

Short Stories for Children
for
Spoken English Program
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Short Stories for Children

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LEVEL 1: STORIES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

THE WIND AND THE SUN

Once the Wind and the Sun had an argument. "I am stronger than you," said the Wind. "No, you are not," said the Sun. Just at that moment they saw a traveler walking across the road. He was wrapped in a shawl. The Sun and the Wind agreed that whoever could separate the traveller from his shawl was stronger.

The Wind took the first turn. He blew with all his might to tear the traveller's shawl from his shoulders. But the harder he blew, the tighter the traveller gripped the shawl to his body. The struggle went on till the Wind's turn was over.

Now it was the Sun's turn. The Sun smiled warmly. The traveller felt the warmth of the smiling Sun. Soon he let the shawl fall open. The Sun's smile grew warmer and warmer... hotter and hotter. Now the traveller no longer needed his shawl. He took it off and dropped it on the ground. The Sun was declared stronger than the Wind.

Moral: Brute force can't achieve what a gentle smile can.

THE VILLAGER AND THE SPECTACLES

There was a villager. He was illiterate. He did not know how to read and write. He often saw people wearing spectacles for reading books or papers. He thought, "If I have spectacles, I can also read like these people. I must go to town and buy a pair of spectacles for myself." So one day he went to a town. He entered a spectacles shop. He asked the shopkeeper for a pair of spectacles for reading. The shopkeeper gave him various pairs of spectacles and a book. The villager tried all the spectacles one by one. But he could not read anything. He told the shopkeeper that all those spectacles were useless for him. The shopkeeper gave him a doubtful look. Then he looked at the book. It was upside down! The shopkeeper said, "Perhaps you don't know how to read."

The villager said, "No, I don't. I want to buy spectacles so that I can read like others. But I can't read with any of these spectacles." The shopkeeper controlled his laughter with great difficulty when he learnt the real problem of his illiterate customer.

He explained to the villager, "My dear friend, you are very ignorant. Spectacles don't help to read or write. They only help you to see better. First of all you must learn to read and write."

Moral: Ignorance is blindness.

AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU REAP

One night, three thieves stole a lot of money from a rich man's house. They put the money in a bag and went to the forest. They felt very hungry. So, one of them went to a nearby village to buy food. The other two remained in the forest to take care of the bag of money. The thief that went for food had an evil idea. He ate his food at a hotel. Then he bought food for his two mates in the forest. He mixed a strong poison with the food. He thought, "Those two will eat this poisoned food and die. Then I will get all the money for myself." Meanwhile, the two wicked men in the forest decided to kill their mate on return. They thought that they would divide the money between the two of them. All the three wicked men carried out their cruel plans. The thief who wanted all the money for himself came to the forest with the poisoned food. The two men in the forest hit him and killed him. Then they ate the poisoned food and died. Thus, these evil people met with an evil end.

Moral: Evil begets evil

THE FARMER AND HIS SONS

A farmer had five sons. They were strong and hardworking. But they always quarrelled with one another. Sometimes, they even fought. The farmer wanted his sons to stop quarrelling and fighting. He wanted them to live in peace. Plain words of advice or scolding did not have much effect on these young people.

The farmer always thought what to do to keep his sons united. One day he found an answer to the problem. So he called all his sons together. He showed them a bundle of sticks and said, "I want any of you to break these sticks without separating them from the bundle." Each of the five sons tried one by one. They used their full strength and skill. But none of them could break the sticks. Then the old man separated the sticks and gave each of them just a single stick to break. They broke the sticks easily.

The farmer said, "A single stick by itself is weak. It is strong as long as it is tied up in a bundle. Likewise, you will be strong if you are united. You will be weak if you are divided."

Moral: United we stand, Divided we fall.

BIRBAL THE WISE

One day, a rich merchant came to Birbal. He said to Birbal, "I have seven servants in my house. One of them has stolen my bag of precious pearls. Please find out the thief."

So Birbal went to the rich man's house. He called all the seven servants in a room. He gave a stick to each one of them. Then he said, "These are magic sticks. Just now all these sticks are equal in length. Keep them with you and return tomorrow. If there is a thief in the house, his stick will grow an inch longer by tomorrow."

The servant who had stolen the bag of pearls was scared. He thought, "If I cut a piece of one inch from my stick, I won't be caught." So he cut the stick and made it shorter by one inch.

The next day Birbal collected the sticks from the servants. He found that one servant's stick was short by an inch. Birbal pointed his finger at him and said, "Here is the thief." The servant confessed to his crime. He returned the bag of pearls. He was sent to jail.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

One day a wolf found a sheepskin. He covered himself with the sheepskin and got into a flock of sheep grazing in a field. He thought, "The shepherd will shut the sheep in the pen after sunset. At night I will run away with a fat sheep and eat it."

All went well till the shepherd shut the sheep in the pen and left. The wolf waited patiently for the night to advance and grow darker. But then an unexpected thing happened. One of the servants of the shepherd entered the pen. His master had sent him to bring a fat sheep for supper. As luck would have it, the servant picked up the wolf dressed in the sheepskin. That night the shepherd and his guests had the wolf for supper.

Moral: An evil design has an evil end.

HARE AND THE TORTOISE

Once a hare was roaming near a lake in a forest. Suddenly he saw a tortoise and mocked at him saying - "Hurry up, you slow coach! Don't you find life very dull taking so long to cover a few yards? I could have run to the other side of the lake by now."

The tortoise felt teased and dared the hare to a race. The race was to be through the wood to a fixed goal.

The hare agreed laughingly. In a few minutes he was away and out of sight.

"What a funny race it is!" he said to himself, "I am already half-way through. But it is too-cold; why not have a nap in the warm sunshine?"

The tortoise walked steadily on and on. In a short time, he passed by the sleeping hare.

The hare slept far longer than he had intended. When he woke up at last, he looked around in surprise and said to himself, "Not even a sign of the poor tortoise anywhere so far; I had better trot along and finish the race."

The hare ran to the goal. He was amazed to see all the animals cheering the tortoise who had arrived just a minute earlier. How ashamed he felt indeed!

Moral: Slow and steady wins the race

NOBODY BELIEVES A LIAR

Once a mischievous boy lived in a village that stood in the feet of a hill. One day he thought of having fun at the cost of his fellow-villagers.

Standing on a high rock, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Lion! Lion! Come, save me."

The villagers heard the shout and ran to help him. But when they reached there, they could see no lion and the boy was perfectly all right. The boy laughed at the villagers saying, "No Lion ; I did it only for fun."

The villagers got highly annoyed and came back with an air of anger.

Few days later the boy repeated the whole act. Again the villagers went to his rescue but were duped again. Now they decided not to be fooled by him anymore.

Unfortunately, one day, the lion really came there. Now the boy shouted, "Lion! Lion! as loud as he could". But nobody came to help him out.

The lion attacked the boy. The boy struggled hard to save himself but within few minutes, the beast killed him.

So, once a liar, always a liar.

