

Theme Introduction

Relationships

In this section of the book, you will read about different kinds of relationships. Thinking about these stories, and about the connections you have with people in your own life, will give you new ideas about what it means to have different kinds of relationships.



IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

Before starting this section, think about your own relationships:

- What are some examples of good relationships in your life?
- Why are your relationships important to you?

Once you have thought about your own experiences with relationships, think about this **theme question** and write down your answers or share them aloud:

What do you need to have a good relationship with someone?

After reading each story in this section, ask yourself the theme question again. You may have some new ideas you want to add.



• *What Grace liked best was stories.* •

BOUNDLESS GRACE

Mary Hoffman

Grace lived with her ma and her nana and a cat called Paw-Paw. Next to her family, what Grace liked best was stories. Some she knew and some she made up. She was particularly interested in ones about fathers—because she didn't have one.

“You do too have a father,” her ma said when she caught Grace talking that way. “I must have told you a hundred times about how we split up, and your papa went back to Africa. He has another family now, but he’s still your father, even though he doesn’t live with us anymore.”

Well, that wasn't Grace's idea of a father! She wanted one like Beauty's, who brought her roses from the Beast's garden in spite of the dangers. Not one she hadn't seen since she was very little and only knew from letters and photographs.

And in her school reading books Grace saw that all the families had a mother and a father, a boy and a girl, and a dog and a cat.

"Our family's not right," she told Nana. "We need a father and a brother and a dog."



"Well," said Nana, "I'm not sure how Paw-Paw would feel about a dog. And what about me? Are there any nanas in your schoolbooks?"

Grace shook her head.

"Do I have to go then?" asked Nana.

"Of course not!" Grace said, hugging her.

Nana hugged her back. "A family with you in it is a real family," she said. "Families are what you make them."

Then one day when Grace got home from school, she saw a letter on the table with a crocodile stamp on it. Grace knew it must be from Papa, but it wasn't Christmas or her birthday.

"Guess what!" Ma said. "Your papa sent the money for two tickets to visit him in Africa for your spring vacation. Nana says she'll go with you if you want. What do you say?"

But Grace was speechless. She had made up so many fathers for herself, she had forgotten what the real one was like.





Grace and Nana left for Africa on a very cold gray day. They arrived in The Gambia in golden sunshine like the hottest summer back home. It had been a long, long trip. Grace barely noticed the strange sights and sounds that greeted her. She was thinking of Papa.

I wonder if Papa will still love me? thought Grace. He has other children now, and in stories it's always the youngest that is the favorite. She held on tightly to Nana.

Outside the airport was a man who looked a little like Papa's photo. He swung Grace up in his arms and held her close. Grace buried her nose in his shirt and thought, I do remember.

In the car she started to notice how different everything seemed. There were sheep wandering along the roadside and people selling watermelons under the trees.

And when they reached her father's compound, there was the biggest difference of all. A pretty young woman with a little girl and a baby boy came to meet them. Grace said hello, but couldn't manage another word all evening. Everyone thought she was just tired. Except Nana.

"What's the matter, honey?" she asked when they went to bed. "You've got a father and a brother now, and they even have a dog!"





But Grace thought, They make a storybook family without me. I'm one girl too many. Besides, it's the wrong Ma.

The next day Grace started to get to know Neneh and Bakary. The children thought it was wonderful to have a big sister all the way from America. And Grace couldn't help liking them too. But she had to feel cross with someone. Grace knew lots of stories about wicked stepmothers—*Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Hansel and Gretel*—so she decided to be cross with Jatou. I won't clean the house for her, thought

Grace. I won't eat anything she cooks, and I won't let her take me into the forest.

Jatou made a big dish of savory benachin for lunch, but Grace wouldn't eat any. "I'm not hungry," she said.

"She's probably still getting over the long flight," said Jatou.

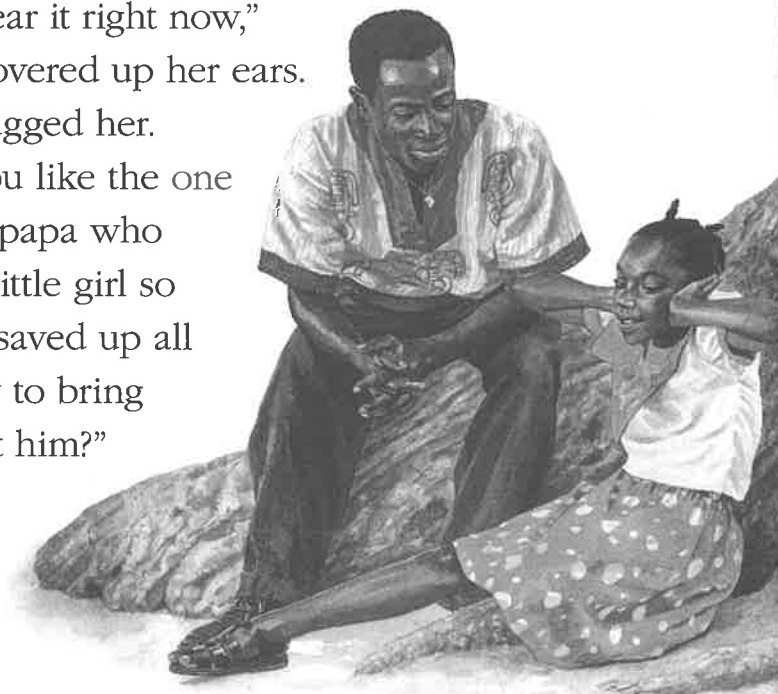
When Papa came home from work, he found Grace in the backyard. He sat beside her under the big old jackfruit tree. "This is where my grandma used to tell me stories when I was a little boy," he said.

