

Highlights™

Fantastic Tales

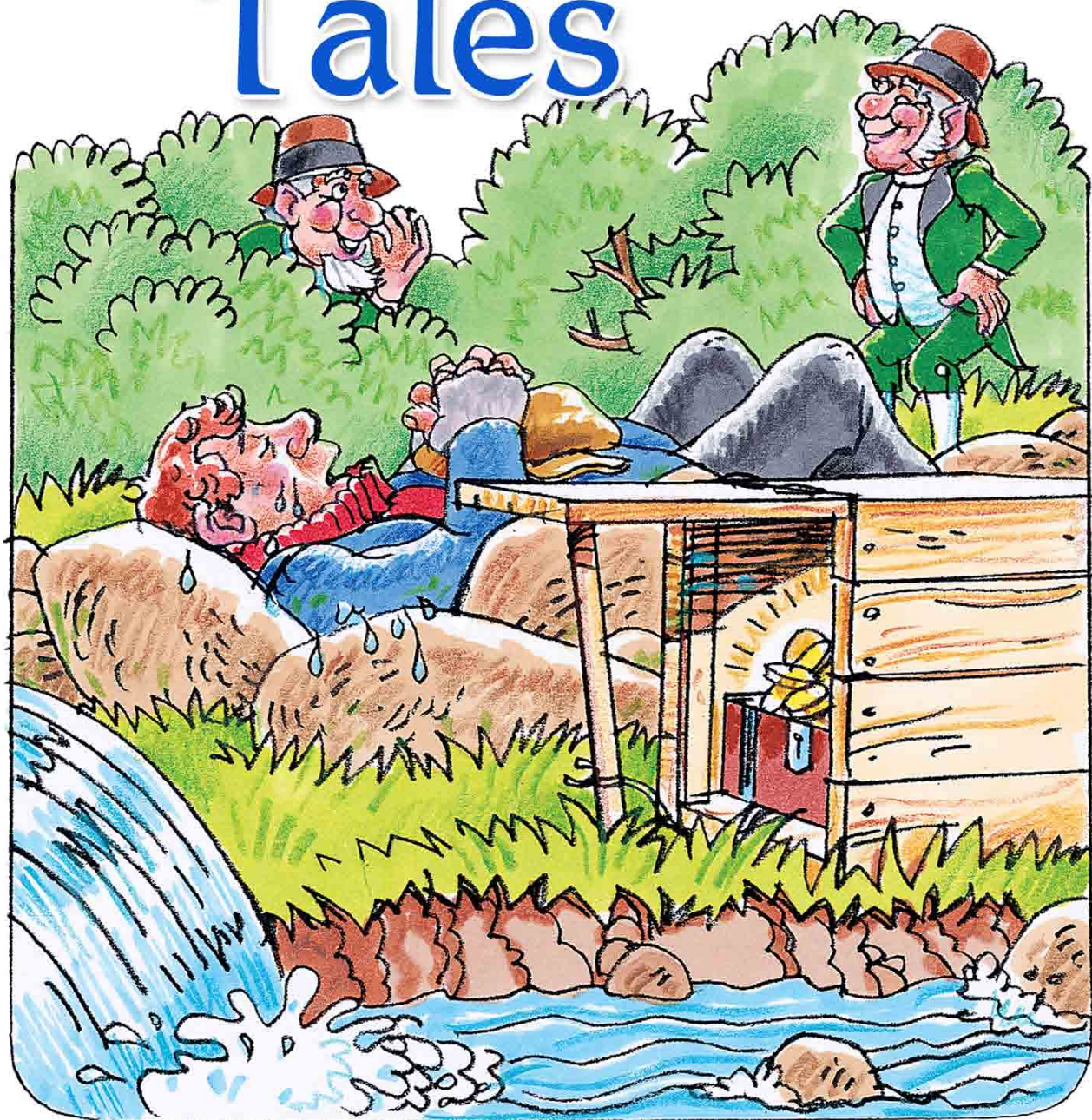


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Capturing Unicorns

By Tim Myers Art by Matt Collins

Long ago, in a land where unicorns still roamed free, there lived a great sculptor. With hammer and chisel, he could turn a block of stone into something that seemed alive: a tree swaying in the wind, a breaking wave, a human being who seemed to think and feel.

The king had ordered the sculptor to make a statue of galloping unicorns, for which the king would pay much gold. So the sculptor had captured two unicorns, one white and one gray. He kept them in a high-walled pen next to his studio so that he could look down from his window and sculpt them just as they were.

One day, a boy wearing a uniform knocked on the door of the studio. The sculptor hated interruptions. "What do you want?" he growled.

"Your unicorns are whinnying," the boy said. "I looked in at them through the keyhole. They're unhappy."

"This is why you've disturbed me? It's no business of yours!" the sculptor barked. "Go away."

"Wait," said the boy. "The king sent me. He told me to ask when you'll finish the statue."

The sculptor sighed. Things hadn't been going well, and he couldn't figure out why. Day after day, he sat staring at the unicorns in the pen—at their long manes and powerful flanks, at their shining hooves and the perfect spirals of their horns. But when he tried to sculpt them, the statue just wouldn't come out right.

"Tell His Majesty I'm working as fast as I can," the sculptor said. The boy paused, looking down.

"Well, be off with you," said the sculptor.

"All right," said the boy. "But . . . maybe I could help. I know about capturing unicorns."

"You!" The sculptor laughed. "You're just a page boy. Now go and take my reply to the king."

So the boy left.

For weeks, the sculptor worked at his statue—watching the unicorns, chiseling the white marble. But he had no more success than before.

And the unicorns grew listless—lying down for hours, refusing their food, and at times whinnying terribly.

After a month, there was another knock at the door, and the messenger boy stood before the sculptor again.

"The unicorns are still whinnying," he said. "They're so sad! You have to do something."

"Don't bother me with that, boy," the sculptor mumbled, exhausted from his endless hours of work and the frustration he felt. "What does the king say now?"

"He says you must finish the statue soon, or he will punish you." The boy trembled as he said this.

