

# *The Little Gingerbread Man*

*Written and Illustrated by Carol Moore*

Once upon a time there was an old woman who loved baking gingerbread. She would bake gingerbread cookies, cakes, houses and gingerbread people, all decorated with chocolate and peppermint, caramel candies and colored frosting.

She lived with her husband on a farm at the edge of town. The sweet spicy smell of gingerbread brought children skipping and running to see what would be offered that day.

Unfortunately the children gobbled up the treats so fast that the old woman had a hard time keeping her supply of flour and spices to continue making the batches of gingerbread. Sometimes she suspected little hands of having reached through her kitchen window because gingerbread pieces and cookies would disappear.

One time a whole gingerbread house vanished mysteriously. She told her husband, "Those naughty children are at it again. They don't understand all they have to do is knock on the door and I'll give them my gingerbread treats."



One day she made a special batch of gingerbread men because they were extra big. Unfortunately for the last gingerbread man she ran out of batter and he was half the size of the others.

She decorated the gingerbread men with care, each having socks, shirt and pants of different colors. When it came to the little gingerbread man she felt sorry for him and gave him more color than the others. "It doesn't matter he's small," she thought, "He'll still be tasty."

Putting the rack on the kitchen windowsill she left it there to cool and went to finish her laundry. The gingerbread men lay quietly, their frosted eyes gazing at the sky with its puffy clouds.

At that moment a voice came from nowhere. "Get up. Get up. Come with me."



Everyone looked to see who was speaking.

It was a butterfly flying just outside the window. Butterflies are naturally beautiful, but her wings were an exceptionally pretty marbled blue.

"Come with me," she urged again.

The gingerbread men didn't react except to keep staring. All but the smallest gingerbread man who jumped up from the tray and leaped off the kitchen windowsill onto the grass below faster than you could say "hurry."

"Where are we going?" he asked breathlessly.

"Away." And before the butterfly had finished speaking children appeared in the yard. Spying the little gingerbread man they started shrieking with delight and began chasing him.



"Stop, stop," they shouted. "We want to eat you."

But with his little legs churning the gingerbread man only ran faster. He yelled,

*"I won't stop.  
Run, run as fast as you can.  
You can't catch me.  
I'm the gingerbread man."*

And truly those children could not catch him. Once out of their sight he continued running until he had reached a pasture where two horses were grazing. He sat down on a rock near the fence.

"Don't stop," said the butterfly fluttering nearby.

"I want to rest," he argued.

That was a mistake as one of the horses trotted over to the fence and whinnied. "Oh you smell so good little gingerbread man. Come over here so I can smell you better."



The little gingerbread man shook his head, but suddenly that horse jumped the fence and began galloping after him, so he had to run even faster. He called out,

*"I outran children and I'll outrun you.  
Run, run as fast as you can.  
You can't catch me.  
I'm the gingerbread man."*

And truly, that horse could not catch him.

The next time he rested the little gingerbread man took care to lie amongst the grass well off the road where no one would see him.

"Everybody wants to eat me," he complained to the butterfly. "Do you want to eat me, too?"

Laughing she answered. "I love the smell of gingerbread. It's better than my favorite flowers. But I sip nectar, not gingerbread. Besides, you're my friend and friends don't eat friends."

Pleased to hear that he had a friend the little gingerbread man was about to reply when again they were interrupted. A farmer's dog with a keen nose had come to investigate. Licking his muzzle at the sight of the gingerbread man, the dog said.

"Excuse me for interrupting, but little gingerbread man you look so good. I mean tired. Please stay awhile and rest if you like."



As the dog talked, he stepped closer and closer. The closer he stepped, the more nervous became the little gingerbread man. When the butterfly flitted from her grass perch in alarm, the little gingerbread man took off running with the dog nipping at his tiny heels. He shouted,

*"I outran children. I outran a horse,  
and I'll outrun you, too.  
Run, run as fast as you can.  
You can't catch me.  
I'm the gingerbread man."*



And truly that dog could not catch him.

At last the little gingerbread man and the butterfly reached a stream.

It wasn't a very big stream unless you are a tiny gingerbread man. To him it was a river. From out behind a bush sauntered a red fox stopping to stretch because he had just awakened from a nap. Looking at the gingerbread man he said nonchalantly, "May I help you?"

The butterfly was quick to respond. "No thank you. We're going to fly across this stream. We don't need your help."

Smiling, the wily fox glanced at the butterfly before turning to the little gingerbread man, "You're going to carry him? I've no doubt Ms. Butterfly that you have good intentions, but you're only a bug. You couldn't carry anything anywhere, let alone this gingerbread man across the stream. You'll drop him. I guarantee it!"

The little gingerbread man was confused. He knew that his butterfly friend had good intentions but could she really carry him? He doubted it. Her wings were so thin and delicate. The thought of him falling into the cold water and crumbling to damp bits was frightening. He said to the fox, "I outran children. I outran a horse, and I outran a dog. Will you keep me safe and not eat me?"

"Of course!" the wily fox quickly assured him before the butterfly could object. "I eat only meat and I had a full meal just before my nap. Here, ride on my bushy tail. Let's go before I change my mind."

So the little gingerbread man climbed onto the fox's tail and they entered the water.



Unfortunately the fox's tail began dipping into the water. "You're too heavy for my tail, he said. Climb onto my back."