"Nana tells me stories too," said Grace.

"Did she ever tell you the one about how your ma and I came to split up?" asked Papa.

"I know that one," said Grace, "but I don't want to hear it right now," and she covered up her ears.

Papa hugged her. "Would you like the one about the papa who loved his little girl so much, he saved up all his money to bring her to visit him?"



“Yes, I’d like that one,” said Grace.

“Okay, but if I tell you that story, will you promise to try to be nice to Jatou? You’re both very important to me,” said Papa.

Grace thought about it. “I’ll try,” she said.

The next day they went to the market. It was much more exciting than shopping at home. Even the money had crocodiles on it! Lots of the women carried their shopping on their head.

Then they went to a stall that was like stepping inside a rainbow.

There was cloth with crocodiles and elephants on it and cloth with patterns made from pebbles and shells. And so many colors!

“We can choose cloth for Grace’s first African dress,” said Papa. Grace and Nana spent a long time choosing. No one was in a hurry.



The days of Grace’s visit flew by. She played in the ocean with her brother and sister, and she told them a bedtime story every night. She told all the stories she knew—*Beauty and the Beast*, *Rapunzel*, *Rumpelstiltskin*. It was amazing how many stories were about fathers who gave their daughters away. But she didn’t tell them any about wicked stepmothers.

Sometimes Ma called from home and her voice made Grace feel homesick. “I feel like gum, stretched out all thin in a bubble,” she told Nana. “As if there isn’t enough of me to go around. I can’t manage two families. What if I burst?”

“Seems to me there *is* enough of you, Grace,” said Nana. “Plenty to go around. And remember, families are what you make them.”

Soon it was their last evening and there was a big farewell party at the compound. Grace and Nana wore their African clothes and Grace ate twice as much benachin as everyone else. “Now you really might burst,” said Nana.



On their last morning Papa took Grace to see some real crocodiles. "This is a special holy place," he said. "The crocodiles are so tame, you can stroke them."



"Not like the one in *Peter Pan*!" said Grace. "No. These are so special, you can make a wish on them," said Papa.

Grace closed her eyes and made a wish, but she wouldn't say what it was.

Later at the compound Grace asked Nana, "Why aren't there any stories about families like mine, that don't live together?"

"Well, at least you've stopped thinking it's your family that's wrong," said Nana. "Now, until we get back home and find some books about families like yours, you'll just have to make up a new story of your own."

"I'll do that," said Grace, "and when we're home again, I'll write it down and send it to Jatou to read to Neneh and Bakary."

The whole family came to see them off at the airport. Grace was sorry to say goodbye

to her new brother and sister and even to her stepmother. But leaving Papa was hardest of all.

Waiting for their plane, Nana asked Grace if she had thought any more about her story.

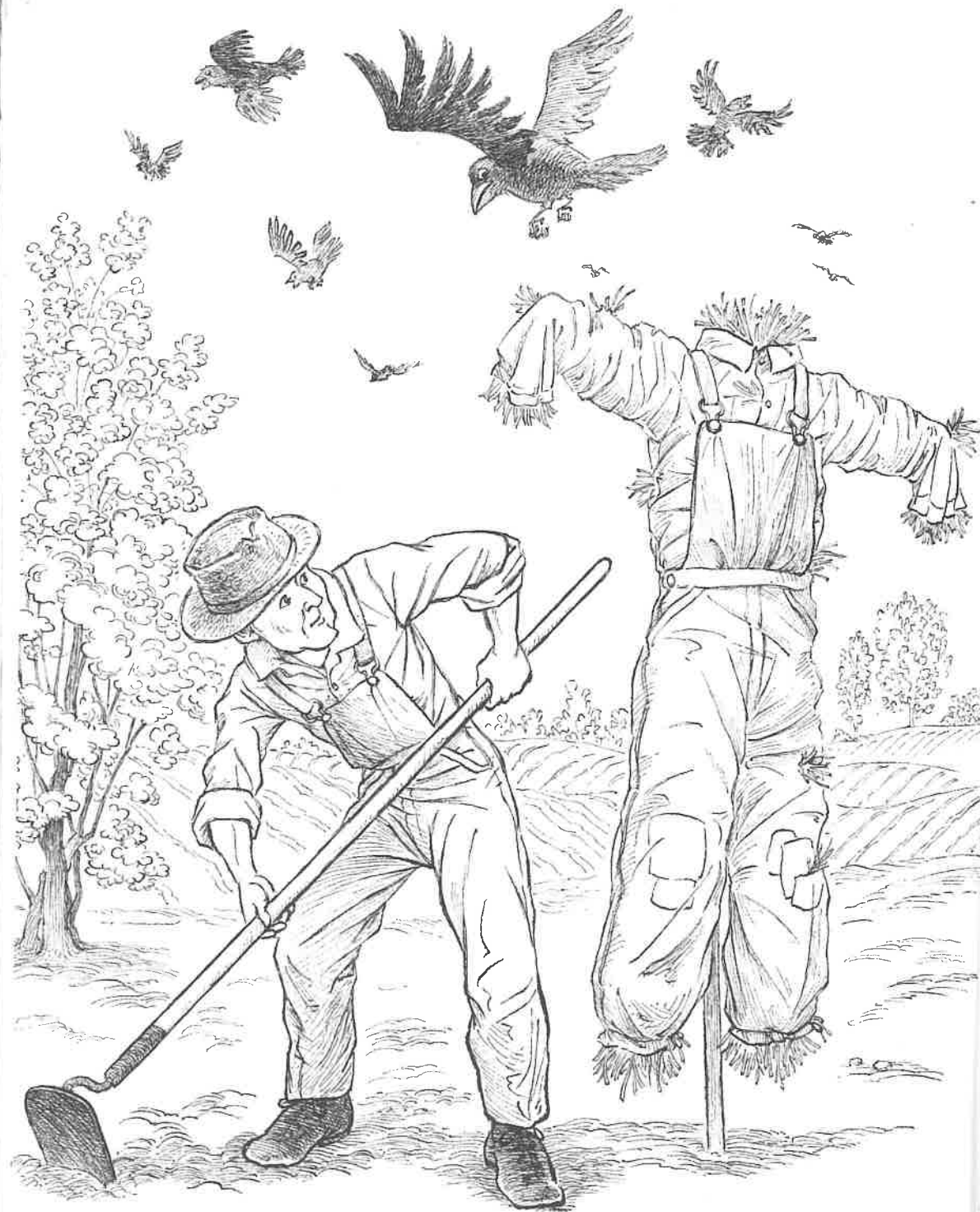
"Yes, but I can't think of the right ending," said Grace, "because the story's still going on."