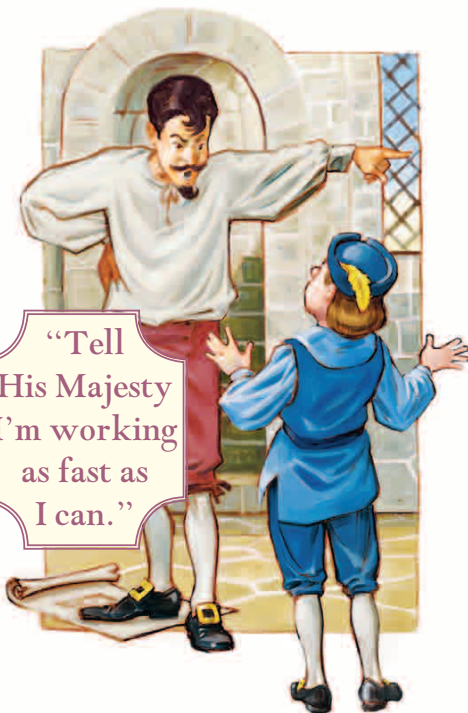
The sculptor slumped down in the doorway till he was sitting on the floor. *What will I do?* he asked himself in despair.

"Sir?" the boy said timidly. "Maybe I could help. I know about capturing unicorns."

The sculptor turned to the boy as if seeing him for the first time. "That's kind of you, child," he said. "I'm sorry I was stern with you before. But you don't understand. I've already captured the unicorns."

"You've penned them, and it hasn't helped you," said the boy.

For weeks, the sculptor worked at his statue but had no success.



"Tell His Majesty I'm working as fast as I can."



through the gate, neighing for joy. Galloping toward the forest, they kicked up their heels and tossed their manes, tails held high behind them.

Watching them, the sculptor felt warm all over. An energy rose inside him that he hadn't felt in a long time. He rushed over to his tools, grabbed his hammer and chisel, then hurried to a new block of marble.

Two weeks later, the sculptor unveiled the statue in the royal throne room. The king and his courtiers gasped when they saw the two marble unicorns—galloping, kicking up their heels, and tossing their manes as they neighed for joy.

"It's . . . it's as if you've frozen real unicorns!" the king exclaimed.

And the next day, the boy began his apprenticeship, there in the great sculptor's studio, because he'd shown such wisdom in capturing unicorns. ♣

"Why don't you let them go?"

I suppose he's right, the sculptor thought. I can't finish the statue anyway, and the king will soon have me thrown into a dungeon. At least I could let those innocent creatures go back to the forest.

"All right," the sculptor said with a weak smile. "Here's the key to their pen. Set them free."

The boy's face lit up. "I will!" he said. "But only if you go to the window and watch."

Might as well humor him, the sculptor thought. "All right," he said, and he plodded over to the window.

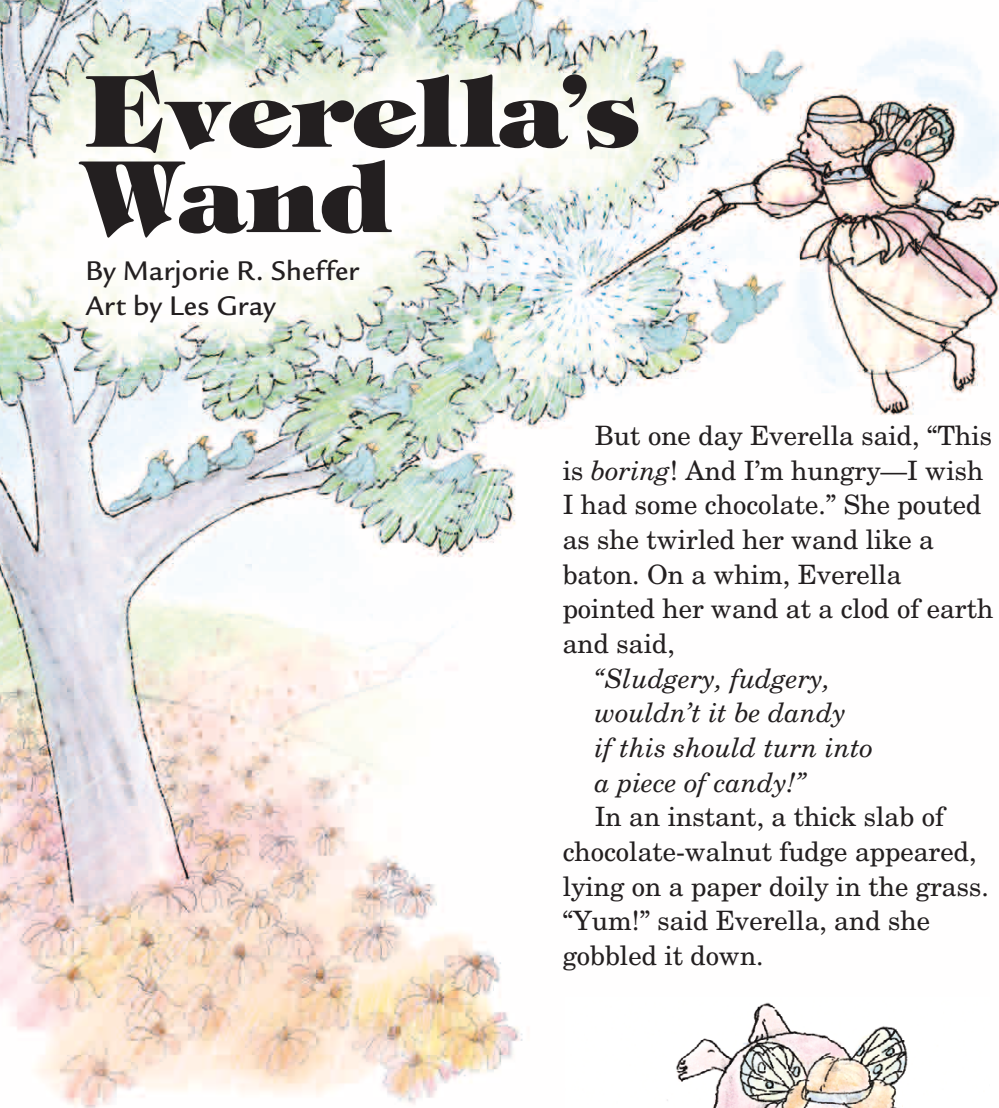
When the boy opened the pen, the unicorns raised their heads. Then they leapt up and rushed



Everella's Wand

By Marjorie R. Sheffer

Art by Les Gray



But one day Everella said, “This is boring! And I’m hungry—I wish I had some chocolate.” She pouted as she twirled her wand like a baton. On a whim, Everella pointed her wand at a clod of earth and said,

*“Sludgery, fudgery,
wouldn’t it be dandy
if this should turn into
a piece of candy!”*

In an instant, a thick slab of chocolate-walnut fudge appeared, lying on a paper doily in the grass. “Yum!” said Everella, and she gobbled it down.



