

# This and That

John Graham

The Copper Press

Hoogstraten, Belgium

© John Graham, 2010

For Jil and Pam

## Contents

The Cabbage Leaf .....	4
The Lion who couldn't roar .....	7
Just Little Birds .....	10
The Comfortable Cat .....	15
The Cat who sat on an Egg .....	18
In the Rain .....	22
Just Yellow .....	26

## The Cabbage Leaf

There was a Mummy who had two little girls, Pam and Jil. But they were quite poor and one evening they had no food in the house for dinner before going to bed.

Pam and Jil felt even hungrier knowing that there was no food so Mummy decided to look everywhere again in case she had missed something. She looked all through the cupboards and drawers in the kitchen but there was nothing there, not even a forgotten crust.

So they all went into the village but the shops were closed. Mummy had a few coins to buy some bread but the bread shop was closed too. There was nothing there for them.

As they went back towards their cottage, they searched the hedges for berries that they could eat but it was late and all the berries had been picked or the birds had eaten them. There was nothing left. Pam and Jil got even hungrier.

When they came to a farm down the lane, a duck looked at them through the bars of the gate. "Quack," she asked, "Why are you all so sad? Can I help? Quack."

Pam explained that they had no food and would have to go to bed hungry.

"Oh, No!" said the Duck, wagging her tail, "I'll lay an egg for you. Quack-quack."

And she did. It was a beautiful big blue-green egg and it was still warm when Pam picked it up. She snuggled it in her hands and didn't feel so hungry at all.

But Mummy and Jil were still sad. They knew that one egg wouldn't go very far between the three of them that night.

Then a chicken, which had been watching them all, asked, "Cluck-cluck, why are you still so sad? Cluck-cluck-cluck." So Jil explained that the egg, even though it was so big and so beautiful, wouldn't go far.

"Cl-u-u-ck," said the chicken ruffling her feathers, "Don't worry, Ducks aren't the only ones who can lay eggs. I'll lay an egg for you. Cl-u-u-uck"

And so she did, ruffling her feathers some more and bobbing her head up and down. After just a few moments a big beautiful white egg rolled out from beneath her and it was still warm when Jil picked it up.

She snuggled it in her hands, just like Pam had done, and she too felt less hungry already.

Mummy smiled and said, "Thank you both so much. The girls will have a lovely meal of eggs and a glass of water before they go to bed."

"Moooooo!" said the cow who had been standing by, "Water! What a terrible idea. I'll give you some milk. All we need is something to put it in."

So they all looked around but there was nothing in sight in the farmyard, not even a rusty can.

Then Mummy saw some cabbages in the field next to the farmyard, and going there she was able to pick off the largest outside leaf of a very large cabbage. "Thanks to you, Cabbage, we now have a bowl."

The cabbage shook a little and Mummy even thought that she might have heard a tiny voice say, "You're welcome."

So the cow put some milk in the cabbage-leaf bowl and Mummy thanked everyone and she and Pam and Jil went home carrying the milk and eggs. They had a wonderful meal of eggs and cabbage with a nice glass of milk each to finish things off. They all slept soundly with full tummies that night.

## The Lion who couldn't roar

A Lion, named Thomas, lived in a thick forest and he was a very sad lion. All the others made fun of him because he couldn't roar.

He was the youngest lion in the jungle but when he tried to roar, even when he was very angry, he could only make a faint meow that even a cat would have been ashamed of. It was so bad that he even stopped trying to roar like a regular lion. His mother thought that he was sick.

One day, he was wandering along trying to snarl convincingly at the smaller animals in the forest and chasing the mice that he came across. All the time, he could imagine them chuckling away at him.

So he tried a small roar, "Meow," he said, "Meow."

And he sat down terribly disappointed and put his head on his paws.

But there, immediately in front of his nose a gopher appeared. At least he thought it was a gopher because he had never seen one before, but this animal was certainly a lot larger than a mouse.

He picked his head up quickly and wondered if the gopher were dangerous. He should frighten it away, so he instinctively roared at the gopher. "Meow," he said, "Meow."

The gopher had great difficulty in not laughing, but he said, "I've heard of your problem and how all the older lions laugh at you. "I'm not laughing. I think you could be pretty fierce."

"But I can't roar," said Thomas, "no matter how hard I try and how angry I get. My mother thinks I'm ill, and my father thinks I'm something the cat dragged in."

"Oh, don't worry," said the gopher, who was actually called Sidney. "I have a solution for you."

