking two glinting objects through the air. They kept their treasure afloat in acrobatic harmony until an old man with a staff stepped out of the edge of forest. The old man pointed with his staff and the first glinting object separated into two pieces while the happleboppers howled and let it fall from the sky as they protectively swarmed their other treasure. The crowd of onlookers booed the old man, but he paid them no heed as he raced to and fro about the area where the broken object landed. The youth, being rather curious about the whole series of events, stepped off the road and jogged toward the old man. It looked like the old man was desperately chasing a group of grasshoppers.

“Why are you chasing those grasshoppers?” the youth asked.

“The better question is why isn’t everyone else trying to catch them,” the old man replied. The youth decided to help the old man in the seemingly endless chase which drew the ridicule of the dismissing crowd. However, the youth and the old man soon succeeded in catching all the wayward grasshoppers. The youth even snatched a bluish green grasshopper away from the claws of a toying cat. After counting twice, the old man put the jar of grasshoppers in his inner cloak pocket and, with the same motion, produced a unique brown nut.

“Here is a small token of my immense gratitude, dear youth,” the old man said. “I never really wanted to bother with the hustle and bustle contained in this small nut, but it is quite

magical and if you plant it somewhere at sunset an exquisite inn will shoot up overnight. Use it how you will to make your fortune.”

Then the old man continued on the road leading into the old forest.

Although the youth questioned whether or not the nut was in fact magical, he determined to make the most of his strange gift and travelled along many roads until he came to an empty crossroads with a spectacular view of the distant forest and setting sun. Unbeknownst to the youth, the crossroads divided four bickering kingdoms.

“This is just the place for me to plant my nut,” the youth said to himself. Thus when the sun set he planted the small brown nut and then lay down next to it and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke in the morning he was lying in the most luxurious bed he had ever seen. The bed itself was larger than his whole hut and the down in his pillow must have come from a hundred birds. The room, and indeed the whole inn, was made of beautiful dark brown wood that had the strength of oak and the sheen of walnut. This strange wood wove together in such a way that man-made carvings seemed crude in comparison. But this was a detail not fully noticed by the youth as he raced out his room and through the hallways.

It was truly the most exquisite inn imaginable. It had so many rooms it was hard to count. Hallway after hallway stood waiting to be explored. Each room had its own set of dressers and mirrors and even individual baths drawn up in small pools by such a large, ornately made bed that the youth soon grew tired of jumping onto each one. The banquet hall towered up in sweeping arches with stained glass windows that showed pastoral scenes of peaceful lands. It seemed big enough to fit an entire village. The attached kitchen had pantry after pantry of delicious food and an oven so big it made most bonfires seem like a matchstick. Stacks of

seasoned firewood rested against the stables in the back and aromatic gardens bloomed a step away from the kitchen door.

But for all its finery the inn didn't have any people.

However, the youth quickly made a plan, and, returning to his room, found an expensive looking suit of clothes lying in his dresser which fit him perfectly. He shed his stained travelling attire and, putting on some airs, walked out onto the westward balcony overlooking the grand entryway. He looked down at the crowd of travelers below with feigned disinterest and then sat down to admire the clouds.

Now there was a hardworking merchant who often travelled this road between the four bickering kingdoms. This merchant, after hastily whispered consultations concerning the manner he should use to address the handsome youth, called out, "Halloo! Pardon me. Excuse me. Sir!" The youth looked down at the merchant.

The merchant continued, "By what marvelous means did this fine inn come to be? I passed by this way not two days past and nothing was yet begun."

The youth replied, "If you mean to inquire about the nature of this inn I should think it's origin is quite evident. It springs forth from magic, and magic of the most powerful kind."

The gathering crowd murmured amongst itself and the merchant waded another question. "And whose magic might that be?"

The youth looked affronted and tartly replied, "Any fool can recognize it is magic of the highest caliber and not the drudgery of some two-bit witch. And if my master had wanted his business known, he would have placed his own name upon this place. As it stands, my master's business is his own and the richest king in these parts shall soon have *his* name attached to this

magnificent inn. For my master said that the richest king would arrive on Midsummer's Eve paying a kingly price to claim the inn and forever place the royal name upon it."

"Until then it is my duty to assemble the most skilled workers to wait upon the richest king. I shall employ only the best the land has to offer and will not waste my efforts scouring your respective hovels. If anyone thinks he is the best in his skill or craft, then let him present himself here and, if he is indeed the best, then the king shall generously reward him."

When they heard that the king would pay handsomely for the inn staff, the travelers who had gathered beneath the youth started talking amongst themselves. They boasted about knowing the best cook or being related to the greatest blacksmith. The youth, knowing his work was finished for now, turned and disappeared inside.

Now the crowd of travelers listening to the youth came from many different villages in the four kingdoms and soon the entire land knew of the magnificent inn. All the common laborers and artisans envisioned working in such a fine place and soon the youth had lines of people willing to work hard to prove their worthiness. Most of these the youth quickly dismissed or moved to lesser roles until he had, in fact, established the most willing and excellent collection of workers any inn had ever known. Travelers rich and poor alike poured into the inn as its fame spread. Thus the youth lived in opulence as keeper of the inn and collected no small fortune while Midsummer's Eve approached.

Meanwhile, in the royal chambers of the four bickering kings, each king was calculating his wealth and trying to determine which of the other three kings was the richest king in the land. For each king had heard such extravagant descriptions and rumors of the new inn that he greatly desired to possess it and, what's more, place his name across the front in shining gold letters.

The mere thought of a rival's name usurping his own nearly drove each king mad with jealousy. As Midsummer's Eve approached, each king reached the same conclusion.

All four kings, who already called the inn according to their personal names, resolved to acquire their inn at whatever cost. They each would bribe, bluff, buy, or besiege it and earn the honor of naming the inn after themselves. Accordingly, all four kings emptied the entirety of their vaults into ornate chests and loaded these chests, along with a good many additional chests containing very little but looking very expensive, on flattop wagons. By doing so, each king hoped to dishearten the other kings and thus win the inn before the bidding began. They then surrounded these many wagons with large companies of armed guards which, in truth, was nothing more than an excuse to muster their armies at the inn.

Midsummer Eve arrived and with it the four contingencies of kings with all their treasure, armies, nobility, courtiers, jesters, heralds, musicians, accountants, pontificators, attendants, dignitaries, and attendants for the attendants. The youth, clever as he was, had somewhat underestimated the egos of kings and was ill-prepared for four kings, armies, and entourages to descend on the inn. However, the inn workers were truly the best in the land and somehow found the proper accommodations for everyone without offending anyone enough to become openly hostile. Thus the youth was only left to decide the actual means of determining the richest king and new owner of the coveted inn since, of course, the rumors had never definitively described the selection process.

Now the youth, having grown more perceptive than he had been before leaving home, feared imminent betrayal and probable death. He could not help but hear the murmuring of the armies and see the malicious glints behind the kings' smiling faces. He knew that selecting any of the kings would surely result in an immediate attack by the other three, and he highly doubted

that he would survive long enough to collect and keep the promised gold from any individual king. Furthermore, seeing the vast armies that transported and protected the numerous chests, the youth realized that, even if he should survive the kings, he had no army to protect himself. Therefore, the clever youth determined a plan to end his portion of the whole affair with his health intact along with some invaluable treasure.

The youth told the kings they had until sunset to fill a table in the great banquet hall with the treasure they valued most as proof of their riches. Naturally, the youth would select a few items for closer inspection and then, if the richest king was not easily determined by the treasure displayed, the kings with roughly equal showings would enter into an auction held at the end of dinner.

Now the kings, wanting to make it look as if they displayed but a trifle of their treasure, took careful measures to ensure their soldiers only carried in the fullest chests of treasure and left the wagons loaded with the numerous chests that contained smaller portions of the treasure. Then each king made a grand show of having their strongest soldiers struggle under the weight of each selected chest. In this fashion, the mounds of treasure grew and grew as the tables groaned beneath their weight.

The youth selected the lightest and most curious items from the growing mound and placed them in four bags before retiring to his room under pretense of inspecting the items and preparing arrangements for christening the inn. The kings, satisfied that no other mound was higher than his own, also retired to their quarters in order to determine different attack or defense plans depending upon whether he won or lost the auction.

Meanwhile, the youth went to his room and wrote a letter to the kings.

My Dear Sirs,

Since you have filled the banquet tables with gold, silver, gemstones, relics, and other precious things, I must conclude that you remain ignorant of riches and know naught but wealth. For the chairs around the tables stand empty with not a single wife, child, father or mother sitting at your side let alone any subjects or soldiers. Because I am a great prince from a distant land in search of a truly kingly gift—the blessing to wed a beautiful princess esteemed by both the royal family and adoring subjects, I shall continue my search elsewhere. You may squabble over this scrap of an inn if your vanity demands it, but know that had you proved worthy your kingdom would be forever joined with mine where such an inn is as common as a wandering hen.

With the letter completed, the youth began changing into his old travelling attire. Then someone knocked on his door. The youth hastily tried to hide his disguise, but was caught in the unfortunate moment when his exquisite pants rested solidly around his ankles. He received the intruder with a defiant look which shifted when he saw, walking through the door, none other than the old man he first saw chasing grasshoppers. The youth, amazed at the sight, continued changing.

The old man read the letter. He addressed the youth. “So, I see you’ve decided to run. It is not a bad plan for you but it certainly is not the best.”

“Have you a better one? The time is short before I must be gone or else lose my head over this fine inn.” The youth was sincere.

The old man replied, “You do know they’ll go to war.”

“And that is precisely why I do not wish to be here.”

“If that is your wish, be gone. I daresay that whoever among the staff survives will wish they’d gone too. But if you desire something greater than war and trinkets return to the kings and carry on as if you were really going to assign a victor and paint his name upon the inn.”

“What will happen if I do so?”

“We can never be too sure about what will happen but what might happen is better than treachery. The sun is setting. I shall sit in the back of the banquet hall.”