WORK IS WORSHIP

One fine sunny day in winter, a grasshopper was basking in the warm sun. But he was very hungry, as he had not eaten anything since last night.

So, he looked about to find something to soothe his hunger. Suddenly, he saw few ants carrying grains into their hole.

He went up to the ants and asked humbly, "Can you, please, spare few grains for me. I haven't eaten anything since yesterday. So, I am almost starving to death."

One of the ants asked the grasshopper, "What were you doing the whole summer? Why didn't you store up the food for the winter season?"

The grasshopper replied, "Truly speaking, I spent all the summer singing songs and that's why I couldn't store anything."

The ant chuckled out a smile and remarked, "Then dance the winter away." The grasshopper pulled a long face and walked away.

So we say "Work is real worship".

NEVER BE UNGRATEFUL

It was high summer. The sun was extremely hot. Two travelers were going along a dusty road that had no trees along its sides. Looking for some shelter from the hot sun, they saw a tree with big leaves and branches spread like an umbrella.

They placed their belongings on the ground and sat in the cool thick shade of the tree. After taking some rest, one traveler said to the other, "What a useless tree it is! It bears no fruits at all."

Hearing this, the tree felt pinched and burst out, "You ungrateful soul! On one hand, you are taking shelter in my cool shade from the burning heat of the sun and on the other hand, you are calling me useless. Get up and leave the place immediately to be scorched again."

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

Once upon a time there was a lion that grew so old that he was unable to kill any prey for his food. So, he said to himself, "I must do something to stay my stomach else I will die of starvation."

He kept thinking and thinking and at last an idea clicked him. He decided to lie down in the cave pretending to be ill and then who-so-ever will come to enquire about his health, will become his prey. The old lion put his wicked plan into practice and it started working. Many of his well-wishers got killed. But evil is short lived.

One day, a fox came to visit the ailing lion. As foxes are clever by nature, the fox stood at the mouth of the cave and looked about. His sixth sense worked and he came to know the reality. So, he called out to the lion from outside and said, "How are you, sir?"

The lion replied, "I am not feeling well at all. But why don't you come inside?"

Then the fox replied, "I would love to come in, sir! But on seeing, all foot prints going to your cave and none coming out, I would be foolish enough to come in."

Saying so, the fox went to alert the other animals.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

Once there was a big pool near a village. The villagers used the water of the pool for drinking and for other purposes also. The pool was abounded with fish.

Once a fisherman went fishing to the pool. He cast his net into the pool and sat down. But he was very impatient. So, he tied a long string to a small stone. Then putting it into the pool, he began to stir the water to drive more fish into his net.

A villager saw him do so and asked him not to make the water muddy. But the fisherman didn't listen to him and went on beating the water and making it dirty. So, the villagers brought some companions armed with weapons. Seeing them, the fisherman got scared. He drew out his stone and apologized."

TIME IS VALUABLE

Anthony was a very lazy boy and always used to postpone things. One day his father called him and made him understand the value of time that one should always do things on time. Anthony promised his father that he would never postpone things.

One day, he came to know that he had won the first prize in a singing competition that was held the previous month. He was asked to collect the prize the same day. He didn't care and went to collect the prize the next day. But the prize became useless for him, as it was a ticket to a circus show, which was held the previous day.

Anthony learnt a lesson from this incident.

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Once a teacher had a disciple who used to live in a hermitage. One day, the disciple was going somewhere. He hadn't gone too far when suddenly it started raining cats and dogs. He returned and told this problem to his teacher. The teacher said, "You should have faith in god. He will save you from all problems."

The disciple obeyed and resumed his journey. He kept reciting the name of god and cleared all the hurdles.

Next day, the teacher had to go on the same route. When he reached a deep drain, he doubted whether god would save him or not. The teacher got drowned.

Thus, doubt drowns you and faith saves you.

BLIND IMITATION IS BAD

One day, a saint while going somewhere with his disciples saw a pond full of fishes, on the way. He stopped there and started filling his mouth with fish. The disciples followed their guru. The saint said nothing to them and after some time moved ahead.

Then they reached another pond, where there were no fishes. The saint stood at its shore and started taking out the fishes he had swallowed. When the disciples saw this, they were

amazed and also tried to vomit out the fishes, but after many attempts, they could only take out some dead fishes.

At this, the saint said, "Fools, when you didn't know how to keep the fishes alive in the stomach, then why did you imitate me?"

Its truly said that never imitate anyone.

A FOX AND A CRANE

Once a fox and a crane became friends. So, the fox invited the crane to dinner. The crane accepted the invitation and reached the fox's place at sunset.

The fox had prepared soup for his mate. But as we all know that foxes are cunning by nature, he served the soup in flat dishes. So, he himself lapped the crane's share with his tongue enjoying its relish a lot. But the crane could not enjoy it at all with his long beak and had to get back home hungry. The shrewd fox felt extremely amused.

After few days, the crane invited the fox to dine in with him. The fox reached his place well in time. The crane gave him a warm welcome and served the soup in a jug with a long and narrow neck.

So, the crane enjoyed the soup with great relish using his long beak. The fox's mouth couldn't reach the soup through the narrow neck of the jug. He had to return home hungry. Now he realized that he had been repaid for his behaviour with the crane.

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Once there lived a grumpy king. He never used to laugh nor allow anyone in the kingdom to laugh.

One day, a small boy couldn't control his laughter. Later, scared of the punishment, he thought of a plan. He wrote a funny story and converted it into a drama.

Then he went to the palace and asked the king, "May I present my drama to you?" the king let him do it. Then the boy started the play. In the end, he came to the funniest part of the story which made the king laugh.

All people present in the court were amazed. The king then allowed everybody to laugh. Everyone then lived happily thereafter.

THE STORY OF LORD GANESHA

One day, Goddess Parvathi, the wife of Lord Shiva, was getting ready for her bath and needed someone to guard her chamber. Therefore she made a beautiful, young boy from the sandalwood from her body. She gave him life by sprinkling the Holy Ganges water on him and entrusted him with guarding the door.

While she was away, Lord Shiva returned and was surprised to find a little boy standing at the entrance to his wife's chamber. When he tried to enter, the boy blocked his path. "Who are you and why are you blocking my path?" demanded Lord Shiva. "No one enters my mother's chamber", declared the boy boldly. Taken aback, Lord Shiva replied, "Step away; I have the right to enter my wife's chamber." But the young and courageous boy did not move but stood his ground. Not knowing that this was his own son, Lord Shiva who was quick to anger grew enraged. Not used to be disobeyed he cut off the boy's head.

Goddess Parvathi on returning from her bath saw her son lying dead and was overcome with grief. She was filled with both anger and sorrow. Seeing this Lord Shiva sent his soldiers to fetch the head of the first beast that they saw. The men rushed and finally came upon an elephant. They immediately took the head to Lord Shiva, who quickly attached it onto the body of the slain boy and gave him life once again.

To further appease his grief-stricken wife he promised that her son would be worshipped first, before all other Gods.

