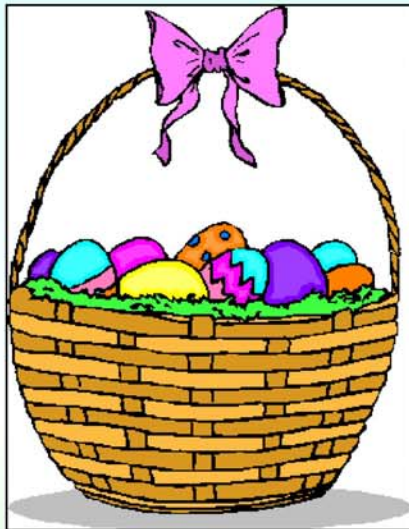


The Miracle of the Eggs



**A New Easter Fable for Children of All Ages
By Ruth Y. Nott
Copyright 2005**

The Miracle of the Eggs

By Ruth Y. Nott

Illustrations by James Melton (deceased)

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all who believe –
for all things are possible if you
open your heart to the Word.

My special thanks to James Melton,
a friend, who graciously donated the
illustrations for this story before
his untimely death.

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Love's Rebirth

By Ruth Y. Nott

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There once was a morn' which dawned so bright
with Love's rebirth and the Son's true light...

Who could have known that a baby small
born on Christmas would give His all
to free mankind from fear and sin...
so many years from Bethlehem?

There once was a morn' which dawned so bright
with Love's rebirth and the Son's true light...

Yes, His mother's love kept Him strong,
but His father's love took Him along
a rocky path with a heavy load...
His burden to carry down Calvary's road!

There once was a morn' which dawned so bright
with Love's rebirth and the Son's true light...

Now with each Easter sun's first rays
we sing for joy and give Him praise...
knowing that for us He lived, for us He died...
for us He waits at the Father's side!

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Chapter One

A New Home



Mariella was tired. She sat quietly by the stream watching her younger brother and sister play nearby. Bart and Norma chased and teased each other and tumbled over fallen branches as they played. They had just moved to this area near Jerusalem and had not yet made new friends. Mariella kept them busy setting up their new home and caring for poor Papa.

After Mama died, Papa had just lost interest in everything and did not take care of himself. The cough he had before they left had gotten worse on the long journey. Now he stayed in bed almost all the time and all the hard work was theirs to do, just Mariella, Bart, and little Norma.

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They had been told that food would be easier to find here, but hunger was everywhere. They were no better off here than in their previous home. That night, after Bart and Norma had said their prayers and were tucked warmly into bed, Mariella explained their chores for the next day.

“First thing tomorrow, before the first rays of the sun peek over the hilltop, you two must take your baskets and begin looking for food around the outskirts of town. I don’t like to send you that close to human folk, but we have to find something more nourishing for poor Papa. If his cough gets much worse, I doubt that even old Elbanu’s medicine will heal him. So, snuggle up and get a good night’s sleep if you can.

Bart shivered and thought about tomorrow. When he did finally fall asleep, it was to a night of restless tossing and turning while Norma dreamed peacefully of baskets full of juicy carrots. She was too young yet to know the fear of human folk.

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Chapter Two

The Search for Food



The next day, very early, while darkness still lingered upon the land, Bart and Norma took their baskets and set out timidly toward Jerusalem. Clutching her hand tightly in his, Bart whispered to his sister, “We have to be really careful Norma. You stay very close to me, okay?”

Slowly they crept about, looking here and there in the fields and gardens of the human folk on the outskirts of the city. They asked each animal they met if they had any food to spare for a poor bunny family, but everyone else was hungry too and no one had anything extra to share. The only help they received was from Llemuel Rooster who awoke just as the first rays of sunlight began to turn the sky a pale pinkish color.

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“What’s this?” crowed Llemual. “Another family in distress? Heaven knows there is little enough for any of us to eat these days, but, if we hurry, I think we just might have time to collect a few eggs from my wife and her clucky old cousin hens before the human folk gather the eggs for breakfast.” Hop-ping down from the fence post, Llemuel scurried away with their baskets.

Before they could hardly blink an eye, he was back with several fresh eggs perched atop the few herbs and roots they had found along the way.

“Run along now children and be quick about it!” warned Llemuel. “Take the short-cut over Golgotha Hill and you will be home in no time at all.”

Flapping furiously, he managed to reach a low branch in the old olive tree nearby. Here, he could keep a close eye on Bart and Norma as they made their way around the bend in the road. Then he began to clean his feathers and watch for the human folk to discover the missing eggs.

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Chapter Three

Trapped!

“Hurry Norma!” Bart chided as he jerked at his sister’s hand. “There’s no time to sniff the flowers with the human folk be-ginning to stir about!”

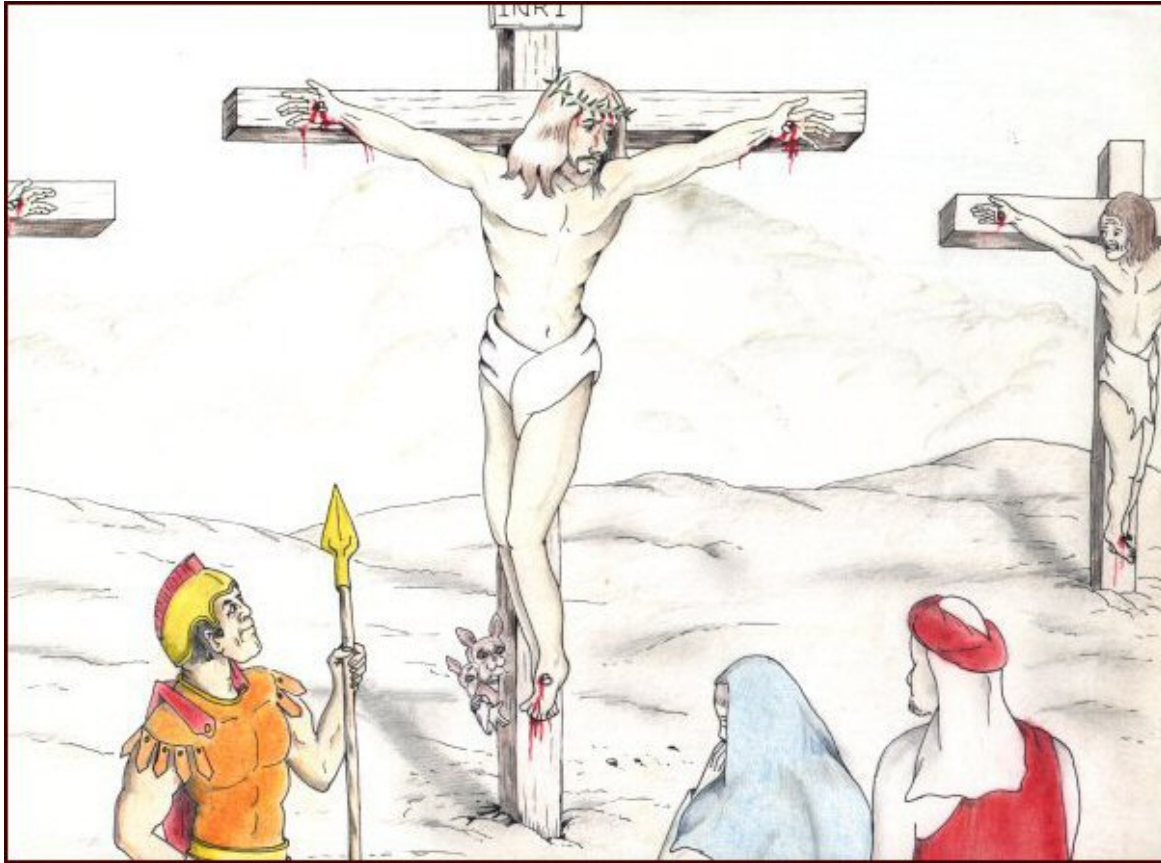
Even as he spoke, they could hear them approaching -- a great crowd which was also headed toward Golgotha Hill. Bart froze. He could feel the tension and excitement in the air and could see fear and sadness on the faces as the crowd pushed in around them. Before they knew what was happening, Bart and Norma became caught up in the running feet and had to jump and dodge along with them, hardly able to avoid being crushed!