"How about they lived happily ever after?" asked Nana.

"That's a good one," said Grace. "Or they lived happily ever after, though not all in the same place?"

"Stories are what you make them," said Nana. "Just like families," said Grace.





• *The scarecrow had no head.* •

THE SCAREBIRD

Sid Fleischman

One time a lonely old farmer jammed some old clothes full of straw and put up a scarecrow.

But the scarecrow had no head.

“Just keep the cuss-hollering birds out of the corn patch,” said the farmer. “You don’t need a head for that.”

It was true. Crows and blackbirds circled the long-armed, long-legged scarecrow and kept at a safe distance.

But as the first days of spring passed, the farmer—called Lonesome John by the folks in town—grew uneasy. Every time he looked up from his chores, there stood that headless scarecrow.

And after supper, when he sat on the porch and played his nickel-plated harmonica, there against the fading sun stood the headless scarecrow.

"If that's not the most fearsome sight I ever saw, it'll do," said Lonesome John in a loud voice. With his family gone and his old dog Sallyblue buried in the pasture, he had no one left to talk to but himself.

"That scarebird's enough to give a man the cold creeps."

The next morning Lonesome John hunted up an old pillowcase and stuffed it with straw. He used house paint to dab on a pair of yellow eyes. A hole in the pillowcase would do for a mouth.

He sauntered to the corn



patch and fixed the head to the neck of the scarecrow.

"Does that face suit you, Scarebird? You look like sunshine on stilts with them yeller-paint eyes! Well, make yourself at home."

The next day, when Lonesome John went out to start up his tractor, he gave a wave. "Mornin', Scarebird! I slept like a pine log. How about you!"

And in the evenings, when he sat on the front porch playing his nickel-plated harmonica, he felt almost as if the scarecrow could hear every note.

"See you tomorrow, Scarebird!" he'd call out when he went in to bed.

Lonesome John was sleeping like a pine log when he was awakened by wind banging the barn door. He'd heard wind before, and went back to sleep. At daybreak, with the wind now howling and shrieking in his ears, he jumped out of bed.

The scarebird!

He looked out the window. There stood the scarecrow, face to the wind, holding his ground. Lonesome John grinned.

"I figured you were a goner, Scarebird!"

But when he squinted his eyes, he saw the wind was plucking straw from the scarecrow's cuffs and carrying off its hands and feet.

Lonesome John rushed outside with a pair of shoes and work gloves, and his pockets full of fresh straw. Within minutes he had replaced the straw in the cuffs, put the gloves on, and laced the shoes up tight.

"You're good as new, Scarebird, and a little better." And then he added, "Ain't you all dressed up! Those are my town shoes, but I hardly go to town anymore so you're welcome to them."



The wind whisked itself away. The days turned hot. Before long the sun was rising like a blowtorch at full blast.

"Mornin', Scarebird. Looks like another scorcher today."

Every time Lonesome John glanced up from his farm chores, there stood the scarecrow bareheaded under the flaming sun. He remembered how ol' Sallyblue used to head for the shade under the house on summer days like this.

"Scarebird, you need a hat," he called.

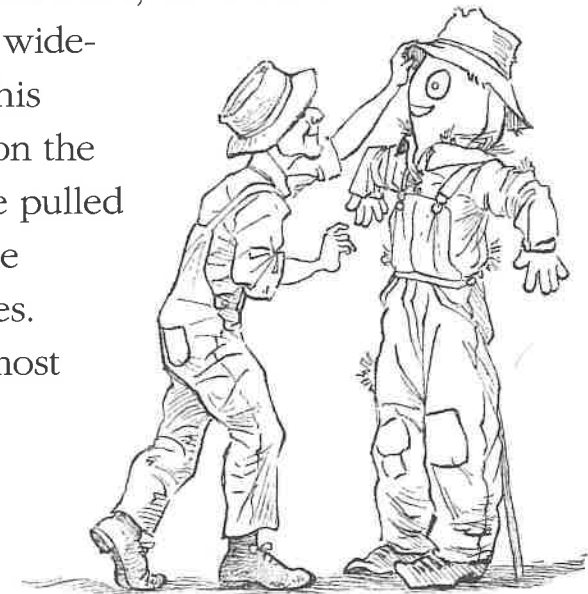
He picked out his wide-brimmed straw hat, his town hat, and set it on the scarecrow's head. He pulled the brim low over the sunflower-yellow eyes.

