

# *The Gift*

*Reg Down*  
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**V**ery early in the morning, just before the sun had risen, an egg was found in a field. It was huge, bigger than any egg ever seen before. It was pure and white and as luminous as snow.

"What's this?" asked the squirrel scampering down from his oak tree. "It looks like an egg."

"It is an egg, you silly," said the blue jay. "But who could have laid it? It's bigger than a bush."

"Caw!" cried the raven from the top of a dead tree. "That egg is too huge for its own good. I'm hungry. Let me crack it open."

"No, no," coo'd the white dove from her olive branch. "What's inside is more important than hunger."

"Nothing is more important than hunger," croaked the raven, and he stretched his dark wings and flew towards the egg.

Just then a ginger cat ran up from the river and the raven had to turn away. He landed on a thorn bush and stared daggers at the cat. The cat rubbed her flank against the egg. "This egg is mine," she purred, sliding past and stroking it with her tail.

By and by two pixies came along.

"Oooo—what's this?" they laughed. "A much-too-big big egg! To whom does it belong?"

"To me," said the cat, licking her fur.

"Not you—that's for sure!" said the pixies. "You're a cat."

"But I'm a ginger cat," said the ginger cat. "I might not be all I seem."

"Ha!" laughed the pixies. "Ha-ha-ha! We're going to tell on you," and off they skipped to get the cow.

The cow came lumbering along. She was brown and brown and had wide-wide horns. The pixies were sitting one on each horn, right at the very end.

"It's the one we've been waiting for," moo'd the cow, nuzzling the egg with her moist muzzle.

"It's mine," purred the cat, rubbing herself against the cow's leg.

"No, it's ours," lowed the cow gently.

"See," said the pixies, tweaking their noses at the cat.

The cat flicked her tail and leaped onto the cow's back. She tried to box the pixies with her paws but couldn't reach them because the cow's horns were too long.

The dove flew down from the olive tree and landed on the egg. Everyone looked at her.

"It's not yours, or ours," she coo'd melodiously. "This egg is for everyone," and she dipped her head up and down and turned round and round.

"Caw! Caw!" croaked the raven. "Stop this nonsense! The day is getting on and soon the sun will be up. Let's eat this thing. I'm famished! An egg is an egg is an egg."

A rooster from the farmyard strutted over. He blustered to the top of the egg and the dove had to move to the cat's head.

"Cock-a-diddle-mee! Cock-a-diddle-mine-mine-mine!" the cock crowed, flapping his wings and making a racket.

"Get off! Get off, you fanfare!" nattered the squirrel. "It's knocking."

The rooster flew off the egg and they listened.

"Knock-knock! Knock-knock-knock!" went the egg.

"See," said the dove, eyeing the raven. "There's a treasure inside."

"Kill it before it's too late!" croaked the raven.

"Knock-knock! Knock-knock-knock!"

"Come, my precious one," coo'd the dove, nodding and bobbing her white and gentle head.

"It's for me," meowed the ginger cat, closing her eyes sleepily.

"Knock-knock! Knock-knock-knock!"

"Mooove back," moo'd the cow. "Here it comes," and they all moved back.

The egg cracked. The snowy white shell fell away. Out came a child with wings of gold.

"Kill it! Eat it!" cried the raven, attacking the child.

But the cat leaped at the raven and clawed him. The raven was lucky to get away with scratches and a few less feathers.

Round and round the child flew, higher and higher until he reached the sunlight as it came over the snowy mountains. Then the morning clouds lit up with gold.

Far, far below, the raven sulked in his thorn bush while the others stood in wonder. Finally the raven flew away, his black wings beating heavily.

“Poor bird,” lowed the cow.

“Good riddance,” said the cat, scratching a flea.

“God love him,” coo’d the dove sadly.

“Let’s dance,” sang the pixies, hopping off the cow’s horns and laughing ‘Ha!-ha!-ha!’ for joy.

And they did, on the grass, where the Tao dew was silver.