



A Collection of

Odd Stories

For Children

John H. Carroll

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Published by John H. Carroll at
Smashwords

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This collection is dedicated to all the demented adults who enjoy my writing.

These are are for children who want Wile Coyote to finally catch the stupid roadrunner, eat it for dinner and use the bones as a toothpick.

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The Emo Bunny that Should

This is dedicated to demented children who don't care about Dick and Jane fetching a pail of water and would rather read about them falling down the hill.

Emo the Bunny was sad. It wasn't that he didn't have anybody to play with, it was that he didn't want to play at all.

While other bunnies were dancing, thumping and hopping all about, Emo preferred to lie in a dark corner and twitch his nose. What he really wanted was for someone to come and hold him, rubbing his cheek until everything was okay.

The glossy, black-haired bunny with grey-bottomed feet lived with his parents and siblings in an upside-down coffin that had been thrown out by humans years ago. The coffin had old purple fuzz inside that Emo liked to rub his back and ears against, making purple streaks throughout his fur. Some of the other bunnies teased him about it, but they made fun of *everything* about him and he just didn't care anymore.

Actually, he did care, he just didn't show how miserable the taunting made him feel.

The one bunny he *did* like was Haylo. Emo had accidentally bumped against her once and noticed her chestnut-brown fur was softer than anything in the world. Her smile, as he stammered out an apology, had melted his heart. It was the only time she had noticed him because her parents didn't like bunnies that were different.

Emo's mother came through the entrance, which was a hole in one end of the coffin. "Get outside, Emo. It's too pretty of a day to sit around sulking."

"I don't want to." He growled at her and pawed at the ground with his nails,

but she took him by the scruff and dragged him outside.

It was a cheerful, sunny day with birds singing joyous songs. It bothered Emo because when it was sunny outside, he was expected to do awful things like forage and socialize. Cloudy days were his favorite, when the sun wasn't too bright and everyone stopped hippity hopping everywhere.

Emo dashed into the thick forest behind the coffin, away from the bright clearing where other bunnies were playing. He wandered through the trees, looking for a quiet, shady area to hide in. Sometimes he would see a butterfly. Other bunnies enjoyed chasing butterflies, but Emo just stared at their

pretty colors and wished *he* could be so beautiful.

A mild breeze brought the scent of flowers and fresh dew to Emo's ever-twitching nose. His long, floppy ears heard a myriad of insects, birds and various woodland creatures going about their industrious activities. The whole thing depressed Emo to no end. Why did everything have to be so wonderful when he was trying to wallow in misery?

It was then that he saw the famed Easter Bunny. The giant idol of Easter was six feet tall with white fur, a blue

jacket, enormous ears and a permanent smile on his face. Word in the forest was that the Easter Bunny wore contacts so people wouldn't see that his eyes were actually black with fiery red pupils.

Duck minions traveling with the Easter Bunny had captured two bunnies from Emo's side of the forest and shoved them into cages to be taken away to the Easter egg factory. The cages were stacked in an evil, duck-shaped wagon pulled by two beaten deer. Frightened chickens cowering in other cages on the wagon would be forced to lay Easter eggs. In another cage was a dejected goose taken to hard-boil the eggs that the bunnies would then paint.

It was a hidden, cruel side of the

Easter Bunny that humans didn't know about. Santa Claus originally had a similar situation with overworked elves before they formed a union to overcome appalling working conditions. Now the elves ran the show at the North Pole and Santa was just a simple delivery driver.

However, the bunnies, chickens, geese, chipmunks and other animals hadn't been successful at forming unions. Most critters were too interested in food gathering and frolicking in the forest to organize and take the Easter Bunny to court.

The captives didn't stand a chance. Everyone underestimated how much being nipped by a duck could hurt. Emo hid behind a bush as he watched the

ducky wagon roll along a forest trail toward the factory.

Recently, a number of bunnies had disappeared from Emo's side of the forest. He had noticed it, but others were too busy being happy to pay attention. Missing bunnies made Emo gloomy. He considered spending the day lying down to think about how miserable the situation was, but in a rare moment of action decided to follow instead.

Most bunnies hippity hopped down whatever trail they were on, but Emo hopped normally and even walked slowly when possible. It was easy to keep up because the Easter Bunny traveled at a lumbering walk, and the ducks weren't in any hurry. More than

once during the two-hour journey Emo considered lying down to take a nap, but he was feeling almost energetic and kept following.

Upon arriving at the hidden factory, the Easter Bunny tapped on a huge tree with his cane. When a door in the trunk opened, he went in and shut it behind him. Then a crack appeared halfway between that tree and another tree fifty feet away, revealing large secret doors that gradually opened.

Emo watched from behind another tree a short distance away as the sinister ducky wagon rumbled inside. The last

minion looked around to see if anyone noticed before heading in, but Emo was excellent at hiding.

As the doors began to shut, Emo hippity hopped his way toward the entrance, just managing to get inside before they closed. He dashed into the dimly lit corridor and caught his breath. If a bunny could blush, he would have at the thought of having hippity hopped.

The wagon rolled around a corner. Emo followed, taking great care not to hop with any enthusiasm while nervously eyeing closed doors on either side of the corridor. Peering around the corner, he saw that it opened onto a huge factory floor. Two mean-looking brown bears were unloading the cages,

chickens to the right and bunnies to the left. The goose had already been taken away. In a short time, the wagon was unloaded and the duck minions nipped at the heels of the deer to get them moving.

When they were gone, Emo moved forward. The factory was immense, with thick columns every forty feet holding up a ceiling as high as the tallest trees of the forest. Animals at workbenches produced colored eggs and other candies. To the right were rows of chickens laying eggs for all they were worth. Overburdened chipmunks carried the eggs to giant pots of boiling water stirred by worn-down geese. When the eggs cooled down, field mice took them to the bunnies for painting and then

gophers put the painted eggs in baskets.

Duck minions kept watch over everything and there were a few bears for heavy tasks and extra muscle. Each of the columns supporting the ceiling had walkways branching out above the factory floor. Nests lined platforms on the sides of the walkways where robins laid eggs that were then filled with chocolate and crunchy stuff. In the far back of the warehouse were chocolate cows, magically transformed to produce all the milk chocolate needed for chocolate bunnies and other treats.

The result of all those captive animals was a smell that overwhelmed poor Emo's sensitive nose. A cacophony of clucks, moos, tweets and honks hurt

his ears while the ducks quacked at every silly goose that couldn't help but take a gander at what was going on around them.

The sight of woodland critters forced into slave labor depressed Emo terribly, so he decided to go home and hide in his corner of the coffin to try to forget the traumatizing image. He turned and hopped back to the large doors. When he reached them, he realized he didn't have a clue how they opened.

Emo froze when he heard quacking. Two duck minions were waddling up the hallway toward one of the side doors. Luckily, the ducks weren't very observant, so they didn't see him. They lowered their heads and head-bumped

the door to get through. Emo watched before hopping over to the door, thinking to do the same thing.

He realized they might be just inside and that following would be a bad idea, so he went to a door on the other side of the corridor and head-bumped it. Much to his surprise, it opened just as easily. Emo slowly pushed through and looked around.

A single candle in a dark room illuminated hundreds of beady black eyes. Sharp paws yanked him inside and a flashlight aimed at his face clicked on. “What are you doing in here?” a

commanding, high-pitched voice demanded. “Are you one of the Easter Bunny’s minions?”

Emo whimpered. “N . . . No. I . . . I’m Emo. I just followed the Easter Bunny and his minions here after they kidnapped some bunnies I know.”

“Are you here to save them?” the shadowy figure asked.

“Wha? . . . S . . . Save them? No. I’m just a Bunny. I want to go home and hide.” The thought of trying to save all those bunnies terrified him.

“Hmm . . . You’ll serve as a perfect diversion,” the figure said. More flashlights turned on, illuminating over a hundred squirrels gathered on bookshelves, chairs and desks in a large

office. They were members of the Squirrel Militia, the organization responsible for the safety of forest creatures. An imposing black squirrel by the name of Captain Nuttington led the tough militia. “The treatment of forest denizens in this factory is unacceptable and we’re breaking them out. Come with me.”

“Wait! Why do I have to be a diversion?” Emo wailed while being pushed through a different doorway into a smaller hall. No answer was forthcoming. In a moment, they reached another door. Some of the squirrels opened it a crack to see if the coast was clear. A column of light from the opening illuminated the hall.

Captain Nuttington stood next to Emo, lifted a floppy ear and whispered, “Alright, this is where the chickens are. Your job is to hop through as fast as you can. Scratch any duck that gets too close and avoid the bears. Once you get about halfway through the rows of chickens, race over to the geese and goose a few. Once you get past . . .”

“Wait a minute!” Emo protested, drawing hushing sounds from the squirrels. “I don’t *want* to do this. I want to go home and take a nap. *I’m* not a hero.”

The captain’s eyes were fierce as he got nose to nose with Emo. “You do this or we’ll stuff acorns in your ears.” Emo shrank back in fear. Nuttington pointed a

finger in his face. “Now, once you get past the geese, run back and forth between the bunnies and tell them to start hopping everywhere.”

“What do I do if they catch me?” Emo whined.

“Don’t get caught. Just keep hopping as though your life depends upon it . . . Because it does. Those bears do terrible things to woodland creatures, things I can’t talk about . . .” Captain Nuttington shuddered while the faces of the other squirrels became grim. “Go, Emo Bunny. Go now!” With that, they pushed him out the door.

Emo stood still for a brief moment, his twitching nose the only movement.

“Hey! What are you doing out of place?” a duck to his right quacked.

That was all he needed. Emo hopped as fast as he could through the rows of egg-laying chickens. It caused quite a ruckus and the poor hens got their feathers ruffled. About halfway through the rows, Emo ran into a bear . . . literally.

He changed direction and headed toward the geese, barely avoiding the paws that tried to snatch him. A duck appeared in front him only to be bowled over by a head-butt. Emo shook his head and continued running.

Captain Nuttington's squirrels

scampered onto the factory floor, adding to the commotion. The chickens flapped into the air in a desperate attempt to get away, which was silly because chickens couldn't fly. The ducks took to the air too, trying to contain the hens.

Emo didn't want to waste time pinching each goose's rear end, so he goosed them with more head-butts. An entire row of geese honked and flew into the air in a wave as he dashed by. It didn't take long for Emo to reach the bunnies and shout for them to start hopping. Chaos filled the building.

Then he saw Haylo and realized she was a prisoner too. She looked at him in surprise before bumping her cheek against his. "What are you doing here,

Emo? Did they capture you too?” she asked in a dulcet voice filled with worry.

“You know my name?” he asked in surprise.

“Of course. You bumped into me last month and I noticed how soft you were,” she told him shyly. “You go off into the forest alone a lot. I follow you sometimes, even though my parents would be furious if they found out.”

The words stunned Emo. He stared at her in adoration and happily noticed she was returning the gaze. Never in his life had he thought someone so wonderful as her could care about a sad little bunny like him.

A duck crashed into him, wildly

flapping its wings. It skidded across the floor with Captain Nuttington courageously hanging onto its neck. The good captain yelled at them, “Don’t just sit there, you silly little bunnies! This is the grandest rescue in the history of the forest. Get to it!” With that, the squirrel leader tweaked the duck’s beak and went off to rescue a chipmunk that was getting its tail nipped.

Everyone else was dashing around in panic while squirrels chucked nuts at the ducks and bears. “Follow me,” Emo told Haylo in an extraordinary moment of bravery. “Follow me, follow me!” he yelled to the other creatures around. The thought that he was actually doing something heroic surprised him. Emo

wasn't sure he liked the way it felt, but continued anyway. "Follow me, follow me!" he yelled again, rushing toward the hallway where the big doors were.

"Follow him, follow him!" Haylo yelled.

"Follow him, follow him!" other bunnies yelled.