"That's my bettermost hat, but you're welcome to it."

The hot spell passed, the evenings cooled off, and after supper Lonesome John sat on the porch playing old tunes on his nickel-plated harmonica.

"See you tomorrow, Scarebird."

But dark clouds tumbled in during the night, and when Lonesome John awoke he



could smell rain. And he heard the windows chattering like baby rattles.

"It's going to rain blue thunderbolts!"

He rushed outside with his yellow slicker, pulled the arms of the scarecrow through the sleeves, and threw the hood over the wide-brimmed hat. When he had the rain gear buttoned, he looked up at the swollen clouds.

"Yes sir, blue thunderbolts. Won't do to have you get soaked through and mold up, will it?"

The earth was drying out when Lonesome John hunted up his old checkerboard. He set an apple box in front of the scarecrow and opened the board.

"How about a game of checkers? I ain't played since the boys left home, so I'll be a mite rusty. You go first."

Lonesome John moved a checker for the scarecrow and then one for himself. Before long the game was far along and Lonesome John was in deep concentration.

"Your move, Scarebird."

Lonesome John hardly noticed the time pass. "King me, Scarebird! I ain't licked yet!"

Then a shadow fell across the checkerboard.

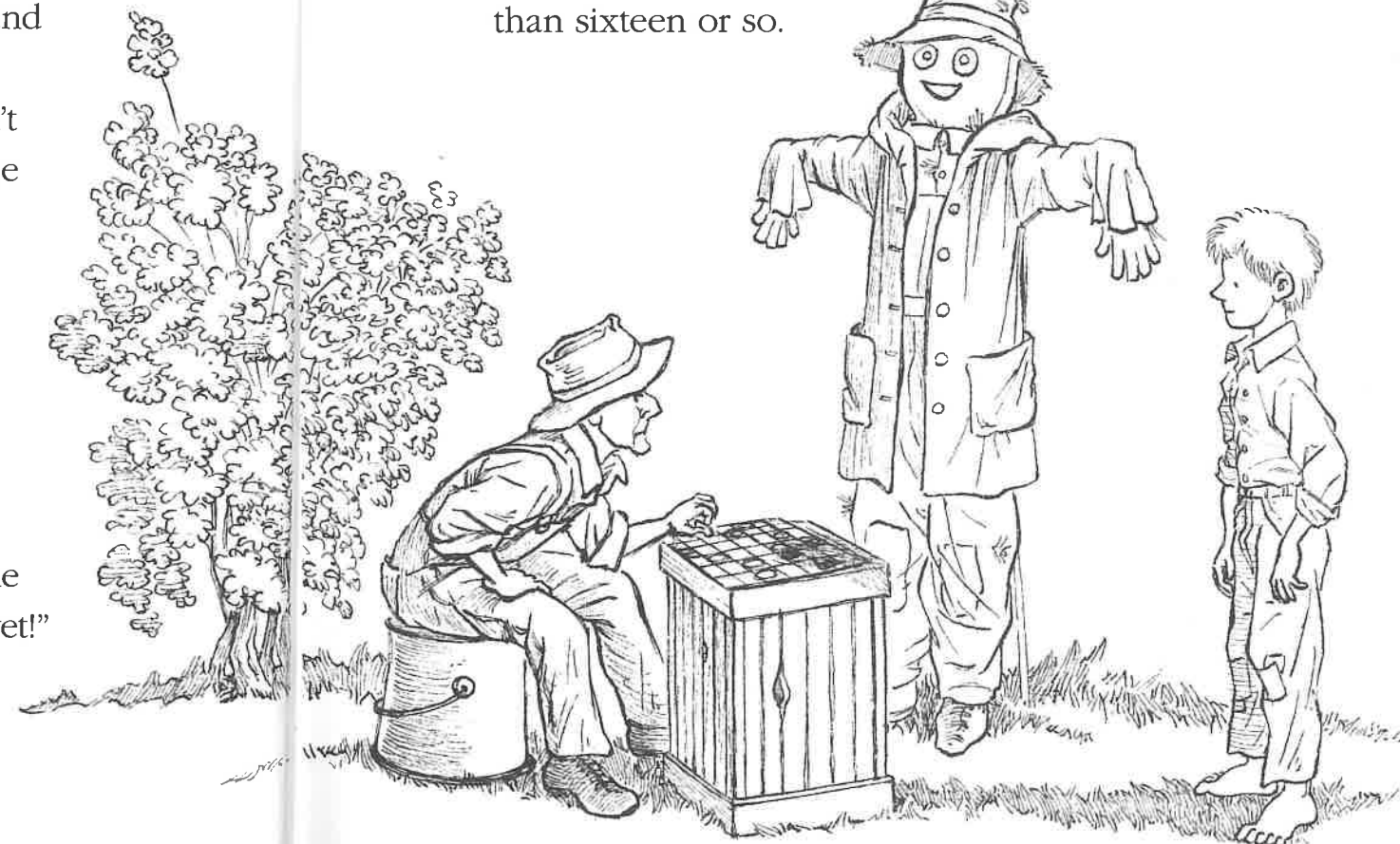
He looked up and saw a young man in worn jeans standing there, barefooted and bareheaded.