From then on, Everella forgot about the flowers and the birds. Pebbles became diamond rings, and leaves turned into frilly new dresses, all for herself. The flowers in the meadows faded away, and the trees became empty and quiet.



One afternoon Everella was fluttering around and searching through the weeds. She found a large stone, pointed her wand at it, and said,

*“Ugly old rock
in front of my eyes,
change to gold slippers,
just my size!”*

Then Everella looked down at the ground, puzzled. The stone was still there, but beside it lay one dirty old shoelace.

“Something’s wrong!” she cried, and she looked at her wand. It was no longer shiny, and the sparkle at the tip was gone. She flew off in tears to find the fairy queen.



“Your Majesty,” sobbed Everella, “my wand needs fixing. It won’t work.”

“I thought so,” said the queen. “I haven’t seen any flowers in the meadows lately, nor have I heard any birds.”

Once upon a time there was a fairy named Everella. After many failed attempts, she finally passed the wand test and was given her own wand.

“Prettier than a peppermint stick!” said Everella. Her wand was long and straight and shiny, and it sparkled like diamonds at one end.

Everella’s new job was to keep the meadows decorated with wildflowers and the trees filled with singing birds. She’d point her wand at the grass and, in the blink of an eye, bright flowers would cover the ground. When she pointed it at the trees, the trilling and chirping of bird songs would begin before you could say “skylark.”

Everella's face grew red. "Er, can you put a new battery in it?" she asked.

"No," said the queen. "You must fix it yourself."

"How?" asked Everella.

"You must live for a time as an ordinary human being in the outside world. Nothing else will bring back the power," said the queen. Then she led Everella to the great door in the side of the fairy hill. The door swung open.

"When you reach the village, ask for Dame Malkins. And take care of your wand," the queen warned, "for it is your only way back to this fairy hill."

"Your wand is your only way back."



The door creaked shut. Everella sighed, then trudged off down the road. She was dressed in heavy dark clothes and thick shoes. Her wings had vanished, and her wand looked like an ordinary walking stick.

When Everella reached the village, she saw a shop with the sign "Dame Malkins's Bakery" painted above the door.

"Come in, come in!" said Dame Malkins, peering out. "I've been expecting you! Here, tie on an apron and start kneading this dough." Her wise eyes twinkled.

Everella wondered how Dame Malkins had known she was coming, but she thought it was better not to ask.

Every day, Everella worked from sunup to sundown—mixing dough, waiting on villagers, sweeping out the shop. Her hands became rough and red from doing dishes, and her feet grew sore because she was not used to walking.

Every night, Everella was so tired that she'd fall asleep almost as soon as she lay down on her cot. First, though, she'd anxiously check her wand to see if it had gotten back its power. But each time she picked it up, it was still just a stick.

The days went by, more than Everella could count. Then one morning she woke up and heard Dame Malkins moaning, "Oh, my old bones! I can't get out of bed!"

Everella quickly made coffee and brought a cup to Dame Malkins, who said, "I could work if only I had a stick to lean on. Oh, dear!"

A stick to lean on . . . Everella wondered if she should let Dame Malkins use her precious wand as a walking stick. What if she leaned on it too hard and broke it? Everella could never go home.

But Everella had grown to like and respect Dame Malkins. She had taught Everella many things and had worked hard beside her. She was always quick to share a kind word or a smile. She had become Everella's friend.


"If only I had a stick to lean on . . ."



At last Everella said, "Here, take my stick."

"You're a good girl," said Dame Malkins, and she hobbled out of bed to mix up a batch of rolls. All day long they worked together, with Dame Malkins leaning on the stick.

The next morning when Everella awoke, the stick was beside her cot. She reached out to touch it. *Poof!* There was a great flash of light. Everella found herself, sparkling wand in hand, fluttering outside the door in the side of the fairy hill.

The door creaked open, and Everella slipped in. She noticed the flowerless meadows and quiet trees, and said, "Time to get to work!" If she did her job well, maybe the queen would let her visit Dame Malkins now and then. 



What Gold Brings

By Teresa Bateman

Art by Lane Yerkes



“I wish I could draw a crowd like that.”

Looking out his bakery window, Sean sighed. Michael O’Donnell was on his way, surrounded by an admiring crowd.

Michael burst into the shop and ordered a loaf of Sean’s finest bread, then spoke of his favorite subject—himself. “Sure and I’m the most popular man in all Ireland,” Michael proclaimed.

The crowd murmured their agreement as coin and bread changed hands. Then Michael swept out, his followers at his heels.



“So it’s wealth and popularity you seek!”

Sean frowned. “I wish I could draw a crowd like that,” he said to his wife, Peggy.

“It’s his wealth that makes him popular,” Peggy reminded him. “True friends are neither bought nor sold.”

But Sean wouldn’t listen. It stung him where it hurt the most—his pride.

“Now,” said Peggy soothingly, “take this basket of sweet buns to peddle. That should give you time to think, and to realize what’s really important.”

Grudgingly Sean set out for the next village.

He hadn’t been walking long before his troubles weighed him down. Slumping on a stump by the roadside, his basket forgotten on the ground, Sean sighed and pondered how unfair life was.

He might have gone on be-moaning his lot forever if it weren’t for a munching sound. Sean looked down.

There, perched on the rim of the empty basket, sat a leprechaun. In his hand was the last of Sean’s sweet buns, which he finished in three bites.

“Here, now!” sputtered Sean.