The little gingerbread man did as he was asked.

But the water began creeping up the fox's back forcing the little gingerbread man to climb higher to the fox's neck. "That's not good enough, I'm afraid," said the wily fox. "Climb to my head."

Now the little gingerbread man was terrified, but what could he do? He climbed to the fox's ears.

"Oh, little gingerbread man, you have to climb onto my nose," insisted the wily fox, "otherwise I can't help you. Don't you see the water is getting even deeper?"

So the little gingerbread man reluctantly climbed onto the fox's nose. The moment he did, that wily fox tossed him into the air, opening his jaws wide with anticipation. The little gingerbread man's eyes rounded with fear because he knew he was going to be eaten. It didn't matter now how fast he could run.



But the little gingerbread man and the wily fox had forgotten about the butterfly. She swooped into that fox's jaws, grabbing her friend by one leg and rescuing him from an awful fate. She flew higher and higher until the stream and the fox were but spots on the landscape.

"You *can* carry me," cried the little gingerbread man.

"Yes," she answered. "I'm stronger than you could imagine. Now I'll take you somewhere safe."



She flew with him over farm fields and forests and even mountains. It felt like they had been in the sky forever when they reached a lake, its waters calm like pale glass. There was an island in the middle of the lake lined with forest trees. And among the trees was where the butterfly took the little gingerbread man. She flew down, down, and down until they came to the foot of a pine tree.

The little gingerbread man could not believe his eyes. Beneath that pine tree was the most beautiful gingerbread house.

Through the front door of the gingerbread house came a gingerbread man and a gingerbread woman. Seeing the butterfly and her companion they smiled excitedly waving their gingerbread hands.

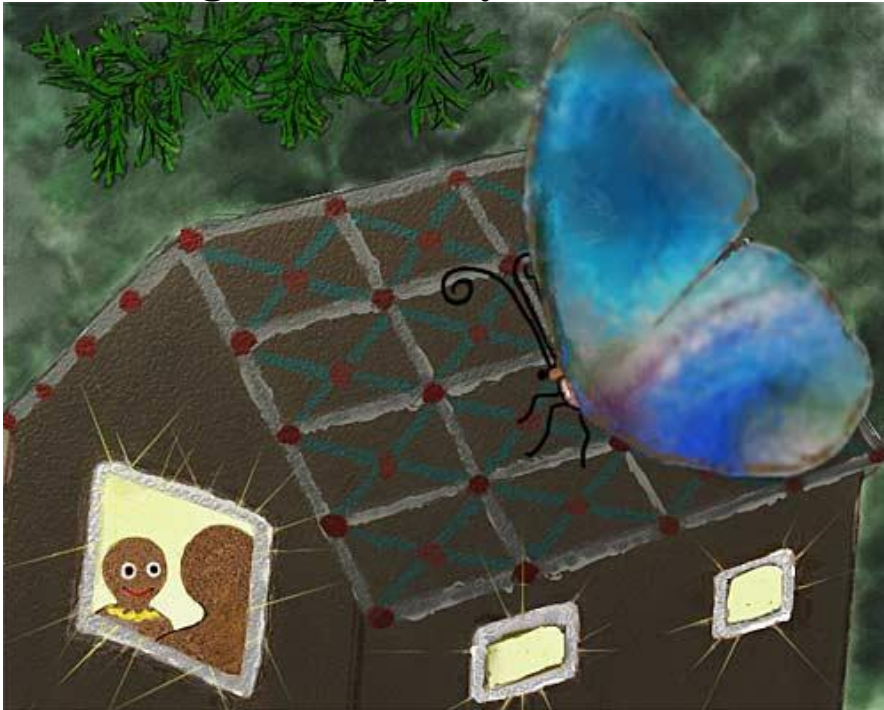
"Oh, what have you brought us?" cried the gingerbread woman. Evidently she knew the butterfly very well.



"I think that's obvious, dear" said the gingerbread man. "She's brought us a gingerbread boy. Do you realize that now we can be the family we always wanted?"

It was true. The butterfly had intended all along to bring these three together. The little gingerbread man had not known that he was, in reality, a gingerbread boy. It was all so sudden, but wonderful. When both his gingerbread parents each gave him a loving hug he knew he was home.

The gingerbread family went inside their gingerbread house to celebrate with the butterfly remaining outside on the roof. She was content just smelling the gingerbread and sitting there quietly, whether it was day or night.



They all lived happily ever after.

# The Littlest Knight



*Follow the littlest knight as he battles to save the kingdom from the terrible dragon and win the hand of the princess.*