Suddenly, everything was quiet except for an occasional shout and the mournful crying of several women standing off to one side. Bart looked quickly around, his heart pounding in his little chest. He still held tightly to Norma’s hand.

“B-B-Bart?” whispered Norma, “Where are we? What are all these people doing here?”

“I don’t know Norma,” Bart answered, “But let’s rest here for a little while before we go on. They don’t seem to be paying much attention to us. They’re all looking up there,” and he pointed to the cross above them.

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Norma huddled close beside Bart and he could feel her begin to relax a bit. As Bart looked up, he saw that they were resting at the base of a great big cross, one of three erected on this hill. On those crosses, three humans had been nailed and the one hanging on the cross above their heads seemed to be of some importance. He was the one these people were shouting at and it was for him the women wept.

“It’s sad what humans do to each other,” Bart thought out loud, “But, as long as he holds their attention, maybe they won’t see us here,” and he inched closer to the foot of the cross.

“Father, forgive them,” they heard the man on the middle cross say as some of the guards threw stones at him and gambled for his clothes. Bart didn’t realize how much time had passed until, suddenly, thunder, loud and angry, echoed across the little valley and over Golgotha Hill. Lightning set the sky ablaze and raindrops pelted the startled crowd into retreat.

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“Now Norma!” Bart shouted. “Run now!” And they ran and ran as fast and as hard as they could away from Golgotha Hill and the awful shouting and crying of the frightened human folk.

Barrrooom! Barrrooom! The thunder growled and the ground shook beneath their feet. Down the far side of the hill they flew, never looking back.

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Chapter Four

The Eggs

Soon, they were safe again in their own little house and Mariella was hugging them and crying.

“Thank goodness you’re safe! I was so worried!” Pulling an already damp hand-kerchief from her pocket, she dried her eyes and tried to listen to what the children had to say.

“We were really scared!” Norma began, “All those humans running and crying and shouting and then the thunder and lightning!” She took a deep breath. “It was terrible! But Bart was SO brave! He knew just what to do!”

“Well,” Mariella said as she hugged them both again, “I’m just very glad you made it back safely. I’m sure you were both brave little bunnies. Now, Norma, Bart...” She stopped then, staring at their little baskets. “What’s all this?”

It was hard to believe the baskets had survived that helter-skelter run home. Nevertheless, there they were, still clutched tightly in their hands. They could not even remember grabbing them up when they had begun running toward home.

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“Mariella, look!” Bart pointed at the eggs, a look of surprise on his face. “What’s that?” The eggs were different from any that Mariella, or Bart, or Norma had seen before. Some were spotted red, some blue, and some yellow.

“How did that happen?!” cried Norma. “Now they’re ruined!” Since the eggs had become wet in the rain, the colors seemed to be spreading and covering more and more of the surface of the eggs.

“That sure looks strange,” said Mariella as she examined each one, “but a little stain on the outside won’t hurt the egg inside.” Taking one of the eggs, she cracked the shell and began to prepare Papa’s meal.

“Why don’t you two tip-toe into the bedroom and see if Papa’s still awake. He was just as worried about you as I was during that thunderstorm.”

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Chapter Five

The Story

Very carefully, Bart and Norma eased open the bedroom door. Papa was indeed awake and, between coughs, begged them for details of their eventful morning.

Norma climbed up on the soft bed and sat nestled under Papa's arm while Bart began to speak... "We looked all over the fields near town Papa, but there were only a few roots and herbs worth picking and it was so dark that Norma kept bumping into me. I may have dropped some of them. We stayed close together just like Mariella said we should Papa. Then, just as the sun came up, when we had about given up, we met a new friend, Mr. Llemuel Rooster. He gave us some of his wife's eggs, and some of her cousins' eggs too. He said they were clucky old hens!" Bart giggled as he continued. "He told us about a short-cut to hurry us back home."

Bart paused a moment and Norma quickly took up the story. "But Papa, the human folk were already up and some of them came running along the road toward Golgotha Hill. We just got all mixed up and had to run along with them." She trembled at the thought of all those human feet bumping and pushing them along.

Papa sniffed the air. "My, that breakfast does smell good! Is that scrambled eggs I smell Mariella?"

"Yes Papa," she replied. "You just rest now and I'll be right in with your tray."

"Do you know where we ended up Papa?" Norma continued, tugging at his sleeve. "Right up on top of the hill, and right at the bottom of a big wooden cross."

"There were three crosses," interrupted Bart.

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“Yes, three,” echoed Norma, “and those awful humans had nailed one of their own kind to each cross, poor things!”

“Do you know who they were?” asked Papa.

“No, but the one above us must have been someone important because I heard them call him the King of the Jews, and they put a thorny crown on his head,” Norma replied.

“And Papa,” shouted Bart, now remembering the fear he had felt, “they jabbed him with a spear and he bled! I thought they were coming after us, but they were only interested in hurting him!”

“He cried Papa,” little Norma sniffed. “And when he asked for a drink, they gave him vinegar! YUK!” She continued without stop-ping. “Why are human folk so mean Papa?”

“I don’t know little one. It’s just their nature I suppose. Go on Bart, tell Papa more.”

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Well, even after they had done all that to him, and he was near death for sure, he asked his father to forgive them. Can you imagine that? I didn't see his father there, but his mother was there. I heard someone speak to her... ah... Mary was her name."

"And did he die Bart?" Papa asked.

"Yes Papa, and it was just then that the thunder and lightning sent everybody running... and we ran home!"

"Okay children," Mariella said as she entered the room with Papa's breakfast tray. "That's enough for now. Papa can hear more of your story after he eats."

"But there isn't any more," little Norma said as she scooted off the bed and sat on the floor next to Bart.

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Chapter Six

The Miracle

Papa began to nibble at the eggs and sip the herb tea Mariella had prepared. “You know,” he said as he rubbed his brow, “I believe I have heard of this human you spoke of. Old Elbanu was mentioning just such a person the last time he was here to fill me with his awful medicine. I think he said the man’s name was Jesus and that he was a great teacher among the Jews. Some even called him King, or Savior, but not enough listened to his words of wisdom.”

He gulped down some more tea and continued. “Elbanu even said many of our own bunny folk had been gathering and hiding in the weeds near the stream to listen to him speak.”

Papa was eating faster now and his face almost began to glow. As he finished off the last of the eggs and tea, he took a deep breath and stretched his arms high overhead. “My goodness, I do feel fine! I think I even feel like getting up. Let’s go into the kitchen and get a good look at your colored eggs.”

“But Papa,” chorused Mariella and the children, “you shouldn’t be up! You are too sick! Elbanu said...”

“Elbanu said... Elbanu said... That’s all I hear these days! Look at me. Am I coughing?”

“No Papa.”

“Am I wheezing?”

“No Papa.”

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“Can I walk without help?” he laughed as he pranced around the room.

“Yes Papa! It’s a miracle!”

