

I wrote the stories in this book to be unusual and fun.

The idea to do this emerged from an incident of horror. No doubt my own subconscious reactions played a part.



-TOM GARBER



Five years ago in Knoxville, my younger son David, aged 40, was unconscious after a traffic accident. A fire broke out inside the car and spread rapidly. The windows were up, the doors locked. He spent several minutes breathing flames.

Bystanders tried desperately to help. One of them finally smashed the window and reached into the fire to open the door from the inside so they could drag David free.

When my wife Anna and I heard what had happened our son had already been flown to the Vanderbilt Hospital Burn Unit in Nashville, 180 miles from Knoxville. We drove there straight away. David was in an induced coma, intubated and connected to a myriad of tubes and wires. The doctors gave us little hope; the inside of his lungs had been burned too much.

They wanted us to talk to him. So we did that. We stood on either side of his bed talking to our dying son. I never felt more helpless in my life. His wife, Stephanie, did the same in our absence and stayed by his side for weeks.

He survived.

His voice has been radically affected, and he will likely always need access to oxygen. But he is alive, and he can laugh, two things I hold equally dear.

Over the next year or so he had many appointments at Vanderbilt. He and I made the 360-mile round trip in a day. On one of these drives back to Knoxville we set the stage for the stories in this book.

David had brought along some recordings we could play on the radio to break the monotony of the drive. Among others, we listened to “The Fisherman And His Wife,” the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, and some of Aesop’s fables.

In the fisherman story, David found hilarious the henpecked man’s pleas to the magic fish. In the version of the story we had, the poor man said, “I desire a boon from thee.” The word “boon” is what got to my son. He cracked up, the merriment was contagious. For several miles we sped down the road, laughing like mad grackles.

Then we listened to a fable which went something like this: “A goat grazes on top of a cliff. A wolf at the foot of the cliff suggests that the goat should come down. The grass is much thicker, says the wolf, and more delicious.

“The goat replies, ‘If I come down there you will eat me.’”

David and I waited to hear the rest, but another fable began. When we realized that we had heard all there was about the goat and the wolf we had to ask, “Whaaaat?”

We couldn’t help ourselves. Again the truck was filled with hilarity. Guffawing merrily, he and I made up lame-as-possible fables of our own.

For one: “It is night. A beautiful woman walks into a dark alley. She laughs out loud. (The End.)”

“Har, har, har!”

“Wait, wait!”

“A deer stands in the forest. A shot rings out. The deer says, ‘But...’ (The End.)”

The horror is now years gone by. I suppose to soothe my own subliminal fears, I wrote the stories in this book as a lark, an attempt to capture the happiness we experienced on that trip home, and many times since.

So, Wise Old Chicken, you are on. Take it away!