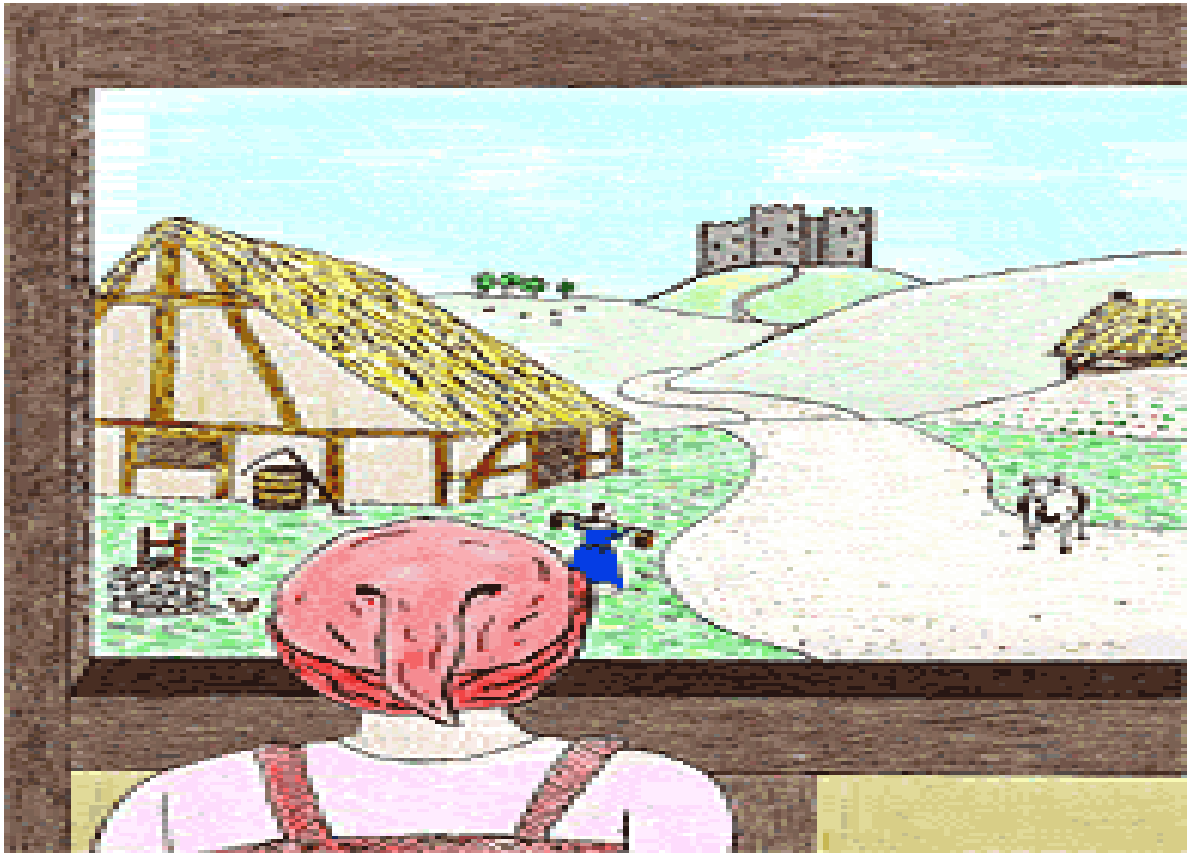
**A Children's Book**

**Written and Illustrated by Carol Moore**

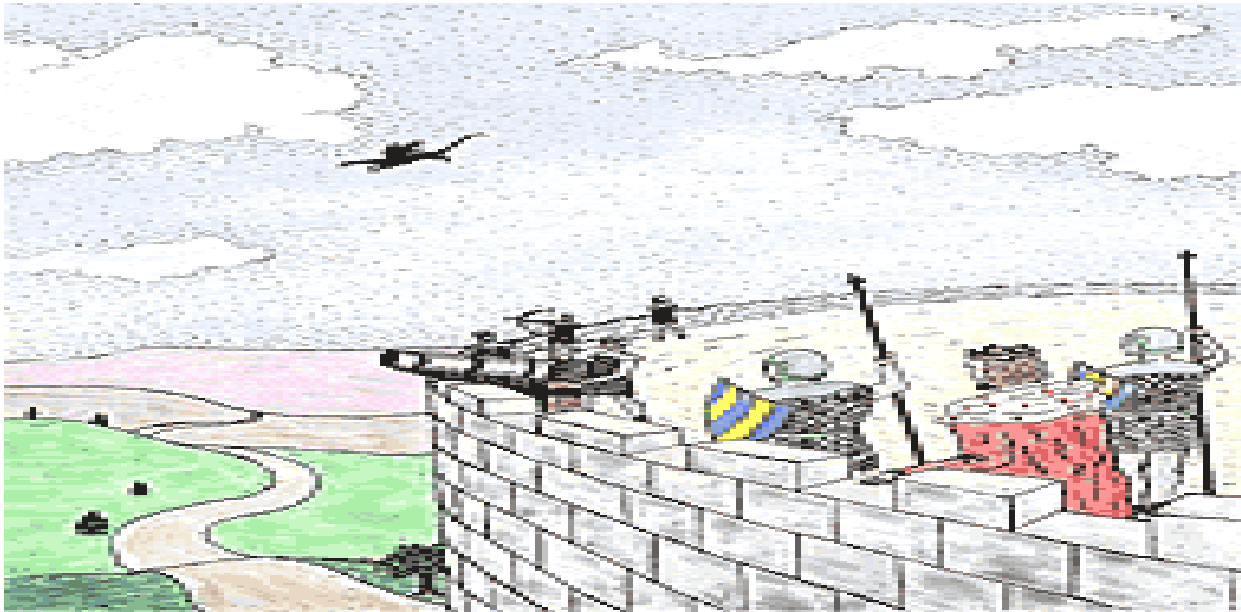




**Once upon a time long ago, even before the days of King Arthur, there lived a blacksmith only three feet tall. He was so short that he needed a stool to stand on to shoe the great steeds of the knights. This bothered him not a bit because although he was small he was very brave. In fact, in his heart he secretly longed to become a knight and win the hand of the Princess.**



