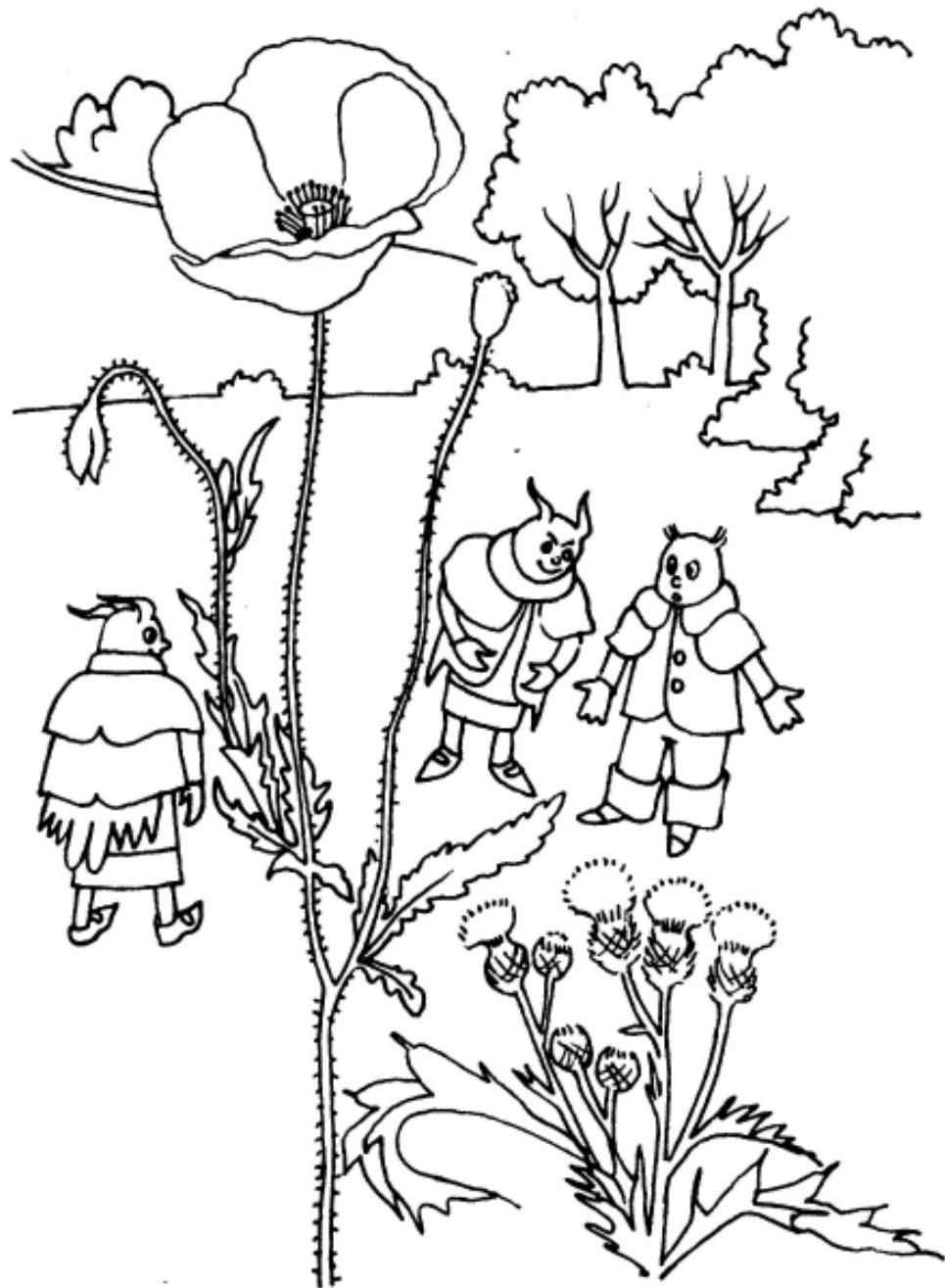


A Birthday Present for Mummy

By Liz Pitman



Illustrated by Jim Torrance

"Wallace," Wanda said on waking up one morning, "Do you remember what day it is today?"

Wallace thought for a while. "Er, Christmas?" he asked uncertainly but quite hopefully, just in case Christmas had come much earlier this year.