"Howdy, sir. Folks in town said you might need a hired hand."

"I get along by myself," answered Lonesome John.

"Yes, sir."

Lonesome John wanted to get back to the checker game, but the stranger looked foot-weary and hardly more than sixteen or so.



"You legged it all these miles? Didn't they tell you it's so far to my place that crows pack a lunch before setting out? If you're hungry, you'll find bread and side meat in the kitchen."

"Thanks."

"And open a can of peaches while you're at it."

Lonesome John resumed the checker game, though his mind was no longer on it.

The hired hand finished his meal. "I'll chop you some stove wood before I head back."

"Just a stick or two will be fine."

Lonesome John finished up the checker game, but felt foolish with a stranger looking on. He was careful not to talk aloud to the scarecrow, but he thought, "Seems like a nice enough lad, don't he, Scarebird?"

When he returned to the back porch, the hired hand was using a whetstone on the blade.

"The axe needs sharpening."

Lonesome John grinned a little. "It usually does. Wouldn't mind some help with the weeds, if you'd care to stay a day or so."

"Glad to. My name's Sam."

"There's a room off the barn. You can sleep there."

After supper Lonesome John sat on the porch, but he didn't play his nickel-plated harmonica. He'd feel uncomfortable with a stranger about the place. He gazed off at the scarecrow standing lonely under the darkening sky.

"See you tomorrow, Scarebird," he muttered softly.

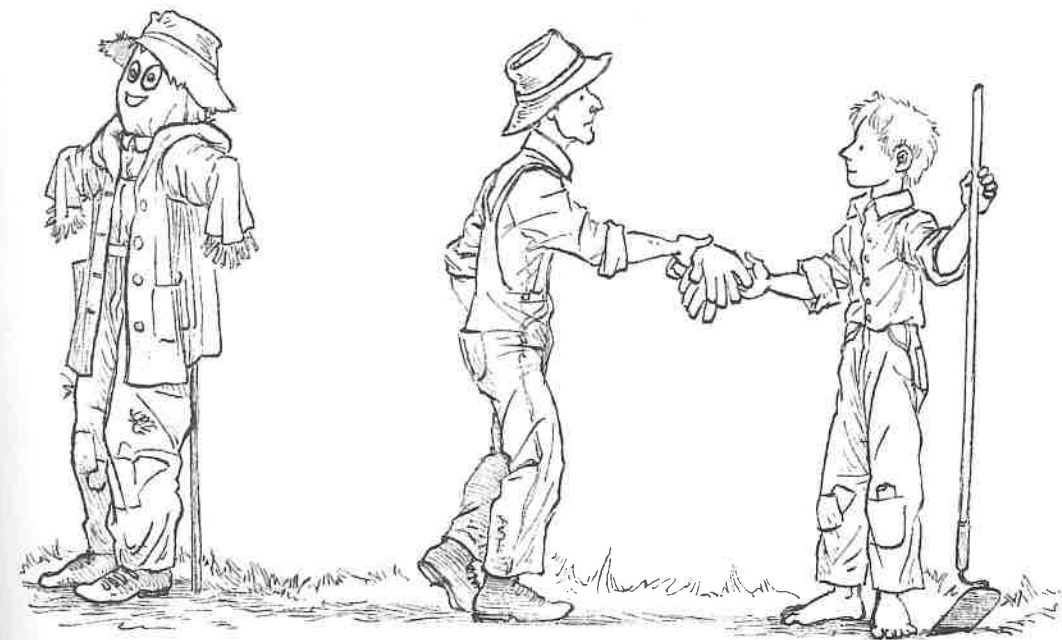
Sam spent the morning with the hoe, working away steady as a clock.

"He's raising blisters on his hands," Lonesome John said to himself, and pulled the work gloves off the scarecrow.

"Put these on."

"Much obliged, sir."

"My name's John. John Humbuckle."





It took more than a day or so to catch up with the weeds. The hired hand stayed on, working under the hot sun without a hat on his head.

"Scarebird," said Lonesome John, "you won't mind if that young feller borrows your hat."

"Thank you kindly," said the hired hand.

"You from someplace?"

"Used to be."

"Where are your folks?"

"We graved and prayed 'em when I was a little kid."

When the weeding was done, Sam hung up the hoe and pulled off the gloves and hat. "I'll head back."

Lonesome John scratched his neck. "I've been meaning to clear that thornbush in the orchard, if you'd care to stay on a day or so."

"Sure thing."

"Them thorns are meaner'n fishhooks. You'd better wear shoes."

It was raining at first light. Lonesome John pulled the shoes off the scarecrow, then the yellow slicker.

"The boy'll be ever so grateful, Scarebird."

It was almost a week before they had the last of the thornbush grubbed out and burned.



After supper, the hired hand joined Lonesome John on the porch. "I never saw a scarecrow with yellow-painted eyes. I had a dog once with yellow eyes. He was a mighty good friend. I'll never forget him."

"That's the way it is with good friends."

"Job's done. Time for me to clear out tomorrow." And then Sam pulled a harmonica out of his pocket and began to play a joyful tune.

Lonesome John was silent for a long time, listening. Then he said, "It's time to start harvesting the crops, if you want to stay on a day or so, or a week or so."

"Yes, sir. Sure thing."



Lonesome John had been fingering the harmonica in his own hip pocket like an itch that needed scratching. Now he pulled it out and smiled broadly. "Do you know this tune?"

He began to play, working his right hand like a bird's wing to polish up the notes. When he was finished, Sam tapped his harmonica. "Do you know this one?"