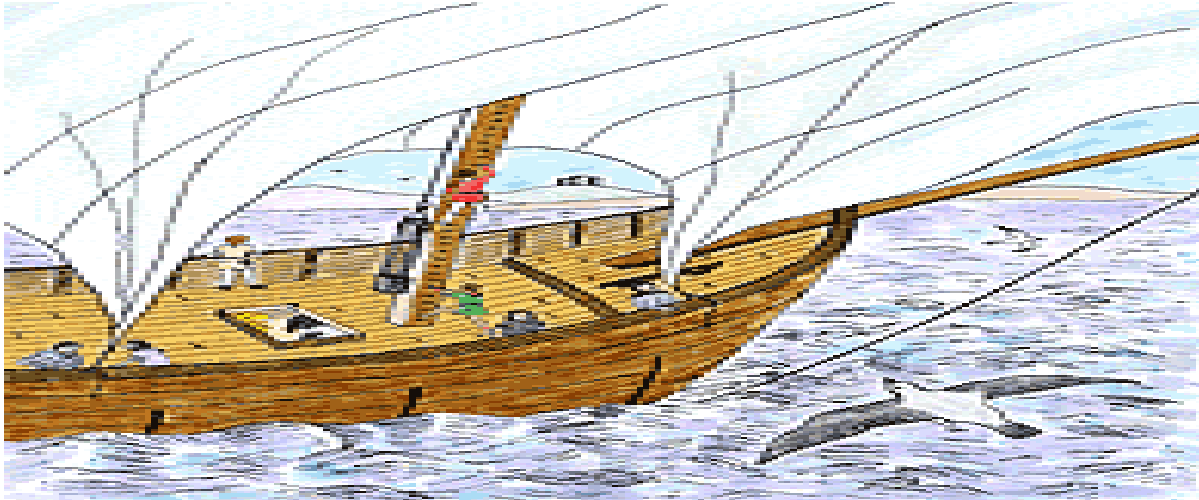
**The Princess was the King and Queen's only child and it should come as no surprise that the little blacksmith loved her very much for she was both kind and beautiful. She was even smaller than he, and had dancing eyes and long silken hair which she wore in a coiled braid. But, alas, the little blacksmith could admire the Princess only from afar because she was, after all, a princess and he but a lowly blacksmith--not even that tall.**



One day a terrible dragon came to the kingdom. Breathing fire on anyone who crossed its path, it trampled houses and burned fields. Many knights battled the dragon but their swords could not cut its thick scales. Each night it flew home to its cave in the mountains surrounded by a deep ravine.

The dragon was enchanted and protected by a magic spell. It said,

*He who would break my spell,  
Must carry a thousand swords,  
And do it well.  
Then cross a bridge which isn't there,  
If he wants to reach my lair.  
And last, not least, my defeat  
Will be an empty cup filled.*



**Many knights went to battle and many knights were hurt as the dragon moved closer and closer to the castle. The King declared whosoever killed the dragon would be granted half his kingdom. Now knights came from across the sea. They were the most fierce, the bravest and the *biggest* knights anyone had ever seen. A thousand of them gathered to attack the dragon.**

**But with his great wings the dragon took no time in knocking 50 knights from their horses and breathing fire on the rest. He said,**

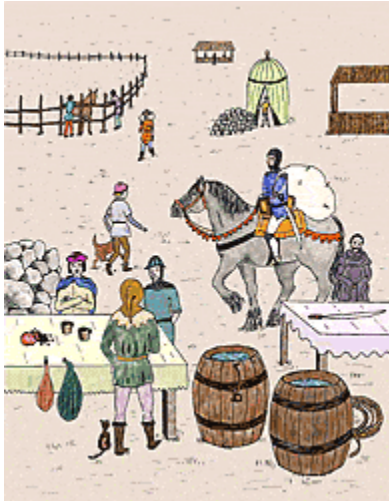
*You must think I'm here to fiddle,  
1,000 men--that's not the riddle.  
One man alone, only one man,  
With a thousand swords,  
That's the plan.*



**In desperation the King proclaimed whosoever solved the riddles and killed the dragon would be granted their heart's desire.**

**Now the merchants got busy. Suddenly there were swords everywhere: fat swords, skinny swords, sharp swords, dull swords, fancy swords, but mostly tiny swords so that one man might carry many of them. But a tiny sword is more like a dagger and most knights were too proud to carry a sack full of daggers.**

**There was also a need for building materials to make the bridge, all kinds and shapes of wood and rock and rope and twine. Of course, with all this material they needed carts to carry it and animals to pull it so there was a run on wagons and horses and donkeys and oxen.**

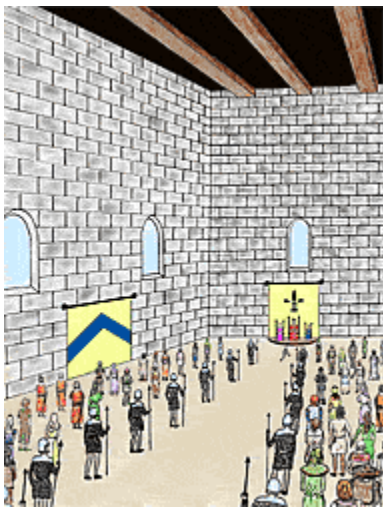


**Lastly, the chinaware merchants had a field day. They sold crystal goblets, wooden goblets, big cups, little cups, coffee cups, fat cups, skinny cups. To fill these cups the wine merchants and the milkmaids sold red wine, white wine, sparkling wine, cow's milk, goat's milk and all types of fruit juice.**