"Follow him, follow him!" chipmunks, gophers and geese yelled too.

"What in the Golden Egg is going on here?!" an ominous voice bellowed. The Easter bunny had come to see what the ruckus was. His contacts were out and his evil red eyes were fierce with anger.

Emo ignored the monster and led everyone into the wide hallway. Squirrel

Militia members were clearing ducks out of the path and even had a bear wrestled to the floor. Emo led the captives around the corner toward the exit. To his delight, the militia had opened the doors and the forest lay ahead.

Emo and Haylo charged into the forest with a bunch of bunnies, a gaggle of geese, a flock of chickens and assorted others while robins flew into the air above. He was pretty sure some of the cows came along too, but he never took the time to look back.

Half an hour later, he and Haylo

were in the corner of his coffin home, desperately trying to catch their breath. The missing bunnies had come home and everyone was in the clearing, shouting excitedly. Somehow, the rescued bunnies didn't even realize that it was Emo who helped save them.

He didn't care because Haylo was softly rubbing her cheek against his. For the first time since he could remember, Emo wasn't sad.

The End

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Zachary Zombie and the

Lost Boy

This story is dedicated to brains: the forgotten victims in all zombie tales.

Tobias was determined to catch the emo bunny. He had been following it for quite a while through the forest. He'd always wanted an emo bunny. They were soft, cuddly and always needed extra hugs because they were so sad.

He wasn't supposed to be in the forest, but there were so many

interesting creatures that he could see from his backyard: deer, wolves, fairies, porcupines, ghosts just to name a few. Tobias's father was a ranger who lived on the edge of the village and the creatures of the forest were respectful to the family, but it still wasn't safe for a boy to wander off alone.

The emo bunny dashed through some underbrush, disappearing out of sight. It was too thick for Tobias to enter, so he went around. A ball of black fur darted out of the tangled foliage and past some densely packed trees. Emo bunnies normally sat underneath shady trees and wallowed in their misery all day, but this one appeared quite serious about getting away from the boy.

After several sharp turns around the trees, it disappeared for good. Tobias couldn't tell where it had gone and he wandered around, looking for it. Sometime later, he came to a small babbling brook. It was babbling about a skunk that had made it stink for a little while and about a log that jammed upstream. Tobias wasn't interested, so he crossed it and continued searching.

It was late in the afternoon when Tobias tiredly sat down on a moss-covered log. The smell of damp earth mingled pleasantly with pine needles. It had rained that morning and the sky was still overcast. He had been gone since shortly before lunch and his stomach growled, mad at having missed the

midday meal. Tobias looked around the dark, unfamiliar forest and panic set in as he realized he was completely lost.

He saw a movement to his right. A man was slowly shuffling through the trees a short distance away. Tobias stood up and waved, the panic instantly going away. "Hello, Sir! I'm lost. Can you help me get back home to the village, please?" His mother would be very proud of him for saying please.

The figure stopped, turned and shuffled toward him with a lurching movement. Tobias ran toward the figure, but stopped abruptly. The man looked very unhealthy. His skin was grey with some on his face hanging down, his left kneecap was showing through his pants

and one of his eyeballs was rolling around in its socket. “Brainsss?” it asked.

“You’re really ugly!” Tobias exclaimed. “Can you help me get back home to the village?”

Zachary Zombie was on a mission to find some newts for Gert, the Wicked Witch of the Forest. A while back, Zachary had been a thief intent on stealing some magical potions from the witch’s tower. However, a magical trap caught Zachary and zapped him to death with lightning. Upon finding his dead body on the stairs, Gert decided to turn

him into a zombie servant bound to do her bidding. He wasn't a normal zombie. The witch had done something to lock his soul into his dead body and as a result, he could still think, although it took longer with a mushy brain.

He heard someone say hello a short distance away. Turning to look, Zachary saw a boy waving and saying, "I'm lost. Can you help me get back home to the village, please?" Zachary was very impressed that the boy said please, so he lurched over to see what was wrong.

As the boy skidded to a stop in front of him, Zachary blurted out, "Brainsss?" It was a habit he tried to control, but the urge for brains was part of being a zombie and the word came out of his

mouth at random times.

“You’re really ugly!” the boy exclaimed. “Can you take me back to the village?”

When he was alive, Zachary had been rather handsome. His charming good looks were one of the things he missed the most. The other thing he missed was the way his right eye used to stay where it was supposed to. Now it was spinning around in his head, making him dizzy. The view inside his head was not all that pretty either.

“Villagshe? Home?” he asked for clarification. Zachary’s brain was decayed, so he liked to make sure he understood what people were saying.

“Yes. Will you please take me home

to the village?” the boy asked. Zachary was very impressed that the boy had said please again.

Zachary wasn't supposed to go to the village. For some reason, whenever a zombie appeared, villagers lit torches and brandished pitchforks. It was a very bad habit that villagers had. However, the boy was lost in the dangerous woods and Zachary *did* know how to get to the village, and the boy had said please. It was very important to say please whenever possible. Zachary's mother had taught that to him. “Villagshe, yeshh,” he told the boy.

“Thank you!” the boy exclaimed happily. “My name's Tobias, what's yours?”

“Tobiashh,” Zachary repeated, making sure he had it right. “Namesh Zshachary.”

“jjack . . . shack . . . oh! Zachary! You’re name’s Zachary!” Tobias exclaimed as he figured out the name. “You talk funny, kind of mushy like your face,” the boy pointed out. Zachary nodded in agreement. It was a personal failing that he was trying to work on.

Tobias took Zachary’s hand and waited to be led. Zachary thought about which way to go. It took a moment since his brains were decayed, but he finally decided that it would be best to go along the cliffs by the sea. The forest had too many dangers in it for a little boy. He led Tobias in that direction.

A stag suddenly appeared in front of them. It was a majestic beast with a yellow glow and its head held high. “A human hunter killed my mother, therefore the boy must die!” it declared in righteous anger, lowering its twelve pronged antlers at Tobias.

Zachary knew instantly that it was a magical deer: partially because it glowed, but mostly because it talked. He pushed Tobias to the side in order to protect the boy from the lunging stag. It hit Zachary square in the chest, lifted him up with its antlers and threw him into the air. Zachary fell to the ground with a squishy thud. “Ewwww,” the deer stated un-majestically and began scraping its antlers on a nearby tree in an

attempt to get the zombie goo off.

“Wow! That was neat!” Tobias exclaimed, looking back and forth between the stag and zombie in admiration. Zachary got up and checked to make sure all his body parts were still attached. There were a couple of puncture wounds and a few maggots had escaped from his chest, but that appeared to be the worst of the damage. Then he realized that half of his vision was missing. The spinning eye was gone.

Searching around for a moment, he finally saw it impaled on a tine of the stag's antlers. Worried that the stag would damage it further while trying to scrape off zombie goo, Zachary lurched

forward. One of the advantages of being a zombie was having the strength of ten men. He grabbed the deer by the antlers and twisted it to the ground. Then he sat on its head and carefully plucked the eyeball off the antler while the stag bleated and kicked its legs in desperation.

Zachary stood up and examined the eyeball, ignoring the stag that jumped up and flailed around trying to shake zombie mush off its face. There was a hole through the eyeball, so Zachary licked it on both sides to fix the hole before setting it back in the socket. It was a little known fact that zombie saliva could heal minor zombie wounds. It was possible it would work on non-

zombie wounds as well, but no one would let a zombie close enough to lick them in order to find out. Not only did the eye work again, but it had stopped spinning, making him very happy.

“That’s really gross!” Tobias stated with glee. “I wish I could do that!” He gently poked his eye with a finger and stretched out his tongue in an attempt to reach it. “Nope! It’s too far away and I think mommy would be mad if I took my eye out like that.”

“Villagshe, home,” Zachary told the boy, holding out his hand. Tobias took it and they walked away from the deer that was still bleating and jumping in disgust at having been slimed.

It wasn’t long until they emerged

from the forest onto the windswept cliffs. The sun was nearly set and its golden rays streaked out from the horizon, causing the bottoms of the clouds to glow brilliant yellows, oranges, reds and purples. It was a truly beautiful sight and the smell of sea spray filled the air. Off in the distance to their right, away from the village, thunder rumbled. Zachary looked in that direction and jumped when he saw a bolt of lightning. He had become terribly afraid of it.

“Look! There’s a woman near the edge of the cliff.” Tobias said. Sure enough, a woman in a flowing white dress and cloak stood with her arms spread. She was staring into the sunset

while a breeze from the ocean swept her dress and beautiful blonde hair back. “Let’s go see if she’ll help us get back to the village!” Tobias tugged on Zachary’s arm, pulling it loose from the shoulder socket. It fell to the ground with a meaty thud and both of them stared at it for a moment. “. . . Oops,” Tobias finally said.

Zachary reached down and picked up the arm. He set it against the shoulder where it reattached. It was another nice feature of being a zombie. While body parts did fall off, they also reattached easily. “That’s really neat,” Tobias told him. “I wish I could pull my arm off and put it back on. Sorry I pulled yours off.”

“Shalright,” Zachary reassured him.

“Shal . . . You mean it’s alright?”

Tobias clarified.

“Yeshh.”

“Okay. Let’s go talk to the woman on the cliff, okay?” Tobias suggested again.

“Yeshh.” They walked toward the sea cliffs. Tobias was very careful not to yank on his arm after that.

Anise stood at the edge of the cliff with her arms spread wide. The breeze brushed her beautiful blonde hair against her cheeks as she cherished her dramatic pose. Everything was perfect. The sun was setting and lighting up the clouds in brilliant golden orange hues. Far to the

right, lightning lit the sky, sending thunder to mix with the sound of the waves crashing against the rocky beach below.

To the left, the cliffs gradually sloped downward until they leveled off near the village that was set between the forest and the ocean about a mile or two away. The village was where Anise lived her lonely and miserable life with no one to care about her.

Oh sure, her mother and father doted on her, all the girls wanted to be her best friend and all the boys in the village thought she was beautiful, but that was to be expected. Anise deserved to live in a brilliant white castle with pink bows and her very own prince to take care of

her and give her ponies to ride. But that was never going to happen. After all, her father was only an innmaster with a tiny three level inn that only took up two blocks. How would a prince ever notice her in such squalor?

In the evenings, just before sunset, Anise would walk up the cliff road past the spooky graveyard where she was certain that zombies, ghosts and vampires had parties. She would continue up to the top of this cliff where she could watch the sun sink into the water at the edge of the world. Here she would spread her arms out theatrically and wait for a prince to come along and save her.

Anise wasn't actually going to jump,

but she wanted very much for a handsome prince to think she was so that he would find her interesting and take her to the castle to marry him and live happily ever after while birds sang to her and bunnies swept the floor; not the terribly sad emo bunnies, but the happy white fluffy bunnies.

Looking down from the very edge where she stood, she could see the rocky beach below. It was quite a ways down. A young voice sounded from behind her. "Hi! Can you help Zachary get me home to the village?" It startled her and she took a hurried step back so she wouldn't accidentally fall over the edge.

"Don't startle me like that!" She whipped around to see who had the

nerve to disturb her dramatic musings. Standing there hand in hand was a zombie and a young boy. She stared at the zombie with her jaw open in stunned silence.

“Brainsss?” the zombie asked.

Anise screamed a perfectly pitched scream of terror that echoed up and down the coast. Then she turned and ran away as fast as possible.

It took her a moment to remember that she had been standing at the edge of a cliff. Anise let out a fresh scream.

Zachary and Tobias looked over the edge as the screaming girl fell and went

splat against a rock. “Well, that was stupid,” Tobias observed.

“Yeshh. Shtupid,” Zachary agreed.

“Let’s go to the village and I’ll tell daddy. He’ll know what to do,” Tobias suggested.

“Villagshe, home.” Zachary nodded and the two of them turned back to the cliff road that headed to the village.