"Christmas! What a silly thing to say!" exclaimed Winnie, for even she knew that Christmas never came while the leaves were on the trees.

Wallace tried again. "Is it my birthday, then?" He was even more hopeful this time, as his birthday always meant a trip to Uncle Waldorf's house, near the broken tree in Hawridge. Wallace loved playing in the broken tree.

"No, not your birthday, silly, Mummy's."

Poor Wallace was quite disappointed it was neither Christmas nor his birthday. Wendy's birthday always meant a yummy supper though so at least there was something to look forward to.

"I think we should go out and find her a present," declared Wanda.

"What sort of a present?" asked Wallace. Wanda didn't know. They sat there thinking for a few minutes.

"Pretty flowers," piped up the little voice of Winnie.

"Yes," said Wanda, "what a good idea. Let's go and pick Mummy some pretty flowers for her birthday.

So the three children set off onto the Common to look for some pretty flowers. As they



came from under the trees, they started to see some very pretty pale pink flowers in the hedges above them.

"What about those?" asked Winnie.

"I think that's a hawthorn tree, like the ones Beatrice Bumble pointed out to us. We couldn't pick those, they're all covered in thorns. Mummy wouldn't like lots of thorns for her birthday."

So they decided not to pick the hawthorn flowers. They walked on until they came to some different pale pink flowers all jumbled up in the bushes.

"Brambles,"
declared William
with authority.

"Even pricklier
than hawthorn.
In any case, if
we picked all the
bramble flowers,
there wouldn't
be any
blackberries in
the autumn."

The girls agreed
that it most
definitely would
not do for there
to be no
blackberries for
Wendy to make
delicious
blackberry and
apple pie with.
They decided to
leave the pretty
pale pink flowers
in the hedges
and look for
something else
instead.



They moved away from the bushes towards the open grass.

"Look at that pretty blue flower," shouted Winnie excitedly. "Mummy would like that one."

They all looked at the single plant with its tall stem bearing five or six delicate, bell shaped flowers. Wallace walked forwards to pick it.

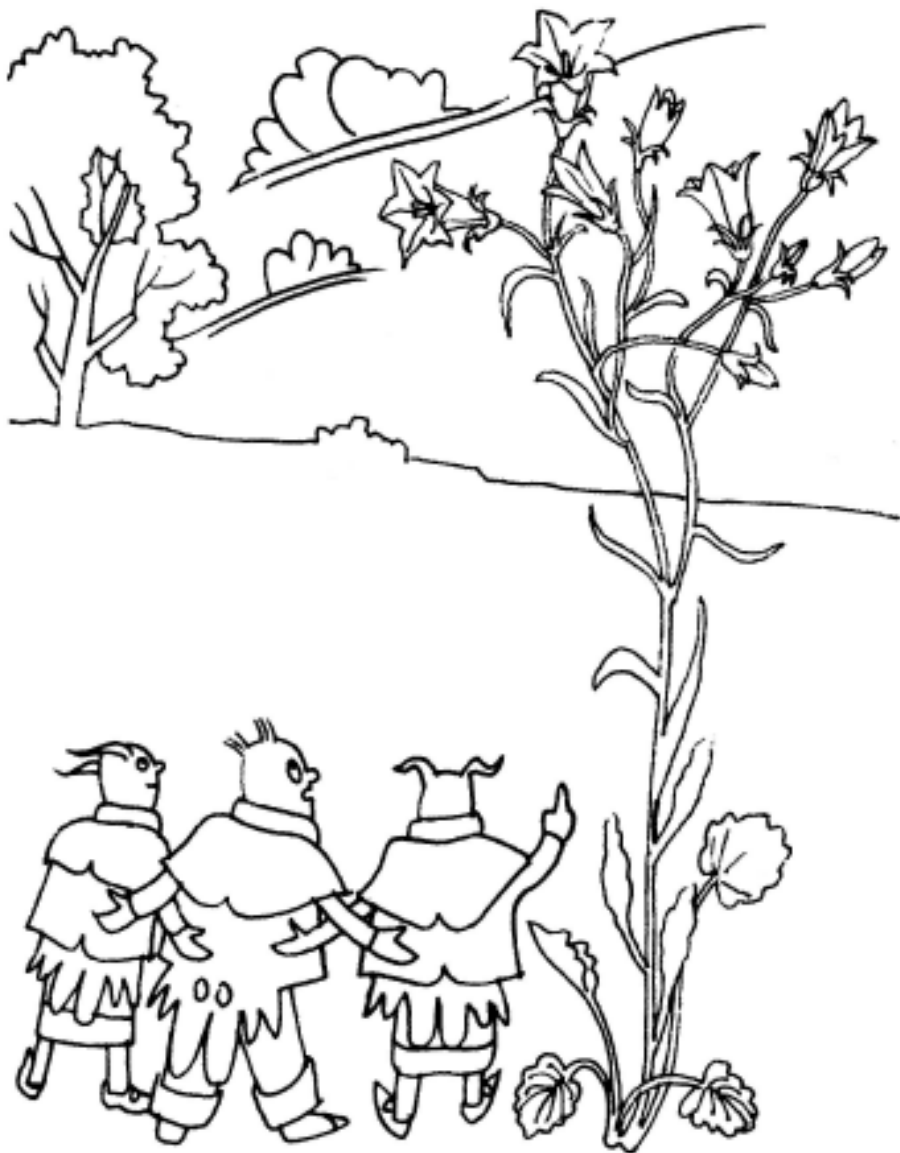
"Wait!" cried Wanda, just as he reached it.