**As a matter of fact, the kingdom had never known such commercial success. Nothing was left of anything resembling a sword or building material, or a wagon to hold it, or an animal to pull it, and there was not a drop of liquid left in all the kingdom but ordinary water.**

**What *was* left were sacks and sacks and sacks of money piled everywhere. And did this do any good? No. The knights for all their effort and all their supplies couldn't defeat the dragon and now the countryside was strewn with debris and the kingdom was a mess.**

**Only the little blacksmith's heart was full of hope for he finally had a chance to win the hand of the Princess. He fashioned a suit of armor and a sword out of old tin cups and scrap metal, mounted his pony and rode to court. Bowing before the King, he said, "I wish to be knighted so that I may rid your kingdom of this horrible monster."**

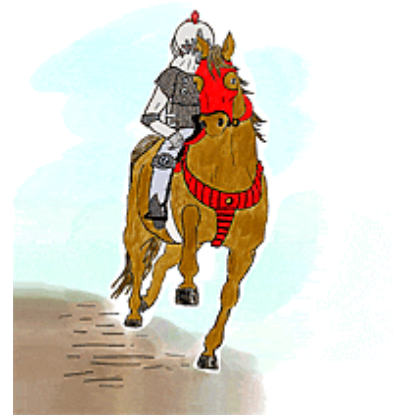


**There was a moment of silence, then everyone but the Princess began to laugh. In fact, they laughed and they laughed, which made the little blacksmith's ears turn red. The King said, "You are no match for this dragon. It takes might to fight. You are simply too small."**

**The little blacksmith squared his shoulders. "I may be slight but I can fight."**

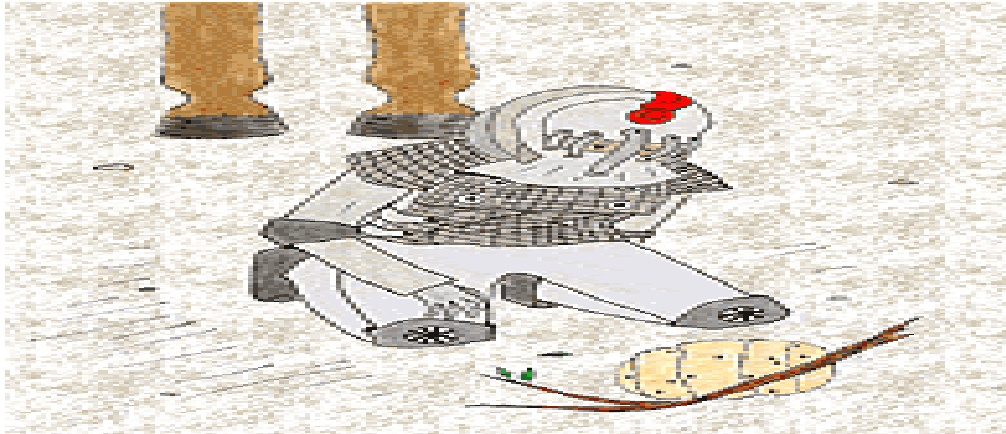
**The Princess was impressed. It was clear to her he was brave and good. "Father, for my sake, knight him this day. You promised 'whosoever should slay the dragon,' and surely he deserves a chance."**

**The King couldn't refuse his only daughter. He rose from his throne and knighted the blacksmith. Then, for luck, the Princess unwound her long braid, pulled out a single hair and handed it to the littlest knight. He placed it in a pocket over his heart. "May you have good fortune, my brave knight," she said.**



**So the littlest knight set out on his pony to find the dragon. He met many tired and injured knights and one helpful fellow told him, "Go back. One man can't carry 1,000 swords, nor can you cross a bridge which isn't there, and if you fill an empty cup it won't be empty any more. It is all a trick." He thought the littlest knight was the biggest fool.**





**The littlest knight had been traveling half a day when he came upon an object in the road beneath a tree. It was a beehive. Being a kind soul he picked it up to put it back in the tree. Suddenly he heard a tiny, buzzing voice.**

*We see you have kind intentions,  
But please don't put us back.  
Every knight who's seen us here,  
Raised his sword and gave a whack.  
Carry us elsewhere, we pray,  
And we'll return the favor one day.*

**"OK," said the littlest knight and carefully tied the beehive to his saddle.**

**It was shortly after that he found the dragon or rather it found him. It landed nearby to look him over, and said,**

*Pfft, why you're nothing but a pea,  
Who doesn't reach my knee.  
Go home and grow some more.  
Fighting you would be a bore.*