Even today at the entrance of all temples one would find the idol of the elephant-headed God, Lord Ganesha.

EAGLES IN A STORM

Did you know that an eagle knows when a storm is approaching long before it breaks? The eagle will fly to some high spot and wait for the winds to come. When the storm hits, it sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it. The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. It rises on the winds that bring the storm. When the storms of life come upon us – and all of us will experience them – we can rise above them by setting our minds and our belief toward God. The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God's power to lift us above them. God enables us to ride the winds of the storm that bring sickness, tragedy, failure and disappointment in our lives. We can soar above the storm.

THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER

One summer's day, a merry Grasshopper was dancing, singing and playing his violin with all his heart. He saw an Ant passing by, bearing along with great toil a wheatear to store for the winter.

"Come and sing with me instead of working so hard", said the Grasshopper "Let's have fun together."

"I must store food for the winter", said the Ant, "and I advise you to do the same."

"Don't worry about winter, it's still very far away", said the Grasshopper, laughing at him. But the Ant wouldn't listen and continued his toil.

When the winter came, the starving Grasshopper went to the Ant's house and humbly begged for something to eat.

"If you had listened to my advice in the summer you would not now be in need," said the Ant. "I'm afraid you will have to go supperless to bed," and he closed the door.

It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.

MOTHER'S DAY

A man stopped at a flower shop to order some flowers to be wired to his mother who lived two hundred miles away. As he got out of his car he noticed a young girl sitting on the curb sobbing. He asked her what was wrong and she replied, "I wanted to buy a red rose for my mother. But I only have seventy-five cents, and a rose costs two dollars." The man smiled and said, "Come on in with me. I'll buy you a rose." He bought the little girl her rose and ordered his own mother's flowers. As they were leaving he offered the girl a ride home. She said, "Yes, please! You can take me to my mother." She directed him to a cemetery, where she placed the rose on a freshly dug grave. The man returned to the flower shop, canceled the wire order, picked up a bouquet and drove the two hundred miles to his mother's house.

MOUNTAIN

"A son and his father were walking on the mountains.
Suddenly, his son falls, hurts himself and screams: "AAAhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"
To his surprise, he hears the voice repeating, somewhere in the mountain:
"AAAhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"
Curious, he yells: "Who are you?"
He receives the answer: "Who are you?"
And then he screams to the mountain: "I admire you!"
The voice answers: "I admire you!"
Angered at the response, he screams: "Coward!"
He receives the answer: "Coward!"
He looks to his father and asks: "What's going on?"
The father smiles and says: "My son, pay attention."
Again the man screams: "You are a champion!"
The voice answers: "You are a champion!"
The boy is surprised, but does not understand.
Then the father explains: "People call this ECHO, but really this is LIFE.
It gives you back everything you say or do.
Our life is simply a reflection of our actions.
If you want more love in the world, create more love in your heart.
If you want more competence in your team, improve your competence.
This relationship applies to everything, in all aspects of life;
Life will give you back everything you have given to it."

YOUR LIFE IS NOT A COINCIDENCE. IT'S A REFLECTION OF YOU!"

THE MISER

A miser sold all that he had and bought a lump of gold, which he buried in a hole in the ground by the side of an old wall and went to look at daily. One of his workmen observed his frequent visits to the spot and decided to watch his movements. He soon discovered the secret of the hidden treasure, and digging down, came to the lump of gold, and stole it. The Miser, on his next visit, found the hole empty and began to tear his hair and to make loud lamentations. A neighbor, seeing him overcome with grief and learning the cause, said, "Pray do not grieve so; but go and take a stone, and place it in the hole, and fancy that the gold is still lying there. It will do you quite the same service; for when the gold was there, you had it not, as you did not make the slightest use of it."

TWO FROGS

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. When the other frogs saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead. Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up. He fell down and died. The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. He jumped even harder and finally made it out. When he got out, the other frogs said, "Did you not hear us?" The frog explained to them that he was deaf. He thought they were encouraging him the entire time.

This story teaches two lessons:

1. There is power of life and death in the tongue. An encouraging word to someone who is down can lift them up and help them make it through the day.
2. A destructive word to someone who is down can be what it takes to kill them.

Be careful of what you say. Speak life to those who cross your path. The power of words... it is sometimes hard to understand that an encouraging word can go such a long way. Anyone can speak words that tend to rob another of the spirit to continue in difficult times. Special is the individual who will take the time to encourage another.

SAND AND STONE

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SLAPPED ME IN THE FACE." They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one, who had been slapped, got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After the friend recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SAVED MY LIFE." The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

LEARN TO WRITE YOUR HURTS IN THE SAND, AND TO CARVE YOUR BENEFITS IN STONE

LEVEL 2: STORIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

A BOX FULL OF KISSES

The story goes that some time ago, a man punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy." The man was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, but his anger flared again when he found out the box was empty. He yelled at her, stating, "Don't you know, when you give someone a present, there is supposed to be something inside?" The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and cried, "Oh, Daddy, it's not empty at all. I blew kisses into the box. They're all for you, Daddy." The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged for her forgiveness. Only a short time later, an accident took the life of the child. It is also told that her father kept that gold box by his bed for many years and, whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there. In a very real sense, each one of us, as human beings, have been given a gold container filled with unconditional love and kisses... from our children, family members, friends, and God. There is simply no other possession, anyone could hold, more precious than this.

THE PRAYING HANDS

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for this mob, the father and head of the household, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade and any other paying chore he could find in the neighborhood. Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of Albrecht Durer the Elder's children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Academy. After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support the other

brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by laboring in the mines. They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Durer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg. Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works. When the young artist returned to his village, the Durer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, Albrecht rose from his honored position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you." All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No ...no ...no ...no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look ... look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother ... for me it is too late."

More than 450 years have passed. By now, Albrecht Durer's hundreds of masterful portraits, pen and silver-point sketches, watercolors, charcoals, woodcuts, and copper engravings hang in every great museum in the world, but the odds are great that you, like most people, are familiar with only one of Albrecht Durer's works. More than merely being familiar with it, you very well may have a reproduction hanging in your home or office.

One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Durer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands."

The next time you see a copy of that touching creation, take a second look. Let it be your reminder, if you still need one, that no one – no one – ever makes it alone!

Remember, it is not the burdens of life that weigh us down; it is how we handle them.

THE FOUR WIVES

There was a rich merchant who had 4 wives. He loved the 4th wife the most and adorned her with rich robes and treated her to delicacies. He took great care of her and gave her nothing but the best.

He also loved the 3rd wife very much. He's very proud of her and always wanted to show off her to his friends. However, the merchant is always in great fear that she might run away with some other men.

He too, loved his 2nd wife. She is a very considerate person, always patient and in fact is the merchant's confidante. Whenever the merchant faced some problems, he always turned to his 2nd wife and she would always help him out and tide him through difficult times.

Now, the merchant's 1st wife is a very loyal partner and has made great contributions in maintaining his wealth and business as well as taking care of the household. However, the merchant did not love the first wife and although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her.