A short while later they were walking along the fence of the graveyard, which bordered the cliff road. Zachary heard the music from the nightly party that all the dead and undead attended. “Is that music?” Tobias asked.

“Yeshh. Dead party in graveyard,” Zachary said slowly. He was good at getting words out if he had time.

“Can we see it before you take me home?” Tobias asked eagerly. “I always wanted to see real dead people.”

Zachary thought about it for a minute. It took that long for the thoughts to make it through the mush in his head. He really couldn't think of any reason why not. “Shhure.” They were at the open front gate leading in. The zombies made sure it was always open, even breaking the hinges whenever the daytime caretakers fixed them. No one living ever came around at night because it was too dangerous.

The bottoms of the clouds still glowed pink and purple even though the sun had sunk into the ocean at the edge of the world. Torches had recently been lit

along the paths. Zachary led Tobias, still holding onto his hand. He liked it. Not many people ever wanted to hold Zachary's hand anymore or even touch him . . . or get anywhere near him.

The music came from xylophones made of real bones and fiddles strung with strings made from tendons. It was an exciting party. Skeletons spun their bones in wild clattering dances, while zombies did the shuffle. Ghosts floated to and fro, talking about the good old days when they were alive. Vampires acted batty and Werewolf Jack led the entertainment.

“This is so neat!” Tobias exclaimed in wide-eyed wonder.

“Yeshh,” Zachary agreed. He

couldn't help but shuffle along, moving his shoulders up and down with the beat. Alive, dead or undead, everyone enjoyed a good party. They joined a group of zombies that were doing a line dance. Zombie line dances were never a good thing. It was certain that a body part or two would go flying. Most of the time, the parts would get back to the correct owner, but mix-ups were known to happen.

An arm flew off and hit Zachary in the shoulder. The owner grabbed it quickly. "Shorry," he told Zachary.

"Shalright," Zachary assured him. A part of him remembered that he was supposed to be collecting newts for Gert the Wicked Witch, but with a quick

shake he moved maggots to that part of his brain and the thought went away.

An exquisitely dressed vampire with slick black hair and a long elegant cloak walked up in front of Tobias. “What have we here? Is it an innocent little boy?” he asked in a heavy accent. “How delicious.” Then he smiled a toothy smile.

Tobias grabbed onto Zachary’s leg and looked at the vampire fearfully. Luckily, zombies were immune to all vampire powers, so Zachary wasn’t the slightest bit afraid. “Bite yourshelf,” he told the vamp.

“Give him to me now, zombie! I hunger for innocent blood.” With that, the vampire lunged forward.

Zachary head-butted the vampire, knocking him to the ground. The zombie line dance stopped as they all watched in fascination. A few other vampires came to back up their friend. Zachary started moving toward the path leading back out of the graveyard.

The vampire slowly stood back up, shaking his head in an attempt to recollect his senses. “Eww!” he exclaimed, wiping his forehead with a sleeve. “I now have zombie mush on my face, you moron!” He flapped his cloak about. Zachary led Tobias down the path, backing away from the outraged vamp. “This is gross, you idiot! Eww, eww, eww! My pale skin is fragile and perfect. It will take me hours to get this

mush off.”

It was then that another zombie head-butted the vampire. Suddenly all the zombies were head banging and body-slamming the vampires. Werewolf Jack had the musicians play heavy metal music by banging chains on empty suits of armor. One of the vampires was being carried along the top of the crowd of zombies and skeletons while waving his arms and legs in the air. The party was getting serious.

Zachary and Tobias managed to get back to the main gate and they continued back down the cliff road toward the village. “That was neat! You’re my best friend ever, Zachary.” Tobias gave him a big hug. Zachary really liked the boy.

He didn't even mind it when Tobias tried to wipe off some of the zombie slime that had gotten on his hands.

The sky was completely dark by the time they neared the village. The magical streetlights that illuminated the main street of the village had been activated. Side streets had simple lanterns to light them. Scents of evening meals wafted lazily by while the sight and sound of people going home for the night filled the air.

They walked into town along the main road. Zachary knew there was something wrong with the plan, but it was taking him a while to figure it out. A woman shrieked, "Zombie! That zombie is eating the little boy's brains!" That's

when Zachary remembered that they should be walking through dark alleys instead of down the main street. He took offense to the accusation that he was eating Tobias's brains as he was doing no such thing.

A couple of men came out of a door with pitchforks and torches in hand. Zachary wondered if villagers kept those things next to their front doors. Luckily, the torches weren't lit and the villagers had to stop to do so.

"C'mon Zachary! We have to get away!" Tobias shouted. He yanked on Zachary's arm, pulling it off again. Zachary picked it up and reattached it as he shambled into a nearby alley behind the boy. They turned down the next

street, which didn't have anyone on it and then they dodged down the next alley. Tobias was panting heavily as they turned the corner of another alley that led behind a small inn.

Zachary was impressed that he had kept up with the boy. He could move fast for a zombie. "I think we're safe now," Tobias said, looking back around the corner. "My house is on the edge of the forest. I know the way and we can stay on the back streets if you keep me safe."

"Yeshh, home, shhafe," Zachary agreed. They continued down the alley. The back door to the inn opened as they walked by and a cook came out of the kitchen with trash in one hand and a frying pan in the other.

“Zombie!” the cook yelled in surprise. He swung the frying pan and smacked Zachary in the head, causing a ringing sound in Zachary’s skull. Everyone knew frying pans were one of the most dangerous weapons to use against a zombie.

“No! He’s taking me home. Please don’t hit him with the frying pan!” Tobias exclaimed, grabbing onto the cook’s arm. The cook stopped, impressed by the fact that the boy said please.

The ringing in Zachary’s head clouded his thoughts. He got angry and his inner zombie took over. “Brainsss” Zachary moaned as he wrapped his arms around the cook and bit his head.

“Oww! He’s biting my head! He’s biting my head! Make him stop! Aaagggghhhh!” the cook shrieked in terror.

“Zachary! No! Stop biting his head!” Tobias began pulling on Zachary’s arm, the good one. Rational thought came back and Zachary let go of the cook right away, ashamed of what he had done. A soulless zombie wouldn’t have stopped, but Zachary was better than that.

“He bit my head!” the cook exclaimed in outrage, holding the wound in both hands. “Eww! The zombie bit my head! Eww!” Tobias pulled Zachary away from the cook who sat down on the back step of the door, rocking back and forth. “I can’t believe a zombie bit my

head!”

A few minutes later, they were near the edge of the forest where Tobias’s home was. They walked up to the front gate of the white picket fence. It was a nice cottage with whitewashed stone walls, a thatch roof and flowers planted around the outside. It even looked pretty in the darkness.

“This is my home. Thank you, Zachary.” Tobias gave him a big hug, which made Zachary feel warm inside. “You better go home before those villagers find you. They seemed really mean.”

“Shalright,” Zachary reassured him. “Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Zachary,” Tobias

replied. With that, Zachary went around the picket fence and into the forest. He stopped at the edge to wave one last time at Tobias who waved back. He said, “Brainsss,” one last time before disappearing into the trees to go find newts for Gert the Wicked Witch.

Tobias waved at Zachary and heard him say, “Brainsss.” Then he went inside the house where his mother yelled at him tearfully for going into the forest and being out past dark. His father came home a short while later. As they washed the zombie goo off Tobias, he told them of his adventures

After dinner, they tucked him into bed and Tobias asked, “Can I play with Zachary again tomorrow?”

“No Tobias,” his father said sternly. “Zombies eat brains and even though Zachary didn’t eat yours today, it’s best not to take chances.”

“Aww, Dad,” Tobias protested.

They kissed him goodnight and blew out the candle. Tobias fell asleep dreaming of zombie parties and fuzzy emo bunnies.

Prince Dashing rode to the edge of the sea cliff on his majestic white stallion and looked at the moon casting

its reflection on the calm waters. He would have arrived a day earlier, but had been held up by a newt infestation in the forest. A deep sigh escaped his lips as he gazed at the beautiful scene. The fresh smell of saltwater filled his nose and the sound of the gentle ocean surf relaxed him.

He had been searching the lands for a beautiful girl to make his princess. If only he could find a simple innkeeper's daughter and spoil her lavishly. He would take her to his castle where she could listen to the birds sing and have bunnies sweep the floor of her room, not the terribly sad emo bunnies, but the happy white fluffy bunnies. Prince Dashing would buy her ponies and let

her put pink bows all over the castle.

With another sigh, he turned and rode down to the village in the hopes of finding a simple girl to spend the rest of his life with.

The End

###

Drippy the Peg Legged **Rainbow**

This story is dedicated to all the straight people who still love rainbows.

Rainbows have existed throughout the universe since shortly after its inception. Born from light and moisture, they have expanded along with galaxies and other cosmic goo. They only die from the destruction of worlds, absence of moisture, or the long loss of light. Many are ancient, being nearly as old as the universe itself. Others are young, only born moments ago. All are beautiful, although many beings in the universe think them to be evil bearers of bad tidings and illness.

This is the story of one rainbow,
neither ancient nor young . . .

“Hey, you, are you using this tree?”
Drippy asked two cute little bunnies
nuzzling by a stately tree. One was black
with purple streaks while the other had
chestnut brown fur. They weren’t
hopping around energetically like all the
other bunnies in a nearby clearing. The
tree was a tall maple with vibrant green
leaves stretching out toward the sky.

The bunnies looked up at Drippy in
surprise. “I didn’t know rainbows could
talk,” the black one remarked in a
gloomy voice. “I hate rainbows.”

“Of course rainbows can talk, although I don’t know why I waste my time talking to bunnies. Here I am trying to be polite when I’m having a miserable day and you respond by saying you hate me,” Drippy grumbled. He hopped a little to the left to get just the right angle of the sun through the light springtime drizzle falling on the rich green forest below.

“I’m always miserable,” the black bunny stated miserably. “I don’t like rainbows because you always seem so cheerful and bright. When you come around, it means the clouds are going to go away and the sun is going to shine. Plus, you don’t have my favorite color.”

“What’s your favorite color?”

Drippy asked out of mild curiosity. He prided himself on having nearly every color in the spectrum even if most eyes couldn't see all of them.

“Black,” the bunny answered cheerlessly.

“Don't mind Emo,” the chestnut-colored bunny said in dulcet tones. “If it gets sunny, he might be expected to hippity-hop and he hates that sort of thing. I'm Haylo. What's your name?” she asked pleasantly.

“I'm Drippy. I can sympathize with not wanting to hop. I'm getting tired of it myself,” he responded while hopping a little more to the left to adjust for the angle of the sun again.

“What happened to your right leg?”

Haylo asked with concern, using a paw to point at the place where Drippy's missing leg used to be.

“It was stolen by a leprechaun who took it from me to mark where he buried a pot of gold. I was distracted while the little green jerk snuck up,” Drippy growled angrily. “Then I couldn't hop fast enough to catch up, so he got away, laughing gleefully the whole time.”

“Didn't it hurt when the leprechaun took it?” Emo asked. “People try to steal my feet for luck. It seems like it would hurt.”

“Yeah, it hurt a lot,” Drippy admitted sadly. “I was bleeding red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.” The drizzle carelessly shifted

back to the right and he hopped to stay with it. “If you don’t need that tree, I’m going to use it as a leg. I’ve seen humans with wooden legs, so I’m going to give it a try.”

Without waiting for an answer, he placed his right arc on the maple tree. Using rainbow magic, Drippy swirled his colors down through the branches and trunk all the way to the roots. The green leaves and brown trunk turned all the colors of the spectrum as Drippy lifted it up, tearing the roots out of the ground. From there, he moved toward a large hillside with a better patch of rain that the sun was admiring. He didn’t notice that massive amounts of wet dirt fell on the two surprised bunnies that he

left behind.

The tree was a little taller than his other leg, causing him to lean as he stumped across the landscape. It was very annoying, so Drippy pounded the tree into the ground, hoping to squish it to a more appropriate size. The pounding helped a little, but not much and Drippy finally decided to ignore it.