With that the old man left the room and the youth, after some contemplation, once again donned the exquisite clothes the inn provided him.

With the sun setting, the treasure piled high on the tables, and the letter discarded in one of his drawers, the youth returned to the banquet hall where the four kings, their entourages, and an alarming amount of soldiers stood waiting. The youth quickly addressed the assembly and, having no better plan than to carry on, started the auction as the sun set.

The four kings bid furiously and the price climbed more swiftly than a streaking falcon. Then one king bellowed, “All my treasure gathered here within and without and what I left at home besides!”

“And I the same!” the second king countered followed by, “And I!” “And I!”

“Now tell us, youth, who is the richest king and whose name shall be upon this place!”

The soldiers’ hands gripped their weapons and the youth looked out the open doors to the setting sun. In that silent moment everyone heard the unmistakable sound of thundering hooves dashing against the road. The hoof beats stopped abruptly and everyone turned to see a graceful silhouette come striding through the center of the sun.

None mistook her for anything but a princess clad in sapphire silk with sparkling diamonds adorning her hair and neck and flashing eyes. A silver dagger hung at her hip and trembled as she spoke with power, “My father bids thrice that of any pitiful king here gathered and offers me besides. He is harsh and powerful and has ten thousand mounted troops waiting to claim this prize.” No one doubted her authenticity and indeed the single diamond upon her brow was worth more than all the beautiful gems of the kings’ crowns combined.

The four kings, quickly consulted with one another and offered to jointly pay their collective bids and thus prove themselves the richest kings of the land. The youth,

The formidable princess pursed her lips and replied, “My father is a shrewd man and will not pay so high a cost while also raising the ire of four united kings.”

The youth slightly pointed to the four kings with his right index finger and received a nod of approval from the back of the banquet hall. Then the youth declared the inn sold and, after another hasty but slightly longer consultation, the four kings declared the inn would ever after be known as The Four Kings’ Inn. The clever youth then announced a week-long feast. The nobility, courtiers, jesters, heralds, musicians, pontificators, accountants, attendants, dignitaries, and attendants for the attendants all cheered. Next, the youth instructed the inn workers to clear the tables for the feast and, while clearing *all* the tables to take an ample reward before depositing the rest of the treasure from the four tables into the empty chests. Meanwhile the most skilled artists began painting *The Four Kings’* upon the outer wall as music, food, and drink flowed freely into the banquet hall.

The old man, knowing that not all eyes were fixed on feasting, came up to the clever youth and whispered instructions. The youth went up to his room to retrieve the four bags of treasure (along with his travelling attire) and set out that night with a caravan of soldiers and the multitude of chests filled with treasure. At their first stop the old man pulled two shovels from within his robes. Then he and the youth tapped three times and pointed to a star before a hole dug itself in just the right size and shape for a chest filled with treasure. The soldiers lowered a chest and the old man or youth tapped upon its lid as before (being sure to point to the same star). The hole filled itself up until the ground looked just as it was before they came. They left four soldiers at each hole with instructions to guard it for the remainder of the night while they

journeyed on. The soldiers stayed behind to guard the treasure, but whenever they attempted to dig it back up they only found hard dirt and stubborn stones. In such a manner the clever youth and old man travelled away from The Kings' Inn for many days and buried chest after chest as their forces slowly dwindled away.

Meanwhile, the four kings, deprived of their wealth, were forced to make favorable trade agreements with one another, and much to their surprise, soon discovered that they actually liked having understanding friends who shared the same burdens of kingship such as the nobility, courtiers, jesters, heralds, musicians, pontificators, accountants, attendants, dignitaries, and attendants for the attendants that followed them everywhere. Meanwhile the many remaining soldiers found the food and drink of the celebration feast so wonderful that they soon forgot they were eating and drinking with enemies and started eating and drinking with other regular fellows.

One last detail remains. For, of course, the youth wholeheartedly fell in love with the beautiful princess as soon as she strode through the doors and, predictably, could find no trace of her or her horse once he finally escaped the celebrations. Just like every other brash youth who falls in love with a mysterious princess, he vowed to search the entire land as soon as he finished the task at hand and, in the meantime, remain faithful to his one true love. After becoming a rich handsome, and in nearly every way highly eligible bachelor, he surprised many people and kept true to his word. He scoured surrounding kingdoms looking for harsh and powerful kings which were, unfortunately, in abundant supply.

The clever youth almost despaired he'd never find her or, even worse, find her already married with no memory of himself. However, on the latter account the clever youth need not fear for, unbeknownst to him, the princess herself had been in love with him ever since a two-bit

witch turned her into a grasshopper. They eventually found each other during an adventure in an old forest and then shared many adventures together before they could wed. Afterwards they continued as before and the clever youth eventually became a king who lived happily ever after with his growing family and many visits from an old man. And all the time the four kings held court together at The Four Kings' Inn which became a favorite meeting place for friends and travelers.

The Sorcerer

There was once an old and very powerful sorcerer who wanted to retire. He was tired of arrogant princes, lost princes, dethroned princes, and lovelorn princes, kind princes, shallow princes, spoiled princes, noble princes, cowardly princes, boastful princes (really any princes) pounding on his door at all hours of the day and night asking for help. He was tired of bending over hot, sticky, smelly cauldrons and stirring, stirring, stirring until never wanted to stir another drop let alone a hot, sticky, smelly cauldron. He was tired of constantly advising other sorceress about this spell or that spell and then having to correct their bad magical grammar. He was even tired of forging enchanted swords for well-intentioned knights. He was just tired. And the flower fairies annoyed him. The old and very powerful sorcerer wanted nothing more, and nothing less, than peace and quiet.

Thus the old and very powerful sorcerer called in some favors and soon three kings (who had once been dethroned, lovelorn, lost princes) sent detachments of soldiers and contingencies of men to move the old and powerful sorcerer. For although the sorcerer lived by himself in a seemingly small house, he had a surprising amount of possessions. After all, an old and very powerful sorcerer does not help all these princes and knights for nothing and, more often than not, the task they accomplished to receive his help resulted in truly curious gifts. Although it would have taken the sorcerer many days to pack up his accumulated belongings (for he had been a sorcerer for quite some time), the small army of men soon had all of his collections, knick knacks, mirrors, robes, books, cauldrons, pets, thing-a-ma-jiggys, weapons, scrolls, staffs, tools, oddities, art and innumerable other objects of sentimental value neatly packed into wooden barrels, boxes, and crates loaded in twelve large enchanted wagons covered with oil clothes. The old and very powerful sorcerer performed one final check to ensure nothing was left behind and,

of course, found something tucked away behind a shelf but missed the small box in the kitchen cupboard. Then he sealed the door and the companies of men and soldiers prodded the strong oxen who strained at their mighty load as the strange contingency ambled down the road.

After travelling for many days, the company arrived at the castle of an old and crotchety king. Many years had passed since the king had last seen the sorcerer, and over the years the story of their shared adventure had included more and more of himself and less and less of the strange sorcerer who helped him defeat the three-headed giant. But that is a story for another time and all that we need to know now is that this old king did not like the shadow of his past looking directly in his eye.

The sorcerer said, "I have come as promised to claim your promise."

"Then take your promise and leave as promised," replied the king.

With that, the sorcerer left the castle and led the wagons past the gawking crowds, through the king's personal forest gate, and down a familiar track leading to the heart of the forest.

Although the forest track pretended to disappear and looked entirely overgrown, the sorcerer knew its tricks well enough. Thus the wagons rumbled steadily on for many days and heard all sorts of mysterious bayings, howling, gruntings, cawings, and hootings but nothing came near the company save a single hummingbird. This hummingbird often flew up to the sorcerer, and the two seemed to converse together in some unknown tongue.

In such a fashion the company arrived at the base of an ancient tree whose girth almost exceeded its age. The towering limbs looked like the well-muscled arms of knights and the leaves were so thick and abundant that a meadow sprawled beneath the gigantic canopy. The old and very powerful sorcerer stopped the company and instructed them to unload the wagons. After the curious men placed all the crates, barrels, and boxes on the meadow floor, the old and

powerful sorcerer gave each of the three company leaders a thank-you card he'd written on the back of a magical map. The magical map kept changing to show their forest surroundings and it always pointed directly at the old and crotchety king's castle.

When the companies were completely gone, the old and very powerful sorcerer tried to find his collection of staves. He opened several wrong barrels, boxes, and crates before finding them next to his anvils. He then selected his oldest and shortest staff before walking up to the tree. He circled it four times to the left and twice to the right. Then he walked five paces back, turned, and knocked three times on an upturned root with his staff. His staff hummed. Then the sorcerer walked up to a gnarled knob and set the top of his staff against it. The knob uncovered years of growth as the staff sunk deeper into the bark. The ancient tree yawned. Then it stirred and the forest felt it move. The staff remembered its old place and grew into a front porch that had a door with a gnarled knob. The sorcerer nodded with satisfaction and entered his home.

The old and very powerful sorcerer took up another staff from within the entryway and politely asked the ancient tree to tell the many boxes, barrels and crates where they belonged. The ancient tree obliged and, touching them all with the budding branches, the boxes, barrels, and crates all grew rooty feet and walked to their own rooms. Before he started unpacking, the old and very powerful sorcerer spent a peaceful and quiet afternoon on his porch listening to the forest.

The Cobblestone Road

Once upon a time not so long ago two children from the plains went to their grandma's house to spend the summer. It was a long journey and, since they were children, they tried to stay awake until they got there. They lasted until the narrow gravel track that wound its way up the mountain. Then they both fell asleep right before entering the old tunnel that leads to Grandma Snow's house. Their parents carried the sleeping children inside and put them to bed in the upstairs room with flowery wallpaper and twin bunk beds.