Thomas picked up his ears. He would be very interested in a solution. "What is it?" he asked.

"Well," said Sidney, "just a little way down this trail there is a little stream. It bubbles along through the undergrowth, winding its way between the stones and washing into the banks. It bubbles and chuckles along."

Then looking quizzically at Thomas, he said, "I think you should follow the stream down where it goes."

Thomas said, "Thank you very much. I will." He purred a little at Sidney who turned and wagged his tail as he ran off.

So Thomas carried on and soon came across the stream, happily gurgling along, and he turned to follow it. He hadn't anything else to do and he rather liked the stream as a companion.

As they went along, the stream got faster and splished and splashed along in the sun, turning over the pebbles on its bed and washing through the overhanging branches. Thomas even thought he could hear the stream saying something but he couldn't quite catch what it was because the sound was low.

In the afternoon, Thomas continued along with his new friend and the stream gathered water from tinier streams and it got larger and it sometimes turned over larger stones and rumbled between the banks. Now the stream had a voice.

As they went down the hill, the stream got larger and louder all the time. The water was splashing over rocks and turning all but the biggest ones over so that Thomas could hear rocks rolling along with the rush of water. It was difficult to hear anything but the water. It now had become a fully-fledged river.

Then the land fell away and the stream went over the edge of the waterfall with a large roar.

And Thomas understood. All he had to do was to grow like the stream had grown and he would be able to roar too.

He turned and ran back to his mother and father in the den. He tried a roar or two as he ran and he was sure that it was already much louder.

## Just Little Birds

The mouse lived in a hole in the garden, not in the house. He was a field mouse. He was not a vole and he was always clear about that. He was not a fat vole, he told other animals, he was a long-tailed field mouse and proud of it.

Mathew's home had an entrance under the hedge at the edge of the lawn. The tunnel led deep underground to a room among the roots of the old oak at the bottom of the garden. His father had dug the tunnel and he had been born there a long time ago ... almost a year ago now.

The garden was a nice place to live because the house had no cat and the garden had lots of fruit bushes and even, at one end, a nut tree. He could always find things to eat and he had a good store in his room under the oak. He drank dew in the morning from the leaves and wanted for nothing.

Also, all the animals in the garden were friends. Mathew always said good morning to the thrush that arrived to search the lawn so early in the day that it was still wet with dew.

One day, when he was out searching for insects under the strawberry plants and fruit along the fence where the vines grew, he was surprised to hear a ruckus ... a real noise from the house.

Then the backdoor burst open and a human jumped out and ran across the lawn shouting and chasing a ball. It was terrifying.

Mathew cowered under the leaf of a big back-eyed daisy and he saw that the human hadn't seen him. He was just very noisy and running hard after the ball every time he kicked it. He didn't seem to be trying to find Mathew, so Mathew just sat still and lowered himself to the ground.

Then he heard another voice shout from the house, "Gerald, come here!" but Gerald, if that was the boy, ignored the voice and went on kicking the ball and shouting at the top of his lungs. It almost hurt Mathew's ears.

Then a larger human came out and grabbed 'Gerald' and took him into the house.

That was the first of Mathew's difficult days. They got worse ... especially when Gerald discovered that he lived in the garden. He never came out of the house without trying to find Mathew.

It was even worse when Gerald stopped shouting and crept around the garden quietly trying to catch him. A couple of times he just managed to leap out of Gerald's reach. It was no longer pleasant to roam around looking for seeds and insects in the sun ... he had to have eyes in the back of his head to avoid Gerald.

Then one day, Gerald found the opening to Mathew's tunnel. Mathew was sleeping inside and "Whoomph!" he felt as the tunnel collapsed. Gerald had stomped on the opening and the tunnel. It was ruined.

Mathew stayed quiet for almost two days, even when Gerald came again the next morning to kick at the earth again.

Then Mathew started tunneling out. He scratched at the soil and made sure that he didn't go out the same way. He went around the other side of the tree. It was much harder to dig but it was much safer too. Eventually, he broke through to the light ... came out through a bed of leaves and shook himself clean of soil.

The first thing he did was to get a drink and look for some more seeds and grubs. He was hungry after all that work.

Then he sat down to think. What could he do?

He wasn't good at that thinking. Being comfortable in a bed of leaves he first fell asleep and anyway all that thinking made his head hurt.

What could he do?

He was very small compared to Gerald but Mathew had friends.

Albert, the plump thrush helped. He said, "The only way a little person can beat a big person is to scare him. We can do that for you."