He arrived at the prime location and basked in the glow of the low-lying sun over the western horizon. The droplets of water falling from the clouds danced in the rays and turned pretty colors as they slid to the ground. The tree leg complicated the journey for a lot of the raindrops, but Drippy didn't care. He was grateful not to have to stand on one

leg all the time.

“Hey! That’s my spot!” an irate voice thundered from his left.

Drippy looked at the rainbow striding resolutely toward him on two perfectly good legs. “I don’t care. It’s my spot now,” Drippy growled defiantly. “Go find another drizzle to stand in.” He used the roots of the tree to help stand his ground. The other rainbow angrily bumped into him, but Drippy didn’t budge.

“This is supposed to be my drizzle! It’s the best spot around and you stole it!” the newcomer accused. He studied Drippy for a moment and his tone went from hostile to curious. “Why do you have a tree for a leg? It looks very odd.”

“It’s called a peg leg. I’ve seen humans with them,” Drippy answered.

“Oh, right. I remember those were popular among pirates a couple hundred years ago. Hey, let’s make a double rainbow. The sun’s just right and this drizzle looks like it’s going to last awhile.” Without waiting for an answer, the rainbow thinned, reversed his colors and stretched over Drippy. “My name’s Bowring. What’s yours?”

“I’m Drippy.” He didn’t feel like talking and wanted to find a secluded drizzle where he could be alone, but there was no way he was going to mess up the grandeur of a double rainbow. Drippy made his colors brighter and richer, showing off his beauty to the

world. There were no people around to appreciate it so deep in the wilderness, but rainbows existed for the universe, not people.

“Hi, Drippy. So are you really a pirate? You have a peg leg and you stole my spot from me, but you don’t have an eyepatch or a parrot.”

Drippy sighed, shaking loose a few extra droplets of rain. “I’m not a pirate. My leg was stolen and I didn’t want to keep hopping on one leg. This tree seemed like the best idea. It’s not perfect, but it’s growing on me.”

“I wouldn’t want a tree growing on me. That sounds uncomfortable. Who stole your leg?” Bowring asked as though they had been best buddies their

entire lives. He was getting on Drippy's nerves.

“A leprechaun stole it to mark his pot of gold. I couldn't catch the little jerk in time.” The color red became a little brighter than the rest as he remembered how angry he was.

“Ahh. You were in Ireland then. Yeah, it's dangerous for rainbows there,” Bowring sympathized. “At least people don't hide their children in huts like in the Amazon or call us snakes like aborigines in Australia used to do.”

“I'd rather deal with that than lose a leg,” Drippy responded sadly. The conversation was really starting to depress him. “At least they just point and say we bring them disease.”

“Remember when Iris used to ride us around the sky all the time?” Bowring said with a laugh. “Good times.”

“I stopped going to Greece because of her,” Drippy responded grumpily. Having goddesses streak across the sky on his back really chafed him.

“You’re a real downer, Drippy. The sun’s setting and the clouds are parting. I’m going to chase the horizon and find a nice drizzle where I can be happy.” Bowring jumped toward the sun, switched his colors back to normal and set off to glimmer in new territories.

“Yeah, whatever. Don’t trip over a mountain. I’m just going to sit here and be miserable,” Drippy mumbled. Bowring didn’t reply because he was

too far away by that point and probably wouldn't have listened if he could have heard. Things became quiet except for the steady drizzle falling over the leaves of the forest. The wildlife had hidden themselves away to keep out of the rain. Plus, the sun would be setting soon and most would go to sleep for the night while the nocturnal animals came out to play.

Drizzle fell in that spot for the next half hour before the sun dipped below the horizon. It wasn't too often he stayed in one place for such a long period of time. After the sunset, Drippy rested in the moisture awhile. Most rainbows always moved west to chase the sun, but he liked the nighttime. Even though

people couldn't see them unless the moon was just right, rainbows still existed and could travel from place to place. Drippy liked becoming a moonbow sometimes. People said he looked white, but their eyes just couldn't see the gentle colors that shone through nighttime drizzles.

A droplet of an idea had been forming in his mind while he stood there enjoying the peaceful, untouched vistas before him. As the sun finally disappeared, he turned and began stumping back the way he had come. A good-sized rock was loose on some hills nearby and he took an experimental kick with the tree. The rock launched into the air with a loud thunk and made a

whistling sound as it flew nearly a mile away. A couple of branches cracked off the tree and Drippy knew it wouldn't last long if he kicked too many rocks, but kicking something was an option not normally available to rainbows. Their misty bodies passed right through things. It was hard to hold onto the tree, but Drippy was strong for a rainbow and would be able to last with it until he was able to implement the idea.

The peg leg made walking difficult and uncomfortable, but he made good progress throughout the night and into the morning, even across the Atlantic Ocean. Drippy was on a mission.

“Mam . . . why’s that rainbow drippin’ syrup?” the young lad asked from the dining table. Rainbow colored maple syrup had just squished out of the rainbow’s odd tree trunk leg, through the window and into his oatmeal. He was just about to pour honey into the bowl, but set the bottle down instead.

“Just eat your pancakes, love,” his mother told him, too busy taking care of his baby sister to pay attention to the peg-legged rainbow walking through the yard.

The lad shrugged, stirred the syrup into his oatmeal and took a big bite. It tasted pretty good, so he smiled and ate happily.

Drippy stumbled over the fence of a house. A little bit of maple squirted out of the tree into an open window and he hoped no one would notice. He saw that his rainbow magic turned the sap into sweet syrup and marveled at how wonderful it was to be a rainbow. It only took a few more steps to move away from the village and continue on to his destination.

Ireland had some of the best locations for rainbows to show their colors, making the country irresistible in spite of the leprechaun infestation. Often times the skies were deep cobalt blue

while the sun lit rocky fields of grass. The contrast made colors stand out brilliantly, flowing power into the rainbow's existence. The best locations were all along the coast in the rainy springtime. Churning waters crashed against white stony cliffs that were covered by emerald grasses, adding stark beauty to the already vibrant sight of a rainbow.

The place where he had lost his leg was further inland toward the north and he was almost there. Finding the leg would be difficult because leprechauns were exceptional at hiding things. They had magic that would disguise it even from a rainbow.

“Why in the world are you walking

around on a tree like that?” a melodious voice sounded from a nearby rain shower. Drippy looked in that direction and saw a pretty rainbow basking in a soft sprinkle. The morning sun reflected through the drops of water to give her rich colors that stretched over scattered farms. “I’ve never seen such a pretty tree . . . in fact, I’ve never seen a maple tree in Ireland, let alone one with all the colors of the rainbow,” she said, amused.

Drippy stopped and looked at her in embarrassment. “It’s from across the pond. Dragging it over the Atlantic was difficult . . . I probably could have left it and grabbed another tree here, but I’ve become rather attached to it.”

“I’ve never known a rainbow to use a tree for a leg. It’s very odd. Did a leprechaun steal yours?” she guessed intuitively while shifting a little to match the rays of the sun as it rose higher in the sky.

“Yes, and I’m going to get it back from the little bugger . . . as soon as I find him.” Drippy became thoughtful for a moment before deciding to share his plan with her. “I can kick things with this peg leg, so I’m going to find the leprechaun that stole my normal leg, kick him to England where he’ll be miserable, and then get my original leg back.”

The girl rainbow stared at him. “That’s just silly.”

“I don’t care. That’s what I’m going to do,” Drippy grumbled as he stumped off determinedly on his quest.

“It’s not really a peg leg!” she called after him. “It’s a just a maple tree!”

He pretended not to hear the comment and moved faster over the soggy ground. A short while later he was above the forest where his leg had been taken. There was no clue where the leg might be or even if it was nearby. Leprechauns were sneaky and it was likely that this one had taken the leg somewhere else entirely. He began walking back and forth through the trees, methodically searching for any sign of his missing leg or the leprechaun.

For the next few days, Drippy

combed the forest back and forth in his quest, ignoring all the tempting rain. It was difficult to resist his basic nature for standing in sunlit drizzle to create splendor for the universe to behold, but he was determined. Finally, on the morning of the third day, he came across a napping leprechaun. He wasn't the one that had stolen Drippy's leg, but perhaps he might have information.

Drippy grabbed the leprechaun with the roots of the tree, which were looking sad after being out of the ground for so long. He slapped the little green man a few times with a branch, not just to wake him up, but also because Drippy was frustrated by that point and wanted to establish who was boss.

“Wha? . . . Hey! . . . Ow, ow, wha’ the . . . ow!” the leprechaun hollered in confusion. “What’s yer damage ya big, dense rainbow?”

Drippy whapped him with a branch again. “My damage is that I’m missing a leg, which was stolen by one of your friends. I want it back and I’m going to slap you until you tell me where my leg is.” Drippy whapped him once more to prove his point.

“Ow! I dunna know where yer stupid leg is or who tuk it. Wha’ the world ya doin’ wi’ a tree leg? I ne’er saw a rainbow wi’ a tree leg!” The little man struggled and tried to get away, but the roots were too strong.

“It’s a peg leg. Now tell me where I

can find the little creep that took my leg or I'll squirt sap all over you. And talk normally. Trying to figure out what you're saying makes my orange drip." He squeezed the leprechaun for emphasis. Drippy's orange color really was starting to drip on the ground. A frog was splattered by some and croaked.

"I dunna know who tuk it, but ya can find yer leg if you luk on de other side of yerself. Let me go!" He struggled some more.

"What do you mean: *look on the other side of myself*? That doesn't make any sense." The Irish brogue was really hard for Drippy to follow, but he concentrated hard.

“If ya wanna find de pot of gold at de end of de rainbow, ya have to luk on de other side of de rainbow. So luk on de other side of yerself!” He struggled again.

It was too hard to follow and didn't make sense, so Drippy swung his leg and tossed the little green man far out of the forest, over a few hills and past a dale. Then he stood there awhile and thought about the words.

A drizzle was falling from scattered clouds and the sun shone just right for Drippy to glow brightly. The sound of the rain pitter-pattered against the trees and ground, creating a gentle symphony. A thought occurred to him that rainbows always looked toward the sun if it was

out. Rainbows always looked forward.

Without moving, Drippy looked on the other side of himself. To his immense surprise, he could see his leg far in the distance to the south near the coast. It was a glistening sort of a glimmer that could be seen through everything in the way.

He began walking backward toward it as fast as he could possibly move. He ran into a few trees and a barn along the way, but kept going in desperation to recover the leg before anything else happened to it.

By late afternoon, he arrived at a

rich green cliff looking out over the stormy ocean. The rainbow leg was in the center of the field right above a tiny pot, which Drippy assumed had gold in it. The leprechaun just happened to be sleeping with his hat down over his eyes and his back against the pot. Leprechauns were always taking naps when they weren't stealing rainbow legs.

Drippy turned around to be able to look forward again. The leg remained in sight now that he was close. "Hey! Leprechaun! I'm here for my leg!" He yelled in a booming voice, startling the little green man awake.

"Eh? Wha'? . . ." The lecherous leprechaun stood and stumbled a few

steps forward while rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Drippy decided not to waste time trying to listen to any more Irish brogue, so he swung the tree back with all his might and punted the leprechaun high into the air. The diminutive scoundrel shot like a rocket through the air headed deep into the heart of England, yelling curses at Drippy the whole time.

The pot of gold was still attached to the stolen leg, holding it down. Drippy swung the tree back and kicked the pot in the direction of a nearby village for the villagers to find. If the leprechaun wasn't mad enough before, he would be when he came back and found the gold missing.