They played, one after another, until full dark. When it was time to turn in, John Humbuckle looked over at the scarecrow for a long moment and then turned to Sam.

"Do you play checkers?"





• "Oh, Peerless Ginger Cat! Catch a fish for me!" •

CHIN YU MIN AND THE GINGER CAT

Jennifer Armstrong

Many years ago, in a village near Kunming, there lived an official of the government named Secretary Chin. In his house by the lake were the finest lacquer bowls, lettered scrolls of the sheerest paper, and many, many strings of cash. Secretary Chin was very prosperous.

The wife of this man, Chin Yu Min, felt that this prosperity was only what she deserved. She was proud and haughty, and she made her

servants perform impossible and meaningless tasks—such as collecting incense smoke in a bamboo cage or teaching carp to strut like roosters—just for the fun of displaying her power. She laughed at beggars and turned them away from her door.

One day Secretary Chin fell out of his small yellow pleasure boat and sank like a piece of carved jade to the bottom of the lake. That was the end of Secretary Chin, and it was also the end of his wife's idleness and luxury.

"Good Chin Yu Min," said her neighbors, "please allow us to help you in this time of loss."

"Aiyi!" Chin Yu Min scoffed. "I don't need help from such as you. Be off!"

She slammed the door in their faces and stomped away. For many months Chin Yu Min scolded her servants and haggled suspiciously with the merchants. She was sure that everyone was out to cheat her, and she answered their pleasant words with bitter ones.



Coin by square-holed coin, her strings of cash flowed away like streams from a fishpond. Chin Yu Min knew she would soon be poor, but she would rather have eaten ashes than let anyone know of this fact.

"Aiyi!" Chin Yu Min screamed at her servants. "You are all less than useless! Leave my house!" When they had gone, she lived alone and tended house with her own hands to save money.

"Esteemed Chin Yu Min," said her neighbors, "allow us to help you."

"Who asked for your help?" Chin Yu Min retorted.

She slammed the door in their faces and stomped away.



Chin Yu Min lived alone for several more months, becoming poorer and poorer. At last she was as poor as a mouse in a monastery.

Not one chicken scratched in her yard. Her rice jar stood cracked and empty. The fine lacquer bowls were dulled by hard use, and the lettered scrolls of sheerest paper flapped like ragged ghosts from the walls.

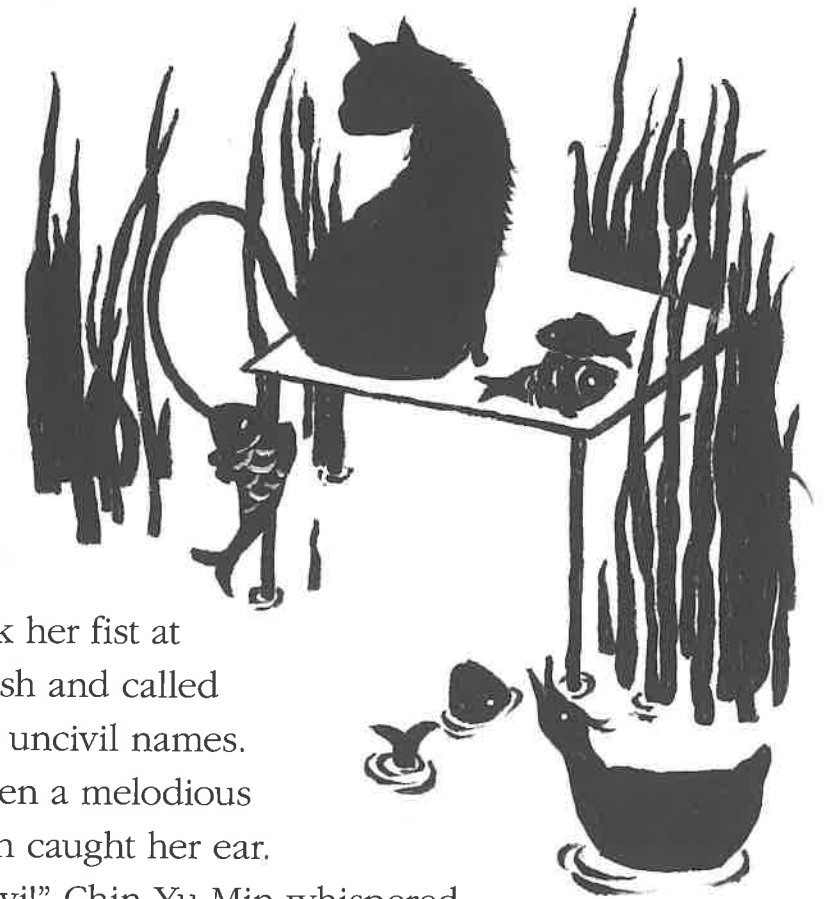
One morning when Chin Yu Min awoke, she knew there was not a thing in the house to eat. She knew there was no cash with which to buy rice.

"I will fish," Chin Yu Min announced to her empty house and the tattered scrolls.

With this decision firmly made, Chin Yu Min took a string and a hairpin for a hook and went to the lake. She stood straight and aloof, arms out, eyes forward, line dangling, and waited—oh, for only a little while—before scowling with impatience.

"There are no fish in this lake!" she complained.

But below the surface of the water many fish indeed shuttled back and forth like monkeys at play in the treetops. Chin Yu Min



shook her fist at the fish and called them uncivil names.

Then a melodious splash caught her ear.

"Aiyi!" Chin Yu Min whispered.