"What's the matter?"

"You can't pick it! It's the only one. If you pick that flower, there won't be any more for others to enjoy."

Wallace had several faults but he was not selfish. He immediately saw that what Wanda had said was true. He also knew that if he picked the delicate blue flower, there would be no seeds for more blue flowers to grow from next year.

So they decided to leave the blue flower growing alone among the grass. Surely, there must be other flowers they could find to pick for Mummy's birthday. As they wandered under the trees in search of flowers, they came across lots and lots of bluebells. They could all remember Mummy saying that no one was allowed to pick bluebells, though, so they left them alone too.



Then, before them in a clearing, they came across the biggest flower they had ever seen. It was a very, very tall and had lots of beautiful pink flowers all the way up.

"Wow!" exclaimed Wallace, "what an amazing flower. Do you think we could carry that home for Mummy?"

He and the girls walked round and round the flower, trying to think of a way to pick it and carry it home.

As they circled the flower, they heard a most strange sound coming from it. It was a sort of buzzing sound, a bit like the sound Beatrice Bumble makes but not exactly like it. It sounded like the sort of noise Beatrice would make if she had got stuck somewhere.

"Oh, look," cried Winnie, "it is Beatrice. She's stuck in the flower!"

And surely enough it was Beatrice Bumble, actually inside one of the flowers hanging on the plant.

"She's not stuck, silly," laughed Wallace, "she's collecting pollen."

At the sound of the children's voices, Beatrice stopped her pollen-collecting and flew out to say hello. The pollen she had been collecting from the flower clung like balls of fluff around her legs. She looked very worried, though, when she heard what the children had been planning to do.



"Oh, no," she cried, "you should *never* pick a foxglove. It's poisonous, you see. It's very not a problem for me to collect its pollen but if you picked it, it might make you very sick indeed. There are all sorts of poisonous flowers on the Common, like buttercups for instance. You need to be very careful with wild flowers."

The children were very disappointed not to have picked any flowers for Wendy's birthday but at the same time were relieved not to have made themselves sick by picking the foxglove.

"Oh dear," exclaimed a sorry Wanda, "that means we haven't got anything at all to give to Mummy now."

All three children sat with their heads in several of their hands feeling very sad about not having a present to give. They were still sitting thus when Wendy found them half an hour later.

"Why children, whatever is the matter?" she asked.

They told her about wanting to find some pretty flowers (Winnie's idea, she proudly explained), they told her about the prickly flowers, the poisonous flowers and the flower the grew on its own.

"What a very sweet thought," said Wendy, hugging all her children to her. "Flowers are pretty, aren't they? But somehow I think they are often even prettier when they are growing in amongst the grass or in the hedges. Especially the pretty blue one you found. By the sounds of it, that's a harebell, one of my very favourite flowers. I haven't seen one for years. It would be a very special treat for me if you could show me the harebell, a very special treat indeed."