The leg shimmered dimly, waiting for Drippy to take it back. But there was still the matter of the beat-up tree acting as his peg leg. It had done a wonderful job of supporting Drippy and he had become fond of it, so he dug the roots deep into the emerald grass atop the cliff. Then he used powerful rainbow magic to restore the loyal tree's health. When he stepped away, the leafy branches reached to the sky to soak in the wonderful warmth of a ray of sun that was bursting through the clouds. The magic left the tree with all the brilliant, beautiful shades of the rainbow. It didn't seem to miss its natural coloring.

Drippy hopped over to his leg and reattached it with ease. It felt wonderful

to be whole again. He hopped up and down then walked around the maple tree a few times. Everything was as it should be and his colors glowed brightly in happiness.

He knew his colors shone bright in Ireland, but didn't want to risk his leg again. Plus, the thief might come back and seek vengeance, so Drippy went off in search of nice drizzles in lands where there were no leprechauns. Everywhere he traveled, Drippy was admired by all those who were fortunate enough to gaze upon him. For the most part, he faced the sun, but every once in a while, he would look on the other side of himself to keep things in perspective.

The End

###

Unholy Cow

*This story is dedicated to brooms that
have the misfortune to be ridden by
ugly old witches.*

“I hope they throw out some
delicious leftovers,” Abel the raven

cawed eagerly from a nearby branch. He was staring hopefully at the headlights of a car coming up the dark country road.

“Littering is one of my least favorite sins . . . at least it would be if I had a least favorite sin. I really like them all,” Runyx replied in her wicked, rhythmic voice before going back to grazing on luscious green grass. She wasn’t in a normal field, but in the carefully tended yard of a farmer’s house.

Runyx was a beautiful, midnight black cow who loved long walks in the moonlight. She didn’t behave like the other cows, preferring to go off on her own. She had the ability to walk through fences and could even talk to people, although she didn’t like to. Most

importantly, she was very evil with unholy powers at her command.

“Littering is my favorite,” Abel disagreed, preening his long feathers, which glistened in the light of the half moon that had just come out from behind puffy clouds. “Hopefully they’ll throw out perfectly good food for me to eat, maybe even a little candy. It is Halloween after all.”

“Candy is bad for you, Abel. It’ll rot your gut.”

“I’m a raven, nothing rots our guts. Plus I’m immortal, so it doesn’t matter,” he pointed out with a wingtip.

“Yes . . . well there is that,” Runyx admitted. They were both immortal, and the best of friends on top of that. The

two of them had known each other for centuries, working together to spread chaos and turmoil throughout the lands.

“The moon just disappeared behind the clouds again,” Abel said, looking up at the glowing cloud passing across the sky. “Isn’t it supposed to be full on Halloween? It just doesn’t seem right only being half full.”

“That’s just in the movies. The moon works normally no matter what night it is.” She tore a flower out of a pretty garden that had been placed around a fountain with happy looking cherub statues spitting water out of their mouths. Runyx hated cherubs. They were little jerks that ran around in diapers and shot things for no apparent reason.

The car roared by, its lights glistening in the red glow of Runyx's eyes. A bag of fast food from the local Fish Burgers was thrown out the window and Abel immediately pounced on the bag, ripping it open to get the partially eaten burger and fries within.

“You get awfully lucky with food being thrown out windows. Are you using your dark powers for personal gain?” Runyx asked suspiciously.

“No . . . I would never do that,” he protested innocently. “I don't lie either.” Abel laughed in his high-pitched caw.

Runyx chuckled softly, the evil sound causing the flowers in the garden to curl back in fear. “What good is having evil powers if you don't use them

for personal gain?” she asked in amusement. “Where is Stryk? He should have been here by now.”

The voice of a proper English gentleman came from the shadows on the other side of the fountain. “Here I am. A pumpkin had the nerve to attack my leg. I had to shake the bugger off!”

“A pumpkin . . . How in the world do you get attacked by a pumpkin?” Runyx asked the straw man who walked up dressed in a tux and top hat, unlike the country scarecrows in their coveralls and plaid shirts. Stryk had joined the pair of them about eighty years earlier during a mission in England.

“No one respects scarecrows since that blasted Wizard of Oz movie came

out. They seem to think we're all brainless gits. It's *quite* irritating." Stryk dusted a sleeve that was already immaculate. Tightly packed straw hands fit neatly into gloves. Bits of straw stuck out of the sleeves and collar. His face was also made of bound straw with large button eyes and coal nose. He was rather handsome for a scarecrow.

"A *pumpkin* attacked you?" Abel asked incredulously. "Pumpkins don't watch movies. I'm pretty sure they don't actually attack . . . *anything*."

Stryk put his arms out to the side. "How should I know why the pumpkin attacked me? I was walking through the field, minding my own business when it suddenly jumped up and started

bouncing about my head and shoulders.” He took a deep breath and sighed even though he didn’t actually need to breathe.

“How did you get away?” Runyx asked.

“Why, I ran, of course. I make it a point *never* to get into fights with pumpkins.” He straightened his jacket. “Shall we proceed?”

“Did you discover anything useful, or were you too busy waiting for the Great Pumpkin to do your job?” Abel asked.

“Aren’t you supposed to be scared of me you foolish little crow?” Stryk folded his arms and glared at Abel.

“I’m a raven, not a crow. And I am neither little nor foolish. And nobody’s

scared of scarecrows, you said so yourself. And . . .”

“Aren’t ravens and crows the same thing?” Runyx asked, mostly to shut him up.

“You’re my best friend and you don’t know the difference? I’m offended,” Abel declared. He went back to picking at the fishburger with his beak.

“The basic difference between ravens and crows is that ravens are larger, pointier and much crazier than crows,” Stryk stated with a grin and a wink. Runyx chuckled and winked back.

Abel spun around and fluffed his feathers, ready to pull straw out of the scarecrow’s collar. Instead, he hopped

up to the fountain, spread his wings, and flew off toward the small town that was their destination.

Runyx followed at a casual pace with Stryk right next to her. She magically shifted through the wooden fence protecting the farm's grassy yard and turned alongside of the road. It would take about fifteen minutes to reach the edge of the town, but they had plenty of time.

“Dear girl, I regret to inform you, but I saw a herd of holy cows eating grass near the graveyard,” Stryk told her nervously, clearly not wanting to bring the matter up. Runyx froze in her tracks without saying a word in response. Stryk stopped as well, holding perfectly still

as only a scarecrow could. After a minute, they resumed walking again. “They’ll likely stay near the graveyard to protect the dead from being disturbed,” Stryk suggested hopefully.

“You’re right. We don’t need to worry about them tonight. I just don’t like holy cows. They’re so *irritating* and they won’t stop preaching whenever you get near one.”

“True. At least they’re not as bad as a holy moly. Those things really get on my nerves. Even worse is holy sh . . .”

“Shh, I hear people ahead.” Runyx stopped and cocked her head to listen. She could hear a group of people talking and laughing in a cornfield not far off the road.

“I say, it’s most likely teenagers partying and getting drunk like idiots. They always do that this time of year.”

“They always do that anytime of the year,” Runyx replied with a snort. “Hey, get on my back. Let’s have some fun.”

Stryk jumped onto her back with a laugh. “Ha ha! Are we going to do the old - charge through while wailing - prank? That’s one of my favorites.”

“Exactly.” Runyx began jogging. From her nostrils, she puffed supernatural smoke that smelled faintly of brimstone. It flowed rapidly ahead of them to make the dim moonlight even spookier. It didn’t take long for her to reach a pounding, rhythmic run and she began snorting loudly to add to the

effect.

“Oooooo, oooooohhhh, beeeewwwaaaaarrreeeee!” Stryk moaned chillingly. He flopped around like a rag doll while using supernatural powers to stay on her back. The straw man hardly weighed anything, so Runyx didn't mind him being there for things like this even though she normally wouldn't accept anyone on her back.

“**Mooooooooooooooooooooo!**” she bellowed as they tore through the small area where six teens had trampled enough of the cornstalks to sit comfortably. They had a camp lantern to provide a little bit of light while they drank cheap beer.

All but one screamed in fright while

scattering in different directions. The one that didn't move froze in terror while urine darkened his jeans. Runyx made it a point to shatter the lantern by kicking it as she charged by.

A minute later, she and Stryk were far enough away to slow down to a walk. They couldn't stop laughing at the reactions of the teens who were still screaming and yelling from deep within the cornfield. One girl was especially loud, letting out high-pitched shrieks over and over again.

Stryk hopped off her back and they laughed the rest of the way to town.

Most of the town was brightly lit so it would be safe for children to stroll through the neighborhoods. Kids from surrounding farms joined with the ones in town, most wearing homemade costumes like sheets over their head for ghosts. Oddly enough, no one dressed up like a farmer.

The edge of the town was darker and few children ventured there. Runyx and Stryk were heading toward a specific house on the outskirts. It was a large manor with sculpted bushes, low cut lawn, pretty trees and a tall stone fence that surrounded everything. Wrought iron gates at the driveway entrance were shut

tight and had a sign that said *Trick or Treaters not welcome*.

“She’s inside,” Abel called from a low-hanging branch of a nearby tree where he had been waiting for them. “Her parents are there too.”

“Thank you, Abel.” Runyx studied the second floor of the manor where a lone light shone from a window at the right corner. “Is she with her parents or is she in her room?”

“She’s alone in her room,” Abel answered. “What do you know about her and what’s the plan?”

“Her name is Opal, she’s nine years old and she’s never been allowed to go trick or treating.” Runyx led them to the gate and moved to the other side with a

blink of her eyes. Stryk squeezed through the bars and Abel flew over before landing on the straw man's top hat. Runyx continued, "She's a very good girl who always obeys her parents and never gets into trouble. It's one of her greatest wishes to go trick or treating, so we're going to see to it that she gets to tonight."

"It sounds like we're doing a good deed. That's not in our job description," Abel said suspiciously.

Runyx grinned evilly, which looked very odd on a cow, even an unholy one. "Her parents have an ironclad rule that she will never go trick or treating. We're going to get Opal to break that rule by convincing her to sneak out of the

house with a scarecrow, a cow and a raven.” They went to the side of the house where the roof hung low. “Then we’re going to take her out to get candy, which is also against the rules in her household. We’re going to encourage her to talk to strangers. Then we’re going to take her home with a full bag of candy and tell her to hide it from her parents.”

“That sounds quite evil to me.” Stryk leapt up to the roof and walked quietly toward the girl’s window.

Runyx used supernatural powers to levitate to the roof. She was able to walk lightly on the shingles with those same powers. She was too big to fit through the window, so she blinked again and magically appeared in the

room. There was just enough space for her to stand at the base of the girl's bed.

Opal was a blonde haired girl with a frilly dress that matched her bright blue eyes. In her lap was a small, floppy eared black bunny that she was softly petting. She stared in wide-eyed wonder at the unholy cow in her room and then at the scarecrow and raven coming in through the window. "Okayyyy, this is really weird. Why are you in my room?"

"I'm Runyx. These are my friends Stryk and Abel." The unholy cow nodded in their direction. "It's our understanding that you want very much to go trick or treating."

"Umm . . . yes . . ." she said tentatively. "But I'm not allowed to.

Trick or treating is evil and only bad children ever do it.”

“Well then. It’s time for you to be a bad girl and join us for a wonderful night of evil candy gathering,” Runyx told her. “Do you have a costume? If not, you could pass for Alice in Wonderland with that blue dress and your blonde hair.”

The girl just stared with her jaw hanging open. It seemed that a talking cow was more than she was capable of comprehending. Stryk sat on the bed next to her and petted the bunny. He jerked his hand back when the bunny pulled a straw out of the sleeve and began eating it. “I love Alice. It’s one of my favorite stories ever, especially the parts with

the pills and the hookah-smoking caterpillar. Now put away that bunny and come with us,” he told her.

“Yes,” Abel agreed. “Come with us. We’re obviously trustworthy. It’s totally going to be safe.” The raven rolled his eyes.