One day, the merchant fell ill. Before long, he knew that he was going to die soon. He thought of his luxurious life and told himself, "Now I have 4 wives with me. But when I die, I'll be alone. How lonely I'll be!"

Thus, he asked the 4th wife, "I loved you most, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No way!" replied the 4th wife and she walked away without another word.

The answer cut like a sharp knife right into the merchant's heart. The sad merchant then asked the 3rd wife, "I have loved you so much for all my life. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No!" replied the 3rd wife. "Life is so good over here! I'm going to remarry when you die!" The merchant's heart sank and turned cold.

He then asked the 2nd wife, "I always turned to you for help and you've always helped me out. Now I need your help again. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" "I'm sorry, I can't help you out this time!" replied the 2nd wife. "At the very most, I can only send you to your grave." The answer came like a bolt of thunder and the merchant was devastated.

Then a voice called out: "I'll leave with you. I'll follow you no matter where you go." The merchant looked up and there was his first wife. She was so skinny, almost like she suffered from malnutrition. Greatly grieved, the merchant said, "I should have taken much better care of you while I could have!"

Actually, we all have 4 wives in our lives

- a. The 4th wife is our body. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it'll leave us when we die.
- b. Our 3rd wife? Our possessions, status and wealth. When we die, they all go to others.
- c. The 2nd wife is our family and friends. No matter how close they had been there for us when we're alive, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave.
- d. The 1st wife is in fact our soul, often neglected in our pursuit of material, wealth and sensual pleasure.

Guess what? It is actually the only thing that follows us wherever we go. Perhaps it's a good idea to cultivate and strengthen it now rather than to wait until we're on our deathbed to lament

WAIT FOR THE BRICK

A young and successful executive was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag's side door! He slammed on the brakes and drove the Jag back to the spot where the brick had been thrown. The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest kid and pushed him up against a parked car, shouting, "What was that all about and who are you? Just what the heck are you doing?"

That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?"

The young boy was apologetic. "Please mister ... please, I'm sorry... I didn't know what else to do," he pleaded. "I threw the brick because no one else would stop..."

With tears dripping down his face and off his chin, the youth pointed to a spot just around a parked car. "It's my brother," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up."

Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me." Moved beyond words, the driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He hurriedly lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair, then took out his fancy handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you and may God bless you," the grateful child told the stranger. Too shook up for words, the man simply watched the little boy push his wheelchair-bound brother down the sidewalk toward their home. It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door. He kept the dent there to remind him of this message: Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention!

God whispers in our souls and speaks to our hearts. Sometimes when we don't have time to listen, He has to throw a brick at us.

It's our choice: Listen to the whisper ... or wait for the brick!

PUPPIES FOR SALE

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising the pups and set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the Eyes of a little boy. Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money." The boy dropped his head for a

moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?" "Sure," said the farmer.

And with that he let out a whistle, "Here, Dolly!" he called.

Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight.

As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared; this One noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up.... "I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt.

The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands."

The world is full of people who need someone who understands.

THE MAN, THE BOY AND THE DONKEY

A Man and his son were once going with their Donkey to market. As they were walking along by its side a countryman passed them and said: "You fools, what is a Donkey for but to ride upon?"

So the Man put the Boy on the Donkey and they went on their way. But soon they passed a group of men, one of whom said: "See that lazy youngster, he lets his father walk while he rides."

So the Man ordered his Boy to get off, and got on himself. But they hadn't gone far when they passed two women, one of whom said to the other: "Shame on that lazy lout to let his poor little son trudge along."

Well, the Man didn't know what to do, but at last he took his Boy up before him on the Donkey. By this time they had come to the town, and the passers-by began to jeer and point at them. The Man stopped and asked what they were scoffing at. The men said:

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself for overloading that poor donkey of yours and your hulking son?"

The Man and Boy got off and tried to think what to do. They thought and they thought, till at last they cut down a pole, tied the donkey's feet to it, and raised the pole and the donkey to their shoulders. They went along amid the laughter of all who met them till they came to Market Bridge, when the Donkey, getting one of his feet loose, kicked out and caused the Boy to drop his end of the pole. In the struggle the Donkey fell over the bridge, and his fore-feet being tied together he was drowned.

"That will teach you," said an old man who had followed them:

Please all, and you will please none

THE WOODEN BOWL

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and a four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together nightly at the dinner table. But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating rather difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass often milk spilled on the tablecloth. The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about grandfather," said the son. I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor. So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner at the dinner table. Since grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl. Sometimes when the family glanced in grandfather's direction, he had a tear in his eye as he ate alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food. The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and mama to eat your food from when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work. The words so struck the parents that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done. That evening the husband took grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table.

For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled. Children are remarkably perceptive. Their eyes ever observe, their ears ever listen, and their minds ever process the messages they absorb. If they see us patiently provide a happy home atmosphere for family members, they will imitate that attitude for the rest of their lives. The wise parent realizes that every day that building blocks are being laid for the child's future.

Let us all be wise builders and role models. Take care of yourself, ... and those you love, ... today, and everyday!

TREES THAT WOOD

Once there were three trees on a hill in the woods. They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the first tree said, "Someday I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and precious gems. I could be decorated with intricate carving and everyone would see the beauty."

Then the second tree said, "Someday I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to the corners of the world. Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull."

Finally the third tree said, "I want to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look up to my branches, and think of the heavens and God and how close to them I am reaching. I will be the greatest tree of all time and people will always remember me."

After a few years of praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees. When one came to the first tree he said, "This looks like a strong tree, I think I should be able to sell the wood to a carpenter" ... and he began cutting it down. The tree was happy, because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest.

At the second tree a woodsman said, "This looks like a strong tree, I should be able to sell it to the shipyard." The second tree was happy because he knew he was on his way to becoming a mighty ship.

When the woodsmen came upon the third tree, the tree was frightened because he knew that if they cut him down his dreams would not come true. One of the woodsmen said, "I don't need anything special from my tree so I'll take this one", and he cut it down.

When the first tree arrived at the carpenters, he was made into a feed box for animals. He was then placed in a barn and filled with hay. This was not at all what he had prayed for. The second tree was cut and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end. The third tree was cut into large pieces and left alone in the dark. The years went by, and the trees forgot about their dreams.

Then one day, a man and woman came to the barn. She gave birth and they placed the baby in the hay in the feed box that was made from the first tree. The man wished that he could have made a crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do. The tree could feel the importance of this event and knew that it had held the greatest treasure of all time. Years later, a group of men got in the fishing boat made from the second tree. One of them was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the sleeping man, and he stood and said "Peace" and the storm stopped. At this time, the tree knew that it had carried the King of Kings in its boat.

Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets as the people mocked the man who was carrying it. When they came to a stop, the man was nailed to the tree and raised in the air to die at the top of a hill. When Sunday came, the tree came to realize that it was strong enough to stand at the top of the hill and be as close to God as was possible, because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you place your trust in Him, He will give you great gifts. Each of the trees got what they wanted, just not in the way they had imagined. We don't always know what God's plans are for us. We just know that His ways are not our ways, but His ways are always best.