“It’s the last straw to have a thieving, bold-as-brass leprechaun eating my sweet buns right under my nose.”

“True friends are neither bought nor sold,” said Peggy.

The leprechaun dusted a crumb off his vest. “You seem down-hearted,” he remarked. “Care to share your troubles?”

Troubles shared are troubles halved. Sean spilled out his woes.

“So,” the leprechaun said, “it’s wealth and popularity you seek? You want people flocking to you like bees to honey . . . like flies to rotting fruit?”

That didn’t sound quite right, but Sean nodded nonetheless.

“Granted!” the leprechaun announced. “I wish all my debts were as easily repaid.”

Then he was gone, leaving nary a footprint behind him.

Sean headed home. Entering the village, he was startled to hear a crowd calling his name.

The villagers swept him up and carried him to his bakery.

“Sean,” Peggy cried. “Look at what tumbled down the chimney!”

She held out a soot-covered sack.

Sean peered inside. His eyes grew as round as sugar cookies. "Gold coins!" he gasped.

"I don't know where they came from," Peggy said. "But someone in the shop spread the word, and look at the crowd!"

Sean looked, and a smile sweeter than honey crossed his face. He doffed his hat to the memory of the leprechaun. A basket of buns was a small price for the popularity he now enjoyed.

Indeed, it was everything he'd dreamed of and more. He didn't dare spend a single coin, knowing that when the gold was gone, the fame would leave with it.

Peggy shook her head as Sean talked to the crowds in the bakery instead of kneading dough and shaping loaves. He traded floury hands for flowery words.

"Those are not true friends, Sean," Peggy pointed out, but Sean didn't care. He was more popular than Michael O'Donnell!

However, when the crowds realized that Sean wasn't going to spend any of the gold, they eventually drifted away. Peggy was pleased the worst was over.



But it wasn't.

Once the crowds had gone, others took an interest. Thieves, who'd hesitated to act with so many people about, began eyeing the bakery and also Sean's home above it.

One night Sean and Peggy awoke to the sound of breaking glass. Stumbling downstairs, they found the bakery in a shambles. Sugar and flour were scattered everywhere.

Peggy gazed at the mess. "Our safety is worth more than that gold," she said. "We must get rid of it."

"What can I do?" Sean asked. "If I spend the gold, thieves will just steal what I buy. That leprechaun gave me nothing but trouble."

"Leprechaun?" asked Peggy. Shamefaced, Sean told her the whole story.

"I might have known it was cursed gold," she said at last. "There's only one way to remove the curse. We must give the gold away."

The next day, an orphanage found a blanket-wrapped bundle on its doorstep. The matron expected to find a baby within, but instead, out spilled a torrent of gold coins.

"It's the answer to prayer," she said softly.

"Aye," whispered Sean to Peggy from behind a gorse bush.

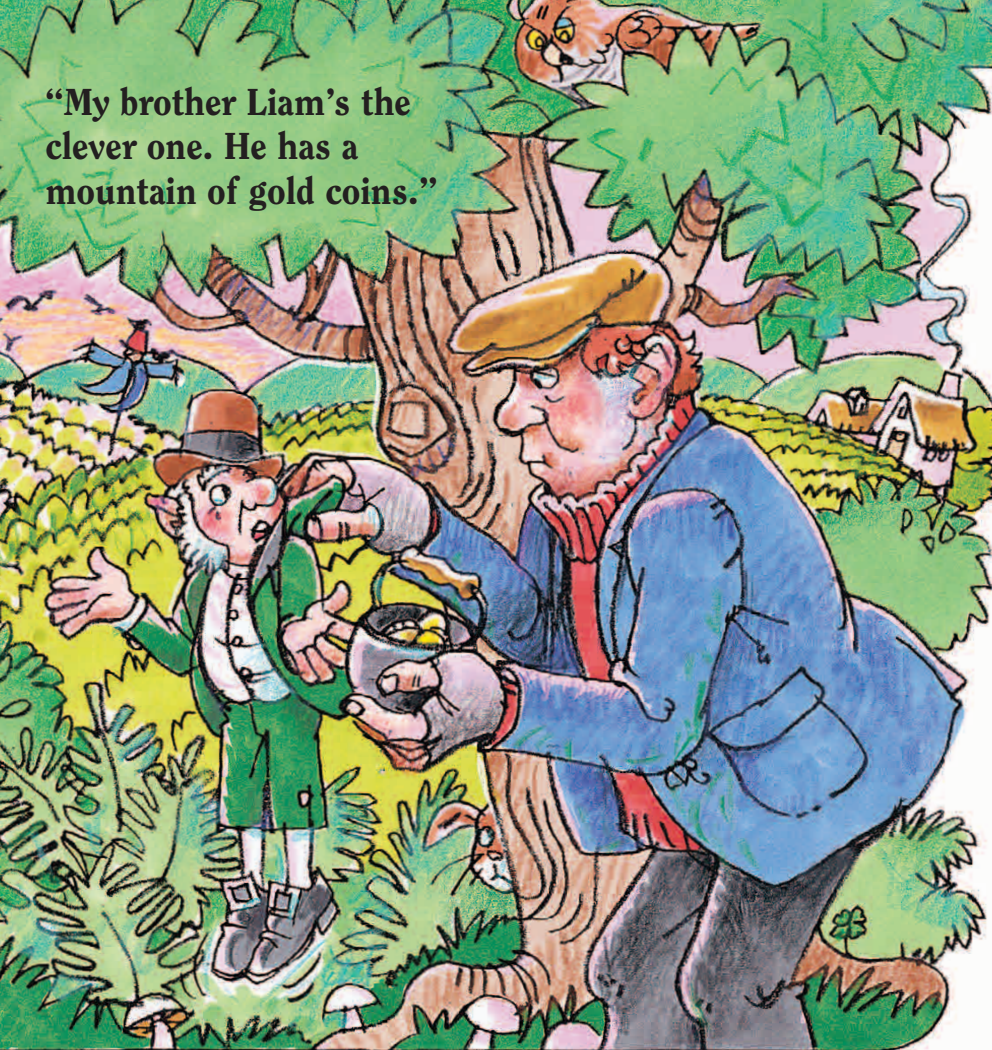
Within a month, things were back to normal at the bakery. Soon people questioned whether there had ever been any gold at all. Sean rejoiced in the love of his wife and the company of his true friends, be they few or many.