Emily was older. Her bright red hair flowed over her pillow like lava. She loved swimming on hot summer days and was disappointed that she couldn't have another pool party for her tenth birthday. However, she also loved climbing trees, and she remembered that Grandma's house had lots of trees to climb. Conrad didn't like heights. He was a few years younger and couldn't remember the last time they visited Grandma Snow. He'd heard about the tunnel that led to Grandma's house, and his dad knew he'd be sad that he fell asleep before they went through it. But for the moment all emotions stayed in the waking world while the children slept.

Conrad woke up when Grandma Snow put a hot piece of bacon in his open mouth. His sister didn't like bacon, which he didn't really understand, but when he rolled over he saw a steaming cup of hot chocolate by her bed.

Grandma Snow tapped the side of the mug with the spoon and sang the same song her mother used to sing to her and her sisters.

"It's time to get up! It's time to get up! It's time to get up— it's moorrn-ing."

Then she hugged them both and gave them each a kiss. "I'm so glad you're here. I've been looking forward to this all spring. I know you're still sleepy since you tried to stay up all

the way here, but it's already half-past nine, and we have some friends coming over for morning tea. The rest of your breakfast is downstairs so up up up!" She hugged them again (and kissed them again) before whistling her way down the stairs.

After breakfast Emily and Conrad wanted to go outside and explore. They asked their mom, and she looked questioningly at her husband. He shrugged his shoulders. The children knew yes was close. Emily looked at her dad and tilted her head slightly. "Please, dad. It's such a nice day, and we won't go very far." Conrad followed suit. He bounced up and down by his mom, "Please Mom, please Mom, please Mom," before falling on his knees and begging. "Please please pleeeeee. We'll stay right by the house and if I find any bugs I won't bring them inside and chase you." Grandma Snow saved them.

"They'll be fine as long as they stay in the meadow. It will give us a chance to *talk* a bit before everyone comes over for morning tea." Emily didn't know why Grandma Snow emphasized the word 'talk,' but it must have meant something to her mom. She conceded.

"Ok, children. Stay right by the house and I'll come outside every few minutes to check on you." Conrad jumped off his knees and sprinted for his shoes. "YES! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" Emily raced after him. "Thanks Mom!"

The children played outside exploring all the little nooks and crannies adults forget to find interesting. After running two laps on the wrap-around porch Conrad jumped over the three front steps and tumbled into the grass. Then he commando-crawled back through the bushes and peered into the cool darkness beneath the deck. Emily swung on the old wooden bench that hung from ancient chains. The bench really wasn't much of a swing so she hopped off the porch and

crouched down in the tall grass. She loved the way the grass always danced with the breeze and watched it sway against the sky until she heard her mom's voice.

"Conrad? Emily? Emily popped up out of the grass. Her mother looked at her with relief. "Emily, where's Conrad?"

"Mom, I'm right here." The bush shook by the front porch and Conrad jumped up with some leaves stuck in his curly black hair.

Their mother breathed deeply. "Why don't we play out in the open for right now. I'm helping your grandma bake some scones in the kitchen in case you need to find me."

"Oh. Ok Mom." Conrad scurried onto the porch and gave her a hug.

Their mother went back inside and the children kept exploring. Conrad walked around the porch again and found a small black rectangular door near the bottom of the chimney. The heavy metal latch turned slowly and the rusty hinges squealed in protest. Wispy cobwebs covered the corners of the opening and soot filled the bottom of the chimney. Cool air escaped until Conrad pushed the iron door shut. He had to put all his weight on the latch to close it. Emily came around the corner and waved her brother over. She stood at the start of a little dirt path that went away from the house toward a hill in the meadow. "Conrad, I've got to show you something I just remembered!" She skipped down the path and her brother followed.

When they got to the base of the hill in the meadow the path stopped in front of two packed dirt steps leading down to an old wooden door dug into the hillside. The faded grey wood rested at an angle looking into the sky. The door was so narrow that it only had three slots of wood going across. A smooth metal handle reflected the sunshine. It was warm when Conrad grabbed it.

"Conrad! We can't go inside. Grandma Snow said so last time we were here."

Conrad looked disappointed, but he still had his hand on the smooth metal. “What is it?”

“I think she called it her root cellar, but I’m not really sure. I just remember that I couldn’t go inside. Besides, Mom said we had to stay out in the open.”

Conrad sighed. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. Let’s climb the hill and roll down instead!”

Emily was going to say that they should probably go back to the house, but Grandma Snow had said they were fine as long as they were in the meadow. Besides, by the time she finished thinking Conrad was already running up the hill. She tried to catch him before the top, but he barely beat her.

Emily gulped the fresh mountain air. She loved being up high. She couldn’t wait to climb one of the towering trees that surrounded the meadow. Maybe this year they’d even hike up one of the mountains.

Conrad dropped to the grass and folded his arms across his chest. “Come on Emily. Let’s roll down together.”

“Not that way silly. We’ll roll right into that old wooden door.” She pulled her brother’s feet and turned him to the right. Then she plopped down and crossed her arms and feet. They counted together.

“One. Two. Three. ROLLLLLLLLL!!!”

The world slowly rotated between green grass and blue sky. Then it started spinning faster and faster and faster as they tumbled down the hill rolling through the crisp grass. Conrad heard his sister giggle and squeal. He screamed, “AHHHHHHHHHHHH,” as long as he could because he loved how it sounded like a passing siren. The hill must have been longer than he thought because he was out of breath and so dizzy that he couldn’t stop. He just rolled and rolled and rolled and rolled closing his eyes and laughing while the world spun. Finally he slowed

down and stopped. Then he tried to stand. That was his favorite part. He stood and stumbled and fell all the way over to his sister. “I’m so dizzy. Let’s do it again.”

Emily just watched the clouds play in circles above her. She sat up while the meadow wobbled into focus. She focused on one of the little yellow flowers to make the dizziness go away faster. She loved all those little bits of gold that dotted the meadow.

“Emily, where’s Grandma’s house?” Conrad looked puzzled. She stood up and staggered slightly. Finally the world stood still. She couldn’t find Grandma’s house, but the trees were so close she could see the sap on their trunks. “Conrad, I think we rolled down the wrong side of the hill.”

Conrad grabbed his sister’s hand. She gave him a reassuring squeeze. “Don’t worry. We’ll just walk back to the top of the hill. Then we’ll see Grandma’s house again.” Emily turned to walk up the hill, but Conrad didn’t move. His eyes drilled into the depths of the forest. Then he pulled his sister into the grass. “There’s something in the forest.”

Emily looked between the shifting heads of grass. Some brush moved at the edge of the forest. She couldn’t throw a rock very far, but she was pretty sure she could hit the rustling bush with little green berries on it. She hoped it was just the wind. After all Conrad had an excellent imagination. Maybe he was imagining it. He wasn’t. A brown and silver bear lumbered into the meadow.

Emily froze everything except her eyeballs. She could barely see Conrad, but she felt him shaking. Her muscles started burning. She wished her hair was pulled up in a bun because it kept blowing across her face. The bear didn’t seem to notice them. He walked in a mostly straight line while wandering from side to side as he sniffed along the ground. It looked like he was going to

amble up and over the hill. He was a little over halfway up when he reached a steeper section and changed his mind. He turned in their direction and started walking around the hill thirty yards above them. Conrad started counting the burrs stuck in the fur on his belly. When the bear's belly stopped moving Conrad looked at the bear's face. Their eyes met across the distance. The bear looked curious. Then he looked concerned. Conrad screamed. The bear tried to run down the hill but tripped over his front paw and started tumbling and rolling while roaring like an avalanche. Both children sprinted for the forest faster than frightened rabbits.

They crashed through the barrier of underbrush and ran screaming deeper and deeper into the woods. They seemed to find forest paths and constantly switched directions whenever stands of brush got in their way. Huffing sounds of heavy pursuit spurred them on. It may have been her imagination, but Emily thought she heard a husky voice yelling "Stop!" She ran faster and hit a branch. Conrad kept up. She kept looking over her shoulder, but trees and bushes blocked her view. She felt hot and sticky and her arms ached more than her legs. The crashing sounds behind them stopped. Conrad passed her. His shirt was torn. They kept running in frantic flight.

They stopped running when they broke into a clearing. Both children listened intently. They heard the hum of the forest. It sounded spooky, but it didn't sound like a bear chasing them to their death.

"Emily! Look! It's a road! We found a road!" As tired as he was, Conrad still managed to jump up and down in excitement. Emily didn't see it at first, but then she looked down and saw a rectangular outline beneath her foot. She kicked the dirt and leaves to one side. There was no mistaking it. It was a cobblestone. Her eyes finally caught up with her brother and she saw an old cobblestone road being slowly devoured by the forest. It was a narrow road to be sure, but it was a road nonetheless. Now, their father had always told them to follow the cornrows if they got lost

in a cornfield and follow the fences if they got lost on the prairie. Since they had never been lost in a wood before, it only seemed logical to follow the old cobblestone road. After all, it must lead somewhere. However, they didn't know which way to go and were just about to argue when a humming bird zoomed by going the direction Conrad felt best about. Both children had always liked humming birds, so they decided to follow it.

As they walked down the cobblestone road, they still felt like they were being watched. But, try as they may, they could never see the pair of eyes stalking them. Sometimes they even heard a twig snap or a branch break. But the farther they walked along the cobblestone road, the less it bothered them. It would have been scary except that they both felt something else. The air trembled with adventure and swallowed up their fear. A cool breeze blew along the road giving them courage even though they didn't know why. They didn't talk much, but they knew they shared something important. Finally, after walking in the wood for a long time, the cobblestone road led right into the side of a rather smallish cliff with rounded lichen covered rocks at the bottom.

It really didn't look that high. Emily was certain she could reach the top. Normally heights terrified Conrad, but after walking along the cobblestone road he was willing to try. They both agreed Emily should go first since she was the most experienced climber. She stepped on the last cobblestone paver and put her hand on one of the rounded rocks. The rock moved. It wiggled itself free and rolled up and over the cliff. Emily tried another rock, but as soon as she touched it that rock rumbled up and over the cliff too. Conrad stepped forward and touched a rock as well. It did the same as the others, and although such disregard of gravity would have bothered them before, the children kept touching the rocks until they all shot up the cliff and

uncovered a gleaming silver door with a smooth golden handle. Just then, the bear came crashing out of the forest and charged down the cobblestone road. He roared, “Open the door!”