The next morning Albert had brought in a lot of friends from other gardens. There were two woodpeckers, two magpies, one blue jay with a very loud voice, three dainty robins, two cooing doves and too-many-to-count sparrows. Albert had explained Mathew's problem and they waited for Gerald on the branches of the oak.

Later in the morning, the back door was flung open and there was Gerald. He ran across the grass to see the mess he had made of Mathew's home and then he tore a small branch from the hedge and ran around hitting the heads off flowers. He was not a nice boy!

Albert gave a squawk and the birds took off. The jay shrilled from the edge of the roof while all the others formed a cloud and dived at Gerald, all making as much noise as they could.

Gerald was very surprised and scared. He put up his hands to defend himself, but the birds never hit him. They just dived and swerved away at the last moment. But Gerald felt as if he had been hit and he ran back into the house crying.

A moment later the door opened and Gerald came out with his Mother, who said, looking at a few birds that were sitting in the open, "Don't be silly, Gerald. They are just little birds." And she went back into the house.

This happened several times and each time Gerald's mother was more impatient. Then finally she smacked Gerald and said, "Don't be silly. I have too much to do to keep coming out and

playing your silly game. Now I'm angry and if this happens once more you'll go to your room and not be allowed out in the garden."

Every time Gerald appeared the birds were there to fly at him.

After a few days, Gerald was a very different boy. Whenever he came out he looked around to see if he might be attacked and he almost never looked down where Mathew lived. Most of the time he wouldn't even come out on the grass and eventually he spent his time outside playing on the deck.

But every now and again he would look up ... just in case.

## The Comfortable Cat

Her name was Smokey because her hair was black but with white in amongst it.

It wasn't because she was old, her coat had always been like that, but now she had become old and she often thought, "I would like some real comfort."

She had a nice home with two sofas and carpets on the floor and she was always well fed, but something was missing.

The older she got the more she wanted a little place of her own.

The two children in the house were nice and would stroke her very well. She played with them when she wanted to but often she just wanted to be alone.

She often crawled under a hedge just where the sun shone on the pebbles so that she could feel safe and warm and not be bothered by the family.

However, winter was drawing close and the sun shone less frequently on the pebbles. Lying under the hedge wasn't quite the same when the pebbles weren't warm to start with.

So Smokey looked for a place in the house that she could make into her place. It had to be comfortable, which meant something soft to lie on and some good warmth on her back. Her back was beginning to ache a little especially on the cold wet days.

She roamed all over the house ... from the basement to the attic, in the sitting and dining rooms, in the kitchen, the garage and in all the bedrooms. She tried under tables, in closets, and even in drawers when they were left open.

Some places were very comfortable but she knew that she wouldn't be left in peace. They couldn't be her place. Others suited her aching bones but had no heat while others, like the hearth, were warm enough but only had tiles to lie upon.

It was a great puzzlement.

The mother always worked in the kitchen and the father always worked in the office. She had tried the kitchen so the only place left was the office.

The office had a desk in the corner and all the walls were covered with books on shelves.

Smokey tried the bookshelves and even pushed a few books off onto the floor to make space. That didn't go down well: the father picked her up and threw her into the garden.

The last place to try was the desk. When the father had gone to work she investigated.

She jumped up, carefully picked her way between pencils, pens and paper looking for her place. Suddenly she felt a wave of comfortable heat along her back. "Ooh! That felt so good."

It was the desk lamp that had been left on. She hadn't realised how warm a light could be. That was just the warmth that she needed to get the creaks out of her bones.

She sat down ... that felt good too. It was a green blotter in a leather surround and some more papers had been left on it. There were enough to be flat and yet soft and warm. This was her place. She had comfort and she slept there for the whole of the day.

The father came home before she had woken up. He looked into the office, swore at having left on the desk light that morning and then he saw Smokey asleep and stretched out in comfort across the desk. She was even purring to herself in her sleep.

So that's how it worked out. The father brought in her basket and lined it with soft newspaper on a pillow. Each morning, before leaving for the office, he put the basket on his desk under the lamp.

A few moments later, after the car had roared away, Smokey appeared, jumped on the desk and settled into the basket for the day.

She was a comfortable cat.

## The Cat who sat on an Egg

The man bought six chicks from a farmer who lived under the hill.

They were just bundles of yellow fluff and he kept them warm and fed them milk as they grew ... and grew ... and grew.

When the little chicks became grown-up hens they knew every part of the man's cottage and, especially they knew, Clarence the Cat.