Why, he even smiled as he sold a loaf of bread to Michael O'Donnell. ❖



"There's only one way to remove the curse."

“My brother Liam’s the clever one. He has a mountain of gold coins.”



The Leprechaun Trap

By Teresa Bateman Art by Bill Colrus

Michael O’Connor was a thief, and proud of it.

“There’s no one in Ireland cleverer than I am,” he declared. “Why, taking gold from the foolish is as easy as plucking apples from a tree. There are days when I think I could outwit even the leprechauns.”

Michael had long believed that cleverness was better than hard work and honesty, and he smiled as he fingered the two gold coins in his pocket.

At that moment, he heard someone coming along the path behind him. He sneaked into the trees, then parted the leaves to see

what luck would bring. His eyes widened, for there, striding along as if he owned the world, was a leprechaun!

Leaping out, Michael grabbed the wee man by the back of his jacket. “Now I’ve got you!” he shouted. “And I’ll not let you go until you’ve given me your gold—and your name,” he added, for he knew that a leprechaun’s name was his bond.

The leprechaun hung there, pitiful and powerless. “Name is Daniel,” he squeaked as Michael tightened his grip. “And all right, I’ll give you what gold I have, only let me go.”

“I’ll not release you until I see the gold,” Michael said prudently.

With a sorrowful wave of the leprechaun’s hand, a tiny pot appeared nearby.

Michael O’Connor dropped his captive, seized the crock, then frowned when he saw only three gold coins inside.

“What’s this?” Michael asked. “Is this all the gold you have?”

Daniel sighed. “Aye, and I’m lucky to have even that. My brother Liam’s the clever one. He has a mountain of gold coins, and is always bragging how nobody can outwit him. Now he’ll laugh at me for having been outwitted myself.”

Michael’s eyes gleamed. “You say Liam has gold?” he asked.

“Aye,” Daniel replied. “And he’s always coming home with more that he’s tricked from one person or another. How he laughs at me and my three coins!”

At that, Michael grinned. “It seems you’re a small fish and there’s a bigger one in the pond,” he said. “I’ll throw you back if you help me teach your brother a lesson.”

Daniel frowned. “It *would* be nice if this time *I* were the clever one,” he said slowly. “All right. I’ll teach you how to build a leprechaun trap,” he declared, “and see how my brother deals with that!”

So the pact was made, and they hurried to Michael’s cottage. Under Daniel’s direction, Michael built a wooden trap with a door that would snap shut when something entered and with sturdy walls that offered no escape. Now all they needed was bait.

Daniel suggested shamrocks. “Leprechauns love them,” he insisted.

They hurried to a nearby meadow where Michael fell to his

knees in the hot afternoon sun to scout about for shamrocks.

"I'd help you," Daniel shouted from the shade of a nearby tree, "only I would never be able to resist the things myself. Best I just stay here."

Finally, red and sweating, Michael clutched in his hand four drooping shamrocks. These he placed in the trap, and Michael and Daniel settled down to wait the night away.

The next morning the trap was sprung, but when Michael eagerly pried it open he found only a rabbit, which hopped away. The shamrocks had been eaten.

"Too bad," Daniel said. "You'd best take my wee pot of gold, and I'll be on my way. No need to tell you more leprechaun secrets or let on about better bait."

"Better bait?" Michael picked up the leprechaun and said, "Tell me more, or you'll wish you did."

Daniel sagged in his hands. "Rainbows," he admitted. "Leprechauns love rainbows. Why do you suppose we hide pots of gold at the ends of them?"

"And where would I get a rainbow to toss into the trap?" Michael bellowed.

"Easy," the leprechaun replied. "On a sunny day like today you'll find a beautiful rainbow in the waterfall just down the river from here. It's one of my brother's favorite spots."

Michael dragged the trap out of the bushes, then hauled the heavy thing half a mile to the waterfall, Daniel riding on top and giving directions.

Michael was scratched, hot, and exhausted by the time they arrived, but he didn't care once he saw the rainbow dancing in the waterfall.

"Just set the trap out under the falls," Daniel advised. "I'll tell you

where. With luck, Liam's gold will be yours before noon!"

Michael dragged the trap into the river. At first the cool water felt wonderful, but soon he was frozen through. He thought of the gold, however, and refused to quit. When the trap was finally set, Michael stumbled, half-drowned, back to the warm rock where the leprechaun was dipping his toes in the water.

Michael flopped down and fell into a shivering doze. He awoke to Daniel's shout.

"You've caught something!"

Back into the freezing water went Michael O'Connor. He retrieved the trap, but when he upended it on the bank, three trout tumbled out and wriggled past his feet into the river again.

Michael scowled. "I should just take your gold and be done with the matter."

"Isn't that what I've been saying all along?" Daniel agreed. "Settle for my three coins. It's not your fault if Liam's cleverer than you are."

At this, Michael's eyes flashed. "Nobody's cleverer than I am," he declared. "I just need the right bait." He glared at Daniel.

"Well, gold's the best bait," Daniel said hesitantly, "but I didn't think you'd want to use it."

"No problem," Michael replied. "I'll just use your pot of gold."

"You can use it, but it won't tempt Liam," Daniel said. "If it did, he'd have already tricked me out of it. To trap my brother you'd

Continued on next page



Now all they needed was bait.

need much more gold. That's why I didn't suggest it before."

This stopped Michael, but only for a moment. Then he pulled the two gold coins from his pocket. "Would these help?" he asked.

"It's better," Daniel admitted, "but Liam has a mountain of gold. It would take more than five coins to interest him."

Michael hurried home and dragged out the small chest where he kept all of his ill-gotten gains. He hauled it to the river and opened it in front of Daniel.

"Will this do?" he panted.