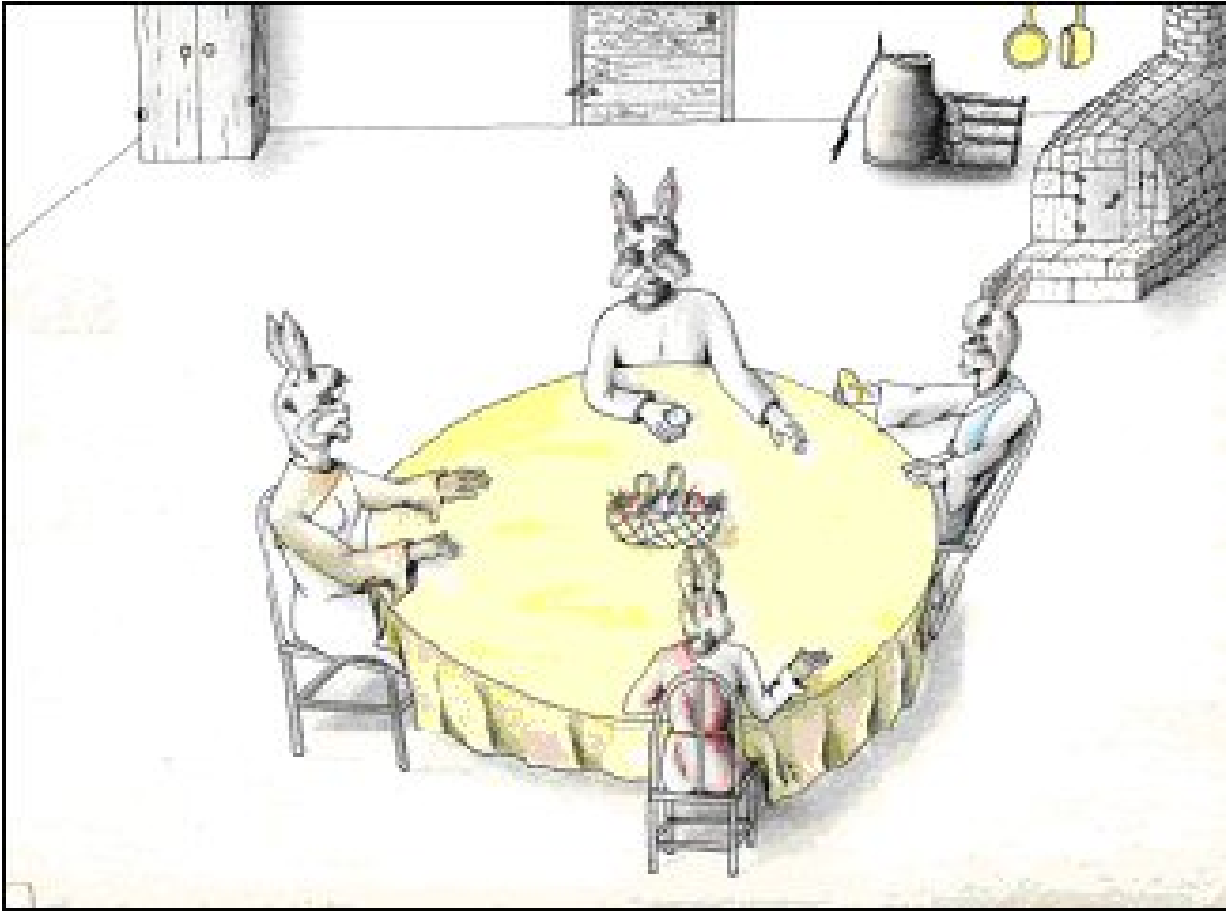
Papa took little Norma by the hand and let them all into the warm kitchen. “Let’s see those eggs,” he said as he lifted one of the baskets close to his face and inhaled deeply to smell each one.

“Aaaah, now I know. Sit down children and Papa will explain your strangely colored eggs.”

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Chapter Seven

Papa Explains



Gathered around the table as they were now, they felt like a real family again. Papa had not been with them at the table for many weeks now. He had stayed in bed, bundled up to his whiskers, and filled with Elbanu's medicine. Now, suddenly, here he was before them, the picture of health. As they stared, Papa continued.

“You say you were huddled beneath the cross for protection. Well, I suspect you have received more than that. Here, pass this yellow egg around and have a sniff.”

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“Augh!” Mariella grimaced.

“YUK!” Norma stuck out her tongue.

“That’s awful!” Bart said as he handed the egg back to Papa.

“You know that smell don’t you Mariella? Papa asked his oldest daughter.

Yes Papa. It’s vinegar.”

“Exactly. The dripping of the vinegar they gave him to drink. This yellow egg is a symbol of their bitterness toward their “King”. Now, take this blue one... It smells of salt and human folk. His tears have colored this egg... his tears of pain and sorrow.”

Little Norma’s eyes began to water and her nose began to twitch just thinking about it. Mariella pulled her into her lap and wiped her tears.

“And the red ones,” Papa continued, “surely you know.” He held one gently to his cheek. “This is the blood he shed as he was dying, the symbol of his love and forgiveness. He even forgave the ones who killed him. Can you imagine such love, especially among human folk?!”

“And Papa,” little Norma said, tugging at his sleeve again, “He must have loved us too or he wouldn’t have colored our eggs so we would know!”

“Norma is right you know.” Papa smiled and went on, “and his love and the nourishment from these eggs has healed me. I’m not sick anymore. He healed me and gave me a reason to live. We have a job to do now. **Children, we must tell everyone this good news and share our blessing!**”

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Chapter Eight

The Mission

Soon the little bunny family was walking arm in arm, going from house to house. They shared the good news with all their new neighbors and told them about Jesus. They told them how Papa had been healed by the eggs. And, with the help of Llemuel Rooster and his relatives, they left an egg at each house as a reminder of the love and forgiveness Jesus had for everyone.

For many years, they traveled about spreading the good news until Papa died an old and happy bunny. Then, Mariella and the children, now grownup bunnies, carried on his work. They passed the good news to their children and their children's children. Even today, so many hundreds of years later, Papa's descendants still scurry about once a year sharing the good news and their colored eggs (now colored with the juice of berries) in remembrance of the miracle of the eggs and the love that Jesus had shown them.

But, since bunnies still have to beware of human folk, they do their visiting long before the break of day, before even the very first humans stir from their beds. That is why we never see them taking their colored eggs to the homes of their animal friends. Instead, we only find the ones they have dropped in the grass or under a bush as they hurried along, racing to finish their mission before the humans wake up. Or, perhaps... could it be that they left those eggs behind on purpose... so that even us humans might know of His love?

What do you think?

The End... (or is it?)

The Miracle of the Eggs

This has been another bunny tale by Ruth Y. Nott

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Look back now at how it all began....

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A Mouse in the House

By Ruth Y. Nott



"Marvin, Marvin! Guess what?!" squealed Martha Mouse as she scurried through the tiny hole in the kitchen wall and slid to a breathless stop in front of Marvin.

"Martha, please..." shushed Marvin, "How many times will I have to tell you not to shout like that when there are people in the kitchen? If they hear us, they'll bring that awful cat in the house again! Now shhhh..." He motioned for her to be quiet and beckoned for her to follow him as he moved silently along between the walls until they could no longer hear the sounds of Mrs. Harris shuffling about in the kitchen.

"This seems like a safe place," Marvin whispered as he settled into a dusty corner.

"Then why are you whispering?" chided Martha.

"Okay, okay, let's have it... What were you so excited about?" Marvin flicked his long tail and watched the dust rise into the air and drift slowly down again forming new patterns on the floor.

"Ah-ah-choo! Ah-ah-choo! Do you have to play dust designer when I'm around Marvin? You know it makes me sneeze!"

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"Sorry."

"Well, you should be. Oh, oh, the news! Mama's going to have babies again! Isn't it wonderful?" Martha danced excitedly around Marvin, unwittingly creating another dust storm all about herself. "Ah-choo, ah-choo, ah-choo, ah-ah-ah-choooooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha, he, he, he, ha, ha, ha!" Marvin couldn't keep from laughing at her predicament.

"That does it! See if I ever tell you any more surprises!" and Martha stalked angrily back along the wall and disappeared through the hole into the kitchen the same way she had come.

"Eeeeeeeek!! A mouse in the house!" screamed Mrs. Harris.

"Now you've done it," muttered Marvin from his dusty corner behind the wall.

Later that evening, as Mama Mouse was tucking Martha into bed, Martha asked, "Mama, what's it like to have babies?"

"Oh, Martha," crooned Mama, "It's a wonderful, miraculous experience. One day you'll know."

"But you get fat Mama. How can that be so wonderful?"

"Fat, yes," Mama giggled, "but only for a little while. Surely you aren't worried about your girlish figure? Not my Martha who eats 24 hours a day! If you don't worry about all that food making you fat, surely a few little babies won't bother you."

"Well, don't babies cry a lot? I went to visit with Mary Mouse this afternoon and her babies were crying, crying, crying!" said Martha, making little wailing noises to show her mother how they sounded.

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"I suppose they do, most of them anyway. You did for sure! Say, my little chatterbox, why don't you just lie back and close your eyes and mama will tell you a story about one baby who lived a long, long time ago, a human baby, who cried hardly at all."

"Okay Mama," and little Martha snuggled down among the warm covers, closed her eyes and opened her ears and waited for mama to begin.

"Once upon a time..."