PENCIL

The Pencil Maker took the pencil aside, just before putting him into the box.

"There are 5 things you need to know," he told the pencil, "Before I send you out into the world. Always remember them and never forget, and you will become the best pencil you can be."

"One: You will be able to do many great things, but only if you allow yourself to be held in Someone's hand."

"Two: You will experience a painful sharpening from time to time, but you'll need it to become a better pencil."

"Three: You will be able to correct any mistakes you might make."

"Four: The most important part of you will always be what's inside."

"And Five: On every surface you are used on, you must leave your mark. No matter what the condition, you must continue to write."

The pencil understood and promised to remember, and went into the box with purpose in its heart.

Now replacing the place of the pencil with you. Always remember them and never forget, and you will become the best person you can be.

One: You will be able to do many great things, but only if you allow yourself to be held in God's hand. And allow other human beings to access you for the many gifts you possess.

Two: You will experience a painful sharpening from time to time, by going through various problems in life, but you'll need it to become a stronger person.

Three: You will be able to correct any mistakes you might make.

Four: The most important part of you will always be what's on the inside.

And Five: On every surface you walk through, you must leave your mark. No matter what the situation, you must continue to do your duties.

Allow this parable on the pencil to encourage you to know that you are a special person and only you can fulfill the purpose to which you were born to accomplish.

Never allow yourself to get discouraged and think that your life is insignificant and cannot make a change.

DAD'S BLESSINGS

A young man was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing his father could well afford it, he told him that was all he wanted.

As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car. Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautifully wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Bible, with the young man's name embossed in gold. Angry, he raised his voice to his father and said "With all your money, you give me a Bible?" and stormed out of the house, leaving the Bible.

Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old, and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. Before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things.

When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and saw the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. And as he did, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer's name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation, and the words PAID IN FULL.

How many times do we miss Spirit's blessings and answers to our prayers because they do not arrive exactly as we have expected?

THE GREEDY CLOUD

Once upon a time lived on a cloud that was grown up over a very beautiful country. One day, she saw another much bigger cloud and she felt so much envy, than the cloud decided that in order to get bigger and grow more, her water would never abandon her, and will never start raining again.

Indeed, the cloud grew up, while his country was getting dried. First, rivers dried up, then people, animals, plants, and finally, the whole country became a desert. The cloud did not care much, but she also did not realize that by being over a desert there was no place where she could obtain new water to keep growing. So slowly, the cloud began to lose size, and was unable to do anything to stop it .

The cloud then realized her mistake, and that her greed and selfishness were the cause of her vanishing; but just before evaporating, when she was just a sigh of cotton, there started blowing a gentle breeze. The cloud was so small and weighed so little that the wind took her far away, to a faraway beautiful country, where once again she recovered her original size.

Having learned this lesson, our cloud remained small and modest, but she became so generous when raining, that her new country became even greener, giving away to all people there the most beautiful rainbow in the world.

A MAD MAN IN THE CITY

Julian finally left his village when there was no one left living there. He had never left his beloved village before, but intrigued by the fact that everyone had gone to the city, he decided to go and see for himself what wonderful things those cities had. So he packed a knapsack with a few clothes, put on his best smile, and off he went to the city.

On reaching the city, he was given a most unexpected welcome. A couple of policemen stopped Julian and questioned him in great detail. It turned out that Julian had seemed 'suspiciously happy' for someone with hardly any possessions. In the end, the police had to let him go, but they were still suspicious about this apparently simple and good-natured fellow.

The first thing Julian noticed about the city was all the rushing around. Everyone was in such a hurry that he thought that there must be something special happening that day, which no one wanted to miss. Curious as to what it was, Julian started following a man who looked like he was hurrying to see whatever it was that was happening. However, after several hours following him, the man arrived at a small flat and went inside. He had done or seen nothing of interest that whole day.

That night Julian slept in a park. The park was strewn with bits of paper and plastic. As the bins were completely empty, Julian thought how cool it was that the city had seemingly invented plants with petals made of paper and plastic. He only believed this until the following morning, when a man came by and dropped his chocolate wrapper.

Julian carried on walking through the city streets, trying to understand what was going on, when he arrived at a group of big warehouses, which many people were entering. "This must be the best museum in the world," he thought, on entering, and seeing all the useless-looking things they had inside. But then he saw that people were picking these things up, paying for them, and taking them away.

"Why would anyone want a watch which doesn't show the minutes?" he wondered to himself, after seeing a woman very contentedly leaving with the most modern of watches on her wrist. He thought pretty much the same when seeing a pair of shoes with impossibly high heels, and then some electronic device which did a thousand things, and none of them well. Once again, he decided to follow the lady with the watch. He saw her joy turn into disappointment when her friends gave her new watch a look of disapproval. Julian started regretting having left his village, just to come to this place where no one seemed happy.

Then he saw a few kids playing. Now, they certainly did seem happy, playing, running about, chasing each other. Except for one child, who seemed troubled by a little machine they were calling a console. He was hitting it so hard with his fingers, and making all kinds of faces and angry gestures, that when one of the other children came over to invite him to play with them, the boy with the console just rudely walked away. Julian thought that the boy was trying to destroy that little machine because it was making him so unhappy. He decided to help the boy. Julian went over, took the console, threw it on the ground, stamped on it, and looked at the boy with great satisfaction.

At this the boy flew into a rage, as did all the other children there, and nearly all the adults. They pursued Julian so relentlessly that he had to run away. He didn't stop running until he reached the road leading back to his village.

As he was making his way home he couldn't help wondering whether the whole world had gone mad.

NEVER MAKE FUN OF A RHINO

Once, on the African plains, there lived a moody rhino who was very easily angered. One day, a giant turtle entered the rhino's territory unaware. The rhino quickly ran over to the turtle, with the intention of getting rid of it. The turtle was frightened and withdrew into its shell.

When the rhino demanded that the turtle get out of his territory, there was no discernible movement. The rhino was incredibly annoyed; he thought the turtle was fooling him. So he started banging the shell to make the turtle come out. No success, and his blows got increasingly violent. He whacked it with his horn, sending the poor turtle flying in all directions. From a distance, it looked a bit like a solitary game of football, with the turtle as the ball.

Quite an amusing spectacle, it was, and a load of monkeys soon gathered close by to enjoy it. They laughed non-stop at the angry rhino and his struggle with the turtle.

The rhino was so furious that he didn't even notice that they were there. On he went, until he had to stop for a second to get his breath.

Now that he wasn't bashing the shell, he could hear the laughing and joking of the monkeys, who were making fun of him in every way you can imagine.

Neither the rhino, nor the turtle - who had appeared from his shell -, enjoyed the fact that a gang of monkeys was mocking them.

So, they exchanged a knowing look, nodded, and the turtle went back inside his shell. This time the rhino very quietly retreated a few steps, looked at the turtle, looked at the monkeys, took a run up, and shot the giant turtle, with such a good aim, that it seemed like he was using the monkeys as skittles.