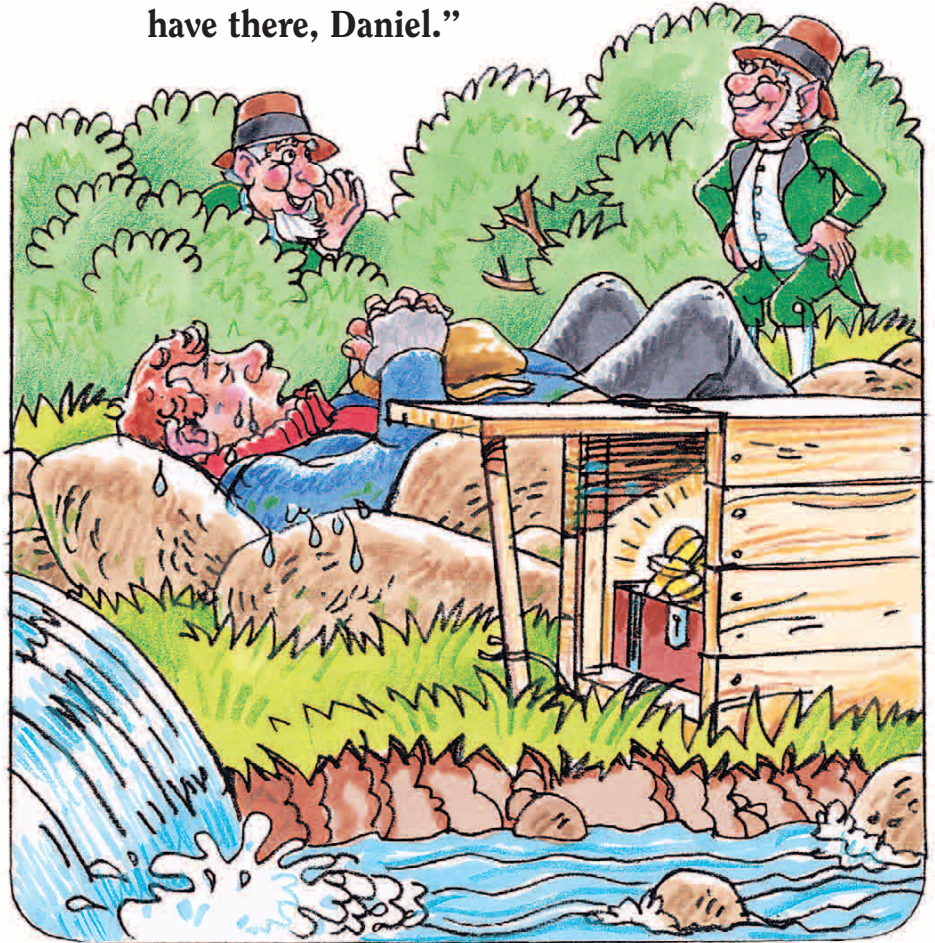
"Ah, there's a glorious sight," Daniel declared. "Add that to the rest, and it's sure to fetch Liam."

Michael O'Connor placed the gold in the trap and settled down to wait. But after an afternoon in the hot sun, a night on the stony ground, and a morning in the river, he was worn out. First his head nodded, then it sagged, then he was asleep entirely.

A small voice came out of a nearby bush. "It's a grand trap you have there, Daniel."

"Aye, Liam. The man's a dab hand at making a trap. It's a fine one indeed."

"It's a grand trap you have there, Daniel."



"No better than our own," Liam replied with a grin.

An hour later Michael's eyes fluttered open. He looked around

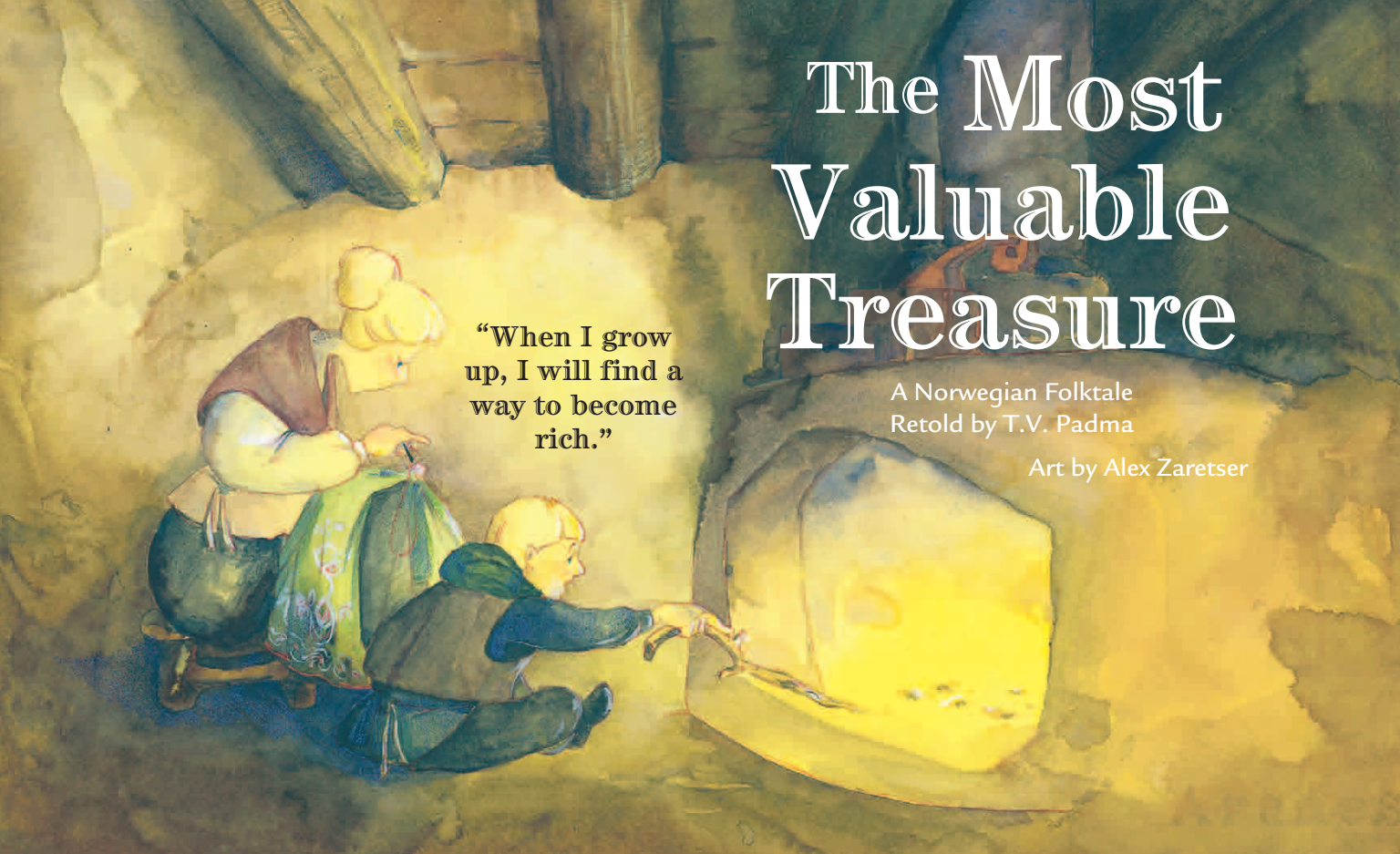
in bewilderment. The leprechaun was gone, and all the gold as well.