"Oh Mama!" Martha's eyes popped open. "It's a make-believe story isn't it?"

"No, it's true."

"But make-believe stories always start with 'Once upon a time'..."

"Oh," Mama conceded, "how about 'Long, long ago'?"

"Okay," and Martha settled back and closed her eyes once more.

"Long, long ago, and far, far away, in a town called Bethlehem, a very special birth took place. It was almost dark when the human couple, Joseph and Mary were their names..."

"Mary?" piped Martha, "Just like my friend Mary?"

"Close your eyes. Yes, just like your friend Mary. And this Mary was going to have a baby very soon; not a lot of babies like we do, but just one baby as humans usually do.

"Riding a donkey, Mary came to Bethlehem, as Joseph walked slowly beside them. They were weary from the long trip and Mary slumped forward weakly on the donkey's back trying to hold on a little longer until Joseph could find a room for them to stay overnight.

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“It was almost dark when they came into Bethlehem that day. Their late arrival was bad luck for these two young humans, for each inn and home they came to was full, no room for two more weary travelers, no beds, not even a corner to sleep in. This was the time of registration and so many people had come, each from his own town of residence, back to the town of his birth, to register for the tax as decreed by Caesar.”

"Caesar?" interrupted Martha.

"Yes, he was the ruler of all those people at that time, and not a very nice man either."

"Oh." Martha wiggled restlessly beneath the covers.

Mama Mouse continued, "When Joseph heard Mary's heavy breathing and little cries, he knew they must have someplace to rest...and now. So, when the last innkeeper mentioned there might be room in his stable, Joseph eagerly agreed and followed the little man to a small musty stable behind the inn where ox and cow, mule and pig, chickens and ducks... and quite a large family of mice resided.

“Joseph thanked the innkeeper and paid him the number of coins he asked, even though it was far too much for such poor accommodations.

“As the innkeeper turned to go, Joseph was already helping Mary down from the donkey. He then spread the donkey's blanket on the straw-covered floor for Mary to lie upon.

“Mary was thankful for a place to rest, even if it was among the animals. The baby would be born very soon and she was in a great deal of pain.”

Little Martha Mouse sat straight up in bed. "Mama, why was she hurting so bad? Does it hurt to have a baby?"

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"Lie down little one and listen," Mama replied. "Yes, it hurts to have a baby, and sometimes the pain can go on for many long hours..."

"That does it! No babies for me, no siree!" Martha wailed.

"Oh, don't be silly child," Mama scolded as she once more pushed Martha back down on the bed and pulled the cover up to her chin. "You'll want to have babies when the time comes because this pain is a glorious ending to weeks of waiting, months for humans, and a glorious beginning for new life. When you see those cute little babies squirming and crying and needing you so much, why child, you won't even remember one little bit of what that pain was like, not one little bit!

"But, Mary was probably thinking just like you right about then, thinking things like...Why am I here?...Why did I agree to this?...Was the angel telling me the truth?...Am I really about to give birth to the Son of God?...Why does it hurt so much?!"

Martha wasn't anywhere near asleep. She grabbed her mother's arm and asked excitedly, "Son of God? Angel? Mama, who was this Mary anyway, a goddess?"

"No, Martha, Mary was just a poor country girl. But one day, many months before, an angel had come to her and told her she had been chosen for a most wonderful task. She was to be the mother of the Savior, the Son of God. And, because Mary loved God and always tried to do what was right, she agreed to be the mother of this very special child."

"Oh, wow," breathed Martha in a long sigh. "She was lucky God picked her!"

"Yes, but for a while Mary didn't feel very lucky because Joseph almost didn't marry her when he found out she was going to have a baby. But God's angel talked to Joseph too and made him understand that Mary was to be honored and she had nothing to be ashamed of."

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"So they got married, right?" Martha asked.

"Yes."

"And Joseph still loved Mary?"

"Yes child, he loved her even more than ever. But you stop interrupting now and let me get on with the story.

"Joseph covered Mary with another blanket taken from their small pack and sat beside her. He rubbed her back and held her hand.

'Joseph,' whispered Mary, 'I need a woman to help me. I've never had a baby before and I'm frightened. Please, Joseph, go to the innkeeper and ask where there might be a woman who can help.' And she clutched his hand real tight and tears ran slowly down her cheeks as the pain began again.

'But I don't want to leave you,' Joseph pleaded. 'What if something happens while I'm gone? What if I can't find anyone?' He was perhaps more frightened than Mary.

'The Lord will watch over me. Now go, please, and hurry!'

Joseph rose to his knees. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes, hurry!' Mary begged.

"Against his own wishes, Joseph left her there in the corner of the little stable among the noisy animals and went out to find help in the crowded, unfamiliar town.

"As Mary waited, she prayed. 'My Lord, you have given me this child to bear within my body and you have cared for us these many months. Please Lord, if this child is truly your son, help us now in the time of our suffering. I am young Lord, and I don't know what to do.'

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“As Mary spoke, somehow, the sounds of the animals in the stable began to change, and instead of whinnies and moos and cackling and squeals, she heard voices...

‘Oh, oh...’ cried Michael Mule, ‘How can we help her? I’m just a stupid mule. I don’t know what to do!’

‘Well, I’m a woman,’ said Catherine Cow, ‘but I’ve never had a baby yet myself so what can I do?’

“Obadiah Ox stomped the floor with his strong hooves and bellowed so that all could hear, ‘Somebody get Marion Mouse out here right now! Right now you hear! If anyone knows about birthing babies, it’s Marion Mouse. Lord knows she must have had a hundred of ?em!’

‘Marion! Marion!’ cackled Henrietta Hen as she ran from corner to corner of the little stable checking each little mouse hole for her friend the mouse.

‘Marion, we need you right now!’

“It wasn’t long before Marion appeared with little Minerva and Minetta, the twins, tagging along at her heels.

‘Such a ruckus! Such a ruckus! How’s a family to eat dinner in peace with all this racket going on out here?!’

‘We need you Marion,’ called Obadiah Ox. ‘This poor young girl is having a baby and there’s no one to help her. We figured you would know everything about that business!’

‘Oh pooh! There’s nothing to it!;’ chuckled Marion. ‘Here girl,’ she cooed as she scampered over the blanket and up to Mary’s shoulder. ‘No more tears now. We’ll get this baby born!’

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“Mary was so surprised at what she heard and saw that she had almost forgotten the pain... ‘A mouse? How can you help me?’ She signed and then screamed aloud as the pain returned, much stronger than before.

‘There, there girl,’ Marion spoke quietly and calmly. ‘First you have to relax. Just let go and ease yourself right out of that pain. Let it wash over you like waves on a beach and it will subside just as quickly as they do.’ Marion then motioned for Minerva and Minetta to join her and, sitting there so close to Mary's ear, she asked them to sing.

‘Sing Mama?!’ they chorused.

‘Yes dears, a nice lullaby like I sing to you at bedtime.’

“And, as the mouse duet softly crooned the lovely lullaby, Marion moved close to Mary's other ear and whispered, ‘Breathe deeply and slowly now. It's not quite time, not quite time.’ And Mary really did feel comforted. She knew the Lord had sent help, just as she had asked.

“And this is how Joseph found them when he came running back into the stable to tell Mary that he couldn't find anyone to help her.

‘Oh no! Shoo! Shoo!’ he shouted, and he reached for his staff to strike out at the mice on Mary's shoulder.

‘No! Joseph, no! These are our friends!’ cried Mary as Marion, Minerva and Minetta ran to hide beneath the folds of her blanket.

‘Friends? These vermin?!’ Joseph couldn't believe his ears.

‘Joseph, I prayed to God for help and he sent these little friends to help until your return. You must thank them, and do so quickly for my time is near and I still need their help.’

‘Thank a bunch of mice?’

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‘Yes, Joseph.’

‘Oh, alright, if it pleases you,’ and he put down the staff and knelt beside her. ‘Thank you mice for whatever help you have given my Mary.’

‘You're very welcome sir,’ squealed Marion, Minerva and Minetta in unison. But Joseph heard only their little mice squeals and not the words that Mary heard, and he could only hold her hand and wipe the sweat from her forehead and wonder at the meaning of all he had seen and heard.