Emily and Conrad wanted to run, but something told them not to. Panic filled the husky voice. “I said, ‘Open the door!’” Thunderous crashing consumed the forest. Three forest trolls broke onto the road tossing trees aside. One was between the bear and the children. The other two were behind. The lead troll tackled the bear and the second troll opened a gigantic sack. Just then a mountain lion leapt into the fray from a tree right above the children. He landed on the first troll’s back and screamed his chilling cry. The troll reached up with a massive hand and grabbed the mountain lion by the scruff of its neck. He tossed the mountain lion into the giant sack while the third troll wrestled with the bear. The skirmish was over. The sack roared and screamed while the trolls bled. The first troll walked up to the petrified children and grabbed one with each hand. His deep thick voice confirmed their worst fears, “You’ll make a nice tasty dessert, you will.”

The sack stopped struggling. A refined but muffled voice made its way out. “I have a feeling they didn’t open the door.”

Neither Emily nor Conrad had been captured by a troll before so it’s entirely understandable that they both fainted when the troll grabbed them. By the time they woke up they were firmly tied and lying by a roaring fire. The bear and the mountain lion were also tied up (with many more ropes than the children). The bear kept trying to bite his ropes off, but trolls know their knots and most have a bit of magic rope handy at all times. The mountain lion scolded the bear.

“Would you leave those ropes alone and try to do something helpful.”

The bear sounded like a complaining child, “But I don’t like being tied up.”

The mountain lion rolled his eyes, “Well you’d better get used to it because you’re a hero and heroes always get tied up. Or they die. The smart villains kill us right away. Those are the ones I really dislike. But most of them want their time to gloat and play. They never learn, but I guess being evil means something’s off on the inside. Besides, she’ll be here soon enough along with everyone else.”

The bear looked hopeful, “Will it really be that quick?”

The mountain lion yawned. “I’m rather surprised it’s taken her this long, but we were already well into the forest before I met one of our squirrels and you know what that road does with time.”

“And she’ll bring everyone?”

The mountain lion was aghast. “Trolls have her grandchildren. Of course she’ll bring everyone.”

“But we’re here to protect them.”

“And aren’t we doing a splendid job of it. I imagine those trolls are almost done arguing about the best way to cook us. You’d think they’d have a system down by now or just play rock paper scissors. Surely such a simple game is within their grasp.”

The mountain lion was right. Two trolls lugged a gigantic metal cauldron away from the fire and crashed it down next to the onion-covered children. The other troll, who seemed to be in charge, poked the bear and the mountain lion with a stick. He licked the gooey end and smiled fiendishly.

“These two are ready for roasting. Crush the other two up with the onions and make some soup.”

Emily objected loudly. “Crush us up with onions? Ick. We taste much better if we sit in the pot all day and slowly heat up. Don’t you agree Conrad?”

Conrad squeaked. “Yep. Crushing is too messy. Besides, you want us to swim around for a bit so we taste better.”

The two trolls holding the pot started nodding their heads in agreement while a breeze tousled their hair. The other troll lost his temper. “I’m not stupid! Why I’ll crush you up right now to stop your clever little mouths!” He threw his stick into the forest and bellowed the death cry.

That’s when the blizzard hit.

A full blown snow fury surrounded the troll camp and mingled flying onions with deafening wind. The children closed their eyes and huddled together but couldn’t stop the assaulting sounds from entering their ears. Two, maybe three heartbeats passed marked by three distinct cracks that sounded louder than a peal of thunder. The wind stopped. Worried silence fell momentarily with the final flakes.

The mountain lion roared in victory and the answering replies filled the forest with a victorious cacophony. Conrad opened his eyes. Grandma Snow adjust an old bag looped around her shoulder as she hovered twenty feet above on an ancient wooden broom. Conrad couldn’t help himself. “GRANDMA’S A WITCH?” His father’s arms scooped him up in a hearty embrace mid-cry. Conrad’s eyes stared through a quiver of arrows and saw a griffin looking back through the fletching. Grandma Snow landed next to Emily as she sobbed in her mother’s lap. A unicorn shed tears in sympathy. Conrad heard his father’s reassuring voice stumbling. “so glad you’re both alive. So sorry you found out this way. We were going to tell you at tea. Introduce you to

everyone. Kind of a family thing if you want it..." His father's voice gained composure. "And Grandma is more of a sorceress technically, but you'll find out all about that this summer."

The Final Passage

There is a story that comes to mind which may be of interest to someone other than myself. It is a story that traces its origin into the ancient past and has roots which, if unearthed, would encompass the whole area inhabited by humanity. It is a story of the desire to be loved and chosen by someone else. It is a story that stems from the desire to be in relationship. It is a story that begins, as does many others, with the happy phrase,

“Once upon a time...”

Once upon a time there lived a girl. She was a beautiful lass who grew into a stunning young lady. But I speak of her spirit and not her presumed outward perfections. For it was her spirit, her soul, her very self that grew from a mysterious spark of life into a truly lovely human being. She grew as the years passed by and children came and went until it came to that final moment when her physical body, now well worn and failing, could no longer contain the life within it. She departed.

I cannot say with certainty where she arrived. I cannot even say with certainty that she arrived at all. Yet she believed it. Her entire countenance believed she gracefully left for an indescribable homecoming. For when she left to walk away from this earth, she made her final passage. She left to be truly beautiful and fully known. Thus she departed and walks in peace.

The Hummingbird Guide

I heard the vibrating flutter of humming wings right behind my ear. I turned. I may have imagined it, but I thought I saw the individual feathers of my guide. They were thin and gray. Like elongated eagle wings miniaturized and dyed the color of elephants. My guide floated coyly for a moment looking at me with curious eyes. Then came two short sounds commonly called tweets or whistles. Perhaps notes if you will. But they were more than that. They were blasts of power from so small a bird. They were bits of a song so old that the rocks I stood on seemed young and the ancient trees clinging to them were nothing more than crying babes.

The hummingbird turned and disappeared between two trees on the other side of the summit's curve. Most would think it had flown away faster than eyes could track. I knew better. It had gone, and I was to follow. I scrambled across the weathered rocks and my right foot slid a bit when I hit the loose gravel. Then I imagined the doorway and stepped out of this world.

A Personal Poetics
The Why And How of My Writing

Introduction

The poetics section portrays three primary influences that shaped *Tales from Here and There*. The first section focuses on the convergence of my writing and my Christian faith. My faith forms the foundation of my writing and the cornerstone of my poetics. It is the reason I write how I write and the reason why I write what I write. I believe I gradually received a calling to write and thus my desire to create excellent children's literature flows forth from my faith. My writing will inevitably convey my hope in the Kingdom of God—that elusive elsewhere that exists here in part but is not yet fully known. Yet my main tension in writing stories is the fact that I'm trying to create quality children's literature—not literature that preaches. I hope to preach elsewhere and write contemplative theology in addition to fictional stories. But for now I attempt to leave preaching aside and instead create stories enjoyed not only by children but by the childlike. Yet I often fail on both accounts and in the midst of my struggles I reflect.

The failure of my writing practice leads to my best reflections on poetics. I, like many humans, rarely stop and reflect when success meets me readily. However I, like most people, experience ample opportunity for forced reflection because my accomplishments are less than my expectations. These moments of reflection rise as an outpouring of emotion and display the oscillating nature of my writing practice. I kept trying to synthesize these moments into a smooth connected whole, but then I realized that a such a streamlined representation is a fraud. I usually don't have nice transitions between sentences and my writing efforts are, unfortunately, crude disjointed things. Thus, the second section of my personal poetics offers glimpses of myself and my writing practice in those moments that hover between hope and lamentation.

The third section of my personal poetics contains the background research paper I wrote at the onset of this project. While it frustrates me that the research paper is a rather dull end to my creative project, it is also a fitting placement because it reflects my practice. I know that I have to develop a foundation of research and scholarship if I am to create excellent children's literature. In fact, it was the recognition of this need that caused me to enroll in an MFA program for creative writing. However, I am not a research writer. On the contrary, the majority of my stories come to me as pictures that join themselves into a narrative as I draw upon the backdrop of my life. Thus my research on fairy tales gave me the initial information I needed to begin the process and then faded to the backdrop as I started creating a world I hope to continue expanding.

The final section of my poetics portion outlines my thought process and intentions for creating *Tales from Here and There*. I began the project with the audacious hope of outlining an entire creative universe. After limiting myself to a secondary world, I refined my objectives even further. Thus, this section describes the way my future goals of creating children's literature impacted my writing process. It lays out four specific objectives before looking ahead to my future creative practice.

Part One: My Foundation of Faith

I write with Jesus. This may sound odd. It certainly seems religious. Yet I feel as if God told me to write. Thus, I write despite my uncertainties about my natural (what some would call God-given) abilities. I write through the struggles. I write amidst my many doubts. Yet somehow when I finally sit down and I write I feel His pleasure and experience the joy that comes from obedience. It is the joy I've known since running as a small boy. It is the joy of Ultimate Frisbee and the joy of reading my favorite story yet again. It is the joy of serving others and the joy of all those little moments in life when I just have a sense that the world is as it was meant to be. When I write, I feel this joy because I am doing one of those things God called me to do. I am being the person Jesus made me to be.

I think God called me to write recently but it may have been when I was young. I remember a grand story that came to my mind in the second grade. It involved a bear and quest to save some damsel in distress after a long journey on the back of mighty steeds. Yet somehow it only came out as a single page with a Paint illustration. I remember the frustration because my creation was less than I imagined it. It was supposed to be a magnificent novel. It was supposed to be wonderful. It was supposed to be the picture in my mind that came from Somewhere. But we only had a few days in the computer lab and my story was less than I envisioned. I didn't recognize it at the time, but that very first story started a pattern I still struggle against today. The pattern haunts me, and it plagued me when I heard God calling me to write.