The 'strike' against the monkeys turned that place into something of a casualty ward for baboons. There they all lay, covered in cuts and bruises, and not even a smirk crossed their lips. Meanwhile, off went the rhino and the turtle, smiling like old friends... and while the monkeys were putting on their sticking plasters, their chief realised it was about time they found a better way to amuse themselves than making fun of others.

THE MATH DUNCE

That year, in the local school, there was a new Math teacher, as well as some new pupils. One of the new kids was the stupidest child anyone had ever seen. It made no difference how quickly or how slowly they tried explaining numbers to him; he would always end up saying something enormously dumb. Like two plus two was five, seven times three was twenty-seven, or a triangle had thirty corners...

Before this boy arrived, Maths lessons had been the most boring of all. Now they were great fun. Encouraged by the new teacher, the children would listen to the pieces of nonsense spouted by the new kid, and they would have to correct his mistakes.

They all wanted to be the first to find his mistakes, and then think up the most original ways to explain them. To do this they used all kinds of stuff: sweets, playing cards, oranges, paper planes...

It didn't seem like any of this bothered the new kid.

However, little Lewis was sure that it was bound to make him feel sad inside.

So, one day, he decided to follow the new kid home after school; Lewis was sure he would see him crying.

On leaving school, the new kid walked a few minutes to a local park, and there he waited for a while, until someone came along to meet him...

It was the new teacher!

The teacher gave the new kid a hug, and off they went, hand in hand. Following from a distance, Lewis could hear they were talking about Math.

And that stupid new kid knew everything about it, much more than anyone in the class!

THE WHITE ROSE

In a garden filled with bushes, out from between a load of grass and weeds, there appeared, as if from nowhere, a white rose. It was as white as driven snow, its petals looked like velvet, and the morning dew shone from its leaves like resplendent crystals. The flower couldn't see herself, so she had no idea how pretty she was. And so it was that she spent the few days of her life, until wilting set on, without knowing that all around her were amazed by her and her perfection: her perfume, the softness of her petals, her elegance. She didn't realise that everyone who saw her spoke well of her. The weeds that surrounded her were fascinated by her beauty, and lived in a state of enchantment at her aroma and appearance.

One hot, sunny day, a girl was strolling through the garden, thinking about how many lovely things Mother Nature has given us, when she suddenly saw a white rose in a forgotten part of the garden. The rose was beginning to fade and wilt.

-“It's days since it rained,”

she thought,

-“if the rose stays here till tomorrow it'll be totally withered. I'll take it home and put it in the lovely vase I got as a present.”

And so she did. With all her love she put the wilting white rose in water, inside a lovely colourful glass vase, and placed it by the window.

-“I'll put it here,”

she thought,

-“so the flower can get some sun.”

What the young girl didn't realise was that the reflection from the window meant that, for the first time, the rose got to see herself and what she looked like.

-“Is that me?”

thought the rose. Little by little her drooping leaves began to rise, once again stretching up towards the sun, and, gradually, the rose recovered her former appearance. When she was

totally back to her best she looked at her reflection and saw that she was indeed a beautiful flower. She thought

- "Wow! Till now I hadn't realised who I was, how could I have been so blind?"

The rose came to realise she had spent her days without appreciating her beauty, unable to see herself, unable to know who she really was.

If you really want to know who you are, forget everything that's around you, and just look into your heart.

THE RUBY THIEF

In the palace of Rubyland there was a ruby thief. No one knew who it was, and the thief had everyone so fooled that the only thing known about him was that he lived in the palace, and that when you were in the palace you should always hide your jewels.

The King decided to find out who it was, and he asked for help from a wise dwarf who was famed for his intelligence. The dwarf spent some days there, watching and listening, until there was another theft. The following morning the wise dwarf made all the palace inhabitants meet up together in the same room. After inspecting them for the whole morning, and during lunch, without saying a word, the dwarf started asking them all, one by one, what they knew about the stolen jewels.

Once again, it seemed that no one had been the thief. But then, suddenly, one of the gardeners began coughing, writhing and moaning, and finally he fell to the floor.

The dwarf, with a cheeky smile, explained that the food they had just eaten was poisoned, and the only antidote for this poison was hidden inside the ruby that had been stolen the previous night. And he explained how, some days earlier, he himself had swapped some false rubies for the genuine ones, and that he expected that only the thief would be able to save his life, since the poison was particularly quick working...

The coughs and groans spread around the room, and terror took hold of all present. All except one person. A footman didn't take long to run over to where he had hidden the jewels, from where he took the final ruby. Fortunately he would be able to open it and drink the strange liquid inside, thus saving his life.

Or so he believed, because the gardener was, in fact, one of the dwarf's assistants, and the poison was nothing more than a potion prepared by the little investigator to cause a few strong pains for a short while, but nothing more than that. And the footman, now found out, was arrested by the guards and taken immediately to court.

The King, grateful, generously rewarded his wise adviser, and when he asked the dwarf what his secret was, the dwarf smiled and said:

-“I only try to get the person knowing the truth to reveal that truth.”

-“And who knew it? If the thief had deceived everyone...”

-“No, your majesty, not everyone. Anyone can deceive everyone, but no one can deceive themselves.”

THE DRAWING THAT TALKED

Pinty Tailor was a little boy who enjoyed going to school and doing all sorts of things, except for art and writing. Using brushes and pencils did not come easy to Pinty, so his works of art did not end happily, and he would just give up in disgust.

But one day Pinty found a pencil of such lovely colours that he could not resist, and he tried drawing a circle. As ever, it did not go well, and he was about to throw the pencil away when his drawing began to speak to him.

‘Psst! You aren’t going to leave me like this, are you? Come on, the least you can do is draw me a pair of eyes!’ said the drawing. Pinty was understandably shocked, but he managed to draw two little spots inside the circle.

‘Much better, now I can see myself,’ said the circle, looking around at itself... ‘Arghh! But what have you done to me?!’

‘I don’t draw very well,’ said Pinty, trying to make excuses.

‘OK, no problem,’ the drawing interrupted him, ‘I’m sure that if you try again you’ll do better. Go on, rub me out!’ So Pinty erased the circle and drew another one. Like the first one, it was not very round.

'Hey! You forgot the eyes again!'

'Oh, yeah.'

'Hmmm, I think I'm going to have to teach you how to draw until you can do me well,' said the circle with its quick, squeaky little voice.

To Pinty, who remained almost paralysed with shock, this did not seem like a bad idea, and he immediately found himself drawing and erasing circles. The circle would not stop saying 'rub this out, but carefully; it hurts,' or 'draw me some hair, quickly, I look like a lollipop!' and other funny remarks.

After spending nearly the whole afternoon together, Pinty could already draw the little figure much better than most of his classmates could have. He was enjoying it so much that he did not want to stop drawing with this crazy new teacher of his. Before going to bed that night, Pinty gave his new instructor a hearty thank you for having taught him how to draw so well.