‘You must breathe faster now,’ guided Marion as she spoke knowingly to Mary, ‘and push with your stomach muscles. Again now, push!’ And Mary did as she was told, again and again, until at last blessed relief, and Joseph held the whimpering little boy-child up high so that Mary could see her new son.

‘Jesus, my son and Lord,’ she sighed. ‘Marion, look what a fine son we have. Look what we have done together.’

“As all the animals watched, Mary held her son close in her arms.

‘He smiled at me!’ beamed Coretta Cow.

‘Be quiet!’ chided Marion Mouse ‘Let Mary and the baby get some rest now,’ And she hurried Minerva and Minetta back into the little mouse hole in the corner of the stable. And outside, a heavenly chorus of angels could be heard singing the very same little mouse lullaby to the now sleeping baby that they had sung to Mary just a short time before.’

Mama Mouse finished the story and once more pulled the covers up to Martha's chin. “And that, little one, is why some humans still feel that it's good luck to find a mouse in the house when a new baby is on the way.”

"Will you sing me the mouse lullaby Mama?" Martha mumbled drowsily.

The Miracle of the Eggs

"Yes dear. It goes like this...

Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye, close your eyes.

Gentle angels whisper sweetly in your ear.

Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye, don't you cry.

Let their voices gently soothe away your tears.

Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye, close your eyes.

Close your eyes little friend and have no fear.

Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye, don't you cry.

We're always here to hold you close, my dear."

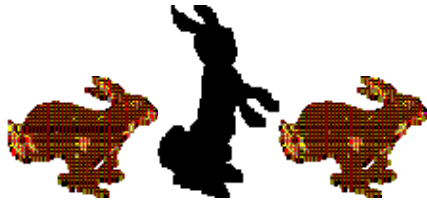
"Good night Mama."

"Good night little one. Pleasant dreams."

Jittery Jackrabbits

By Ruth Y.Nott

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Jerry motioned for the other Jackrabbit children working and playing in the yard to join him. "Come over here," he called as he headed toward the big willow tree, "I know a secret!"

"What is it Jerry?" asked Jarod, the first to follow.

Jill was next, kneeling directly in front of Jerry, holding out her paw to show her big brother the tiny, furry caterpillar she had found on the rose bush. "See Jerry, look how he wiggles!"

Jamie half-heartedly strolled over to the others, dragging her rake behind her.

Jennifer, always the tomboy of the group, somersaulted across the yard. "So, we're all here, what's the big secret?"

"Okay, okay," Jerry began, "I was just upstairs and heard Mama say something VERY special. Mama told Daddy we're going to be adding some new members to our family!"

The Miracle of the Eggs

"Oh!" Jamie cheered, clapping her paws together. "Are Uncle Jimmie and Aunt Jane coming to visit again? They were so much fun and they brought lots of nice presents!"

"No," said Jerry.

"No?" Jamie pouted.

"No," Jerry grinned, "Mama meant babies! We're gonna have new little brothers and sisters...and soon!"

"There won't be enough carrots to go around!" moaned chubby Jarod.

"We're going to be even more crowded!" complained Jill.

"Ooooooh, babies!" cooed Jamie, rocking an imaginary infant in her arms.

"Cry, cry, cry! All they'll ever do is cry!" grumbled Jennifer.

"That's right," Jerry spoke up. "You're all right. There will be lots of problems. That's why we need to do everything we can to help out so things won't be so hard for Mama and Daddy."

"But..."

"No buts," Jerry said firmly. "This is what we'll do. Jamie, you should be extra careful with your gardening and make sure we have lots of nice fresh lettuce leaves and tender young carrots when the babies arrive. Jill, Mama taught you how to crochet...You get busy and whip up some booties and caps for six to eight new arrivals. (Jackrabbits always have large families.) Jennifer, you're to think real hard and come up with a list of names for the babies. Jarod, you come with me. We're going to get a job and earn some extra money!"

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## The Miracle of the Eggs

Soon the excitement of Jerry's ideas caught on and all the little jackrabbits were scurrying off to begin their tasks.

Jerry and Jarod hurried down Main Street to Betty Bunny's Bakery where they had seen a sign in the window. Yep, it was still there. The sign read "DELIVERY BOYS WANTED". Rushing inside, Jerry boldly stated, "Mrs. Bunny, we'd like to be delivery boys and work for you."

Betty Bunny's glasses had slipped down her nose and she peered over them into the expectant faces of Jerry and Jarod. "Jackrabbits, eh? Never gave much thought to hiring jittery Jackrabbits. I wanted Bunny boys," and she turned back to where she had been arranging blueberry muffins on the counter top.

"Please Mrs. Bunny, we can do a good job," Jarod pleaded. "We need the money and you can use the help."

"Guess you're right there young man," she answered, still frowning. "I don't know though... Oh, alright, we'll try you out. Pay is 50 cents for each order you deliver... and it **MUST** be delivered whole and unharmed in any way. Do you understand? Anything you drop, or spill, or **EAT** will be deducted from your pay!"

Both boys shook their heads vigorously indicating they understood. They followed her into the big kitchen where shelf after shelf was filled with pies of all flavors, all fresh from the oven that very morning.

Each boy lifted one box from the shelf, read the address on it's tag and ran out the back door of the bakery. Mrs. Bunny threw up her arms in frustration... "I knew it! I knew I shouldn't have hired those jittery Jackrabbits! Look at them run! Not a one of those pies will be safe in their hands! I know it! I just know it!"

Outside the back door of the bakery, the two Bunny children whispered in agreement. "Mother's right you know... Jackrabbits never take a safe step when they can take a giant leap instead!"

## The Miracle of the Eggs

Millie Mockingbird, up on a branch just outside the kitchen window, chirped repeatedly, "Look at ?em run! Look at ?em run!"

But they were all wrong as Jerry and Jarod proved. Between the two boys, 20 pies were safely delivered that afternoon and Mrs. Bunny handed over \$5.00 to each boy saying, "You really surprised me today! You did a great job. Will you be back tomorrow?"

"You bet!" they echoed.

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Three days later, when Joy Jackrabbit called her five youngsters into the bedroom to introduce them to their seven new brothers and sisters, they were ready.

Jamie held out her basket of nice tender vegetables.

Jill offered eight sets of booties and caps in all shades of pink and blue.

Jennifer handed her mother a long list of names as, giggling, she and Jill both spoke at the same time... "We didn't know how many you needed Mama!"

Their mother smiled and hugged each one. She dressed each new little Jackrabbit baby in warm booties and cap and, reading down the list of names, she introduced them to the family. "Here's Jeremy, and Justine, and Joseph, and John, and Jane, and June, and Jim. Then she turned her gaze toward Jerry and Jarod. "I haven't seen much of you two lately," she noted.

Jerry and Jarod sat down, one on each side of the bed. "We have a surprise for you too Mama," Jerry began.

"We got a job delivering pies for Betty Bunny's Bakery and we were so careful and we didn't drop a one, not a one, and she didn't think we could do it but we did and we worked every day and we got paid 50 cents a pie and..."

The Miracle of the Eggs

Jarod exploded in a torrent of excitement... "...here's the money!" Each boy pulled ten one dollar bills from his pocket and laid them on the covers for her to see.

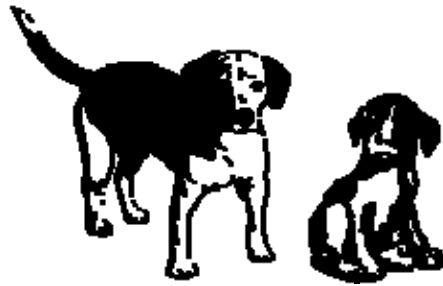
"What a FINE family we have!" exclaimed Joy Jackrabbit, her eyes filling with tears.

Father gave her a loving hug and patted the boys on the back. "Yes we do," he replied proudly. "YES WE DO!"

This has been another bunny tale by Ruth Y. Nott

Going Home

By Ruth Y. Nott



Two miles, three miles...how far had he run? Jason didn't know, didn't want to know, didn't care. His breathing was hard and uneven. Sweat had turned his once shining brown, black and white coat to a dirty, dripping mess. He wanted to keep on running and running, as far away from home and reality and memory as he could go.