I first felt a small nudge toward writing when an idea popped into my head shortly after college graduation. I could write a book for young Christian guys. I could encourage them, teach them, and provide something fun and meaningful for them to read. It even seemed like a God idea – one of those ideas that comes to me through the subtle guiding of the Holy Spirit. I prayed

about it and felt like I should pursue it. Thus, I developed the foundational ideas of a book I playfully named *Youthful Wisdom*. I wanted it to be a fun mixture of theology and life experiences about growing up as a Christian guy in small town America.

I hadn't written anything yet, but I shared my audacious hopes about *Youthful Wisdom* with my fiancé. I even said I had a goal to finish it before our wedding. She encouraged me and we dreamed together. We decided it should be a topical book filled with anecdotes about friendship, sports, love, lust, family, and failure. We thought of different ways to write it and created an outline. Six months later I married my best friend. My computer stored one written page of *Youthful Wisdom* while entire chapters remained prisoners of my mind.

I somehow never really started writing that book. I'd think about it. I thought about it a lot as the chapters slowly receded into the shadows of my mind. Then I tried to avoid remembering a quote I accidentally read by Madeline L'Engle. I'd just finished one of her wonderful stories about the Austins, and this particular edition (obviously meant for children) concluded with a small section about the author. It held the usual biographic information along with a Q and A section with word art straight from the early nineteen-nineties. One of the questions, purportedly asked by some small child, centered on becoming an author. L'Engle replied by saying, "Writers write." I'm sure she said more than that, but that phrase followed me. "Writers write." I wasn't writing. I wasn't writing and I was fairly certain God wanted me to write. I could tell by the feeling of conviction that followed my excuses. I wasn't willing to admit it to myself, but I knew God's gentle calling had urged me to write and God was pressing the issue.

The longer I kept from writing, the more I remembered that phrase. Writers write. It haunted me. Especially because the next book in the series ended with the same section and this

time I felt like I had to read that condemning page. “Writers write.” I feared L’Engle’s ghost might reappear, but Vicky Austin’s story was not quite done. I read the next book and this time it was as if Marley’s chains resonated in my mind rattling out, “Writers write.” Unlike Scrooge, I did not heed the warning. I did not sit down in obedience and write any of my envisioned chapters. Instead, I kept doing the ordinary things of life and tried to make believe that they were enough. They weren’t. When I failed to obey the gentle whisper and repetitive convictions, God persisted pursuing me and called me into obedience.

I didn’t write until the Holy Spirit kept me awake one night. My wife and I decided to sleep in the living room on our new hide-a-bed, but when I lay down I felt no peace in my spirit. I begrudgingly got up out of a sense of duty and hoped that a show of response would result in peace. When I laid down a second time, it still didn’t come. Thus I rose again and, admitting that I knew it centered upon my call to write, I looked for writing programs and may have even typed a few thoughts. The annoying part was I wanted to sleep. That’s why I kept going back to bed. Thus, for the third time I tried to fall asleep and once again I felt no peace. Instead a sense of urgency gripped my spirit and I felt like Samuel being called in the night. For that time my head barely touched the pillow when I heard, “NO!” powerfully in my mind. Writers write, and I felt called to write that night in no uncertain terms.

I wrote in response to my calling and typed two stories about apples. They’d come to me a few nights before when my wife asked for a bedtime story to help her fall asleep. They’d come in the form of a picture that wrapped itself in words. I simply spoke the words into a story. I didn’t really stop to contemplate from whence they came. That night I knew. I knew that my stories came from God because I knew they weren’t my own. I knew they weren’t my own

because that night I finally obeyed and let the words unwrap themselves onto the page. Yet this unraveling of words from elsewhere also creates the largest tension of my personal poetics.

As I write I struggle with the confluence of faith and writing. For I write out of the overflow of my life and my life, as best as I can tell, is a journey with God through the murky waters. I cannot separate my art and my faith. Whenever I write it comes forth from me and I know not who I am without Jesus. And yes there is a part of me, a part that I wish would grow toward the whole, that wants everyone else to know Jesus as I do and more so. Not because I think I'm right and all other perspectives are wrong. But because I actually believe what I profess. Not fully, for my faith is certainly flawed. But I do believe that God exists and He loves me. I believe that Jesus came to make a way for humanity to be right with God. And I believe that we are all eternal beings chosen to spend eternity with God yet given the opportunity to exist apart from Him. These beliefs impact my writing because when I write I can only write as myself and, though it is only a partial gift often rescinded, I believe that I have given and am giving myself to Jesus. The life I live is no longer my own; thus I write with Jesus.

I want to write with Jesus. I want the Holy Spirit to lead me in creating something beautiful that contains enough wonder to show a glimpse of God. Yet I struggle in this act of creation. I wrestle with writing as a Christian, a follower of Jesus who cannot even say I do my best to always follow him. But even though I am encumbered by my inadequacy, Jesus remains with me. So I write with Jesus as a type of communion joining in his life by giving up my own.

Part Two: Honest Oscillations

Oscillations

I find that my creative practice oscillates between the endless possibilities of imagination and the depressing confines of reality. Some days I start writing and the words flow together with the chortling harmony of a happy mountain spring skipping down flowering slopes. On other days I'd rather be a NFL receiver blindsided by a vicious strong safety. Perhaps such a hit would knock some stories loose. At the very least people would see it and I'd receive a nominal cringe of empathy. As it is, I attempt to write in stubborn isolation and struggle to move forward through rising self-pity. I feel the urge to dub myself a misunderstood artist attempting some insurmountable goal. My inner world revolves around my inability to produce and I feel greyer than a Seattle winter. It's really quite abominable. Eventually one of those divine moments of creative genius breaks through my gloom and blends my imagination with written words. Then I return to alpine bliss and enjoy the cascading freedom until I keep going down, down, down and down even further still until my words no longer flow but stick. Then I'm bogged down yet again. Such is my creative practice.

My personal poetics suffer similar fluctuations. Sometimes I'm immobilized by my inadequacy. Other times I write with discipline and pleasure. I vacillate between believing that I write with a divine calling and wondering whether or not I should write at all. I explode in torrents of effective writing then struggle through long droughts filled with fragmented work. I research in a flurry, write in a storm, and then wrestle with completion. The only certainty is my volatility. Yet I continue writing because I believe God called me to write. It is my spiritual act of worship.

The Poetics of Paralysis

Writing is difficult. There are just so many things that get in the way. This morning I was going to write some fairy tales. Then water seeped into my living room. I had to pull out the baseboards (again) and pull the carpet back (again) and set up the dehumidifier (again). Then there are flies that need killing. I don't know where they came from. They just showed up. Fat stupid hairy flies that have purplish guts when they crack and squish. I think I've killed five today. But they keep coming. Words don't. Words remain stuck. Stories lodged in my mind that steadfastly refuse birth upon a page. It's like they have stage fright. Or maybe that's me. Perhaps I'm the one with the stage fright after all for I fear seeing myself as I am and not what I hope to be.

From a Place of Emptiness.

I contemplated what to write. From whence does writing flow? From emptiness. From the quiet hours of the night when all rests but the mouse scratching in the walls. Writing comes from the emptiness of oneself. The outpouring of thoughts and words which swirl into meaning within the cauldron of the mind. Such are words of emptiness. Fine sounding things which have no meaning if they are not imbued with truth. Time to rest. Time to sleep and dream. Hope awaits with the coming of dawn and all shall be well. And all shall be well. And all shall be well. For I am not empty but filled with the Spirit of the Word that spoke existence.

Distractions

My writing is mired by distractions. Recently the distraction manifests itself in the form of aggressive pawns and knights that must be electronically repulsed. Each successful checkmate boosts my winning percentage as my computer opponent tracks my progress. The internet also contains a few distractions. Thus I went to write at McDonalds. When I went to write at a McDonalds (a place where presumably the only distraction is free Dr. Pepper refills and the natural progression of indulgent liquid consumption) one of the teenager guys I mentor through the church wandered in and sat down next to me. I was once again distracted. Then I asked myself what I was truly distracted from.

Doubts

As I write doubts plague my mind. Secret doubts. Doubts about my future and calling. Doubts about my ability to write. Sometimes these doubts immobilize me. I am captured in the confines of my mind and try to write my way out. But I can't. My story has no happy ending because the story never starts. It never comes to be. It never experiences the growth of life because it fades into forgotten memory or remains hidden and veiled within me. A story lost in a world I only partially imagine.

To write is to assail the doubts. To write is a struggle with the words and syntax and grammar and perhaps following the conventional rules of accepted usage when the words within me simply wish to be and flow while I let them stagnate. The quagmire of myself. The stoppage of writing and end of creation caused by cessation due to doubt. After all, what was I thinking? Dreaming? Hoping? Living. With doubt I can't do that.

I wait for the dam to burst. The volcano must explode for the pressure is rising and words are dying waiting to write themselves into existence. This is my poetics. The poetics of pressure causing creation. Adrenaline writing by necessity. The pressure within to perform and produce rising higher compressed by time with ever increasing intensity until I finally explode in forceful flowing words erupting splattering on the screen.

The pressure contained within myself somehow escapes. But not into words. The pressure of words—the poetics of creation I routinely use fails. And when pressure fails doubts rise. They tell me to rest and write no more for I doubt if it matters anyways. My former hopes and dreams are foreign now. But my separation of self from self and self from calling and self from writing is temporal. For doubts only linger before relinquishing their grip.

Then I breathe again and grasp the life that never fully disappears. It is a life of hope with wings that, wobbly at best, begins to fly away and raise me from the self I have become. In writing there comes a point, a subtle victory that renews hope and continually bids me rise up from the doubts and feelings of inferiority. For writing, at least the kind that I like best, always reaches a doubting point. A point of desperation where it seems as if hope itself has abandoned me. Then the unexpected thing we've all been waiting for happens and it somehow turns out right in the end. Deus ex machina.