“Okay,” Opal agreed, much to Abel’s surprise. “Come on Emo Bunny, let’s put you back in your cage for now and I’ll bring you a nice bit of apple later.” She got off the bed and took the bunny over to a multi-level cage. After putting him in, she turned back to Runyx with concern on her face. “I’ll get into a lot of trouble if my parents find out.”

“They won’t find out. Now take Stryk’s hand and go out the window with

him. We'll get you down from there." Runyx was thrilled that the girl was agreeing so easily. She didn't even have to influence Opal with magic like she expected. Sometimes the best-behaved children were the most likely to do foolish things.

"There's a good girl," Stryk told her as he lifted her up through the window. Abel flew ahead to perch on the front gate and Runyx blinked herself back onto the roof.

"Lift her onto my back," Runyx told the scarecrow. He did so and the girl plopped down with a gasp of surprise. She gasped again when Runyx jumped off the roof and floated gently down to the ground.

“This is really weird. I love it,” Opal said happily.

“You’re not worried that we’re kidnapping you or something terrible?” Abel asked incredulously from the gate. Runyx glared at him for daring to jeopardize their mission. He ignored her.

“No, cows don’t kidnap people. Plus, it’s Halloween, so weird things are supposed to happen. I read it in my grandma’s diary.” She held her arms out to Stryk as he lifted her off Runyx. Then she slipped through the gate with him. “Grandma was a witch, but mother and father don’t know that. I hide her diary in a secret lock box in the attic.”

“I say, her grandmum was a witch.

That explains a great deal about why we're here," Stryk said with a nod. He walked hand-in-hand with Opal as they headed into town. "Did you know her grandmum, Runyx?"

"No," she answered with a shake of her bovine head. It *did* explain a lot. Witches tended to bargain for unholy favors. Runyx didn't know the exact nature of the arrangement and really didn't care. The important thing was that they had an impressionable child to corrupt.

Opal looked at her. "Runyx. I love your name. You're very beautiful for a cow."

"Thank you, Opal. That's very nice of you to say."

“Being called pretty for a cow really isn’t that much of a compliment,” Abel said with a smirk.

“Don’t make me slap you with my tail,” Runyx threatened with narrowed eyes. Abel cawed and flapped away to the nearest tree. It wasn’t an idle threat. Her tail was extremely dangerous.

“I say, this looks like a good house to start at,” Stryk suggested, pointing toward a rundown shack. A dimly lit jack-o-lantern on the front porch was the only light. It was quite a distance from Opal’s house and the girl looked around in astonishment. Runyx didn’t bother telling her that she used magic to get them to a different neighborhood.

“There’s no porch light on. In

school, they told us to go only to houses with porch lights on,” Opal explained.

“Well, if they said it in school, it must be true,” Abel said from the branch of a dead tree. “It’s not like schools are political propaganda tools for brainwashing children or anything.”

“What did he just say?” Opal whispered to Stryk as they walked up the dirt path to the front door.

“Don’t pay attention to him,” Stryk replied. “He tends to squawk a lot.”

“I heard that, you rotten sack of hay.”

“How nice,” Stryk replied with a grin. They reached the door and he leaned down to Opal. “Knock on the door and when the person inside answers, say ‘trick or treat’.”

“But I don’t have a bag to put candy in.”

“Ahh. I happen to have a pillowcase for the occasion.” Stryk pulled white cloth out from under his shirt. He brushed a few pieces of straw off it and handed it to Opal. It was just as big as her when she unfolded it. “It came off the biggest pillow I’ve ever seen. I went out specifically to get it tonight before coming here. Now knock on the door like a good little girl.”

“Okay.” Opal knocked on the door. It didn’t take long for an ancient-looking woman to open the squeaky door and stare at the child with big buggy eyes. “Trick or treat,” Opal said timidly, taking a step back.

The old woman turned her head to the side and looked at Opal with only one buggy eye. Then she put a candy bar in the pillowcase. Before Opal could say thank you, the old woman grabbed a handful of candy bars and put them in the pillowcase too. Then she turned her head to look at Opal with the other buggy eye before slowly closing the door with a long drawn out creak. It clicked shut and the sound of a latch came from the other side as it was locked.

“That went extremely well,” Runyx said happily. “Let’s go find another house.”

“I didn’t say thank you though,” Opal protested.

“You don’t have to say thank you to anyone tonight,” Runyx told her. “Be a rebel. If they tell you to say thank you, stick your tongue out at them.”

“I can’t do that,” Opal said in horror as they walked back down the dirt path.

“Sure you can. They should be thankful for the opportunity to give such a wonderful young girl candy. Stick your tongue out at them if they give you any problems about it,” Runyx insisted. They turned down the sidewalk and headed to the next house.

When the girl blinked, Runyx put them in front of a different house. It was brightly lit with orange and white lights. There were glowing pumpkins and ghost lights in the yard and cheerful looking

spiders and vampire posters everywhere. “This is just disgusting,” Abel said in disgust, landing on a happy mummy poster staked in the yard. “Must everything be commercialized these days? I’m surprised the vampires don’t sparkle.”

Opal looked around in amazement as Stryk walked her up the sidewalk. Runyx stayed behind to keep an eye on things. Some of the kids looked at her oddly, but they didn’t say anything. A couple of teenagers came by and smacked her rump. “Hey! It’s a cow in the street. Let’s tip it over.”

Runyx’s favorite supernatural ability was the fact that her tail had bug zapper power in it, fifty times more powerful

than the ones that people used to kill mosquitoes. She whapped both teens in rapid succession. The zapping sound her tail made was pleasing to her ears. Even more pleasing was the blue electricity that knocked them both on the ground where they lay twitching and glowing.

A cheerful woman wearing a blue Frankenstein wig was handing out candy at the door. “Oh my, aren’t you just the most precious thing ever! Here have lots of candy.” She dumped the entire bowl of candy bars into Opal’s bag. “Bye, bye now, you precious little girl.” She smiled and waved enthusiastically as Opal and Stryk turned around and walked back to Runyx.

“She gave me all those candy bars! I

didn't expect that," Opal exclaimed in awe. "This is really fun."

Opal blinked again and they were in front of another house. "It looks like a lot of fun," Runyx told her. "Now go get some more from this house." They were standing in front of another well-lit house, though not with so many cheerful decorations in the yard.

A minute later, the girl came back with even more candy bars dumped into her pillowcase. She held it out to show Runyx, who nodded and waited for her to blink again. When she did, they were in front of another house.

Fifty houses and fifty minutes later they were standing in front of yet another house. “This is the last house we’ll be visiting,” Runyx told Opal.

The girl was struggling to carry the overstuffed pillowcase by that point. “I’m so surprised that every house we visit has had candy bars! And they keep dumping all of them into my bag!” There was a big grin on her face and her lips were covered in chocolate from the eight candy bars she had already eaten. Instead of wearing down under the load, she was extremely hyper and jumping up and down at each new house they visited.

“I’ll carry that for you,” Stryk said helpfully while taking the sack. He led

her up to the porch, which was crowded with numerous artistically cut jack-o-lanterns.

When a portly man opened the door with the largest basket of candy bars yet, Opal yelled enthusiastically, “Trick or Treat! Hee, hee, hee, hee.” Her eyes were wild and her hair was ragged by that point.

“What a . . . pretty little girl,” the man said, taking a step back from the fanatical child. “Here, just take the whole basket.” He dumped it in the pillowcase Stryk and Opal were holding open, filling it to the top. As they turned to leave, the man asked, “Aren’t you supposed to be saying thank you, little girl?”

Opal stopped in her tracks, slowly turned around and stuck her tongue out. “Ttthhhbbbbbtttthhhttt.” She gave him the longest, noisiest, juiciest and chocolatiest raspberry anyone had ever seen. Then she turned around and skipped back down the walkway while Stryk carried the bag with a big grin on his face. Abel cawed with mad laughter from the white picket fence surrounding the yard.

Runyx waited for Opal to blink her eyes again. When she did, they were suddenly back in her room. “How did we get here?” she asked, looking around as though she had never been in her own room.

“Wherever shall you hide your

candy?” Stryk asked, hefting the pillowcase.

“Umm . . .” Opal stared blankly.

“Put it under the bed,” Runyx told him. “Opal, your parents won’t look under your bed for the next month, but you have to eat all those candy bars before then.”

Opal looked at her with wide eyes and nodded slowly.

“If you don’t eat it all before then, they’ll find the bag and all the wrappers and you’ll be in big trouble. You don’t want that, do you?”

She shook her head slowly back and forth.

“Good. Now have fun eating all those candy bars and don’t tell your

parents.”

“I won’t,” she promised quickly.

“Good girl,” Runyx told her. “Have a good life and be sure to sneak out of your room next year and every other year after that to go trick or treating too.”

“I will,” Opal agreed enthusiastically. “Goodbye and thank . . . I mean ttthhhbbbbbtttt.” She stuck her tongue out and gave Runyx a raspberry. They all laughed. After Stryk and Abel exited the room, Runyx blinked past the wall. They headed away from the house in a different direction than they had come.

“I say, that went extremely well,” Stryk said happily. “The evening was quite enjoyable.”

“Most fun ever!” Abel agreed. “I stole all kinds of candy out of little children’s bags.” He laughed evilly.

“It was one of the best Halloween nights I’ve had in a long time,” Runyx agreed. “Let’s go spread more evil now.”

The scarecrow and the raven went with the unholy cow to make the world a more dangerous place to live in.

The End

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Attack of the Sugar Plum

Fairies

This story is dedicated to my Dad. The memory of him reading “The Night Before Christmas” to us kids every year is one that I have always cherished deep within my heart.

Light from tall streetlamps illuminated the snow that drifted lazily down to the cobblestones. “Wait here while I scout ahead,” Araedae the Sugar Plum Fairy whispered back to her two

friends who had volunteered for the special mission with her.

“Be careful. Some of the elves might still be in the warehouses or walking along the streets,” Sydae warned while holding tightly to one of Araedae’s arms. She fixed her grey-blue eyes on Araedae’s silver ones. “I would just die if anything happened to you.”

“She’ll be fine,” Zanna reassured their friend. Her brilliant violet eyes sparkled in the light from the nearby streetlamp. Every Sugar Plum Fairy in the world had different color eyes with wings and hair to match. It wasn’t hard; there weren’t many of the rare type of fairy. “No elf would voluntarily be away from the sleigh loading ceremony.”

“True, they wouldn’t want to miss the spiked eggnog,” Sydae said derisively, causing the others to giggle. She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. “Brr! It’s so cold up here. Why do we have to wear these ridiculous outfits at the North Pole?” Sydae stretched out a petite leg clad in candy-cane striped silk while scornfully gesturing up and down at a white tutu embroidered with poinsettias and candy canes. Silken gloves extending above her elbows matched the stockings, but provided no protection from the chill air. The whole effect was topped off with green lace and bows.

“It really *is* inappropriate for the children who have visions of us dancing

while they sleep,” Zannae agreed with an emphatic nod.

“The children just have visions of sugar plums dancing, the sweet treats, not sugar plum fairies,” Araedae corrected.

“Not the naughty children,” Zannae pointed out.

“She has a point,” Sydae agreed with a grin.

Araedae rolled her eyes. “I’m going to scout ahead now. I’ll let you know if it’s clear.”

“Go on. Just be careful, the attack is about to begin,” Sydae said.

Araedae gave them an encouraging smile and headed into the street, stepping lightly in her thin slippers. She

stuck as closely to the building as possible without scraping her beautiful gossamer wings against the cold brick. The only sound heard over the gentle patter of snow was that of Christmas carol laced revelry from the sleigh warehouse in the distance. The scent of peppermint candy canes drifted under her nose. It was everywhere at the North Pole and Araedae was pretty sure the elves used it as cologne.

Flying would have been preferable, but snow was unpleasant against her wings and it was harder to sneak while flitting through the air. To make matters worse, the elves had defenses against anything that could fly over the North Pole, even fairies.