Slowly, however, without his realizing it, his body was taking control, forcing his pace to slow until, exhausted, he dropped at the side of the road, his chest heaving. His eyes were wild and red. His muscles twitched uncontrollably. It seemed an eternity before he could regain enough strength to crawl weakly into the thicket in anticipation of nightfall and the dangers it held.

This night, though, held no danger for Jason beyond the fitful dreams which again and again plagued his troubled mind. He awoke frightened and shivering when morning's first light made its way through the leaves overhead, gently nudging him back to meet another day.

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## The Miracle of the Eggs

Lady lifted her head and sniffed the air. The odors of early morning were drifting gently on the breeze, bacon frying, coffee brewing, breakfast was underway in the house above. She sniffed the ground beside her, but Jason's scent was a day old. He had not come home to join her in their sleeping place beneath the old porch. He had been gone much too long and she was worried.

Rising slowly and stretching muscles not quite ready for waking, Lady padded across the lawn to the corner of the rail fence to get a better view of the road. Jason was nowhere in sight. Sitting back on her haunches and easing slightly to the right, she prepared for a long vigil. She tried hard not to imagine that he would not return...he must! To lose them both within 24 hours would be beyond her endurance. She would wait and he would return. She would not allow herself to believe otherwise. And while she waited, she remembered...

There, just 300 feet or so down the rutted dirt road, was the place they had first seen Blue Babe (or Granny Blue as Jason so fondly called her). She had been trudging through the rain, head down, barely able to put one foot in front of another. Then, seeing the old house off to her left seemed to induce a small ray of hope. She turned and headed slowly in that direction, and she held her head just a tiny bit higher despite the pelting rain.

Jason was only six months old then. He was a frisky, playful pup who loved to play in the rain, running back and forth and round about. He seemed to be playing tag with the raindrops. It was one of these jack-rabbit passes in and out among the roses and across the yard, ever so close to a direct collision with the rail fence, that he spied Blue Babe. He tumbled to a halt and watched her make her way purposefully toward the open gate. Doing a clumsily acrobatic about-face, ran helter-skelter beneath the porch to cower at Lady's shoulder.

"Mama! Who's that?!" He yapped excitedly.

"I don't know Jason, but she looks like she's traveled a long way."

## The Miracle of the Eggs

By the time Blue Babe stood before them, peering into the shadows beneath the porch, her eyes were only half seeing the haven it offered. "Beg pardon Ma'am," she rasped, "Have you room for a tired old traveler to rest?"

"Of course we do my dear," Lady replied. She spoke with a softness to her voice which Jason recognized, but he could not understand its use in connection with this bedraggled, drenched, and obviously confused stranger.

"Jason, show our guest that nice warm spot in the back where the warmth from the kitchen can be felt," Lady directed.

Blue Babe hesitantly followed the obedient pup to what was indeed a fine resting place. It was warm and dry and there she lay down. She rested her chin on her two front paws and wearily closed her eyes.

"Pssst!" Lady whispered. "Jason! Don't stare! It's not polite. Come back here now and leave her alone."

Jason hadn't realized he was staring. He was just overwhelmed by this visitor to their neighborhood. She had been such a surprise, and was such a mess, and looked so sad. He didn't understand the ease with which his mother had accepted her. He wasn't at all sure he approved. They didn't get many visitors here in Breslow County. Farm country created great distances between homes and his mother never let him roam far enough to meet much more than rabbits, opossums, birds and squirrels. And all of those could be found quite close by. As a matter of fact, this was the only other dog he had seen besides his brother and sister. He sure missed them since they had gone to live at George Grayson's place four miles south nearly four months ago.

Reluctantly, Jason lowered his gaze and turned to question his mother. "Ma, who is she? Do we know her? Where's she going? What is she doing here? How long is she staying? Will she be here at suppertime? How old do you think she is?" So fast came Jason's questions that Lady couldn't find any place between to answer even one of them.

## The Miracle of the Eggs

Looking back on it all now, as she kept her vigil by the fence, Lady realized it could not have ended any other way. Although Jason was a little shy at first around this stranger, he soon was nuzzling under her neck, showing her all his puppy antics, and listening intently when she spoke to them of her long, eventful life. He came to love his "Granny Blue" in those few months she was with them. And Blue Babe gloried in his playful attentiveness. She relaxed, smiled more, and her appetite increased for a while. They were good for each other.

Jason and Blue Babe often went for long walks together on the farm. They wandered down the winding dirt road and occasionally Lady tagged along. She also liked to listen to Blue Babe's stories. They were exciting tales of days gone by and how she came to this place and into their lives.

Blue Babe had been well known in these parts some 18 years ago, a champion beagle, born and bred on the Draper farm on the western edge of Breslow County. That was another 25 miles from where Lady and Jason lived. She had lived with the Drapers for 12 years and had favored them with many more champion pups than any of their other breeding beagles. She was happy there. Then, young Bobby, her favorite of all the Draper boys (and there were eight in all), took her to live with him and his new wife. They lived 300 miles away in North Cambridge County.

Blue Babe told Jason and lady how she had loved it with Bobby and Vivian at first. Then, as the years passed, Bobby's children were born and grew to take more and more of her master's attention. She was left alone in her pen most of the time. Time which was spent wishing she was back home on the old Draper farm.

Of course Bobby's children had loved her, but she was not used to their hyperactive, boisterous and sometimes thoughtlessly painful attempts at playing with her. What they needed, and received, was a younger, more energetic companion. Fritz, the German shepherd pup their father chose for them, was just that. He had more energy than she could ever remember having. She missed their attention, but she was more hurt that young Fritz virtually ignored

## The Miracle of the Eggs

all her attempts to become friends. So, Babe kept more and more to herself and spent long hours dreaming of those days back in Breslow County...of her youth...of her children. And one day the longing to return home became more than she could bear. She slipped unnoticed into the front yard, then into the street, then down the block... and on towards home.

One steamy summer day, the heat seemed almost overpowering. Even breathing was difficult. The three new friends, Lady, Jason and Granny Blue, lay panting beneath the great harvesting machine on the edge of the field. It was then that Granny Blue began the story of her journey home and Jason listened intently.

"I knew it would be a long, hard trip," she whispered. It was even too hot that day to expend much energy talking. "But, I guess I didn't realize just how long or how hard. I wasn't prepared," she mused.

"It was early November when I began. The days were cool, just right for traveling. It was hard to find any good place to rest at night, or any friendly home where I could beg a meal. Lots of times I went without eating or had to scratch through people's garbage to find a bite or two worth eating. And sometimes my judgment wasn't so good, and the few bites I did get made me very, very sick.

"All too soon, November faded, day by day, into December. Snow began to fall. Even though my feet were callused from long days of walking, it was hard to take the cold. I had to find shelter for several weeks."

"But where Granny Blue?" Jason asked attentively. "Where did you stay?"

"Luckily for me, I met the nicest lady right about then. Late one snowy night, I had crawled beneath the back steps of a house on Chestnut St. in Bakersville. It was so cold and I was really hungry. I couldn't help but whimper. I was curled up so tightly hoping to ward off the cold, but it didn't help much. I hadn't been there but a few minutes when the door opened and a

## The Miracle of the Eggs

gray haired old woman peered out and slowly made her way down the steps, almost tripping on her long chenille robe. She pulled it closer around her as she knelt and reached out a hand to touch my head."

"Ah, you poor thing," she murmured. "You're just like me, cold and alone. Come on now," she said as she tried feebly to pull me from under the steps, "Come inside with Susie and warm your bones. Maybe there's some leftovers from supper."

At that point, Blue Babe stretched and yawned, the heat causing a drowsiness which she could no longer resist. She lay her head down between her paws and slept.

"Granny..." Jason moved closer and peered into her face.

"Mmmm?" she roused.

"What happened then?"

"Later boy...later." And her eyes closed again.

"Let her rest Jason" Lady whispered. "This heat is hard for her to bear. It's her age you know. We may not have her with us much longer."

"Will she continue on her journey then?" Jason asked.

"One journey or another, Jason. One journey or another." Then Lady also placed her chin on her paws and closed her eyes.