It seems that whenever I begin to type I write something unexpected. Something I've been looking for but can never fully see. It is as if my fingers finally find their place and words begin to flow that release the pressure within. As I write the words certainly ebb and flow but the life within me steadily rises. For when I write I know that I am obeying the One who authored my life, who spoke me into existence. It is what makes writing an act of worship and spiritual devotion. Not some heavy thing with chains fettered by the impositions of religion. For me writing is a form of liberty a freeing of myself from myself since the words don't come from me.

Inadequacy

I kept trying to write the stories that came to my mind. Yet my words always diminished the images and stories as I saw them with my inner eye. It frustrated me then and frustrates me now. In a moment of frustration I saw a wondrous poem drop into my mind that fully conveyed all I felt. It was an older poem from another age and I was sure that Mr. Blake would be jealous. Then I wrote it down and, instead of being what it was it became what it is—an embodiment of

My Inadequacy

My inner tongue
expressed in wild ecstasy
dost die when ink attempts
to write my vision
seen with clarity.

The songs of glory
ascending past reality
n'er take flight but sit and stay
stuck in cursed gravity.

My glimpse of greatness
eclipsing brilliant galaxy
waned and dims upon the screen
while I type on—
toward imperceptibility

Alas! My words miscarry
with irksome regularity
and yet I write
with hope
that I may somehow birth eternity.

Production

It seems that within the culture of America there is an overwhelming urge to produce. Emphasis lies on production. Numbers. Stats. Efficiency proven to the world through production. We must work harder, earn more, make more, and produce more.

Then production merges with the artist. Write more pages. Read more. Think more. (A skill I have improved while I neglect the former two with a mixture of guilt and shame) I feel better about myself when I write two pages instead of one. My crossed off list of accomplishments provides satisfaction—even if it is just for that day. But this emphasis on my production leaves little room for being something other than robots. In other words, sometimes our accomplishments obscure our humanity.

We forget, or at least I do, that writers are human just like the rest of us. I forget that Tolkien probably coughed on his pipe and fought with his wife. That C.S. Lewis grew frustrated with the blank page sticking out of his typewriter. That Homer, whoever or whomever Homer was, was nothing more, and certainly nothing less, than a person. I forget that David the psalmist tore up pieces of parchment and heard snickering after he played the wrong note. I even forget that Dr. Seuss made bad rhymes. I forget they were people because their production eclipses their humanity.

When I read stories that transport me to high places, I mistakenly assume that these authors always dwelt where their work resides. Yes I know that Dostoevsky was once sentenced to death. I know that David was a lustful murderer. I even know Cervantes died penniless and C.S. Lewis lost his wife. With a simple internet search I know the biographic facts of nearly any author's life but I don't really believe it because they created something that transcended the

reality of their life. I don't actually consider them people with lives because I also live and know I can't be like them.

The stats say my production will never transcend time. The numbers say that although I aspire to ascend into the high places through writing, my inane attempts will leave me firmly planted in the grey reality of a dreary Seattle winter. But then I remember that all authors were people. They were people before they produced anything. They were people who wrote. They were people like me.

I still get caught up in production. I still want to produce great things. But part of writing is being human instead of a production machine. It is a part of writing I must continually rediscover.

Second Sight

I sit on my couch and stare out the wavy window to the fluttering trees. In the world in which I reside, the window is wavy because the pane of glass is old and no longer clear as it should be. But in the world of fairy tales, in the land of imagination where reality merges with magic and all impossibilities cease, my window is not old. My window is a ripple. A covering separating two places, and if I were to lightly touch it, my finger would stick to the pane. Then I'd pull it back and watch the slightest little wave run to the edges. Pushing forward with anticipation I'd enter the waves and feel the rippling transparency pass through my solid self. Then the trees would truly flutter. Bending bowing dancing laughing trees filled with thousands upon thousands of green butterflies disguised as leaves waiting to release and fly amidst the tumbling breeze. And if I saw them let go, I'm sure that I'd forget myself and fly right after them.

But that is fairyland.

Here I sit and know that they are but leaves attached to a solid tree. One that will never walk or see. And I see them all through an old, warped window pane.

Terry Pratchett introduced me to the idea of second sight. I cannot explain what he actually means by it. In fact I have a feeling that my understanding is more than somewhat incorrect—more of a nuanced appropriation than an accurate definition. Yet I remember a story of a girl with second sight. A story about a girl who could see things as they appear and then, with second sight, see them as they are. Sometimes she even had a third sight. And a fourth. Seeing things as they may be and even seeing glimpses of glory. One of the oddest things about her sight was that she often saw them all as such simultaneously.

Fairyland is full of second sight. Or perhaps it is filled with the possibility of second sight. For in fairyland reality is never quite sure of itself. A frog may be something more than a frog. A wash girl may be a beautiful princess. This possibility of second sight makes fairy tales enjoyable for we eagerly wait to see the characters as they truly are. With second sight we know that an ugly frog is actually an enchanted prince and we know Cinderella is still a lowly servant girl even though she appears to be the most beautiful princess at the ball. All of this comes before third sight. For, as we all really know, Cinderella is much more than a lowly working girl. We rejoice in seeing her become what she can be—a beautiful princess married and living in a castle. But the fourth sight remains. Where is the glimpse of glory?

In Cinderella, just like many other fairy tales, the glimpse of glory resides outside the page. It is the hope that happens within us all when we read such magic tales. Fourth sight is that glimpse of glory we see in ourselves as we hope to become Cinderella, the princess who rises up from scrubbing the floors to living in the castle. It is this fourth sight that seems to be that intangible something that all great works of art produce. It is the fourth sight I live with for a moment when I pass through the window pane and experience a glimpse of glory. It is this fourth sight that I hope other people can see through my writing.

If my first purpose in writing fairy tales is to create excellent stories, then my second purpose is creating moments of fourth sight. I hope to imbue my stories with that intangible factor of fourth sight clearly evident in the work of the masters yet difficult to describe. I really can't describe it, but I know it. We all know it. It is that factor that stirs something within us humans which we can never put our finger on even though we try. It is those moments of revelation when art takes us beyond the confines of this world and lets us see something from

elsewhere. It is the moments when art takes your breath away. In those moments I know that I've stopped dwelling in reality long enough to see a glimpse of God. As I continue to write and create, I hope that my efforts are strong enough to offer others a similar chance. I hope my old, warped window pane ripples into reality so people can catch a glimpse of glory.

Part Three: From Fairy Tales to Fantasy
A Brief History Leading to Created Fairy Tales in a Secondary Fantasy World

The *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* describes fairy stories or fairy tales as, “narratives, set in the distant past, of events that would be impossible in the real world. They often include magical happenings and the appearance of fairies, but the supernatural does not always feature in them, and the heroes and heroines are usually mortal human beings. Such creatures as giants, dwarfs, witches, and ogres frequently play a part, as well as talking animals” (177). These same characters and settings often occur within the realm of fantasy. In fact, the fantasy genre emerged from the fairy tale tradition, and this paper ultimately demonstrates how created fairy tales can bolster the laws and history of secondary fantasy worlds. In order to understand how a creative collection of fairy tales can lay the foundation for excellent children's fantasy, one must first develop a working understanding of fairy tale history and development. Jack Zipes acknowledges the difficulty of writing a comprehensive summary of fairy tale history at the start of his article, *Fairy Tales and Folk Tales*. He writes, “Each region of the world has a different and distinctive fairy tale tradition, and since it is difficult to summarize the history of the fairy tale for children throughout the world, this article will focus largely on the development of the fairy tale for children in the West” (45). Likewise, this brief overview of the fairy tale genre will remain focused on fairy tale development and history in the West leading up to the emergence of the fantasy genre.

The origins of fairy tales are most often traced back to oral tales and stories transmitted through peasant culture. These foundational stories, called wonder tales or magic tales, generally focused, “on miraculous transformations that enable disadvantaged protagonists to gain advantages and succeed in life” (Zipes 45). Technological progress allowed for wider distribution of written material, and, “as more and more of these wonder tales were written down

in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, they began to constitute the genre of the *literary* fairy tale that began forming its own conventions, motifs, topoi, characters, and plots based to a large extent on those developed in the oral tradition but altered to address a reading public formed by the aristocracy and the middle classes” (Zipes 45). These stories emerged from the peasant culture and as such did not align themselves with the conventions of “civilized” society. The tales were often bawdy, gruesome, and violent while the plots centered on experiences common to the peasant class. When these tales transitioned from oral stories shared in taverns to written tales engaging the fanciful wit of societal elite, the peasant class itself lost authorship concerning this emerging genre. Nevertheless, “it was their material, tone, style, and beliefs that were incorporated into the new genre” (Zipes 45).

After slowly emerging during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, the literary fairy tale briefly emerged in Italy before flourishing in France during the mid-17th century. Zipes notes that Italy was the first place where “wonder tales were fully adapted and transcribed to amuse courtly and educated middle-class readers” by Giovan Francesco Straparola in *The Facetious Nights* and *The Delectable Nights* (1550-1553) and Giambattista Basile in the *Pentamerone* (1634-1636) (Zipes 47). However, the genre did not flourish until it migrated to France in the mid 17th century where, “there were literary salons established by aristocratic women, who organized types of parlor games that incorporated the use of folk motifs and narrative conventions. The participants were expected to show their wit and eloquence by inventing wondrous tales, and they were the first to coin the term *conte de fées*, or fairy tale” (Zipes 47). These societal meetings soon created a flurry of fairy tale activity and Charles Perrault emerged as the preeminent fairy tale writer of that time period.