**But the littlest knight charged anyway striking a blow with his sword.**

**"Ouch," said the dragon. The littlest knight charged and struck him again. The dragon roared.**

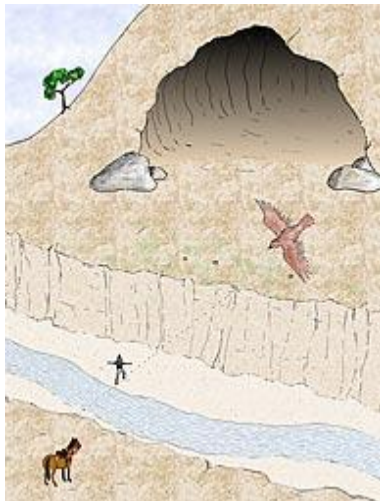
*You've gone too far this time.  
You hit me on my behind.  
I'll fry you 'till  
What you look like most,  
Is a piece of burnt up toast.*

**Suddenly there was a buzzing from the knapsack. A bee flew out and up to the littlest knight's ear.**

*We have a way to repay you,  
Throw our beehive and we'll save you.*



**So the littlest knight grabbed the beehive, throwing it at the dragon's head. Immediately a thousand bees flew out with a thousand stingers. With their tiny swords they stung the dragon again and again. The dragon's eyes began to swell and he could hardly see. With a bellow of pain and anger he leaped into the air and flew off to his cave in the mountains.**

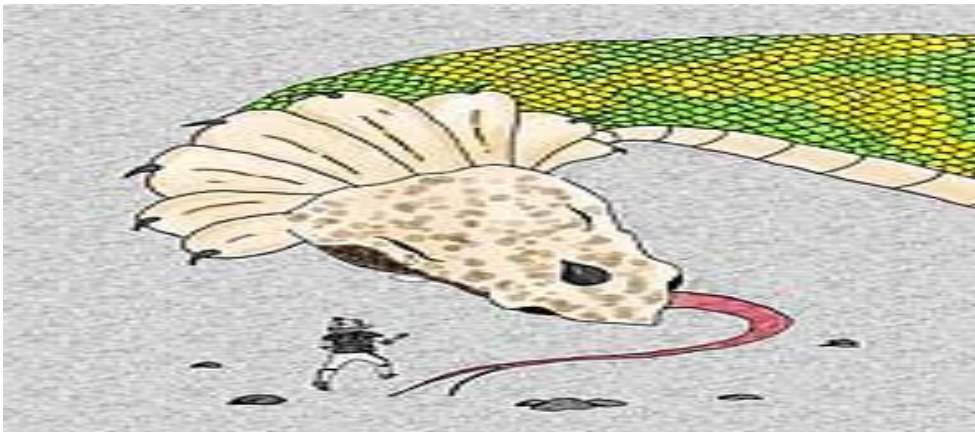


**The littlest knight followed on his pony. When he reached the dragon's lair he saw that the cliffs of the ravine were so far across that building a bridge would take a year. He sat down to think about it, meanwhile pulling from his pocket the Princess's single silken hair.**

**Again there was a buzzing from the knapsack and a bee flew out. It asked him what the matter was. When he told it, it said.**

*This is easy.  
To cross a bridge which isn't there,  
Could be a single human hair.  
Tie the Princess's to my back.  
I'll fly it there and  
Tie it near the dragon's lair.*

**The bee did just that. The littlest knight couldn't believe his good fortune until he was fully halfway across the ravine, balancing like an acrobat. The Princess's hair seemed magical for it stretched the whole distance and even with his weight did not break.**



**He made it across and entered the cave. There he found the dragon in a far corner. It was in misery with its eyes swollen shut and its forked tongue lying on the ground. It hissed at his approach, for it could still smell him.**

*I warn you do not come in here.  
I'll kill you if you come near.  
It's foolhardy to be involved,  
When there's still a riddle to be solved.*

**But the littlest knight wasn't afraid. With his kind heart all he could feel now was pity. He wanted to help the beast, to give it water to drink and cool its swollen eyes.**

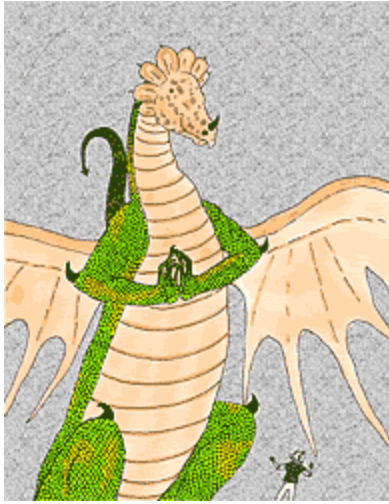


**Returning outside he climbed down the cliff to the stream below. At the bottom there was plenty of water but nothing with which to carry it. Then he spied a chipped cup some knight had tossed from above. Carefully picking it from the sand he filled it as best as he could and climbed back up.**

**But when he got back to the dragon he discovered that not only had the cup been chipped but it had a crack he had not seen. What little water there was had drained out while he was climbing. He approached the dragon and said, "I'm sorry. I meant to help you, I really did. But the cup is empty."**

**To his surprise the beast rose up with a roar of glee.**

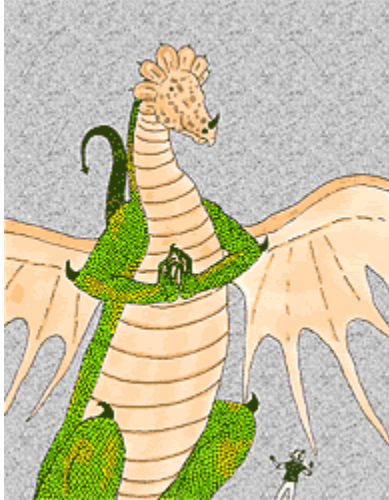
*Thank you, oh thank you, little knight,  
You have saved me, all right!  
An empty cup it may be,  
But it was filled with kindness, you see.  
And an empty cup filled, sets me free!  
I was a good and gentle dragon long ago,  
Before I angered an evil wizard so that  
He cursed me to be as wicked as he.  
I'm forever in your debt,  
I'm the happiest dragon yet.  
Let me take you home.  
I'll guard you forever, I tell no lies.  
I'll be your wings, if you'll be my eyes.*



