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Billy's Trip in the Coach

Mary Graham Bonner

Billy had been looking at the picture over the fireplace for as long as he could remember.

It was a wonderful picture. A great stage coach with a coachman in red, eight white horses with red plumes in their harnesses, and two footmen who had been climbing up the side of the coach for years without ever reaching the top.

Sitting by the fire one evening, toasting his feet before bed, Billy began to feel sorry for them. The horses must want a good gallop. The little coachman must want a trip. And those footmen — surely they were tired of reaching for a handhold they never quite managed.



Then, quite suddenly, the coachman waved his arms. The footmen jumped — actually jumped — and landed on the roof. The horses tossed their plumes.

A little gnome climbed down from the coach and offered Billy a hand.

Off they went at a dashing, reckless speed, around cliffs and over roads so narrow Billy held his breath. Finally they reached the most extraordinary cliff — sheer and steep and apparently impassable.

"Well," said the coachman cheerfully, "here we are all dashed to pieces, unless the Tipping Bird arrives in time."

"I do hope it arrives," said Billy.

"Don't worry," said one of the fairies — the Fairy Queen and all her court were also passengers, which Billy only now noticed. "The Tipping Bird always comes when the Queen waves her wand."

A tremendous black bird came sweeping over the cliff-edge — the largest bird Billy had ever imagined. Everyone left the coach and found a comfortable place among its feathers, and the bird lifted them all gently over the cliff and down into a valley of extraordinary softness.

"Where are we going now?" Billy asked.

"You must sleep in your good soft bed," said his mother, who was tucking him in. She had carried him there from the armchair, still asleep, while he was deep in his dream of the Tipping Bird and the valley of feathers.

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