For, indeed, it had been a fine leprechaun trap. ❧

The Most Valuable Treasure

A Norwegian Folktale
Retold by T.V. Padma

Art by Alex Zaretser



“When I grow up, I will find a way to become rich.”

Long ago, in Norway, there once was a boy called Halvor. He lived with his mother in a cottage near the great Bjølstad forest.

Halvor’s mother had smooth, fair hair, but her hands were calloused and red, for she sewed all day to earn enough to keep them alive. Every night, the tips of her fingers tingled with pain, and her sky-blue eyes ached from the strain. She had only a worn woolen shawl to wrap around her shoulders. She often shivered and coughed.

Halvor hated being too young to help his mother. One winter night when the cold crept through the rafters making her teeth chatter, he said, “When I grow up, I will find a way to become rich. You will be served thick soup for supper every night. A fire will

crackle and roar in the fireplace. You will never shiver or cough again.”

“I don’t need thick soup or a roaring fire, my treasure, my *skatt*,” his mother said. “You are all I need.”

That night Halvor lay awake, thinking. There was nothing he could do to grow up faster, but was there some way to find wealth without waiting all that while? There must be something even a young boy could do to become rich.

He heard the distant roar of a hungry troll from deep inside the Bjølstad forest. That terrifying sound gave him an idea. Trolls taller than fir trees roamed the forest, but tiny pixies scurried in it, too. Halvor had heard that if you trapped a pixie, it would give

He heard the distant roar of a hungry troll.

you one wish in exchange for its freedom. He could ask the pixie for a valuable treasure. He would just have to find a pixie before a troll found him.

Early the next morning, Halvor sprang out of bed, stole out of the house, and set off in the direction of the forest. He entered it fearlessly. The scant daylight dwindled quickly into darkness. Halvor tramped on. Pixies, he knew, were to be found in the very center of the forest. Twice he thought he heard the dull thud of a lumbering troll, but he kept walking.

At last, Halvor could walk no farther. The trees ahead grew so tightly together that they would not let him through. He sat silent and still, his back against a mossy trunk, peering into the blackness, waiting for a pixie.

The slender silhouette of a pixie



“Make up your mind,” the pixie complained.

“I’ve been trying to make you rich. I went into the forest and caught a pixie. I asked it to grant you the treasure that was most precious to you, and to make sure it was safe as long as you lived. That puny pixie tricked me! We are still poor.”

He was about to burst into tears when his mother shook her head and smiled. “The pixie didn’t trick you, my skatt,” she said. “You are my most valuable treasure, and now I can be sure that you will be safe all my life. It was the best thing you could have wished for. I need never worry about you again.”

She hugged him tightly and stroked his head with her calloused red hands. Halvor’s lip trembled, but his mother began to laugh. At last, Halvor joined in.

“You are my most precious treasure, too,” he said, realizing he meant it.

Halvor’s mother smiled. Halvor never became wealthy, but from then on he was happy. He lived long, and grew to be as wise as his mother. ❧

slipped past him. Halvor leaped up and grabbed it. It struggled wildly.

“What do you want?” it asked, turning its pinched face toward him. “A wish, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Halvor.

“Humans.” The pixie sighed. “Can’t leave us alone.”

Without loosening his grasp on the wriggling pixie, Halvor wondered what to ask for. Were precious stones more valuable than gold? Would his mother prefer rubies or diamonds? Or a castle?

“Make up your mind,” the pixie complained. “I have work to do!”

What would his mother like best? If only he had asked her that!

“Give my mother the treasure that is most precious to her,” he said. “Make sure she never loses it.”

The pixie chuckled. “Is that all?”

“Yes. I wish that she gets whatever she thinks is the most valuable treasure, at once, and that it remains safe as long as she lives,” Halvor repeated.

No sooner did he let the pixie go than he was standing in front of his home. What a surprise! There, before his very eyes, stood

... the cottage, which looked as dilapidated as ever. Not the castle he had expected. Perhaps his

mother had the treasure inside?

The door burst open. The cottage was empty. His mother rushed out, her worn, woolen shawl still around her shoulders.

“Halvor, my skatt, my treasure,” she cried. “Where have you been?”

What treasure would his mother like best?

“Where have you been?”



Sir Delbert sat dejectedly on a rotting tree stump. He had almost no chance of winning the award tomorrow, and he knew it.

Every year, the knights held a special festival called Knights' Day. They played games, had tournaments, and ate lots of food. The highlight of the day was when the king awarded a medal to the knight who had performed the most dramatic feat of daring during the past year.

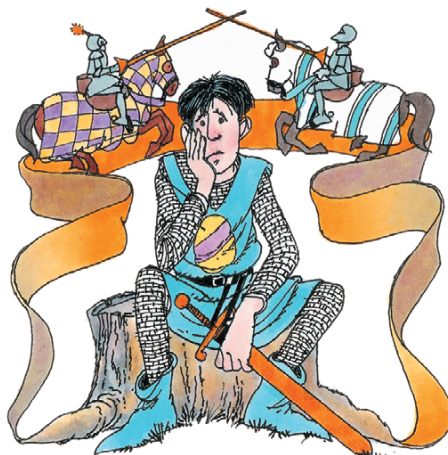
Sir Delbert never won because at the crucial moment of every attempted rescue, he always fell off his horse, Edgar, or ran into a tree or tripped over a rock.