Calling it the North Pole wasn't really accurate any more. Santa had moved the base of operations a century ago when explorers started making attempts to reach it. The industrial age brought new techniques in toy-making that required retooling the warehouses and extra space was needed to handle the population explosion throughout the world. The result was that the entire operation had been placed on a series of enormous ice floes a few degrees away from the pole. Christmas Eve was the only time the ice came together in order for the sleigh to be loaded.

Everyone knew that Christmas Eve was the best time to attack. The elves would be busy getting everything

together. Santa's only job was to drive the sleigh and deliver the presents. Even the list checking had become automated with the use of a supercomputer. It was checked three times now, although that wasn't broadcast so they wouldn't have to change songs that mentioned 'twice' in the lyrics.

Araedae made it to the next corner and waved for the other two to follow once she saw it was clear. The private residence of the Claus's was just ahead. It was a large, three-story gingerbread mansion surrounded by snow-covered Christmas trees and candy canes.

"Do you think we'll be able to get past the security system?" Sydae asked as they came up behind Araedae.

Zannae answered the question before Araedae could. “I already told you that I can break any code in the world. Why won’t you believe me?”

Sydae sighed. “It’s just that the elves are notorious for combining magic and science. I’m worried that it won’t be as easy as you think.”

“I’m more concerned about the reindeer guards. Those things are pretty vicious with their teeth,” Araedae said with worry thick in her voice. The other two nodded in agreement. “We have to *try* to get in so we can get to the master computer. I *know* Zannae can hack into it. She’s the best in the world.” Zannae beamed at the compliment.

“I still don’t understand how a Sugar

Plum Fairy got an advanced degree at MIT,” Sydae said with a shake of her head. “We’re supposed to be frolicking in nature while helping plum trees and sugar cane grow tall and healthy.”

Zannae stuck her tongue out. “Humans are destroying nature. Someone has to figure out how to stop them so the rest of you can frolic.”

“We are *not* getting into this argument again,” Araedae chastised. “It looks clear. Let’s get underneath one of the Christmas trees until the attack begins.”

The other two stuck their tongues out at each other and then they all ran across the street as fast as their little stockinged legs would carry them. When they

reached the tree, they dashed through a low spot in the circular drift surrounding it.

“It’s so *cold!*” Sydae complained, vigorously rubbing her arms and stomping her pretty green slippers in the thin snow by the trunk. Her wings shivered along with the rest of her body.

“Quit yelling. Just because I don’t see anyone doesn’t mean we can’t be heard,” Araedae told her irritably. “I don’t like it any more than you do. We’ll get inside just as soon as we can.” She rubbed her own arms, trying to bring some warmth to the numb skin.

“Shh, someone’s coming,” Zannae warned them, pointing at the front door of the mansion. An elf and Mrs. Claus

came out and moved down the steps, speaking in angry tones. The sugar plum fairies peeked out over the drift and listened in.

“What’s wrong with Santa?” Jarlen the elf asked Mrs. Claus. He brushed falling snow off of his thick, green jacket and adjusted his felt hat. “He’s been sick all week and it’s Christmas Eve. He needs to get his butt in the sleigh and get those presents out to all the little brats around the world.”

“Ever since elves unionized, you’ve become unbearable,” Mrs. Claus said irritably. She crossed her arms and

glared at the pointy eared manager. Jarlen was responsible for communication between the elves and the Clauses. He was a demanding jerk and neither she nor her husband liked him. “You sit around all the time, the quality of your work is terrible, you import most the toys from overseas putting us so far in debt that China’s going to own the North Pole before you know it, and you have more vacation days than you do work days. Everything is just terribly wrong and the spirit of Christmas is being lost.”

“Yeah, yeah. Elves are evil, short and they have pointy ears. I get it already,” Jarlen said dismissively in a high-pitched voice. “The toys are ready.

It's time for Santa to do his job.”

“Santa hasn't missed a Christmas yet and he's not going to miss this one. Now get off my steps. I can take care of him.”

“You'd better get him in that sleigh *fast*, or *you'll* be delivering the toys this year!” Jarlen threatened. He turned and stomped down the walkway, stopping suddenly as the sound of an alarm pierced the air.

A sugar cube shot out of nowhere and thumped him between the eyes; he fell over, unconscious, into the snow.

Mrs. Claus looked up with wide eyes and saw sugar plum fairies flying low toward the sleigh hangar. There looked to be nearly a hundred of them, which was shocking because that was all there

were in the entire world. One with bright yellow wings and eyes twirled and shot another sugar cube from her wand at the unconscious figure. It smacked him solidly on the side of the temple, ensuring that the curly toed elf wouldn't be waking up anytime soon. "Ha ha!" she crowed in triumph before flitting off with the rest.

The fairies were supposed to be helping tie string on the presents before going to dance in ballets and children's dreams. The last part was something Mrs. Claus disapproved of. The outfits worn by the fairies were far too skimpy for children's dreams.

Elves rushed out from the sleigh warehouse to meet the unexpected threat.

“Those poor fairies don’t stand a chance,” Mrs. Claus said to no one in particular. She noticed they were careful to stay below the rooftops so the air defenses couldn’t get them. To her surprise, six fairies carrying a long tube with wheels on it landed out in the open. One of them turned a crank while others poured sugar-coated plums into a funnel on top.

Sugared plums began splattering messily all over the ground in front of the elves and into the crowd. Mrs. Claus gasped as she realized what the fairies were doing. “Oh, how brilliant,” she remarked quietly. She turned around and headed back inside, smiling to herself.

Santa had never missed a Christmas

Eve in all the time he had been giving toys to children. He wouldn't miss this one either, but something was definitely wrong. It wasn't the first time people had attacked on Christmas Eve. Everyone knew it was the best time. Mrs. Claus remembered a few decades earlier when a group of drunken Scottish gentlemen invaded just to steal some wooden duckies on wheels because they hadn't gotten any as children.

Mrs. Claus hurried up the stairs and into the bedroom she shared with Mr. Claus. Piteous groans came from the bathroom where he had been spending way too much of his time. "Are you alright, dear?" she asked through the door.

“No, no, no,” he moaned from the other side. “I’ll be out in a minute.” His normally jolly voice was filled with misery.

“Alright, dear. I’ll be out here when you need me.” Mrs. Claus sighed and looked around the room. She walked to the cage wrapped by a pretty red bow and containing a miserable black bunny that had been sent to them by the Easter Bunny. “What in the world am I going to do with a bunny named Emo?” she asked the unhappy creature, noticing that it had purple streaks in its fur. “Go free little bunny.” Mrs. Claus said a few words of magic, made specific gestures and cast a spell that sent the bunny back to the forest from whence it came.

It was a well-kept secret that Mrs. Claus was a witch, a good one though, not one of the green, warty witches. Santa had met her in the forests of Germany where they fell in love. Upon discovering how much he cared for children, she had given him the enchantments for the reindeer and sleigh. In addition to that, she introduced him to the elves, knowing they loved building things and would be immensely helpful at making the toys.

She didn't like to use magic on her husband, but with the way he was feeling, it seemed like it would be the only choice. There had been a few times when she had given him herbal remedies because he didn't feel well. It was

unusual that he was having so many problems with his bowels all of a sudden. Regrettably the sleigh didn't have a restroom, and Santa tried to avoid using the bathroom at the houses where he delivered toys. It seemed rude to leave the gift of gas in a person's bathroom.

She sat down on the luxurious red comforter and took a sip of Santa's hot chocolate from his nightstand. It only took her an instant to realize that there was an odd taste to it, one she recognized. "Prune juice! Someone spiked the hot chocolate with prune juice!" Mrs. Claus exclaimed in amazement. "Who would do such a thing?"

Santa appeared in the bathroom doorway. “I thought it tasted funny. Is that why I have to keep using the toilet?”

“Yes! I don’t know who would do that, but not to worry. Give me just a few minutes and I’ll brew up a potion that will immediately solve the problem,” Mrs. Claus assured him. She stood and went to her spell room next to the bedchamber.

Santa’s stomach grumbled and he pointed over his shoulder. “I’ll be in here. I’m just glad the elves installed that fancy new toilet with the self-warming seat last year.”

The three sugar plum fairies under the tree initially didn't see Mrs. Claus go back inside because they were too busy watching the beginning of the battle. Sugar plums were splattering on the ground and the elves. Whenever an elf got plum juice on his outfit, he would immediately stop and frantically try to wipe it off.

Elves hated getting messy more than anything else in the world. They wouldn't even walk on the plum juice that was splattered all over the ground by that point. Their workspaces were always perfectly clean and whenever their clothes got even a little bit of dirt on them, they would change. Sticky sugared plum juice didn't clean off

easily though and it was everywhere. To make matters worse, half of the elves were already drunk and staggering into others.

The few elves that did get by were thunked in the head by sugar cubes shot from the wand of fairies flitting by. Zannae did a little twirl. “It’s working! Yay!”

“It will only work for a few minutes before the elves regroup. We need to get to Santa’s computer or else it’s all for nothing,” Sydae scolded.

“It looks like Mrs. Claus went back inside without closing the door. Now’s our chance,” Araedae said, motioning them to follow. The three of them flitted up the steps and into the doorway.

A beautiful living room with burgundy furniture, lush green carpeting, candy-cane wall paper and a giant Christmas tree greeted their eyes. A fireplace warmed the room while the scent of cinnamon and hot cocoa drifted through the air. Christmas carols played softly from an old stereo in the corner.

“Their room is up the stairs. We have to go through it to get to the office,” Araedae told them as she flew slowly up.

“Won’t Santa and Mrs. Claus be in the room?” Sydae asked. They all stopped and exchanged glances. “Exactly *why* did we put prune juice in Santa’s hot chocolate?”

“We did it so he wouldn’t be able to

help the elves defend against the attack.” Araedae answered. “There’s no way the fairies would be able to take on Santa too. It made sense at the time.”

“We didn’t think about Mrs. Claus either,” Sydae pointed out.

“She’s really nice from what I hear. All the reindeer love her. Comet’s wife, Sharla, told me so.” Zannae said with a nod.

“I can’t believe we kidnapped Sharla so that Comet would sneak the prune juice into Santa’s hot chocolate. I feel bad for Sharla most of all, but at least she’s been understanding about the whole thing.” Araedae said with a sigh. “It had to be done though. We just don’t have any choices left to us.”

“I still don’t understand how a reindeer can sneak prune juice into hot chocolate,” Sydae said, her face twisting in confusion. “They don’t have hands and they’re much too big to sneak around.”

They all exchanged glances and shrugged.

“We have to try to get into the computer as fast as possible. Let’s go.” Araedae zipped the rest of the way up the stairs and went to the Claus’s bedroom door to peek in. “It looks clear. I don’t see Santa or Mrs. Claus.”

They carefully walked along the floor toward the office, which was on the far side of the bedroom. Halfway through, they passed the bathroom door

and heard a loud disgusting noise. “It sounds and smells like the prune juice is working,” Zannae said, waving her hand back and forth in front of her scrunched up face.

“Ugh. Let’s get this done as fast as possible,” Araedae suggested. They took to the air and flew toward the open office doorway. “There’s no one here. Zannae, go to the computer right away.” She pointed toward the computer desk against the far wall. The monitor’s screensaver was scrolling through various tropical beach scenes. “Sydae and I will watch the door.”

“You got it!” Zannae zipped toward the desk and tapped the keyboard to get rid of the screensaver. Then she began

gracefully dancing on the keys in order to hack into the system.

“Wow. What a neat globe,” Sydae said as she darted off to a table where a brilliantly colored globe sat slowly spinning.

“We’re supposed to be watching the door,” Araedae said in exasperation. She stared at the globe from a distance. “You’re right. It really is pretty.”

“It has Santa’s workshops on it too and it looks like they move around.”

Araedae couldn’t resist, she went over and joined her friend to stare at it in amazement.