'But I didn't do anything, silly!' answered the little drawing, in its usual quick manner.

'Don't you see that you've been practicing a lot, and enjoying it all the while? I bet that's the first time you've done that!'

Pinty stopped to think. The truth was that previously, he had drawn so badly because he had never practiced more than ten minutes at a time, and he had always done it angrily and grudgingly. Without doubt, what the little drawing had said was correct.

'OK, you're right, but thank you anyway,' said Pinty, and before he went to bed he carefully placed the pencil in his school bag.

The next morning Pinty jumped out of bed and went running to find his pencil, but it was not there. He searched everywhere, but there was no sign of it. And the sheet of paper on which he had drawn the little figure, although still full of rubbing out marks, was completely blank. Pinty began to worry, and he did not know if he had really spent the previous afternoon talking with the little man or whether he had dreamt the whole thing.

So, to try to settle the matter, he took a pencil and some paper and tried to draw a little man.

It turned out not bad at all, except for a couple of jagged lines. He imagined his bossy little teacher telling him to round out those edges, and that it looked like he was trying to give him spots. Pinty gladly rubbed out those bits and redrew them. He realised that the crazy little teacher had been right: it made no difference whether you had the magic pencil or not; to manage to do things, you only needed to keep trying and to enjoy doing so.

From that day on, whenever Pinty tried to draw or paint, or do anything else, he always had fun imagining the result of his work protesting to him and saying 'Come on, my friend, do me a bit better than that! I can't go to the party looking like this!'

THE SINGING HIPPO

Once upon a time, a hippopotamus lived in a river next to a big and solitary tree.

One day, a bird came and nested in the tree. The songs and the flight of the bird caused such envy in the hippo that he couldn't think of anything else. Every day he would lament the fact that he had been born a hippo. This, despite the many times the bird told the hippo he was so lucky to be so big and such a good swimmer.

Finally, the hippo made his mind up that he would come out of the river, climb the tree, go out to perch on a branch, and start singing. However, when he tried to climb the tree it was all too clear that the hippo didn't have wings, nor claws to climb with, and neither could he hop.

Realising that he would never manage it, he angrily rammed his whole weight against the tree until it came crashing to the ground. Then, triumphantly, he stepped onto the leaves of the fallen tree, and began singing.

Unfortunately, hippos can't sing either. All that came from his mouth were horrible noises, and when the other animals heard this they all gathered round to make fun of the hippo standing on the branch of a fallen tree, trying to sing like a bird.

He was so embarrassed by this that he decided to never again regret being a hippo. He also felt bad about having knocked the tree over. He used all his strength to raise the tree back up again, replant it, and look after it until it had completely recovered.

THE INCREDIBLE BLACK RAIN

Gus Grumplings was never happy with anything. He had lots of friends, and parents who loved him dearly, but all Gus could think about was what he didn't have, or things he did have which he was unhappy with. If someone gave him a car, it would be too big or too slow. If he went to the zoo, he'd come back disappointed because they hadn't let him feed the lions. If he played football with his friends, he would complain, saying there were too many of them for just one ball...

What caught Gus unawares was Chuckles the prankster cloud. One day, Chuckles was drifting past, and heard all of Gus's complaining. Chuckles wafted over to see. When the cloud was right above Gus, he started dropping heavy black rain on him. That was Chuckles' favourite trick to play on grumpy little kids.

Gus wasn't at all impressed by this new development; it just made him complain even more. He was even angrier after he realised that the cloud was following him.

Well, this carried on for almost a week. Gus couldn't get away from the cloud, and he got more and more infuriated.

Gus had a little friend, a happy and generous girl called Gladys. Gladys was the only one who had been willing to hang around with Gus during all those black, rainy days. All the other children had run off to avoid getting soaked and ending up completely black.

One day, when Gus was at the end of his tether, she said to him: "Cheer up! What you should realise is that you're the only one of us who has his very own cloud, and even better, its rain is black! We could play some fun games with a cloud like this, don't you reckon?" As Gladys was his only company these days, and he didn't want her to leave as the others had, Gus reluctantly agreed.

Gladys took him to the swimming pool, and left him there until all the pool water was black. Then she went and got other kids. They came and played in the pool. The water being black meant they could play hide and seek! Grudgingly, Gus had to admit it had been a lot of fun, but what was even more fun was playing Wet the Cat.

Gus would find cats and run alongside them. When the cats felt themselves getting wet they would jump about in the craziest way, and run off at top speed, with funny looks on their

faces. Before long, all the children in town had gathered around Gus, thinking up new games they could play using the cloud.

For the first time ever, Gus started to see the positive side of things; even things which, at first, had seemed so bad. Chuckles, the prankster cloud, thought that he could now leave; his work had been done. But, before leaving, he gave Gus two days of multicoloured rain, with which the children invented the most fun games ever.

When Chuckles finally left, Gus didn't complain. Now he knew to focus on the good in life, and the good thing about Chuckles' departure was that no longer was Gus soaking wet all day. Now he could go and do dry things, and that's exactly what he did.

MY LITTLE WORLD HAS BROKEN

Once upon a time there was a spring who lived happily and safely inside a pen. Although he heard many noises coming from outside, he lived believing that outside his world inside the pen, there was nothing good. Even just to think about leaving his pen made him so scared that he was quite content to spend his life compacting and stretching himself again and again inside that tiny space.

However, one day, the ink ran out, and when the pen's owner was busy changing it, there was an accident. The spring was flung through the air and landed in the toilet drain, well out of sight. Terrified, and cursing his bad luck, the spring was flushed through pipe after pipe, each time thinking it might be his end. During the journey, he did not dare open his eyes out of pure fear. Nor did he every stop crying. Swept away by the water, he travelled on and on and on, until he ended up in a river. When the river current lost its force, and the spring could see that things had calmed down a bit, he stopped crying and listened all around him. Hearing birdsong and wind in the trees, he felt encouraged to finally open his eyes. What the spring saw was the pure, crystal waters of the river, the rich green rocks of the riverbed, and all kinds of fish of many colours, whose skin seemed to dance under the sunlight. Now he understood that the world was much greater than the space inside the pen, and that there had always been many things outside, waiting to be enjoyed.

After spending a while playing with the fish, he went over to the riverbank, and then moved on to a field of flowers. There he heard weeping. He followed the sound, which took him to a lovely flower that had been flattened by a rabbit, and could no longer stand up straight. The spring realised that he could help the flower, so he offered to be his support. The flower

accepted, and slipped through the middle of the spring. There they lived happily together. And they would always laugh when remembering how the spring used to think that all there was to life was being a sad and fearful spring.

THE UNFRIENDLY RIVER

Once upon a time there was a river. This river was rather unfriendly and lonesome. The river could not remember how long ago he had decided that he no longer wanted to put up with anything or anyone. He lived alone, refusing to share his water with any fish, plant or animal.

And so his life went on, sadly and filled with loneliness, for many centuries.