Jason couldn't sleep. He kept wondering what his mother had meant. Where else could Granny Blue be going?

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The Miracle of the Eggs

Several weeks passed in Breslow County with little relief from the summer heat. Jason continued to spend most of his time at Granny Blue's side, but their long walks were reduced to leisurely strolls along the fence line near the house. Granny Blue's strength seemed to be lessening day by day. More often now, Jason had to be her eyes and lead her home as her vision dimmed. Granny found herself stumbling where once her pace was steady and sure.

One morning Granny Blue failed to meet Lady and Jason at the back door when Mrs. Gardner put out the breakfast leftovers in the old aluminum pie tin.

"Don't eat too much Jason," scolded Lady as the growing pup hungrily wolfed down the bits of bacon and scrambled eggs. "We'll leave what's left for Granny Blue."

Lady and Jason then made their way back under the porch to the corner Granny Blue had made her own, each taking turns dragging the tin plate of scraps.

"Mama! Look! She's not here!" Jason yelped excitedly. "Granny?!" He called, "G-R- A-N-N-Y!" But there was no answering yelp or whine, only silence.

"Mama, where can she be?" Jason asked anxiously.

"I don't know Jason," Lady answered. "We'd better look around. You look out front and I'll check behind the barn. She hasn't been feeling well lately. She may have wandered off and become confused."

Jason ran from beneath the porch calling all the way. "Granny! Granny!" and was back at Lady's side almost before she reached the barn.

"Mama, she's gone! Granny's gone!" he cried.

"I know Jason, but we'll find her. Come on, help me look," she said, trying to calm him down.

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But Jason would not be calmed.

"No, Mama! You come with me... footprints... Granny's footprints... headed out the gate... down the road!" he gasped breathlessly and ran back toward the road with Lady trying to keep up.

"Jason, wait! You're too fast for me! No wonder Granny tired so easily. Slow down!"

"Look, Mama...that way..." and he ran to the west, following the trail Granny Blue had left in the dust. Jason trotted on, head down, oblivious to Lady panting along behind.

It was just this head down, searching posture which prevented Jason from seeing the tragedy which Lady saw as she loped along scanning the road far ahead. She saw Blue Babe making her way down the road, apparently unaware of the oncoming pickup truck, her mind probably wandering, again, into the days of her youth.

"Granny!" Lady called, but too late.

Lady's shout and the thud of the impact brought Jason to a halt, unable to believe his eyes as the truck sped on down the road, never stopping. His hesitation gave Lady just a little head start. But, after regaining his senses, he set out for Granny at such a pace that he still beat Lady to her side by a second or two.

"Granny!" he shouted, then whispered tearfully, "Granny?" He began to lick her bloodied face and push his nose into her warm neck, but she didn't move, and didn't answer him.

Lady gazed on Granny's broken form and knew it was no use. "Jason, Jason..." she coaxed..."Let her rest son. Granny's gone Jason. We can't help her now."

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"Gone? Gone where? She's hurt Mama! Help me, Mama!" and Jason circled, around and around, nudging, prodding, trying to get Granny to move... to answer.

Finally, Lady could stand it no longer. "Stop it Jason!" she shouted. "Stop it! She's dead." She caught Jason by the neck and dragged him away to the edge of the road.

Jason was confused and didn't know why Lady was pulling him away. He backed away and looked sadly into her eyes. "Dead? What does that mean?"

Lady thought hard. What could she tell him now that would make him feel any better? "Jason, I...well...her body is no longer alive. It's of no use to her now. She can't walk or talk or open her eyes. But her spirit, Jason, that part of her..."

He didn't let her finish. "Can't walk...or talk...spirit...I don't understand," Jason interrupted in a wail. "Mama, I don't understand!" Crying and frightened, Jason turned and ran...not knowing where... just wanting to escape the pain and confusion and sadness which surrounded him. He ran...and ran... and ran...

Lady watched him go, but couldn't stop him. "Jason!" she cried, but he didn't turn back. Lady remembered her first encounter with death. It wasn't like this. It had been easier. She had been prepared. Now she wondered why she hadn't talked to Jason about it before. She knew Blue Babe was ill. She knew how close Jason was to his Granny Blue. But even she had not been prepared for this. Lady slowly lay down beside the still form and began a lonely vigil.

Later that afternoon, Mr. Gardner saw them there as he made his way down the road on his way to town. He pulled his old Buick to the side of the road. He lifted Blue Babe in his arms, placed her in the trunk. He tried to get Lady to ride back in the car, but she shied away.

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Lady had never liked cars. She walked slowly back on her own and found the Buick parked out by the barn. Mr. Gardner was straining with a shovel, digging a final resting place for Blue Babe. Lady lay down at his feet and watched and prayed that Jason would come home safely.

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Jason didn't sleep much that night. When morning came, his muzzle was still wet with his salty tears, but he breathed a little easier. He was so sad, but he knew that Lady would be worried about him and that he didn't want to stay out here much longer. He was lonely and he had so many questions to ask. And his puppy stomach was telling him it was breakfast time.

He got up, slowly stretching muscles sore from yesterday's long, wild run. He sniffed the morning air to get his bearings and then turned and headed home.

As Lady watched, a familiar shape emerged around the bend in the road. It was Jason. She was sure of it. It had to be Jason, but she waited, her tail wagging slowly at first, then more and more quickly as she saw him more closely. When she could wait no longer, she jumped up and ran from her spot near the rail fence and met him before he entered the yard. She licked his ears, nuzzled his neck and yipped her greeting so loudly that Mr. Gardner pushed open the old screen door to see what was going on. Smiling and nodding in their direction, he closed the door and went back inside.

Snuggling together in the warm spot beneath the kitchen, Jason finally began the questions which he didn't really want to ask. "Mama, what is death? What is this spirit you talked about? Why is Granny gone? Where is she now?"

"Jason, how can I explain a spirit? A spirit is that part of each of us which thinks and feels and loves.

## The Miracle of the Eggs

"Not long ago, when your body was still being formed inside of mine, long before your birth, God took your spirit from its home in Heaven and lovingly placed it inside your body so that you could experience life on earth. But our bodies don't last forever Jason. They get old like Granny did, and they get sick like Granny was, and then they just quit working. It's really sad that Granny was hit by the truck, but it only brought her death a little sooner. It would not have been long before her old body stopped working all by itself. And when that happens, Jason, whether naturally or by some terrible accident, then God takes your spirit back from that useless body.

"Your spirit never dies Sweetheart. God takes you home again to live in Heaven again with Him. That's where Granny is now Jason. She's gone home... not the home on the Draper farm in Breslow County where her memories were taking her, but her permanent home in Heaven. She's happy there. She has no more pain and there's lots of friends and relatives to talk to and tell all about her life here. And, Jason, it will be the same for us when it's our turn to go back home with God."

"Granny likes it there mama?" Jason asked timidly.

"You bet she does! And she'll be waiting for you there one day too. The two of you can run and play and she'll never get tired. You'll see Jason. You'll see."

"Will she Mama? But I miss her so much right now!" Jason whimpered.

"It's okay Jason. Go ahead and cry. You do miss her now, and you'll miss her tomorrow. But tomorrow will be a little easier and the day after that a little easier. We never really stop missing someone whom we loved so much... and we never forget them either. We just have to try to think of how happy they are now and remember that we'll be seeing them again one day. God loves us Jason, and He won't let us go on being sad forever." Lady snuggled up beside him then and licked his tears away with a big sloppy kiss.

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The Miracle of the Eggs

And in the years that came after that, Jason remembered everything that his mother had told him and found that she was right. Happiness did come again into his life, and sadness too each time he remembered his Granny Blue. But, he would smile and say to himself... "She waiting for me," ...and a nice warm feeling would always fill his heart with joy.