Clarence was an old tabby ... set in his ways. He just wanted to sleep so when the little fluffy yellow chicks climbed on him, he ignored them and went on sleeping. It was more difficult when they got bigger and still wanted to sit on him ... especially because they grew claws.

Still they were friends so he let them crawl over him or sit against him fluffing out their feathers. He admitted that they did make him nice and warm.

So when the man took them out into the cottage garden and built a coop for them to live in, Clarence missed his friends. Sometimes he would go and look for them and he started sleeping in their coop in one of the nests. Clarence and all the hens were happy.

When, eventually, the hens started laying eggs the man collected them for his breakfasts. They were big beautiful brown eggs, which he said "Were the best he had ever tasted," and his friends said so too.

But then disaster struck. One night a thief jumped over the cottage fence and broke into the chicken coop. He bundled all the hens in a sack and ran off with them. He left Clarence behind.

Clarence woke with a start and started yowling ... his friends were missing. He yowled and meowed so loudly that the man was woken from his sleep inside the cottage. He tumbled down to see what was attacking Clarence. He thought that perhaps a fox had come by.

But it was worse than a fox. The hens were all gone and Clarence was standing at the entrance to the coop meowing and snarling with all his hair standing on end. Even the man didn't want to go near him but eventually he did. He managed to stroke Clarence so that he stopped yowling, even though the man felt like yelling himself.

They could find no sign of the intruder. The footsteps across the garden led only to where the man had jumped over the fence and reached his bicycle.

Now the man had no hens and he wouldn't have eggs for breakfast again. He felt sad about that, while Clarence wondered how cold he would be when he had no one to keep him warm at night.

They were both sad, but suddenly they found ... one lonely egg that had been laid during the night before the thief came. It was still warm in the nest.

The man said, "Well, at least I'll have an egg for breakfast one last time", but as he reached down for the egg, Clarence snarled and scratched his hand.

The man drew back in surprise. Then he watched Clarence climb slowly into the nest and lower himself over the egg. He tried to lift Clarence out of the nest and got scratched again for his trouble. Clarence would not move.

Over the next days, Clarence never moved even for food. He drank some milk when the man brought it to him, but we wouldn't move. He snarled first as a warning but then his claws became weapons. The man's hand had blood on it several times. Clarence was firmly fixed on the nest ... sitting on the last egg.

The man noticed that Clarence moved occasionally, standing to look down at the egg and to touch it carefully with his paw ... moving it around. Then he sat down again, keeping the egg warm.

Then one day, when Clarence got up to look, the egg was cracked and a tiny little beak poked out and moved. The egg cracked more as the chick pecked to break out of it. Finally, as Clarence and the man watched, the tiny yellow ball stood and looked up at them.

The man took out the eggshell, gave Clarence some milk and left a little more beside the nest. Then Clarence climbed back into the nest and put his paw around the chick.

Clarence's chick grew and Clarence led it around the cottage garden and scratched the ground to show how it should search and peck for little things that were good to eat.

Then, after a while, the man gave Clarence some more eggs to sit on and more chicks came out of those eggs too. So there were more chickens to be friends with Clarence and the man had eggs for breakfast again.

## In the Rain

It was raining and cold rain strummed hard on the windows: dibble-dibble-dop.

Mummy told Peter to take buckets of warm feed and throw it to the chickens in the field ... so he dressed to go out in the rain.

First, the Wellington boots: his were black like grown-ups' because he was grown enough not to wear red baby 'Wellies'. He was proud of his new boots though they were hard to put on. He enjoyed being six.

Peter's feet always seemed to grow when Wellington boots appeared but eventually, after a lot of squirming, he managed it ... he was in. Standing in his boots, he felt as if they were holding him up.

Then came the raincoat. His was made of yellow oilskin, "just like the seamen had", Mummy said. It was hard to pull the raincoat apart because it all stuck together and then it stuck together again once he pulled it apart if he wasn't careful. By the time he stood inside the stiff yellow oilskin tent, he was rosy with effort and looked forward to the cool rain. Mummy placed the yellow hat, also made of oilskin, squarely over his head so that the rain couldn't drip down his neck ... although it always did.

Then he clomped outside. There is nothing smooth about walking in Wellington boots. He felt like one of those large wooden soldiers with movable legs that sometimes arrived at

Christmas - clomp, clomp, clomp.

Outside there was a large puddle where the concrete was uneven. Dressed for the rain, the puddle was a game. Peter jumped as high as he could into it, but, as always, the water splashed up onto his trousers under the raincoat. He always forgot that would happen when there were puddles to be jumped in.