“What do you think you’re doing?!” a booming voice asked. The fairies turned to see Santa in the doorway. His shirt

was rumpled and his hair was matted with sweat, but he was standing straight and looked angry.

“Nice job of watching the door,” Zannaë said with her arms spread wide while glaring at her two partners in crime.

“We were looking at the pretty globe, Santa,” Sydae said quickly, flying up to the usually jolly man. “You have a *very* nice office.” She gestured behind her back for Zannaë to continue.

Araedae saw what she was up to and flew up as well. “Oh yes. It’s a very nice office and the globe is *very* pretty. We were just trying to see if we could find our home.”

Mrs. Claus came in behind her

husband and looked at the fairies with narrowed eyes. “So you’re the ones who have been putting prune juice in my husband’s hot chocolate. Sugar plum fairies are attacking the elves too. What games are you playing?”

“Reindeer games,” Araedae said quickly.

“Oh yes. Those are the best kind,” Sydae agreed.

“You picked the wrong evening to irritate me,” Mrs. Claus said in angry tones. “Broom!” She held out her hand and a broom suddenly flew in from the other room. It was an old straw witch’s broom with green and red bows on it. She grabbed it by the handle and took a fierce swing at the fairies.

Araedae ducked out of the way just in time, but the broom grazed Sydae and sent her crashing into the nearest wall where she crashed with a thud and fell to the floor.

“Sydae! No!” Araedae shot a sugar cube from her wand directly between Mrs. Claus’s eyes. Then she flew down and took her unconscious friend into her lap. “Sydae! Don’t be hurt! I need you!”

Mrs. Claus rubbed the bridge of her nose, and started swinging her broom in a circle like she was a baseball player going to bat. “I can’t believe you just hit me with a sugar cube. I’m going to squish you like a bug.”

“Enough!” Santa yelled. “Will someone please explain to me what’s

going on?” He put an arm out to prevent his wife from hitting the fairies. She turned her angry gaze on him. “Peace, dear. I would like to know what’s happening.”

“I can explain, Santa,” Zannaë said from the keyboard. “I’ve pulled up the file that proves that the sugar plum fairies have been bound to do the bidding of the elves.” She pointed at the screen.

“*What?*” both of the Clauses said in surprise. They bent over the computer and peered at the monitor together.

Zannaë explained. “The picture on the left is the contract the elves had us sugar plum fairies sign. The picture on the right is the binding spell that the

elves put into the contract so that we can never change the terms. They can change it all they want, but we can't and it's a terrible contract!"

"That's right," the irritating voice of Jarlen the elf came from the doorway. Everyone turned as he walked into the office. "You're just a bunch of fairies, so you have to do what we tell you." He had a bright red spot between the eyes where the sugar cubes had hit him. It was a little known fact that sugar plum fairies were *excellent* shots.

"Here now, you go too far!" Santa protested. "You elves were right to stand up for yourselves when working conditions were bad, but the Elf's Union has become corrupt and greedy."

Jarlen sneered. “Whatever, Santa. Isn’t it about time you got in your sleigh and got going on your deliveries?”

Sydae had woken up by that point and Araedae helped her stand on her feet. Turning to Santa, Araedae asked, “Did you know about the enchantment on the contract, Santa?”

He looked down at the fairies and shook his head sadly. “No, pretty little fairy. I did not know. I have that computer, but only use it to play solitaire. Jarlen keeps track of all the legal paperwork. Please forgive me for the oversight.”

“It doesn’t matter. No one’s changing the contract,” Jarlen said with a smirk. “The sugar plum fairies need to go back

to dancing and you need to visit the good little boys and girls, Santa. Oof!” The last word came when Mrs. Claus whacked him in the side of the face with her broom, slamming him into the door, where he fell unconscious again.

“That’ll be enough of that!” Santa’s wife said. Everyone looked at her in amazement. “I wish I had known about this enchantment earlier. I’d have done something about it sooner.” She turned to Zannae. “Can you print that binding spell out?” Zannae nodded and did so quickly. Mrs. Claus picked the paper up off the printer and set it on the table. “Everyone be quiet while I fix this.”

They watched as Mrs. Claus began an incantation. Her voice took on an

eerie quality and her hands began to glow as she moved them around gracefully above the paper. The designs on the paper glowed the same colors that her hands did. Suddenly, the paper burst into red and green flames. A moment later, it disintegrated.

“It’s done. The sugar plum fairies are no longer bound to their contract,” Mrs. Claus declared. She wiped sweat off her forehead and leaned on the table tiredly.

“That was a great deal of magic you’ve used, dear,” Santa said as he went over and took her into his arms.

“We’re free!” Araedae declared triumphantly. All three fairies flew up into the air and met in a spinning hug. “No more skimpy outfits in the snow!”

“You mean you don’t *want* to wear those outfits?” Mrs. Claus asked wearily from her husband’s arms.

“No!” Araedae answered emphatically. “We have to because of that stupid contract. We have to dance all winter without any breaks. The cold and snow gives us sugarbumps.”

“Sugarbumps?” Santa asked. “Do you mean goosebumps?”

“No, we’re fairies. Goosebumps would be too big for us and that’s a silly name anyway,” Zannae pointed out. “We’re sugar plum fairies, so we get sugarbumps.”

“Well I suppose that makes sense,” Santa replied. “I want to tell you again how sorry I am. I didn’t realize the elves

had made such a terrible contract and bound you to it. Let's take care of it right away and then I have presents to deliver! Ho, ho, ho!"

Another Sugar Plum Fairy zipped in suddenly. "Araedae! We're out of sugar plums and I don't think we can hold off the elves anymore!"

"Call off the attack! We succeeded!" Araedae declared triumphantly.

The newcomer did a spin in the air. "Woohoo!" Then she zipped off just as fast as she had come in.

"Attack?" Santa asked with a raised eyebrow.

"It's alright, dear. They got the elves messy with plum juice and knocked a few out with sugar cubes," Mrs. Claus

explained. “Now, little fairies, what are your demands?”

Araedae ticked off the list on her fingers. “Sugar Plum fairies are to get paid in chocolate from now on. We weren’t getting paid at all, you know.”

“I did not know that. Shameful,” Santa replied with a shake of his head.

“Each of us will get a spa day every other week.” Araedae knew they wouldn’t go for that, but they had to make at least one outrageous request so the other side could bargain. “From now on, we get to wear age-appropriate fur coats and leggings.”

“But we get to keep the tutus and stockings. Sometimes fairies like dressing up super cute,” Sydae

interjected.

Araedae nodded. “Yes, definitely. Also, we want hot chocolate breaks a few times a day. But most importantly, we don’t want to have to spend all winter at the North Pole anymore. Sugar Plum Fairies like warm climates with no snow.”

“Those are all very reasonable requests,” Santa said with a nod. “I agree.”

“The spa days every other week are *not* reasonable,” Mrs. Claus said, putting her hands on her hips.

“You should give Mrs. Claus a spa day every week!” Zanna suggested. The other two sugar plum fairies nodded vigorously.

“You are absolutely right,” Santa said with a smile. “And a spa day every week for my wonderful wife.” He kissed her on the cheek, and she blushed becomingly.

Santa went to the table, wiggled his fingers and made three pieces of paper appear. They had North Pole letterhead at the top and candy cane borders. He took a quill and quickly moved it over the center paper without touching it. Words magically appeared in green ink on all three papers. When he was done, he signed his name on one of the signature lines, causing his signature to appear on all three pages. “Here you are: a contract agreeing to all your requests. Just sign at the bottom.”

Zannae zipped over and fluttered above the papers for a moment, before nodding. “They look good, Araedae.”

Araedae waved her wand over the line for her signature. Her name appeared in vibrant purple plum ink on all three contracts at the same time. “There. It’s done.”

“Excellent! Now I have a sleigh to catch and toys to deliver!” Santa exclaimed. He put on his jacket, which had been hanging on a hook near the door. Mrs. Claus gave him a brush and told him to tidy his hair and beard in the sleigh. As the jolly old man headed down the stairs, they heard him exclaim. “Ho, ho, ho!”

“Why don’t you invite all your

friends in for hot chocolate and spice cake,” Mrs. Claus suggested. “We can have it in the ballroom. There’s plenty of space there for all of us. The elves can clean up the mess outside.”

“Oh yes! We’d love that,” Araedae agreed, with nods from the other two. They followed Mrs. Claus past the unconscious body of Jarlen the elf, down the stairs and into the ballroom. The rest of the fairies joined them and they all thoroughly enjoyed wonderful hot chocolate and the best spice cake in the world. From that point on, the sugar plum fairies only wore the skimpy outfits when they wanted to and every fairy made certain to take advantage of their spa day every other week.

The End

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About the Author

John H. Carroll was the youngest of seven children and was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1970 where he was kept in a dresser drawer with the clean socks. Luckily, he wasn't kept with the dirty socks or else he might have grown up to become slightly warped.

As a child, John spent most of his time wandering through the Mojave Desert in an attempt to avoid people. He would stare at the sky, imagining what it would be like to explore different worlds. One of his favorite memories is watching his dad build the fuselage of Evel Kneivel's skycycle in their garage. One of his least favorite moments was

watching that skycycle fall into the Snake River. (Not his dad's fault and he has documentation to prove it, so nyah)

As a teenager, John spent most of his time driving wherever he could in an attempt to avoid people. He would stare at the road, imagining what it would be like to explore different worlds. He was the captain of the chess team, lettered in golf and band while in high school, and wasn't beaten up anywhere near as much as one might imagine.

As an adult, John spends most of his time staring at a computer screen in an attempt to avoid people. He stares at the monitor for hours, imagining what it would be like to explore different worlds. He has been married to his

wonderful wife for sixteen years and they have three obnoxious . . . wonderful children who always behave . . . when they're asleep.

Emo bunny minions surround John at most times. He is their imaginary friend and they look to him for guidance. At one point, they took over the world. No one noticed because they left everything exactly as it was. They gave the world back after a week because it was depressing.

The Willden Trilogy is his first endeavor into the field of writing. Other series and standalone works will be forthcoming. In addition, John has written a number of short stories that can be found at most eBook sites. He writes

in the evenings and weekends whenever possible. Regrettably, the family mentioned in a previous paragraph desires food and shelter, requiring the author to possess a full time job until his writing makes him rich.

If you would like to be alerted of new releases, you may sign up for his newsletter. Your email will never be shared with anyone else. You may unsubscribe at any time.

<http://mad.ly/signups/76337/join>

You can follow his blog where he discusses writing, emo bunnies, family and various other topics of insanity.

<http://www.ryallon.blogspot.com/>

Follow him on twitter if you like insane ramblings and random comments.

<http://twitter.com/kookoo88>

Find him on Facebook where he discusses current projects and writing in general:

<http://www.facebook.com/John.H.Carrol>

His Goodreads Page:

<http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/>

Odd Stories for Children:

Odd tales of anti-heroes doing their best to survive odd circumstances.

*The Emo Bunny that Should
(Illustrated)*

Zachary Zombie and the Lost Boy

Drippy the Peg Legged Rainbow

Unholy Cow

Attack of the Sugar Plum Fairies

Naughty Nanoworms

Zachary Zombie and the Wicked Worm

Novels of Ryallon:

My full-length novels are set in the world of Ryallon. They are high fantasy with rogues, knights, dragons and flower children. You can get them at the store where you found this one.

Willden Trilogy (Written first)

Rojuun

Anilyia

Kethril

Dralin Trilogy (Set in time before the Willden trilogy)

Dralin

Ebudae

Pelya

The Wyvern Trilogy (Parallel to the Willden Trilogy, set in time after the Dralin Trilogy)

Wyvern

To Be Announced (Coming 2014)

Cloudswept (Coming 2014)

Stand-alone Novella

Rain Glade

Coming soon:

The Crazyed Trilogy (Set in time after the Willden Trilogy)

The Morhain Trilogy (Set in time after the Willden Trilogy)