On the next dock sat a fine ginger cat. He draped his long elegant tail into the water, and

flick!

Out it came with a fish biting the end. The cat regarded the fish with a solemn look, blinked, and then quickly ate every bit, scales, fins, and all.

"Oh, Peerless Ginger Cat!" said Chin Yu Min. "Catch a fish for me!"

The ginger cat blinked his eyes. "Certainly, Auntie."

He draped his long elegant tail into the water, and

flick!

Out it came with a fish on the end.

Chin Yu Min picked it up and sniffed deeply. "Steamed with ginger and soy sauce, this will be delicious."

Chin Yu Min hurried back to her house with the fish and put it on to cook. But as the aromatic steam curled up around her gray-haired head, Chin Yu Min began to worry.

"I have a fish today, but what will I have tomorrow?" she asked herself.

She peeked out the window. The ginger cat was still sitting on the dock, meditating on a pair of mandarin ducks who swam in graceful harmony through the reeds.

Chin Yu Min had an idea.

"Oh, Gracious Ginger Cat!" the greedy woman said, joining him on the dock. "My house is large, my bed is soft. Why not come and live with me? There you will be safe from dogs, cool in the summer, and warm in the

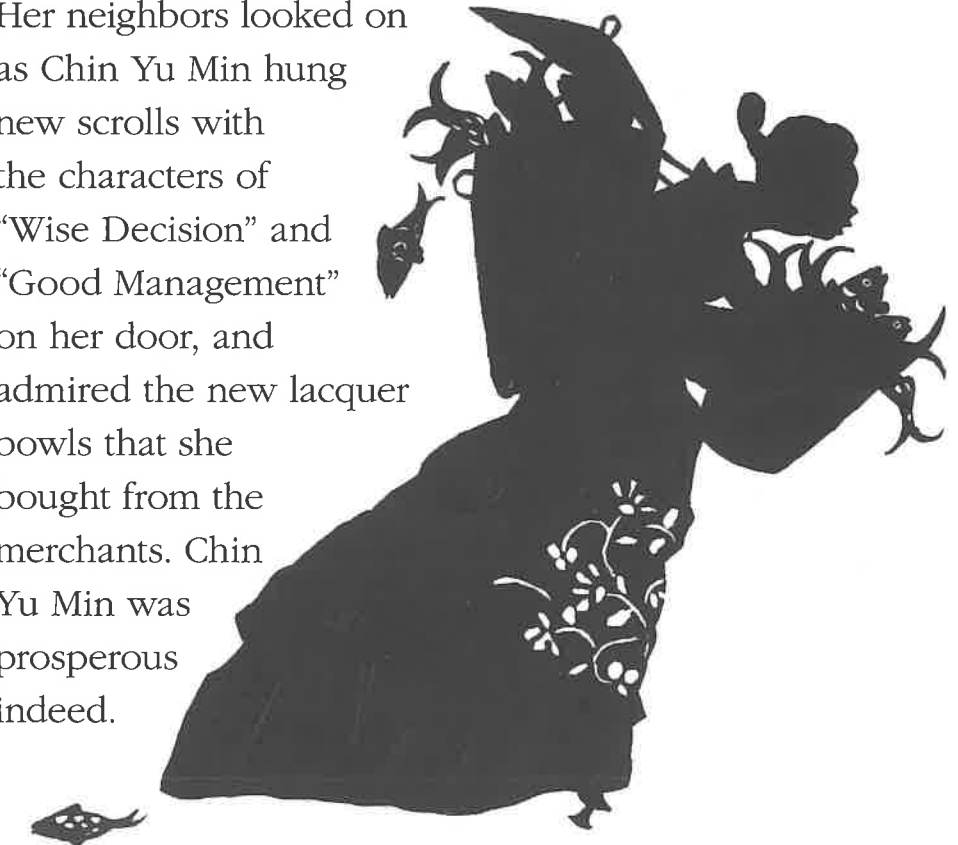
winter. All I ask is that you continue to catch fish."

"I thank you, Venerable Auntie," said the cat. "I accept your offer. You are truly generous."

Chin Yu Min smiled a thin smile and hurried back to her house.

From that day Chin Yu Min's prosperity returned. Surely, her neighbors agreed, she had found a charm to make fish jump from the lake into her basket, for every day she arrived at the market with a load of glittering, glistening fish. Her neighbors looked on

as Chin Yu Min hung new scrolls with the characters of "Wise Decision" and "Good Management" on her door, and admired the new lacquer bowls that she bought from the merchants. Chin Yu Min was prosperous indeed.



Every day in the afternoon the ginger cat sat on the dock and draped his long elegant tail into the water and
flick!

He pulled out fish after fish until they were piled up like the mountains of Guilin. Chin Yu Min rubbed her hands together and counted her strings of cash.

"Auntie," said the ginger cat one day, "what would you do if I went away?"

"Aiyi!" gasped Chin Yu Min. "Don't leave me! How would I eat?"

Chin Yu Min wrung her hands. She could not bear another plunge into poverty.

"I will stay, Auntie," replied the ginger cat.

In the evenings of the warm months, Chin Yu Min sat in front of her door watching the lake with the ginger cat at her side. From time to time the sound of his purring broke the stillness, and Chin Yu Min was content as she watched the cranes fly overhead.

In the evenings of the cool months, Chin Yu Min sat in front of a fire in the house watching the coals with the ginger cat at her side. From



time to time the sound of his purring broke the stillness, and Chin Yu Min was content as she watched the embers glow at her feet.