**The littlest knight was shocked, stunned and delighted. The evil dragon wasn't evil at all, only bewitched, and now that the riddles were solved it was proving to be as kind as its new master.**

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**The first thing the littlest knight did was attach the beehive to a high rock at the mouth of the cave. The bees were thrilled. They had a new home with shelter, protection and most important, privacy, and the stream below had enough flowers growing by it to make more honey than they would ever need.**

**Then the littlest knight, astride his flying dragon, flew home with his pony galloping beneath.**





**At first the King and all the kingdom were terrified. All except the Princess, that is. She trusted her littlest knight and upon hearing the whole story set about immediately to make a healing salve for the dragon's eyes.**

**The littlest knight married her and got half the kingdom. The dragon got back his eyesight and, true to his word, guarded the kingdom faithfully.**



**In time, the littlest knight and the Princess had seven children who loved taking rides on the dragon's back.**

**Of course, they lived happily ever after.**



**The End**

# **Go For It, Bablu!**

## **By Chitra Padmanabhan**

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It happened on the day school started after a heavenly two months of summer holidays. Shankar refused to wake up at 6 am. He wanted to dream more about his visit to his grandparents' home. They lived in the picturesque city of Mysore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. He particularly wanted to remember his two trips to the Bandipur National Park. It was a magical forest in the shade of the Nilgiri mountains which always seemed to have their heads in the clouds! Shankar had been lucky to see the stately Asian elephant, the Mugger crocodile, the four-horned antelope, and the leopard. The tiger had been elusive. "Next time," Shankar told himself happy at the thought.

He wanted "next time" to be now! But first, his mother and then his father kept talking in his ear till he was forced to get up. Have you ever had anyone droning into your ear while you tried to sleep? It can be terrible. However, once Shankar saw his friends in the school bus, he felt happy to be back from his dream.

When Shankar returned home in the afternoon he saw his mother standing at the door. That was strange. He wondered, “Why hasn’t Amma gone to office today?” When he saw the worried look on her face he felt a flash of fear.

Amma gave him a tight hug and two kisses on the forehead. “Shankar, I wanted to tell you myself. Your father had an accident while driving to office. The good news is that he will be out of hospital in two weeks. He will be absolutely fine. But I think it is time to get a driver for him. You and I shall select a fine young man to drive Appa carefully to office.”



Amma's words calmed Shankar. He felt happy at the thought of helping out Appa. In the next few days he sat next to his mother while she interviewed several men for the post of chauffeur to Appa. They both decided on Raj. He was 30 years old and had a pleasant way of speaking. "Raj will take good care of Appa," Shankar thought.

Finally, Appa returned from hospital. He told a worried Shankar that Raj had driven very carefully. A lot of exciting things happened on that Sunday. Raj's family came to stay with them in the small flat in their backyard. That's how Shankar met Raj's eight-year-old son Bablu.

Bablu had a monkey face, with bright eyes and spiky hair. From the day he met Shankar, he became his fan. To eight-year-old Bablu, 11-year-old Shankar seemed to be a big boy. He would always follow Shankar around. Whenever Shankar looked up from the book he was reading, he would find Bablu's face staring at him through the window. While brushing his teeth he would often get confused when he saw another face staring back at him from the mirror! And when he walked back from the school bus stop in the afternoon, he would have two shadows – one was his own and the other shadow was Bablu walking a few paces behind!

Bablu did not go to school. Of course he was admitted to a local government school but he refused to go. He told Shankar shyly that the teachers only made them copy words from the blackboard. Since he had not learnt to read he could not understand anything that was written on the board.