Loud screams interrupted his dismal thoughts. He clumsily leaped onto Edgar and galloped away to investigate.

At the top of a steep cliff, he dismounted and peered over the



**“The humiliation,
the embarrassment,
the dizziness. . . .”**



Knights' Day

By Diana Logue Art by Les Gray

edge. Below, on a narrow ledge, stood a young woman. She shrieked as a chunk of the ledge crumbled, disappearing into the chasm below.

Delbert flung himself on the ground and reached down for her. But he slipped and quickly found himself hanging upside down over the cliff. Only his feet, tangled in a bush, prevented him from falling farther.

Suddenly Sir Ulric burst onto the scene. In one swift motion he reached down, grabbed the woman's hand, and lifted her to safety. Then he carried her away on his horse.

“The humiliation,” murmured Delbert, still hanging by his feet. “The embarrassment, the *dizziness*. . . .”

He felt someone tugging on his boots, dragging him onto solid ground.

“I'm glad you're not any heavier!” said a cheerful voice.

Delbert rolled over to see another young woman, this one with a friendly smile.

“I'm Edwina,” she said.

“I'm Sir Delbert,” he replied. “Thank you for your efforts, although I did have the situation under control.” Delbert paused awkwardly, then said, “Well, I'll be seeing you!”

Edwina stood by her horse and watched as Delbert stumbled over a tree root, climbed onto Edgar, and galloped away.

It wasn't long before he and Edgar whipped around a bend and crashed into a dragon that was carelessly napping in the road. The dragon awoke, snarled, and raised his claws to strike. Delbert tried frantically to pull out his sword.

There was a whooshing noise, then a loud *bonk* as a boomerang struck the enraged dragon on the snout. He fell to the ground with a thud.



**“I would have had him
myself in another minute.”**



“You need someone to look out for you.”

Edwina rode into view and snatched up her boomerang. Grabbing Edgar’s reins, she led horse and rider to safety just as the dragon started to awaken.

“Thank you,” said Delbert. “I would have had him myself in another minute.”

Edwina waved and rode away.

The day was nearly over. Just as the sun was setting behind the hills, Delbert heard cries coming from the river. A child was bobbing in the water, shouting, “I can’t swim!”

Delbert leaped into the water feet first, holding his nose. It wasn’t until he found himself floundering helplessly that he remembered he couldn’t swim either.

Sir Baldric crashed out of the bushes, tied a cork-tipped arrow to a rope, and shot it across the treacherous waters. The child

grabbed it, and Baldric pulled him ashore.

Meanwhile, the current carried Delbert downstream. Edwina was standing on a point of land, holding out a long branch to him. Delbert grabbed it and climbed onto the bank.

“Sir Delbert,” said Edwina, her eyes twinkling, “you need someone to look out for you.”

Waterlogged, cold, and choking, Delbert looked up at her. “Maybe you’re right,” he said, coughing. “Say, would you like to attend the Knights’ Day festival with me tomorrow?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” said Edwina.

The next day Delbert wore mismatched boots, and his shirt was askew, but with Edwina beside him, he didn’t have a single accident.

When it was time for the medal presentation, everyone waited breathlessly to see who would win. Would it be Sir Ulric? Sir Baldric? Another knight?

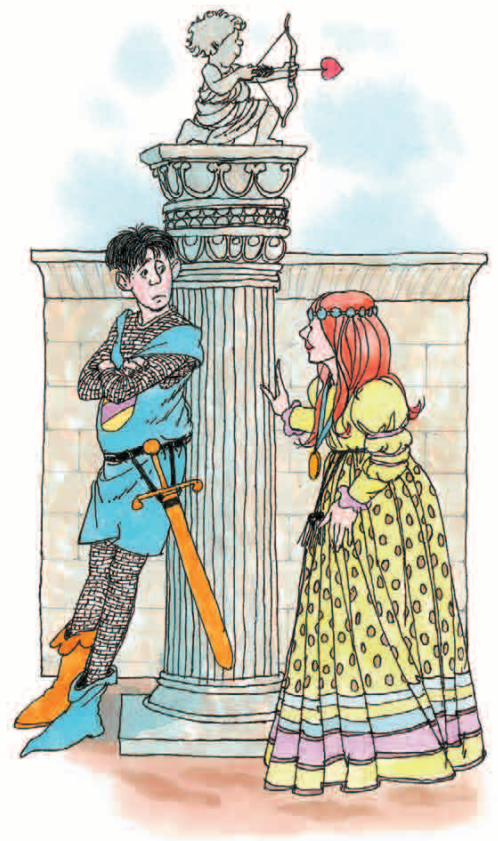
“We’ve seen many impressive deeds during the past year,” the king began, “but yesterday, in a feat unequaled by even the best of knights, Edwina rescued Sir Delbert three times. Instead of awarding the medal to a knight, I’m giving it to Edwina!”

Amid cheers, Edwina stepped forward to accept her award. Delbert slunk away, ashamed. But his mismatched boots left un-mistakable footprints in the soft dirt, and Edwina easily caught up with him.

“Why are you hiding?” she asked.

“Go away,” he said. “Congratulations and all that, but GO AWAY! You may be a hero, but I made a fool of myself.”

“But, Delbert,” she protested, “I



“I couldn’t have done it without you.”

couldn’t have done it without you. We’re a great team. You’re a very brave knight. You selflessly tried to rescue a woman in danger and a drowning boy. When faced with an angry dragon, you didn’t turn and run; you stood your ground. With me to help you, think of all we could accomplish.”

Sir Delbert considered this several times, from all sides. If there was a flaw in her reasoning, he couldn’t find it. “Together? Us? A team?”

She nodded.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely,” she said.

“OK, then,” he said, smiling. “You’re on.”

They headed back, arm in arm. As Edwina carefully guided him around a mud puddle, Delbert knew he had won a prize far more precious than a mere medal. 