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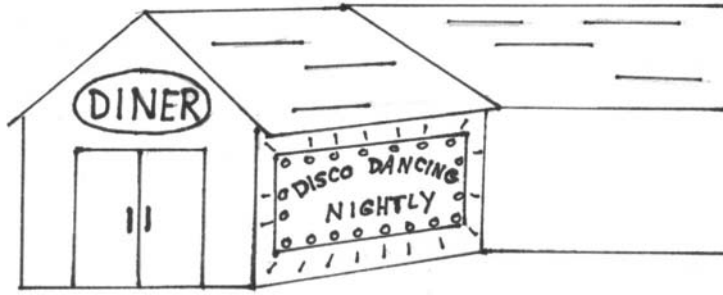
Elmwood

By Ruth Y. Nott



Elmwood, population 5,962, just a dot on any trucker's map, but every trucker knew it was "the friendliest place this side of the Mississippi." Even though you had to follow Rt. 50 right through the middle of town and almost always got caught by all three traffic lights, somehow you never considered it a nuisance. Folks walking by would give you a great big grin, wave, and holler up "Hello!" Somehow, you just couldn't resist smiling back and returning their friendliness. At least that's the way Harold Morgan felt about Elmwood and he had been trucking through these parts for ten years or more. He knew a good many of the folks by name and felt concern for some of their woes and problems. Why town gossip was the favorite, and sometimes only, topic around the bar and pool tables at the Half Moon Diner where he now pulled his rig into an overnigher's parking slot. Climbing wearily down to ground level, he headed for the front of the building.

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Rounding the corner, his gaze was drawn to a new sign posted on the window..."Disco Dancers Nightly". Racing lights chased each other, around and around the neon letters. "Ain't nobody gonna miss that announcement!" Harold mused to himself.

Opening the faded green door, he was greeted by the usual "Hello! Come on in, coffee's hot!"

"Hi Mary!" Harold shouted back and a broad grin accentuated the wrinkles age had already etched upon his rugged countenance. "What's this about disco dancers? When did this place start to rockin'?" Harold parked his gargantuan frame on one of the stools at the counter and accepted the brimming cup of black coffee already waiting for him there.

"Where have you been?" Mary set the cream pitcher in front of him and continued. "Oh yeah, the boss decided we had to keep up with the times. Bessie's been movin' and groovin' up on that there stage for a couple o' weeks now. Heck, Harold, you just missed her last performance for tonight though." Mary winked and laughed.... well, guffawed would have been more accurate. "Yes siree, the whole place rocks when Bessie comes on!"

Just then, a scream pierced the air and brought instant silence to the raucous crowd. "Oh man! What's was that?!" Mary shouted and ran toward the back of the diner where a makeshift dressing room had been set up for the dancer. Before she could reach the entrance, Bessie burst through the curtained

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doorway, bathrobe hastily thrown on over her costume, her all too abundant curves not quite concealed as she tugged and jerked the little man she held in her clutches into the main room.

"Here!" she rasped as she shoved Victor angrily toward the astonished group." Take this vermin and keep him away from me! Some plumber he is! He's been back here six times to fix the leak in my dressing room sink and it still squirts water in my face every time I turn on the faucet. NOT to mention the fact he can't keep his beady little eyes off every move I make!"

Victor stumbled and couldn't regain his footing.

"And," Bessie blustered, "how come he only comes to work on the pipes when I'm trying to change clothes?!"

Harold sidestepped Victor's form as he landed in a heap on the floor between the tables and heard the crunch of glass as Victor's bifocals skidded across the floor beneath the feet of the curious onlookers. Red-faced and bruised, Victor picked himself up, quietly apologized to Mary and slipped quickly out the door.

Huffing and puffing, Bessie jiggled her ample curves back toward the dressing room and the diner once more returned to its usual din of loud conversation, high-pitched laughter and blaring music.

"What a night!" Harold observed as he took his seat again at the counter and raised the still steaming cup of coffee to his lips. "Have things been this lively every night since you went disco?"

"Well...no," Mary replied, "Only other thing of any account was the rats across the way in the trailer park." She leaned close across the counter, her garlic breath just inches from his ear, "Why folks are startin' to worry about those critters. Giant pack rats they call 'em. They say they like to collect things, but they always leave something behind to replace whatever they steal."

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She leaned on her elbow and wiped the counter top in small circular motions as she continued. "Ain't that weird though? Heck, Harold, if you'd believe the tales spreadin' around here, those rats are as big as raccoons!"

Harold's eyes grew large and he drew back, as much to escape Mary's garlic breath as to appear incredulous of what she was saying. "You don't say!"

"Yes I do! Some people say they're feeding off the leftovers from the mortuary and startin' to get a real taste for human blood. I heard the sheriff trapped a couple of 'em and has 'em caged up downtown. I haven't been by to get a look at 'em yet, but just about everybody else has!" Mary winked and couldn't keep a straight face as she saw the doubt in his eyes.

"You're puttin' me on again!" Harold stood, tossed two wrinkled dollar bills onto the counter and shook his finger playfully in Mary's face. "You always did think I was a gullible old fool didn't you?" Pulling a ten from his wallet, he slapped that down on top of the other bills. "Here's for the parkin' spot. I'm gonna go take a snooze for a few hours."

"No problem big fella. See ya in the mornin'!" Mary cocked her head to one side and muttered under her breath, "Hmmm... I don't think he feels real great... didn't even finish his coffee."

Harold headed toward the men's room where he quickly washed his face and hands. Making a mental note to return it in the morning, he took a glass someone had left on the sink, rinsed it out, filled it with water, and walked out to his rig.

He appreciated the hospitality afforded him by Mary and Ron, the owners of the diner, and had often spent the night curled in the sleeper of his cab while parked at the rear of the diner. The large open field gave him plenty of room to maneuver his truck and the diner closed at midnight leaving the area quiet and peaceful, with the exception of an occasional baby crying or some domestic

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altercation going on over at the trailer park across the field. All the truckers agreed and there was seldom an empty slot, especially on the weekends when Mary personally cooked breakfast for any of 'em still there around 6:00 a.m.

Making preparations for the night, Harold removed his false teeth, placed them into the glass of water, and set it on the dash of the truck. He placed his jacket on the seat and rolled down the passenger window, letting in the cool late night breeze. With increasing effort these days, he pushed his rotund form into the sleeper. He was tired and sore from a long day on the road and quickly slept, although fitfully, tossing and turning within his narrow lodgings, his dreams racing alternately between Bessie's curves and the sight of angry red rodent eyes staring hungrily into his own. Several times he almost forced himself awake, sure he had felt a furry form brush his leg or sharp claws upon his body.

It was, however, the delicious smell of bacon frying which finally opened his eyes to the morning's light. Half awake, he fumbled for a fresh set of clothes from his bag and slid down into the seat. The air was damp and the chill from the open window sent a shiver of goose bumps down his hairy arms. Harold felt for his jacket on the seat where he had left it.

It wasn't there. Instead, his fingers gripped twisted metal and shattered glass. A drop of blood appeared on his thumb and ran down towards his wrist. "Victor's glasses! How...?" Harold's silent question was interrupted by his continued glance around the cab. Within the glass of water where he had placed his false teeth, there floated a human eyeball staring blankly through the bloodstained liquid, and bits of gray, furry hair clung to his trousers.

Mary heard the roar of the truck as it careened out of the parking lot and wondered why Harold hadn't stopped in for his usual breakfast. As a matter of fact, neither Harold nor several of his friends were ever seen there again. "Those truckers sure are a fickle bunch," Mary told Bessie later, "although I don't know how they could've found any friendlier place than Elmwood to spend the night!"

About the Author



Ruth Y. Nott is a native Floridian living now in North Central Florida with her husband, Merle, and Boston Terrier, Pepper. Ruth has been writing poetry since elementary school, but setting pen to paper became therapy for a troubled soul after the loss of a son to Werdnig-Hoffman's disease and learning her daughter would also be handicapped by infantile spinal muscular atrophy. This short children's story is one of several she wrote sometime during the 1980's and the illustrations were done by James Melton, a friend and then incarcerated "pen-pal", who is now deceased.

Ruth's poetry which can be found on her website <http://www.creativewordspoeetry.com>, flows easily from page to page in a lyrical, rhyming, river of verse, her words drifting along through her thoughts and her life, reverently, gently, and in her own unique style.

Ruth's first book of inspirational poetry, "A Pure and Simple Faith", can be purchased on her personal web site <http://www.ruthnott.com> along with her other books, "Crazy Patch", "Haiku for Lovers", and "Family Matters" an eclectic anthology of family creativity by Ruth, her children, other relatives, and friends.