Charles Perrault's fairy tales became the cornerstone of the fairy tale genre. Mary Louise Ennis lists some of Perrault's popular tales in the *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tale* when she writes:

“Histoires ou contes du temps passé avec des moralités (Stories or Tales of Past Times, with Morals, 1697) is the best-known French fairy-tale collection today. It includes ‘La Belle au bois dormant’ (‘Sleeping Beauty’), ‘Le Petit Chaperon rouge’ (‘Little Red Riding Hood’), ‘La Barbe-bleue’ (‘Bluebeard’), ‘Cendrillon ou La Petite Pantoufle de verre’ (‘Cinderella’), ‘Le Petit Poucet’ (‘Little Tom Thumb’), ‘Riquet à la houppe’ (‘Riquet with the Tuft’), ‘Le Maître chat ou Le Chat botté’ (‘Puss-in-Boots’), and ‘Les Fées’ (‘The Fairies’).”

In his article on Charles Perrault Jack Zipes notes that, “All of these fairy tales, which are now considered ‘classical’, were based on oral and literary motifs that had become popular in France, but Perrault transformed the stories to address social and political issues as well as the manners and mores of the upper classes.” The classic fairy tales composed by Perrault anchored the popularity of the new fairy tale genre as it grew in popularity with a primarily adult audience.

It is interesting to note that the literary fairy tale genre, although popularly associated primarily with children, began with adults and only slowly became acceptable for children. In *Fairy Tales or Folk Tales*, Jack Zipes describes the original fairy tales written in France by saying, “All these fairy tales were written explicitly for adults, even those by Perrault; although it is generally supposed that the fairy tale for children originated during this time, there is actually no evidence documenting that these complex and subtle tales were read to children or that children read them” (Zipes 47). During the latter part of the 18th century some fairy tales were “cleaned up” for children, yet the popular sentiment still distrusted the effect of the tales on

young people. However, fairy tales continued to grow in popularity and soon fairy tales were published for both children and adults.

The beginning of 19th century saw an emergence of fairy tale collections for children. When it came to writing fairy tales for children, authors had to overcome the fact that fairy tales were distrusted due to their lack of overt morals. Despite their inherent suspicion, fairy tales collections were published for children “in England by John Harris (*Mother Bunch's Fairy Tales*, 1802) and Benjamin Tabart (*Popular Fairy Tales*, 1804–1808) along with illustrated chapbooks containing “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Jack the Giant-Killer,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and so on.” (Zipes 49). Zipes describes the mixed reception of these collections by saying they, “flourished throughout Europe and were read by children and adults, but they were not considered the prime reading material for children, nor were they considered to be “healthy” for the development of children’s minds” (Zipes 49). While fairy tale content remained questionable for children, adults recognized the cultural value of fairy tales.

At the beginning of the 19th century, fairy tales became recognized as an effective and popular medium for transmitting cultural heritage and commentary for adults. Jack Zipes describes this different paradigm by saying, “at the beginning of the 19th century the function of the fairy tale for adults underwent a major shift throughout Europe, thanks to the German Romantic movement and tales by Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, Adelbert von Chamisso, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, among others, that made it an appropriate medium to carry on a sophisticated dialogue about social and political issues within the bourgeois public sphere” (Zipes 49). Nationalism became one of the noted conversations surrounding the genre, as evidenced by the explicit goal of the Grimm brothers, “to save the rich tradition of German folk tales (*Volkspoesie*) from oblivion” because they “wanted the rich cultural tradition of the common

people to be used and accepted by the rising middle class” (Joosen, Carter xvi). Thus, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm began collecting their famous stories in 1806. Their subsequent collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–1815; English trans., *Children's and Household Tales* or *Nursery and Household Tales*), enjoyed immediate national and international success (Joosen). While the Grimm’s collection attained their original goals, it also led to the popular acceptance of fairy tales for children.

By selectively editing their fairy tales, the Grimm brothers inadvertently yet firmly tied the fairy tale genre to children and the emerging middle class. Vanessa Joosen makes a compelling argument for this unsought effect by citing work by Jack Zipes and Ruth Bottigheimer before stating:

“The Grimms adapted the fairy tales to fit the middle- class morals of their time. Wilhelm Grimm's editions led to an inscription of more explicit patriarchal values and gender role models. He also added numerous elements of Christianity and made the tales more homey and cute, for instance by adding diminutives. This helped to make the *Children's and Household Tales* more suitable for children, an audience for which the first annotated edition was not specifically intended.”

Jack Zipes himself comments on the ensuing shift of public perception concerning children and fairy tales when he writes, “Change occurred after the 1820s publication of Edgar Taylor’s translation of the Grimm’s fairy tales. Educators and parents began to realize, probably due to their own reading experiences, that fantasy literature and amusement would not necessarily destroy or pervert children’s minds” (49). In fact, fairy tales for children became highly popular as the 19th century progressed and Zipes correlates that acceptance with the rising middle class. He states, “Significantly it was from 1830 to 1900, during the rise of the middle class, that the fairy tale came into its own for children. It was exactly during this time, from 1835 onward, to be precise, that Hans Christian Anderson began publishing his tales” (Zipes 49).

When Hans Christian Andersen began writing fairy tales in 1835, he also began rewriting some of the conventional rules of the fairy tale genre. First and foremost, he created much of his material instead of gathering material from traditional oral tales. While he also retold classic oral tales at the beginning of his career, the introduction to the Penguin Popular Classics collection of Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales* highlights his imaginative creations by saying, "Unlike the Brothers Grimm, Andersen invented much of his material, drawing inspiration from his extensive travels abroad, traditional folklore, tales remembered from childhood and, often, both major and minor incidents in his own and his friend's lives." In addition to the creation of his original stories, he also wrote them into contemporary settings with a personal touch while using "colloquial, everyday language" and "an explicit narrative voice, commenting on the events and addressing the listener" (Nikolajeva). Additionally, "there are no conventional morals in the tales," and, "most of Andersen's fairy tales are radically unlike traditional folk tales as they lack happy endings, the token of true folk tales" (Nikolajeva). Even though Andersen broke away from many of the conventional fairy tale techniques, his stories, "became extremely popular throughout Europe and North America" (Zipes 49). His popularity helped pave the way for another shift in the ever changing fairy tale genre.

During the last part of the 19th century, well-known writers took up the fairy tale form and, "began to experiment with the fairy tale in a manner that would make young readers question the world around them." (Zipes 50). This large group of notable authors included:

Writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray (*The Rose and the Ring*, 1855), George MacDonald ("The Light Princess," 1863), Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland*, 1865), Charles Dickens ("The Magic Fishbone," 1868), Jean Ingelow (*Mopsa the Fairy*, 1869), Juliana Ewing (*Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales*, 1882), Andrew Lang (*Princess Nobody*, 1884), Mary Louisa Molesworth ("The Story of a King's Daughter," 1884), Oscar Wilde

(*The Happy Prince, and Other Tales*, 1888), Kenneth Grahame (*The Reluctant Dragon*, 1898), Edith Nesbit (*The Last of the Dragons*, 1900) (Zipes 50).

While some of these writers, such as MacDonald and Carroll, helped spawn new genres, others, such as Andrew Lang, contributed to the ever changing trends within the fairy tale genre.

In creating his fairy books, Lang began a movement toward collecting, editing, and retelling fairy tales. Gillian Avery describes his writing process by saying,

“Lang was often thought to have himself written the stories in his series of twelve fairy books published between 1889 and 1910. The series began with *The Blue Fairy Book*, which he never then supposed would have any successors. Though he personally selected the tales, arranged for their adaptation and translation, and wrote the prefaces, he relied after the first two books entirely on others, chiefly his wife, for retellings.”

In his efforts to continue the series, Lang looked beyond his local context. Avery writes, “As the series progressed, it expanded beyond Europe to Africa, America, Brazil, Persia, Turkey, India, and Japan.” Lang’s collection, with its inclusive nature, helped broaden the fairy tale genre even as American authors took up the genre for themselves.

Although Western fairy tales were largely centralized in Europe, the latter half of the 19th century gave rise to the Americanized version of the fairy tale. Numerous authors began producing fairy tale works that were greatly influenced by European authors yet distinctively reflected American culture. Jack Zipes states, “Writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Kirke Paulding, Christopher Pearse Cranch, Horace Scudder, Louisa May Alcott, Frank Stockton, Howard Pyle, Catherine Pyle, and others contributed fairy tales to magazines like *St. Nicholas* in the 1870s and 1880s or published their own collections of tales” as “part of a movement to establish a genuine American literature” (50). While Frank Stockton emerged as an early American fairy tale creator, Zipes claims that “The most notable and memorable American fairy tale was produced right at the end of the 19th century: L Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz*

(1900)” (50). Following the fairy tale tradition of writing social commentary into an endearing story, Baum ultimately leads Dorothy to a conclusion that she, “cannot stay in a country where farmers are driven to ruin by bankers and exploitation is accepted as the “American way of life”” (Zipes 50). Zipes goes on to claim that, “Baum's creation of fourteen Oz books, considered as an American fairy tale saga, is a political and cultural commentary with profound ramifications for the eventual development of the fairy tale as genre. In fact, Baum set the stage for other fairy tale novels and series such as those by J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, T. H. White, and Michael Ende” (50).

The fairy tale novels produced during the end of the 19th century and first portion of the 20th century spawned the creation of the fantasy genre. As the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* states, “Fantasy is closely related to the traditional fairy story, and the birth of fantasy-writing in Britain coincided with the 19th cent. revival of interest in, and admiration for, the orally transmitted fairy tale.” (Fantasy, 181) The close relation is notably reinforced by the fact that both genres stake a claim in the same authors and works. In the article “Fantasy” contained in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Maria Nikolajeva writes, “Fantasy became a strong tradition in Britain in the second half of the 19TH century, with works such as *The Water Babies* (1863), by Charles Kingsley; *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), by Lewis Carroll; and *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), by George MacDonald. In all these, the contrast between the magical and the real world is evident.”

