

The Old Woman and the Tulips

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THERE WAS ONCE UPON A TIME a little old woman who lived in a little house. The house had two windows, one on either side of the door, and two more windows that peeked out from underneath her roof. In front of the house was a garden full of flowers. The old woman loved to have flowers all year long. But of all the flowers that grew, her favorites were the tulips.

Very early every spring, she would begin to walk up her garden path and walk down her garden path, looking at her garden bed. Each day she would walk up her garden path and down her garden path and at last she would see a little green head pushing up through the brown earth. Then she would say, "There's one!"

Soon there would be another and another and another. And the little shoots would push up taller and at last the leaves would unfold and a little green head would appear. And the sun would shine and the rain would rain and the wind would blow. And soon the tulips would open to the sun—pink, white, purple, red, yellow and even red and white!

And then the old woman would walk up her garden path and walk down her garden path and look at her tulips and say, "Well, there they be, just a-growin' and a-blowin' . . . just a-growin' and a-blowin'." And the old woman thought that her tulips were very pretty—and indeed they were!

Now one evening in May when the moon was shining bright, it was the old woman's bedtime. She was getting ready for bed when suddenly she

thought about her tulips. "They will look so pretty in the moonlight," she said to herself. "I will just peek out my door at them."

And so the old woman peeked out the door. The moon was shining so brightly that it was almost as light as day. A gentle wind was blowing and the tulips swayed from side to side. The old woman smiled at her tulips and said, "Well, there they be—just a-growin' and a-blowin' . . . just a-growin' and a-blowin'."

She was just about to go back inside—for it really was past her bedtime—when suddenly she stopped and put her hand to her ear. "I hear singing." Now it was quite late and the old woman lived far out in the country. "What can that be?" she asked.

She did not go back inside, but asked again, "What can it be?" The old woman walked down the path. At the end of the path, she leaned against the gate. The music grew clearer, nearer, and louder.

Suddenly she stood straight up and said, "I know! I know! I know! 'Tis the pixies singing!" Now pixies is another word for fairies. Past the hedge beyond the gate was a pixie ring and the old woman knew that in May when the moon shines full, the pixies come up from their homes under the ground and dance on the pixie ring. No wonder the music was so beautiful! The old woman also knew that the pixies do not like to be watched. So she said, "Bless their little hearts!" and turned to go back inside—for it really was past her bedtime.

Now the old woman walked up the path in the moonlight. There were her tulips. . . just a-growin' and a-blowin'. They looked so pretty in the moonlight, that she bent over to take a closer look. But she jumped back and cried, "Well, bless me!" She went to another tulip, bent over and soon jumped back and cried, "Well, bless me!" She went up and down the walkway and at each tulip the same thing happened and the old woman cried, "Well, bless me!"

The old woman was very surprised and you would have been, too—for in each tulip she found a sleeping pixie baby. She knew just what had happened. When the pixies came up from underground, they could not

leave their babies behind—no one would do that! And they could not dance while holding their babies. The old woman's tulips made a perfect cradle, deep and safe. When the wind blew, it rocked the babies to sleep. And so the old woman walked up and down the path and said, "Well, bless their little hearts!" a great many times.

But it really was past her bedtime and so she went inside to bed.

But the old woman who loved her tulips was ever so pleased to know that the pixie babies were sleeping in her tulips. She continued to take the greatest care of her tulips. And sometimes, when the moon was full in May, she would go outside, and peek inside her tulips.