One day, a little girl with a goldfish bowl came to the bank of this river. In the bowl lived Scamp, her favourite little fish. The girl was about to move to another country, and she wouldn't be able to take Scamp with her. So she had decided to give Scamp his freedom.

When Scamp fell into the river, he immediately felt the river's loneliness. Scamp tried talking to the river, but the river told Scamp to go away. Now, Scamp was a very happy little fish, and he wasn't going to give up so easily. He asked and asked, swam and swam, and finally he started jumping in and out of the water.

The river, feeling all the jumping and splashing, started to laugh. It tickled!

After a while, this put the river in such a good mood that he started talking to Scamp. Almost without knowing it, by the end of that day, Scamp and the river had become very good friends.

The river spent that night thinking about how much fun it was to have friends, and how much he had missed by not having them. He asked himself why he had never had them, but he couldn't remember.

The next morning, Scamp woke the river with a few playful splashes... and that was when the river remembered why he had decided to be such an unfriendly river:

He remembered that he was very ticklish, and that he wouldn't have been able to stand it! Now he remembered perfectly how he had told everyone to scoot, that he wasn't going to put up with all that tickling.

But, remembering how sad and lonely he had felt for so many years, the river realised that although it may sometimes be a bit inconvenient or uncomfortable, it was always better to have friends and to try to be happy.

THE TICKLING SCALES

One day, in the jungle, a set of bathroom scales appeared. The animals played with it for quite some time until a parrot who had escaped from the zoo explained to them how it worked. All the animals took turns to weigh themselves. At first this was a big game; every day each animal would see how much weight they had gained or lost. However, before long, many animals began to obsess about their weight. The first thing they would do each day would be to run to the scales, weigh themselves, and spend the rest of the day with a grumpy expression on their faces. This because, no matter what the scales said, the animals always weighed the same, in other words: "more than they wanted to".

As the months passed, the scales began to suffer the animals' disapproval. The scales were regularly kicked, or given poisonous looks. One day, the scales decided that from the following morning things would have to change.

That morning, the first to run to weigh itself was the zebra. However, as soon as it stepped onto the scales, the scales began tickling the zebra's hooves. Soon the scales found just the right spot, and the zebra couldn't stop giggling. This was so much fun for the zebra that from that day on it no longer worried about its weight, and off it went to happily eat its breakfast for the first time in ages. The same happened to whoever went to weigh themselves that day... so that, before long, no one was worried any longer about their weight. Rather, they all commented on how much fun the scales and its tickling were.

As the months and the years passed, the scales stopped reading weight and began reading good humour and optimism instead. Soon everyone happily discovered that this was a much better indicator of beauty and a person's value. Finally, in the jungle everyone forgot about that antiquated and old-fashioned measurement known as the kilo.

A DAY WITH PIGS

There was once a boy who would never get dressed when his parents told him to, nor would he put on what they wanted him to after his bath. He preferred to dress in a much stranger manner, but above all, he liked to take his time. His parents were always in a rush, and

wanted him to be a lot quicker, but the boy didn't like this, and he would slow down even more.

One day, his parents were in their usual hurry, and they got so angry when he refused to dress, that they told him that he would have to go out naked. The boy didn't mind this in the least. So out they went.

While the boy was standing naked outside his house, waiting for his parents to bring the car, along came the local pig farmer. The pig farmer was hard of hearing and had poor eyesight. Not only that, but he'd also forgotten to put his glasses on that day. When he saw the little boy's pink skin, he thought it was one of his pigs. And, with a bit of shouting, prodding, and pushing, the farmer managed to get the boy safely back to a pigsty.

The boy protested the whole way there, but as the farmer was almost deaf, his complaints didn't help him. And there he was for the whole day, living amongst the pigs, thought to be a pig, and sharing their food and home.

Finally, though, his parents found him. The boy had had such a regrettable day that never again did he want to be mistaken for anything other than a human being. Nowadays he's the first to get dressed, and look perfectly neat and tidy, just like those children in the clothes catalogues

THE WARM WHALE

Gail the Whale lived in a small salty lake. She was the only whale in that territory, and she led a very comfortable life. In fact, this easy life made her a bit fussy. But, one year, there was such an incredibly hot summer that the lake's water really warmed up. Gail, used to such an ideal existence, could hardly stand the hot water. A little fish, which had spent some time in a child's goldfish bowl, told Gail that humans used fans to cool themselves down in summer. From then on, Gail the Whale couldn't think of anything else apart from how to build her very own fan.

Everyone told her that she was overreacting, and that the hot weather would soon pass, but Gail got to work, constructing her enormous fan. When it was finally finished, she started fanning away at herself.

Unlucky for the fish! The giant fan beat the little lake's waters so strongly that huge waves rolled right across it. The waves crashed onto the lakeshore, leaving the lake half empty, and Gail stranded in only a few inches of water.

"You couldn't just hang on for while. You had to empty the lake," some unhappy-looking fish berated her. "So impatient! So selfish!" others shouted. But the worst of it for Gail was not the insults, but the fact that with so little water around her, the heat was becoming unbearable. Preparing herself to die of heatstroke, she said her goodbyes to all her friends, and they asked for her forgiveness. She assured them all that if she were to live again she would be stronger and learn to put up with life's discomforts.

Yet, once again, Gail the Whale was overreacting. She managed to survive those hot days without dying, although, of course, she suffered. When the next rains arrived, the lake filled up again, and the weather improved. Naturally, Gail had to keep her promise, and show everyone that she had learned not to be so dependent on comfort, so impatient, and so fussy.

THE MAGIC WINDOW

Once upon a time there was a little boy who became very ill. He had to spend all day in bed, unable to move. Because other children weren't allowed to come near him, he suffered greatly, and spent his days feeling sad and blue.

There wasn't much he could do except look out of the window. Time passed, and his feeling of despair just grew. Until one day he saw a strange shape in the window. It was a penguin eating a sausage sandwich. The penguin squeezed in through the open window, said "good afternoon" to the boy, turned around, and left again.

Of course, the boy was very surprised. He was still trying to work out what had happened, when outside his window he saw a monkey in a nappy, busy blowing up a balloon. At first the boy asked himself what that could possibly be, but after a while, as more and more crazy-looking characters appeared out the window, he burst out laughing and found it hard to stop.

Anyone wanting to stop laughing would never be helped by seeing a pig playing a tambourine, an elephant jumping on a trampoline, or a dog wearing a pair of glasses and talking about nothing except politics. The little boy didn't tell anyone about this because who would have believed him? Even so, those strange characters ended up putting joy back

in his heart, and in his body. Before long, his health had improved so much that he was able to go back to school again.

There he got to talk to his friends, and tell them all the strange things he had seen. While he was talking to his best friend he saw something sticking out of his friend's school bag. The boy asked his friend what it was, and he was so insistent that finally his friend had to show him what was in the bag:

There, inside, were all the fancy-dress suits and disguises that his best friend had been using to try to cheer the little boy up!

And from that day on, the little boy always did his best to make sure that no one felt sad and alone.