George MacDonald helped create the foundations of the fantasy genre when he wrote fairy tale novels for children. As the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, states, “George MacDonald took a very different approach to fantasy-writing, following somewhat in the footsteps of Hans Anderson. In short stories like *The Light Princess* (1864) and in his later full

length books, beginning with *At the Back of the North Wind*, (1871), he produced tales in which a brilliant imagination was subtly blended with a didactic purpose (Fantasy 181). In an introduction to *Phantastes*, C.S. Lewis describes MacDonald's work by saying, "What he does best is fantasy—fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and the mythopoetic" (ix). MacDonald's fantasy, in turn, influenced such authors as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien who became cornerstones of the fantasy genre for children.

While J.R.R. Tolkien is most notably remembered within fantasy circles for his creation of Middle Earth and *The Lord of the Rings*, he also helped define the fantasy genre with his literary criticism. Maria Nikolajeva writes, "The most common designation for the various representations of magic in fantasy is the concept of the Secondary world, originating from J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories." Thus, fantasy may be roughly defined as a narrative combining the presence of the Primary and the Secondary worlds, that is, our own real world and some other, magical or fantastic imagined world." It is the full creation of the secondary world which marks an excellent work of fantasy. Nikolajeva continues by saying, "For Tolkien, genuine and skillful fantasy creates Secondary belief (as opposed to the Primary belief of myth or religion), putting the reader in a temporary state of enchantment. As soon as suspension of disbelief is disturbed, the spell is broken, and, Tolkien adds, art has failed." Thus Tolkien points to a fundamental component of fantasy writing that emerged with George MacDonald's perspective on fantasy.

Readers can only become enchanted with fantasy writing if the Secondary world adheres to consistent laws which reinforce its reality. As George MacDonald himself writes in "The Fantastic Imagination," "His world once invented, the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; and

in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws. The moment he forgets one of them, he makes the story, by its own postulates, incredible” (24). This harmony of laws becomes essential to the creation of fantasy because, “The imagination in us, whose exercise is essential to the most temporary submission to the imagination of another, immediately, with the disappearance of Law, ceases to act” (MacDonald 24). While there are many different ways in which an author can create children’s fantasy that enchant the imagination of young readers by abiding by consistent laws, an intriguing idea is to create a Secondary world filled with secondary fairy tales.

In an effort to create excellent children’s literature, I hope to create a collection of original fairy tales that inform the created culture of the Secondary world. The history of the fairy tale, which began with oral folklore and then transitioned into amusing written tales with obvious morals, could be emulated within the history of the imagined world. Then, just as fairy tale writers used the amusing stories to make pointed social commentary, the fairy tales of the secondary world would comment on the society and culture of that created world which, of course, is ultimately a means to wrestle with the joys and woes of our modern world. By creating such an extensive backdrop of fairy tale stories for this created world, I could begin developing the laws and history of that world which, in turn, provides the depth and richness which marks quality fantasy literature because the reader and protagonist would then have to determine whether or not these fairy tales are simple stories or past realities.

By using created fairy tales to inform the plot of the Secondary world, I’d align my creative world with numerous other fantasy worlds that wrestle with ancient beliefs affecting the action of the plot. For example, J.K. Rowling utilizes *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* as an underlying backdrop to the entire Harry Potter world. It fully emerges in the final installment of

the series to drive the plot of the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. In a slightly different manner, Maria Nikolajeva notes that, “Certain authors, notably C. S. Lewis, repeatedly emphasize the idea that Secondary worlds are composed of characters, objects, and events in which people on Earth have ceased to believe. In J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), belief seems to be a matter of life and death for fairies in the Never-Neverland.” Within the concept of fairy tales informing a secondary world, the characters within the secondary world could encounter characters from fairy tales which their world has ceased to believe in. Thus I’d be exploring “Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic that draws a clear distinction between the marvelous, the fantastic, and the uncanny” in multiple layers which intrigues me as a creator (Nikolajeva).

By creating a tertiary fairy tale realm within the secondary fantasy world, my writing could continue to explore ideas surrounding mystical beliefs which I hope to wrestle with through writing. Maria Nikolajeva provides a summary of Todorov’s theory which, in part, describes the difference between fairy tales and fantasy. She writes, “The fairy tale hero does not interrogate the existence of dragons or witches, because they are part of the fairy tale realm. For the fantasy protagonist, the appearance of witches or unicorns in his own reality, or the phenomenon of being transported into another world, presents a dilemma, which we as readers share.” It is sharing this dilemma that causes us as readers to reflect upon our beliefs in our world. Nikolajeva continues by saying, “The events may be actually happening, causing us to accept the existence of magic in our own world. Alternatively, the character (or the reader) may decide that he is dreaming or hallucinating, but no definite answer is to be found in the text.” This is one reason that created fairy tales have such powerful potential. While some of the fairy tales could certainly trace historical events within a secondary world, an entire volume of fairy

tales that seem to merge into and out of the reality of the Secondary world creates an ambiguity of reality that becomes an intriguing space for exploring ideas surrounding beliefs.

Part Four: The Poetics of Tales from Here and There

I started my thesis project with the goal of creating the backdrop of my future creative worlds. In my previous creative practice, I toyed with the idea of interconnected worlds within a secondary universe. I wanted to expand upon this initial idea and use that forming universe as a stage for my first forays into young adult novels. Thus, I hoped to write fairy tales that informed the history and legends of this secondary universe in order to give it a depth and richness that marks the type of young adult and fantasy literature I wish to emulate. However, I did not realize the monolithic task I set before myself. I naively thought one collection of interconnected fairy tales could give a secondary universe some sizable shape and structure. Once I started work on the project, I soon realized that I needed a narrower focus in order to succeed in a timely completion of my thesis project.

Instead of creating a universal backdrop for my secondary worlds, *Tales from Here and There* focused on a single secondary world. Thus, I paused the universal elements of my secondary creation and set aside all attempts of cosmological grandeur and detailed galactic history. Instead, I focused on the secondary world that serves as the hub of the galaxy by connecting all my other imagined worlds together. Thus the secondary world portrayed in *Tales from Here and There* is the world between the worlds and the first place characters from Earth find when they leave Earth. However, as the collection of stories clearly shows, this secondary world is still in the infancy of its development.

After narrowing my sights to the creation of a single secondary world, I realized that I my objectives still remained too large. Given the constraints of time, I could not fully create a single secondary world complete with heroes, history, geography, and legends. Thus I decided to do the work of an archeologist and slowly uncover bits of this world as fairy tales came to me. In this

manner, I could still continue working towards my initial goal of creating a backdrop for future literary works while completing my current project. I utilized the background research I completed during the fall to direct this investigation and began writing fairy tales with four objectives in mind.

When I started forming the initial fairy tales of my secondary world, I centered my fairy tales upon the creation of magical places and relics. My initial research showed the merger of fairy tales and fantasy has incredible potential for creating future magical places and relics. Andrew Lang tells a story about a flying ship, Charles Perrault describes an enchanted castle, and the Grimm's collection contains numerous combs, sticks, lights, dogs, and coats with magic properties. Kurt Vonnegut even created a piece of magic that froze all the water on the earth. These little bits of magic form the foundation of fairy tale pleasure and I wanted the fairy tales in my secondary world to highlight bits of magic I could use later.

As I began writing and collecting my fairy tales, my second objective became creating independent stories that took on additional significance when one realized that someone else had collected, edited, and arranged *Tales from Here and There*. For the time being these tales are written, collected, and edited by the author. However, in my secondary universe someone else will fulfil that role. As such, children living on my fictitious Earth will read the tales and experience that crisis of belief when they wonder whether or not the stories are true. As small children they'll take delight in discovering the secondary world is true. As older children, they will realize that the tales are gathered for a specific purpose.

The third objective in writing *Tales from Here and There* was conveying the values and principles of my secondary world and this objective proved the most difficult. The main difficulty in this task was the fact that I have not yet created the values and beliefs of my

secondary universe because I placed the cosmology on hold for the duration of this project.

While fairy tales have historically conveyed the values and ideals of their creators, I attempted to minimize the influence of my Christian beliefs because I do not yet know how Christianity enters my secondary world. Thus the values and morals reflected in the fairy tales are much more generic and can best be described as good vs evil. As such, the characters in the stories do not have any specific moral grounding which, as has been pointed out, makes them rather flat. Furthermore, as I discuss in other portions of this project, my Christian faith forms the foundation of my writing which means that my Christian paradigm enters my fairy tales far more often than I realize. While future revisions and stories may develop the morals and beliefs of characters in my secondary world, it is safe to say that, for now, *Tales from Here and There* falls short of my intended goal. Although the morals and beliefs of my secondary world remain undeveloped, my final goal in creating this collection of fairy tales has not yet been widely tested.

My final objective in creating *Tales from Here and There* was to convey small moments of glory and wonder. Of all my goals this one is the most subjective and difficult to describe. George MacDonald describes this goal in “The Fantastic Imagination” when he says, “If there be music in my reader, I would gladly wake it. Let fairytale of mine go for a firefly that now flashes, now is dark, but may flash again” (28). I experienced it in Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” when her story revealed new wonder in nakedness. An audience experiences it every time they clap for J.M. Barrie’s Tinkerbell. I hope that, in at least some of these collected tales, my readers will find similar moments of glory and wonder.

Whether or not others find such moments, my personal search for them will continue as I delve further into this creative world and continue exploring this secondary universe. Throughout

the process of creating these fairy tales I've felt like an archeologist uncovering ancient ruins or a fantasy gamer exploring the darkened portions of the video game map. Sometime discoveries excite me, and other times my back hurts from dusting and my eyes water from staring at the screen too long. However, there are also euphoric moments of discovery when I uncover the edge of a new artifact or find a secret passageway. The conclusion of *Tales from Here and There* is like unearthing one artifact only to discover it is connected to another. These fairy tales are connected to the waiting novels, and I've developed enough of a backdrop to start exploring the foreground of my young adult literature. As such, I'm excited to continue creating fairy tales while I write new adventures and seek moments of wonder in my waiting universe.

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