His father gave him the buckets of feed at the shed behind the garage and warned him again to be: "Careful of that old cockerel."

Peter clomped up the driveway, put the heavy buckets down to open the gate, and then he went along the road to their 'field.' This is where the hens lived under the care of their cockerel.

The cockerel came to meet Peter, carefully sidling towards him.

"There is a way to deal with this old boy," Peter thought ... though his Mother never managed it.

If his mother had to feed the chickens she would always come back swearing about the cockerel. "That devil," she would say, "he's getting worse. He flew at me again. I swear he's the next one for the pot. Maybe we can eat him on Sunday." And his Father would smile, knowing that the cockerel was needed for the next batch of chicks. He would say, "There, there, the cockerel's only doing his job."

So Peter's approach was to chase the cockerel. He roared and charged. The cockerel was good for a few turns of the muddy field before it retreated around the back of the hen house. Peter stopped in a slide. He was panting. Now his trousers were thoroughly wet and his 'Wellies' were heavy with mud.

He fed the hens, talked to the ducks and scratched the pig in the sty. The pig loved being scratched behind his ears as he leant against Peter. Then the return home was very obvious - there were now interesting snails and worms to investigate in the rain so Peter left a trail of muddy footprints on the paths going from side to side.

Then he got undressed to go in the house. He needed Mummy's help, for it was impossible to get out of Wellington boots without help. Even his father couldn't do that. His mother came out of the back kitchen to stop Peter walking across her newly scrubbed red tiles and they struggled together with oilskins and boots and his wet trousers. Then, newly skinned, he was thrown into the living room like a newly plucked hen. Mummy told him to stand still until she could hang the oilskins in the outhouse and swill the Wellington boots under the outside tap.

It was hard labor in the rain. A fine day wouldn't involve dressing and undressing, but Peter didn't remember the fine days, he only remembered the rainy days, when water dripped and ran, when there were puddles to be jumped in, when he slid madly through the mud, and when the cockerel lost its dignity in a flurry of squawking wet feathers. He remembered the fun days.

The rain outside had stopped and the grey clouds were breaking apart. Perhaps the sun would soon come out ... but he still looked forward to another rainy day.

## Just Yellow

The sprout came up through the green leaves of a large dandelion in the middle of the field.

The dandelion had great bright yellow flowers and they shone across the field. Everyone could see them.

The sprout felt glad that he was a dandelion and that the girls and boys would admire him too. He shivered as he grew faster and faster in the warm rain of the summer.

He was a little disappointed when he grew as tall as the dandelions around him and still had no flowers ... none at all.

He was even more worried when he was twice as high as the dandelions and was only just beginning to show flower shoots. Also, they were all wrong: instead of growing separate flowers, he had little flower shoots along his stem.

The dandelions teased him. "You're a weed and not a flower at all. We don't ever think you'll be shiny yellow like we are."

So, he was glad when some of his flower shoots showed a little yellow under the green covers. "I am going to be a shiny yellow," he thought.

He still grew and grew and now looked down on all the other dandelions around him. He even waved in the breeze and his stem got thicker and stronger.

Then one flower burst out of its green sheath. It was yellow all right but not shiny and when it was quite open it had a black middle with just a fringe of yellow petals, not a wonderful bunch of yellow florets like the dandelion. "I am a freak," he thought.

And so it went on, he grew taller and the flowers grew from each connection where a leaf grew. He was really odd and he was ashamed to even look at the beautiful dandelions, even though they were now so far beneath him.

Then a yellow bird came by and rested on one of his flowers.

"Hello!" said the bird, "I'm a finch, a Goldfinch. Why are you are growing in the middle of this awful field of dandelions? Were your seeds blown here?"

"I don't know. I just think I'm odd and not at all beautiful like my dandelion brothers and sisters."

"Ha! Ha! What a joke! You're not a dandelion. You're something much better ... a sunflower. Your flowers look exactly like the sun. You're beautiful."

"A sunflower?"

"Sure, and when your flowers grow older they don't just decay into a sticky lump like dandelion flowers, they have hundreds of beautifully tasty seeds. Then I'll come back and visit you again. I love sunflower seeds although I'll leave you enough for your family."

With that, the Goldfinch flew off, fluttering his wings to say good-bye.

He left the new sunflower feeling great in the warmth of the sun. He even saw that his flowers were like the sun. He was not 'just yellow' ... he was as important as any plant in the world and he waved his stems with joy.