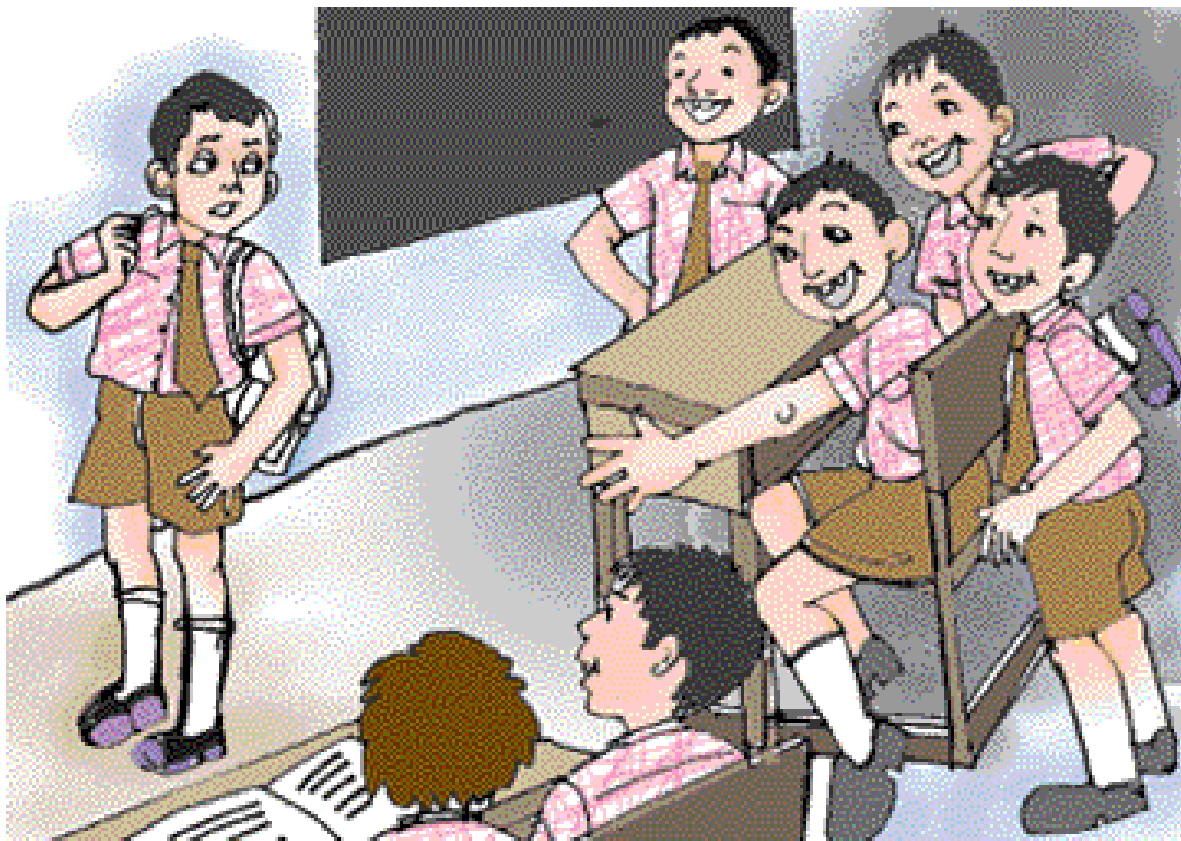
Shankar felt sorry for him. One Sunday, Shankar decided to ride his bicycle to his friend's house nearby. As he wheeled out his bicycle from the garage, he saw a strange sight. Bablu was sitting under a tree holding a book in his hands. Shankar tip-toed closer and discovered that Bablu was holding one of his books. What's more, Bablu was holding the book upside down. Since he could not read it, did not matter which way he held the book.

Shankar took the book out of Bablu's hands and turned it the right side up. "This is how you are supposed to read," he told Bablu in an affectionate tone. Two big tears rolled down Bablu's cheeks. He looked like a sad little monkey. Bablu told Shankar, "I want to be like you but I can't do anything."

The bicycle went back into the garage. Shankar walked back to the house. His parents were reading the newspapers over steaming cups of delicious south Indian filter coffee. Shankar told them they had to help Bablu get into a better school.

It was not very easy to get Bablu admitted to a new school, because the time for admissions was over. But one principal looked at Bablu kindly and admitted him to her school. The next day, Bablu went to his new school a very proud boy – wearing a brand new shirt, shorts and a tie!

When Bablu returned from school he was a bit tearful. The other children in his class had teased him. He told Shankar, "They all said I am much older than them but in a smaller class. I don't want to go to school."



Shankar said, “Don’t cry Bablu. I will teach you to read and write. Very soon you will be as good if not better than your classmates.” From the loft the older boy took out all the books and kids magazines that he had read years ago. The kids magazines were in Hindi and in English, and Shankar's favourites were *Chandamana*, *Champak*, *Twinkle* and *Target*. There were fairy tale books, from the Grimms Brothers to Hans Christian Anderson. There were several volumes of *Panchatantra for kids*, ‘*Mahabharata for kids*’. And, best of all, he still had his entire collection of early reading books. These would be ideal for getting Bablu to practice his reading. “Shankar thought to himself, “There is enough reading for kids here for Bablu to get over his fear of reading and writing.”

Shankar went to the stationary shop which kept kids magazines, books, craft kits for kids in the 4-8 age group and worksheets for kids up to Class VIII. He bought two interesting worksheets. One worksheet taught the Hindi alphabet. Each letter had a picture of a bird, animal, eatable, flower or tree next to it. There was also a story attached to each letter. The English worksheet was also similar. Bablu had a great time coloring the apple while chanting A for apple. Shankar read out the story of William Tell and the apple. He also read stories from Hindi kids’ magazines like *Champak* and *Chandamama* and from English kids’ magazines like *National Geographic Kids’* magazine. When he wanted to reward Bablu for working hard he would read from his favourite fairy tale book for kids.

Two months later, Bablu returned from school with a beaming face. He kept his school bag on the chair and without eating his lunch ran to Shankar's school bus stop. The moment Shankar got off from the school bus Bablu hugged him hard. He rattled on, "Shankar bhaiya, the principal praised me in the school assembly today. She told everyone that I am one of the best students in her school now! I have become the monitor of my class."

Shankar picked up Bablu and did a war dance right there and then.

Now Bablu has another wish. He wants to work on the computer like Shankar. He wants to visit reading websites for kids, and he wants to play the online treasure hunt games that his Shankar bhaiya plays.

Go for it, Bablu!