"Auntie," said the ginger cat one day, "what would you do if I went away?"

"Aiyi!" gasped Chin Yu Min. She hastily stroked his back. "Don't do that to an old woman!"

Chin Yu Min wrung her hands. She could not bear another plunge into solitude.

"I will stay, Auntie," replied the ginger cat.



One day a beggar came to the door.
“Please, Virtuous Lady,” he said, “have you
an old basket in which I may carry my meager
belongings?”
“Pah!” said Chin Yu Min. “Filthy beggar!
There, take that ragged thing. It’s of no use
to me.”
So saying, she pointed at a torn and tattered
basket that lay discarded in the sun.

“Blessings upon you,” the beggar said. He
hoisted the basket above his head and limped
off to town.

Chin Yu Min cast a thoughtful glance out at
the lake. It was time for the ginger cat to start
fishing for the day.

“Honorable Ginger Cat!” she called out.
“Where are you?”

The answer was wind soughing through the
trees.

“Delightful Ginger Cat!” she called again.
“Where are you?”

The answer was wavelets lapping the
pebbled shore. The ginger cat was nowhere.

“He has left me!” Chin Yu Min cried out.
She stood stricken in the doorway, staring
at her fine scrolls. “Wise Decision” and “Good
Management” mocked her as they rustled in
the breeze.

“No more fish!” Chin Yu Min despaired.
The scrolls rustled again.

“No more prosperity!”
The scrolls shivered.

“No more sitting by the fire!”
The scrolls flapped forlornly.

"No more purring!"

The scrolls fell from their hooks.

"No more fine ginger cat to sit beside me!"

Chin Yu Min tore at her hair. "Wise Decision" and "Good Management" lay in shreds at her feet. In despair Chin Yu Min took up a brush and wrote the characters for "Bottomless Sorrow" on her door.

"Have you seen my ginger cat?" Chin Yu Min asked the neighbors. "Help me find my ginger cat!"

Her neighbors frowned. "When we offered you our help, Chin Yu Min, you scorned us."



"I beseech you," Chin Yu Min said. "Most humbly I ask, have you seen my ginger cat?"

"We have not," her neighbors said, taking pity on her bottomless sorrow. "But we have seen a beggar with an old basket pass this way. Perhaps he knows something."

Chin Yu Min stood as still as a plum tree rooted to the ground. As sure as the sun rose and set, she knew that the ginger cat had been sleeping in the basket. She had given him away.

"Where, oh, where has the beggar gone?" Chin Yu Min asked her neighbors.

"To the market," they replied.

Chin Yu Min ran as fast as her skinny old legs would carry her to the market. There, to her amazement, she found many, many beggars, each with a tattered basket. To her, all beggars looked alike, because she had always been too proud to see their faces.

Now she did not know which one had her basket.

"I beg you," she said to the first, "Venerable Old Monk, allow me to buy your basket."

The beggar bowed once and pulled on his thin gray beard. "For ten cash, madam."



Chin Yu Min gritted her teeth. But her ginger cat was worth more than that in fish. She paid the beggar and snatched the basket: empty.

"I beg you," she said to the next, "Spiritual Old Monk, allow me to buy your basket."

The beggar bowed once and tugged his short stubby beard. "For ten cash, madam."

Chin Yu Min gritted her teeth. But her ginger cat was worth more than that in fish. She paid the beggar and snatched the basket: empty.

"I beg you," she said to the third, "Self-Denying Old Monk, allow me to buy your basket."

Before each beggar she humbled herself and paid for the baskets. Her strings of cash were vanishing like water into sand. The longer she searched for her cat, the more desolate she became.

"For ten cash," said another beggar.

Chin Yu Min pulled at her hair. But all the fish in the Middle Kingdom were not equal to her ginger cat. He was worth far, far more in companionship and warmth.

"Ten cash," said the next.

"Ten cash," said another.

At last she had not one single coin left, and Chin Yu Min was as poor as the beggars—even poorer, for each of them had ten cash, and she had none. But more bitter than the loss of her cash was the loss of her cat.

"Let him not catch another fish!" she cried to heaven. "But still let my friend come back to live with me!"

In tears, Chin Yu Min turned away from the market and trod wearily back to the lake. But

before she reached her home, she saw another beggar ahead on the road. This beggar, too, had an old basket.

"Most Scholarly Old Monk," cried the proud Chin Yu Min, "pity an old woman as poor as you! I beg you to give me your basket."

Chin Yu Min knelt in the road and kowtowed with her forehead to the dust. Her heart cried out for the ginger cat.

"Certainly, madam," the beggar said. "If I can take away your bottomless sorrow in this way, I will give you my basket."

So saying, he placed the basket on the ground beside her and hobbled away.

Fear shook Chin Yu Min's hands as she opened the basket. Her breath quaked in her throat.

Inside, curled in sleep, was the ginger cat.

"Oh, Generous Friend!" Chin Yu Min cried. "I have found you again!"

"Good afternoon, Auntie," said the ginger cat, stretching his legs. "Isn't it time to fish?"

For her answer Chin Yu Min hugged the cat to her heart.

"Today I fish for you," she said.

With the cat perched on her shoulder, Chin Yu Min walked back to her home. At the doors of her neighbors, she stopped and bowed.

"Please honor me by taking a meal at my house," she said. "My table is poor, but your presence will make it seem rich to me."

Her neighbors returned her bows and accepted with thanks.

And from that time the scrolls on Chin Yu Min's door read "Contented Joy."

